

A lifetime encounter with Sain Zahoor~Part 1

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Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated. ~Confucius

I had read this quote very many times, but had never realised the real essence of it until I met Sain Zahoor.

Little did I know that the two days of my interaction with him would be like a refresher course on Bulleh Shah and would make me so enamoured by his simplicity that all starstudded concerts or hi fi music orchestras, would appear meaningless.

It was the annual **RBC Mosaic Festival 2011**, in Mississauga. I was given the task to look after the VIP lounge for the artists and other VIPs. I skimmed through the likely VIP list—just one name was enough for me to feel elated—**Sain Zahoor**. The excited preteen in me actually waited with impatience the moment when I would interact with him.

He arrived on the Gala opening of the festival with his entourage of four modest men. Instantly all the designer clad guests, the ministers, the VVIPs lost their shimmer. All heads turned to see this barely five feet few inches tall, clad in shimmery robe, black turban, a bunch of turquoises and agates around his neck. The aura of his simplicity was mesmerising. His eyes had a mystical depth and serenity in them.

The next evening, before the performance, he walked on the stage, modestly with folded hands, amidst a roar of applause from the spectators, who had come to watch him, sing live, from far flung locales of Ontario.

He began, most humbly, “**I am neither an artist nor a star, I am a faqir (devotee) like my master, Hazrat Hazur Baba Bulleh Shah and I sing to please Allah and to spread the message of peace.**”

The instrument he held was the simplest that a musical instrument could be- with a single string, and hence the name Ektara. His ektara is uniquely festooned with multicolored tassels of wool, which remind of the memories of back home. And not to forget, he had adorned a bunch of ghungroos (ankle bells) , which jingled during his whirling and swinging during the performance.

His orchestra, exemplifying simplicity, comprised of four of the most basic instruments —a chimta (metal tong), a dholak (a desi double headed hand drum) a table (a set of two drums) and a harmonium(a desi accordion). One could hardly believe before he began that this brief ensemble of ‘desi’ instruments would be more than enough to wreck a havoc on the psyches of the listeners.

Needless to say of Bulleh Shah’s poetry that flowed through his intense voice, simply pouring magic into the air. No sooner had he begun that the listeners were transcended into the heights of ecstasy.

As remarked by one of my friends who drove 2 hours to listen to him, “It appears more of a mystical call, than a mere singing of a sufi song.”

We all lost our sense of time, song after song, a span of three hours seemed to have flown in three moments. The magnetised audience did not let him stop. Nor did one notice any fatigue in his voice or spirit, and he went on.

Sain Zahoor’s reverence to his master Baba Bulleh Shah was glaringly obvious through the life he brings to the verses and also by the effort he takes each time to refer to him with a complete “**Hazrat Hazur Baba Bulleh Shah.**”

With so much of love and devotion, why would he not have that aura and mysticism in his eyes, I told myself.

[To those who do not know him: Sain Zahoor or Saeen Zahur Ahmad is a Sufi singer from Pakistan. He spent his life singing in the Sufi shrines, and had not cut a record until 2006, when he was nominated for the BBC World Music awards based on word of mouth. He emerged as the "best BBC voice of the year 2006"]

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