

Notes on loss

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

A poet and an artist collaborated through the pandemic years to produce an album that reflects on a dark, personal and collective period of isolation



Jeet Thayil and Yashas Shetty met once every fortnight for a year at Shetty's house, which has a studio, to record *Speak, Amnesia*. **PIC COURTESY/PRATYAY RAHA**

THE tracks are atmospheric because they were all recorded pretty late at night in a space of solitude," poet, novelist and musician Jeet Thayil tells us about *Speak, Amnesia*, an album he has collaborated for with contemporary artist Yashas Shetty. Thayil met Shetty at the end of 2021 at an event at the Sangam House International Writers' Residency. Interested in creating an album together, and having discovered that they lived across the street from each other, the duo met once every fortnight for a year at Shetty's house, which Thayil tells us is a kind of studio with all kinds of exotic string, percussion and wind instruments. "The space lent itself to the atmospheric sound that we put together."

Some of the music in the album is instrumental. "I'd play the guitar, or Yashas would come up with a riff or melodic figure, and that's how it would begin," says Thayil. "There are bits in there that are wholly improvised and in-the-moment. It felt like we were working subconsciously, without the usual controls, until later during editing and production."

After over a year of these sessions, they began assessing all the material they had accumulated and separated six tracks, which will be released over the next few weeks. "Because they were made over an isolated period during the pandemic years, I think they share a mood, a sense that things are dark and getting darker," Thayil shares.

Shetty agrees that much

of the album's content is personal and dark, and is reflective of the time period in which it was produced. "The whole album deals with this idea of loss and memory, and that time when we were locked up in our houses."

For Shetty, who has been involved with experimental sound research work at the Indian Sonic Research Organisation, the idea behind the album was to "put the poet at the forefront of the work". The poet's ability to improvise with words is some-

thing he finds impressive. "It was interesting also because it is the original job of a poet. Written text came later; the poet was originally a performer. So [Jeet] would come and perform his poetry. Mostly we would talk about this or that and sometimes I would hit record when he would say something."

The album has been released with Bengaluru-based record label ISSAI, created by Shetty, which, he explains, was meant to be a place where people who are traditionally outside the mainstream world of music—folk artists, poets or activists—can work with musicians. "We intend to work with people who have an opportunity to use sound and music as an additional way of expressing themselves," he says.

Shetty, whose practice explores working between various disciplines like installation, sound, software and biotechnology, adds that while he has worked with scientists in his career, this was his first collaboration with a poet. According to him, poets are the best to start off with.

And does he have a favourite track from the album?

"No, we can't do that," he laughs. "They are like your kids. Some of them misbehave but you still have to love them."

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WHAT: *Speak, Amnesia*

WHERE: Bandcamp; issai.world

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Jeet Thayil

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Yashas Shetty

Saxing April up

Ahead of International Jazz Day, OG musician Louiz Banks is glad more youngsters are picking up that crazy tune

NIDHI LODAYA

WE had a place reserved at a world music-fusion jazz gig later in the night, the afternoon we spoke to Louiz Banks, the 'Godfather of Indian Jazz'.

The 82-year-old jazz pianist, singer and composer has been curating the International Jazz Day, now on its 12th edition, with the sole aim to, "ensure that there is a joy of discovering new talent and giving musicians a platform to play". Above all, Banks feels jazz is a performance art.

Over the three-hour-long performance, musicians will perform jazz standards and fusion jazz. "We give youngsters who want to play early jazz with conviction a platform," says Banks, "It's lovely to see so many youngsters with hidden talent."

Banks himself will perform a fusion set, and there will be other veterans on stage too, such

as Mohini Dey, Zian Bhamgara, Arka Chakraborty, Gino Banks, Jean-Christophe Cholet, Shreya Bhattacharya, Avishek Dey, and Satyajit Talwalkar.

The prime quality Banks looks for when choosing artistes every year is "originality and sincerity to the genre, and keeping up with jazz traditions as they are always evolving". He is quite excited by the number of youngsters venturing into this genre, coming in with fresh tunes and creating something original. Renowned bass player Mohini Dey also agrees. "I think there is a new energy emerging

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MOHINI DEY



in our country again. Some of the foremost elder musicians are beginning to form bands that put Indian musicians on display at the same time as many young Indian musicians are making their debut. It is an exciting time," she says.

Fifteen-year-old Shivin Shirodkar—the youngest musician in this year's lineup—had our ear. Shirodkar has been playing the guitar since he was three years old. "I'm mostly looking forward to seeing the live arrangements of the different songs because I want to see how other artistes perform with their unique style," he says. "I'm also delighted to perform in front of such a large audience."

Banks, who has been performing for around four decades, now says that the most significant change he has witnessed is, "a young generation of musicians getting more serious about music that is beyond commercial and pop music. I can see that there is huge talent out there and that is very interesting".

And the enthusiasm is mutual. "Clubs and restaurants are promoting jazz musicians and bands, and that is a great thing because we need more clubs where we can perform. This is a very good sign and I'm very happy," concludes Banks.

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Louiz Banks, curator of the International Jazz Day for the last 12 years, says the audience should expect a lot of young talent this year with their fresh original tunes



SHIVIN SHIRODKAR

WHAT: International Jazz Day

WHERE: Tata Theatre, NCPA

WHEN: April 30, 6.30 PM onwards

PRICE: ₹500 onwards

TO BOOK: ncpamumbai.com