

What's On



AACD team with AUK president, Dr. Rawda Awwad; and executive vice president, Ms. Amal Al-Binali



AUK alumni representing their companies.

Event paves way for students' future achievements

American University of Kuwait hosts 18th annual Career Growth Fair

KUWAIT CITY, May 30: The American University of Kuwait (AUK) held its 18th Annual Career Growth Fair where employers from leading companies across Kuwait visit campus to discuss future employment opportunities with AUK students and alumni. This initiative is part of AUK's commitment to providing its community with opportunities to meet face-to-face with future employers to explore possible career options. The Career Growth Fair was organized by AUK's Office of Alumni Affairs and Career Development (AACD) and took place at the AUK gymnasium.

This year's event was sponsored by Alghanim Industries, United Real Estate Company, Burgan Bank, SLB, and Kuwait Airways (Platinum Sponsors); Al-Tijari, KA-

MCO Invest, and Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Co. K.S.C.C. (Gold Sponsors); City Centre, MC Group, Tawfeek, AlShaya Group, City Group Co. (Silver sponsors). Meditation Nation was the official wellness partner, and 15 general participants were involved.

AUK president, Dr. Rawda Awwad, inaugurated the fair with a speech and a tour during which she discussed with the participating organizations their job offerings and required student qualifications. In her opening statement, Dr. Rawda highlighted the distinctiveness of AUK students, "Welcome to our annual university Career Growth Fair, a great event where we bring together academia and the real world. It's all about bridging that gap between education and the great opportunities out there.

This fair is about connecting our students with different industries and showcasing their amazing talents. We want to show how our education seamlessly connects with the job market. Our students are truly great. They have got that curiously, adaptability, and creativity that will help them thrive in this rapidly changing world."

Abir El Tannir, AACD director, commented on the success of this year's career fair, "We are excited to host the AUK Career Growth Fair, an event designed to ignite students' professional development and pave the way for their future achievements. Our goal is to provide students with exceptional networking opportunities, valuable learning experiences, wellness tips, and insights from industry leaders, all of which will empower them to confidently embark on their chosen career paths. We are also proud to collaborate with Meditation Nation, one of our esteemed alumni, to emphasize our dedication to holistic development and fostering a supportive environment that addresses employees' well-being. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our alumni who represented their companies at the event, as well as to Eminds, a member of the Wolf Pack and our talented event planner. Lastly, we express our deep appreciation to our amazing sponsors whose support played a pivotal role in making this event a resounding success!"

Attendees interacted with the companies. Gift bags, brochures, contact details, and CVs were exchanged, creating a welcoming space to grow, develop, and learn.

Indian Cultural Society to present musical concert on June 2

Rasika embraces India's diverse cultures with her music

By Chaitali B. Roy

Special to the Arab Times

On Friday, June 2, Indian Cultural Society, a cultural organization popularly known for presenting some of the biggest concerts to Kuwait will move out of their comfort zone and present Rasika Shekar, a prodigiously talented artist known for her eclectic taste in music at the AIS auditorium Maidan Hawally. Rasika is true to her name, which means a connoisseur, or a person of taste steeped in beauty or excellence. Like her name, she immerses and floats through diverse musical landscapes owning them all at the same time. Her personal life too exemplifies this ability to transition and willingly embraces diverse cultures. Indian Cultural Society, the local organization presenting her has a reputation for bringing professionally managed entertainment with many successful featuring artists.

Community

Rasika Shekar is an Indian born in Dubai and raised in New Jersey, USA. She is a gifted singer, flautist and composer, who plays the bamboo flute. She is trained in various traditions of music including Carnatic and Hindustani Classical music, both vocal and instrumental. Music is her way of going back to her roots. Rasika agrees. "Absolutely. Growing up in the US, music was one of the strongest ways to feel connected to my community," she said in an exclusive interview to Arab Times. "It was like a feeling of home. There was comfort. Moreover, the more I dug deep into music, I found myself getting more connected and going into the depths of languages and different cultures of our regions."

Rasika started training in Carnatic flute at the age of 14. It was her mother, who caught a floating comment from her school going daughter, and promptly got her a teacher. From then, there was no looking back. But her introduction to music had started much earlier in her initial years. "Growing up, there was a lot of Indian folk music playing at home on my father's side - Music from the folk cultures of Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, I was exposed to Carnatic classical music from my mother's side. It was a good mix!" she recalls. Rasika began her formal training in Dubai, a place where she was also exposed to diverse traditions of music. "I started training in classical vocals from my aunt in Dubai, where I grew up. Luckily, Dubai was a place where I was exposed to music and people from all over the world including Bollywood, Arabic music, classical, western pop and more. When I was seven, my parents gifted me a small toy Casio keyboard and that was my first journey of playing music."

Despite being born out of India, growing up in Dubai, shifting to the States, and getting immersed in the western traditions of music at Berklee and outside, Rasika Shekar did not lose cultural contacts with India. "Both Dubai and the US have a strong Indian community luckily," she shares. "People are very happy to be connected to their roots, and one can find a number of events and resources that keep you connected. Every weekend, you can find musical events across Indian genres, art workshops, lecture demonstrations, community meetups and religious events. There was never a dearth of opportunities to connect. Moreover, I have to thank my parents for instilling



Rasika Shekar to perform in Kuwait on June 2.

ing that interest in me from childhood."

Trained

Despite having trained in music from her childhood, Rasika was unsure of her professional trajectory in the beginning leading her to graduate in Chemical Engineering from Rutgers University. "As much as I was drawn to music from childhood, it was not until my last year of college that I felt I wanted to take it more seriously. Until then, I had no idea what it meant to be a professional musician," she explains when asked about why she trod the well beaten path in her early years. Her tryst with her musical destiny came later. "I was learning and exploring music for the pure joy of learning. After high school, I was genuinely interested in mathematics and chemistry and the engineering stream felt like a natural fit. At no point then did I think I would make music my profession! But I have to confess, I would spend a lot of time at home, in front of the mirror, with a brush in my hand, imagining that I was singing in front of many people. I guess some sort of manifesting."

After graduating, Rasika started spending more time in India, training and performing music. At that time, she was chosen to tour with the legendary Ustad Ghulam Ali Khan as a vocalist where she performed a repertoire of ghazals. It was baptism by fire, as the maestro is one of the best ghazal singers of his generation and Rasika was yet to make a mark pro-

fessionally, but she rose to the occasion admirably. Her years of training and community performance helped. "The tour with Ustad Ghulam Ali Khan was the first tour I went on right after college," she recalls. "It was before Berklee and somewhere I'm extremely grateful I got that early exposure. While in college, I was singing in many community events over the weekends and at one such event, I decided spontaneously that I would sing one of my favorite ghazals. One of the promoters was in the audience and offered me the opportunity to tour with the legend. While studying for my engineering degree, I spent all my free time listening to hours and hours of music from across genres. I would sit alone in my room and imitate different styles of singing. It opened my ears, heart and appreciation towards so much more music and styles. It helped me straddle across genres. Right after that, I started touring with Shankar Ehsaan Loy in India and it was after a few years of that, when I decided to go to Berklee."

Empowered

The tour that followed with the electrifying Shankar, Ehsaan and Loy empowered her further. "It was truly a blessing!" she says. "I learnt so much from them individually and collectively. They set such high standards for artistry all while being gems of human beings. It's truly a rarity. I'm grateful I got to see their music making up close. Touring was a lot of fun! They're just incredible people and have immense energy

and respect for music. The beautiful thing was to see three artists from very different musical backgrounds come and collaborate to make such masterpieces. The respect and love they have for each other's art is beautiful."

In between touring, training and performing, Rasika Shekar studied Jazz and Western contemporary music at Berklee, further honing her ability to straddle genres. By that time, she had done playback singing in Bollywood films like 2 States, Kill DII, Katti Batti and Love Games. Despite having no connections in Bollywood and having spent her growing up years outside the country, Rasika was able to make inroads in the music industry. Was it challenging? "No doubt, it was completely a new territory for me when I came to Mumbai," she answers. "I had to learn and adapt to the workings of the city and the industry. It's undoubtedly challenging as a newcomer just like in any other industry or walk of life. The sense of belonging wavered. In retrospect, what truly kept me going was the pure love for music. I surrendered to the exploration of it. It kept the naivety and childlike passion for it alive. In doing that, the actual challenges blurred out."

As a flautist, she started performing solo Carnatic flute concert in the United States, Dubai, Chennai and Mumbai. Once again, she broke the glass ceiling and joined the small, exclusive club of female flute players. "I used to often be met with a

surprised look when I told people I played the bamboo flute," she explained when asked about stereotypes associated with women playing flute. "The first thing I heard was something like 'oh that must require a lot of strength, I've never heard of a girl play.' I believe it's a stereotype and nothing else. In my opinion, the challenge of playing the flute is not gender based. As far as the instrument is concerned, it takes a little getting used to it and working on your breathing a lot. The resources to learn the Indian flute are slightly more limited in comparison to other instruments. And that perhaps adds to the limited feeling of accessibility. But that said, every instrument is an ocean in itself."

Traditions

Rasika Shekar is an exceptionally talented flautist, singer and composer, disciplines that require a strict training regimen. When asked if she finds it difficult to balance her artistic identities, she answers, "In the years I was learning to straddle with both, I was always caught trying to choose one over the other. Most people discouraged me from doing both. But my heart just couldn't pick! They both were and are very honest ways of my musical expression and rather than having to pick, I jumped deeper to understand the breathing required for both. One does overtake the other depending on the context the music. But it's all within the honest expression I prefer. If I had to take a pick, I prefer to sing for myself."

Rasika is a baroque artist who has

embraced different traditions of music, both Indian and Western. She has collaborated with artists like John McLaughlin, AR Rahman and many others. She has also performed in a variety of spaces cutting across mediums. With Bombay Jayashri and Resul Pookutty, she has appeared in theatre director Roysten Abel's Weaving Voices. She has composed music and song in different Indian languages. She can move effortlessly through Punjabi folk to moving ghazals to AR Rahman compositions and popular Bollywood numbers. Her versatility is striking. Through her flute she explores the traditional and experimental, sometimes adding a jazz component to the seemingly traditional.

At her Kuwait concert on June 2, she promises her audience a musical journey that spans across genres of new and old Bollywood, ghazals, Punjabi folk, fusion music, her original compositions on the flute. "I'm super excited to be able to sing and dance together with them! I hope to give them an evening where they feel joy, love and soak into the music!" Speaking of the platform provided by Indian Cultural Society to perform at Kuwait, Ashfaque Khan and the entire team have been so supportive and given us the beautiful creative freedom to come and perform our music there. It's always lovely to see such genuine music and art lovers. I'm truly excited and looking forward!"