

Interview with Alamgir

Sameera Gokal: What motivated you to get into the singing career?

Alamgir: It was passion right when I was about 10-years-old; I was playing the guitar and singing Beatles, Rolling Stones and Elvis Presley. It was a passion. To make the long story short, when I came to Karachi, Sohail Rana, the Music Director, wanted me to play for the Children's Program. So I went to play the guitar for the Children's Program. And from there on, I started getting my first major singing opportunities as well.

SG: How did Sohail Rana find you?

Alamgir: See, I wanted to make it a short cut but you're making it longer. But I'll go back to your question (laughing). There was a talk show, and the host called me when she heard I sing English songs. So I went there for auditions, and before I even started singing, she said, "I'm sorry, we've already chosen someone else, but don't worry we'll listen to you, and maybe we'll call you some other time." In a very sweet way of saying, 'Get lost' (laughing). I was very disheartened, but I still sang a couple of songs. When I was singing, Sohail Rana was also sitting in the room. I didn't know that he was sitting there. As I was coming out of the television station, Sohail Rana was waiting in the car for me. He spoke to me and said, "You play very good guitar. Would you like to come and play guitar for the Children's Program?" That's how it all started ... then I started working with him.

SG: How many songs have you composed or performed throughout your career, and which song is your favorite?

Alamgir: About, I think altogether 400. Out of 400, about 200 are my own compositions. I also sang for films and television. Sham Se Pehla Aana is my favorite song. I don't know how I could make such a wonderful composition; I cannot believe it till today (laughing). When composing this song, I was not inspired by anyone else. It was just my feelings that made this melody.

SG: How many albums have you released throughout your singing career?

Alamgir: Officially about 15 and unofficially about 25 albums. What I mean by unofficially is I had gone to Singapore on a vacation and noticed my albums being sold in the market without my prior knowledge.

SG: Why did you decide to leave Pakistan?

Alamgir: I'm so happy I have done what I have contributed to Pakistan in my career. I have given so much that I am proud today. I have opened the doors for the young generation. I left because I wanted to say good-bye to that cycle of life after 25 years of working 24-hours, no sleep, no schedule. I was working around the clock in the studios. I wanted to relax for the rest of my life and not come on television anymore. I just wanted to do concerts and have a nice, peaceful life.

SG: What prompted you to finally return after such a long gap?

Alamgir: In 2006, ARY had an award program and wanted to have me there. Then in 2007, GEO called me for programs. Now I am just doing part-time while staying here.

SG: That's a great idea. You're more relaxed now, but yet, still continuing to do what's your passion.

Alamgir: Exactly.

SG: Do you feel your concerts have changed throughout the years?

Alamgir: Yea, now I have added a mature part along with what I used to do. I do *ghazals* at the same time because I have developed my voice in the last 10 years. My fans grew up with me. They are doctors and engineers. I am doing concerts all over the U.S., Canada, England, Middle East, Korea and even in Bangladesh. I am a Bengali. I sing in 17 languages.

SG: I understand you said that the new generation is becoming your fan through their parents. How do you feel about the reaction you're getting from your new generation of listeners?

Alamgir: It really is a wonderful thing. I was happy with just my own fans that grew up with me, but to have the new generation as my fans is a good feeling. I feel proud of that. It's all about having an ear for good music.

SG: What are your upcoming projects in the next 5 or 10 years?

Alamgir: I don't have anything fixed, but presently, I know I am making videos of my own songs. During my time, there was no concept of videos in songs. I used to stand in the studio inside the television station, and I would sing songs. Today, they are having wonderful videos of songs. I didn't have that opportunity during my time. So now, I have 400 songs that I can choose from to make videos. I'm re-recording them and making videos. Currently, I am working on four songs.

SG: Besides your passion for singing, what other things do you enjoy doing?

Alamgir: I think music makes me travel so much that it comes on the way. It's having it without asking for it (laughing). I'm having fun while traveling. Music is such a powerful passion for me, that although it's profession, I hardly think about it that it's my profession. It's a very powerful passion. Something that I love the most has become my job. All the time I'm enjoying myself. I get paid for enjoying myself (laughing).

SG: What advice would you give to aspiring singers?

Alamgir: Most of the singers today take the help of software to correct their voice when they sing out of tune, and they don't have to do much work. That's why most of the singers when they go to perform overseas, they have to play the CD and lip sync because they didn't sing it perfect in the first place because it was all software help. This way, our future is kind of diminishing. It's scary to think about the future of music because just about everyone is going for correction and not quite learning. So I would advice the new comers to learn and to practice voice and become a real good singer, so they don't have to depend on correcting their voices by the software. This way, they can sing live equally as good as they would sound in the recording studio, and they can sound the same when they perform. That is what I want the future of Pakistani music.