Nihal Nelson, the lone hand in moral *kapirinna*

CHAMIKARA WEERASINGHE

We are here today blessed by the "clap" of your hands. By putting them together you made us, gave value to us and established our station, I salute you, stutiye, "

This was Nihal Nelson live on stage giving vote of thanks to fans around him. Everybody knows Nihal would not sing out of key. But to utter these few words Nihal has to go through a lot, his voice becomes tensed, his hand starts moving towards his chest, he adjusts his spectacles, touches his forehead, his voice becomes shaky, his tone deep and low .

The fans know that the singer has just shared his gratitude with them.

This is Nihal Nelson at his natural best in real life and song. He functions from deep rooted Buddhist principles which is apparent from his signature songs such as *"Epa Epa Mas kannata Kiri Ammage,"* (a song against the slaughter of cattle for human consumption, *"Me kudu Atha Ariye Nethinam Ape Rata Kude Kudu"*(Anti drug song) and *"Saamaye Salakunalu Pareviya ..."*

Nihal has made his voice and music felt and wanted by audiences across the country , making his style of singing a much needed element in Sri Lanka pop.

Nihal Nelson is perhaps the only artiste to set out the genre of *kapirinna* music in Sri Lanka on a Buddhist moral footing amidst a long line of *kapirinna* singers whose songs were more or less restricted to relay sarcasm or laughter to the audiences. The In Tune is pleased to bring this much overlooked fact about the artiste to light. This is evident upon analyzing his creations . He is the first artiste to bring about this characteristic feature to Sinhala kapirinna music in such force as no artiste of the genre has ever done. This has been conveniently forgotten and overlooked by music critics while Aesthetic directors have been endearing themselves criticizing "baila" and new wave music at school assemblies.

The In Tune met singer composer Nihal Nelson at his residence in Rawatawatta, Moratuwa for an interview on his musical career in relation to his achievements as a prominent figure in the local music scene. .

Nihal Nelson has recorded over 5,000 songs , most of them written and composed by him with over 111 cassette albums under his belt, 25 LPs , 100 Eps and 20 CDs . His is the first CD in Sri Lanka titled "Salli Miti Ganan" which was presented to late President R.Premadasa in 1989.

Over 45 years in music his contribution to Sri Lankan pop has been Jurassic . One cannot judge Nihal Nelson by his appearance just as one cannot judge a book by its cover. Following is the interview with Nihal.

Nihal Nelson *Pictures: Ruwan de Silva*

What is the story behind your success as an artiste who made a move from fun-inducing lyrics to spiritual themes in a style that is best suited to generate excitement and laughter?

An artiste having recorded his first song present it to the public through a medium. Then the people evaluate the quality of his creation , whether it has good rhythm , melody, lyrics and pitch. . Upon accepting that creation, the people want to know about the person responsible for that creation, whether he lives in keeping with the morals he is trying to promote through his songs. If found so people respect him. With the respect growing the artiste has got to produce more work that can satisfy them . He has got to strive to preserve the respect he gets from them not only with his creations but also with good conduct.

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Are you an artiste brought to the limelight by society?

I am an artiste accepted by the society, My popularity is based on the value that the society has bestowed on me and my creations. Yes. I am an artiste brought to the limelight by the public.

Does that mean that there are artistes who have been brought to limelight by some other agent outside the society?

That is also to be decided by the society, and not by the artiste. I regard myself as an artiste to have been brought about by the society because I feel it so strongly when I go live on stage.

I represent them with my creations. If I should see shortcomings of the society, I bring that forth with my creations to show what is wrong to establish what is right. It is only a very few artistes who have prevailed with acceptance by the society after going into the society , the reason being , it is the people that pass the judgment at the end of the day.

But isn't that a fact that there are artistes who have become popular in Sri Lanka by virtue of video clips or music videos save live performances.?

I know that I did not become a star by virtue of videos. I have remained in the field for over 45 years without videos clips. This is the most interesting point.

No body has seen Sunil Shantha on video, but the children in the country seem to know about Sunil Shantha very well. I had the opportunity to see him singing on stage three or four times . I was a child then. No body has seen Sunil Shantha, but remains popular to this date. This is the difference between a video clip and the true value of an artiste. That is the place we must come to. No need to hook on clips.

Didn't you compose a song with a "short rap" in Sinhala some years ago?

You must be referring to the part of " Pattarawala vistara goda tatparayata Es Eragena Api Kiyawanawa." This was never meant to be rap of the sort.

I only thought of singing those lines in rapid motion to add colour to the flow of its lyrics. The public branded it as "rap". There was no such intention.

Would you mind composing rap singles?

I have already had a few.

Have you added any English rap parts in the middle of your songs?

No . The problem with local rap music is not in their singing because one could hear that there is pitch, rhythm and meter except that these rap parts do not go well with the songs and their meaning. Most rap singles are like eating mangoes with onions. Better to eat mangoes with salt.

There are new trends in Sri Lanka with new wave music making rapid progress. Any comments?

It is good. When waves hit the sand , the sand becomes rich and clean. But one should never expect the sand to go and hit the wave.

Did you have any mentors or any artistes who influenced your music or singing?

I listen to every artiste . When I listened to them first I thought I can do this . So I prepared myself to do what I thought I can. Anyway I I must make mention that I worked with my fellow artistes Karunaratna Abeysekera , Hemasiri Halpita ,Saman Chandranat Weerasinghe, Vernon Perera, Hector Wijesiri , Lal Thenabadu,Stanley Peiris and Sarath Alwis.

Have you done politics or supported political parties in your capacity as a singer.?

I have associated with politicians. But I have not sung any hosannas for them. But I would sing on political platform because singing is my profession. I do not look at theilr flags or colours. I would sing my songs for a fee as a professional artiste.

But there are songs that humiliate politicians . They come in audios and videos. Some of them are telecast on TV. Don't you like doing a few songs like that?

" I do not want to entertain generalized ideas such as that "All Politicians are corrupt" because I feel that it could remove their fear to do wrong."

I do not want to entertain generalized ideas such as that "All Politicians are corrupt" because I feel that it could remove their fear to do wrong . If a politician has done some wrong , I would rather go and tell that person that he was wrong instead of criticizing the entire community of politicians. That is the decent way to deal with the problem.

Do you believe in using technology as a recording artiste?

I also believe that there will be destruction if technology was used without proper knowledge. Suppose there is a person with a knife who has gone about killing..

He can be more effective with a machine gun in his hand which is what technology in this case. But if if was wise he would not kill with the a knife or the machine gun. Technology is dangerous with little or no knowledge..

Do you approve programs like "shadow stars " which brings forth people with similar looks and abilities resembling local artistes?.

There is a 'shadow star' on TV who acts like me.

I am very pleased that these programs serve us to shine. Because there is no way that one's shadow can fall in front. It always stays behind. It's safer to establish one's identity than working hard to preserve another's.

Angel

Song bank

-Shaggy

INTRO

Shooby dooby dooby doo woi
Shooby doo
Oh
Shooby doo dooby doo boi oi
Yeah, ah
" THE CHORUS JUST REPEATS THE SAME CHORDS: G,C,D,C,D"
G C D C D
Girl, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
G C D C D
Closer than my peeps you are to me, baby
Shorty, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
Girl, you're my friend when I'm in need, lady

Life is one big party when you're still young
But who's gonna have your back when it's all done
It's all good when you're little, you have pure fun
Can't be a fool, son, what about the long run
Looking back Shorty always mention
Said me not giving her much attention
And you appear to me so tender, say girl I surrender
(Thanks for giving me your love)
Girl, in spite of my behavior, well, you are my savior
(You must be sent from up above)
And you appear to me so tender, well, girl I surrender
(Said thanks for giving me your love)
Now life is one big party when you're still young
And who's gonna have your back when it's all done
It's all good when you're little, you have pure fun
Can't be a fool, son, what about the long run
Looking back Shorty always mention
Said me not giving her much attention
She was there through my incarceration
I wanna show the nation my appreciation
Girl, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
Closer than my peeps you are to me, baby
Shorty, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
Girl, you're my friend when I'm in need, lady
Girl, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
Closer than my peeps you are to me, baby
Shorty, you're my angel, you're my darling angel
Girl, you're my friend when I'm in need, lady

- **Jan St. Werner:** Effects, Keyboard
- **Andi Toma:** Effects, keyboard
- **Dodo Nkishi:** Percussion

"Mouse on Mars" in Sri Lanka at Barefoot Gallery

Goethe-Institute Sri Lanka, in collaboration with Barefoot Gallery presents German Electronic Music Band "Mouse on Mars" to perform at Barefoot Gallery, 704, Galle Road, Colombo 4, on April 7 from 7 p.m.

Mouse on Mars was formed in 1993 by Jan St. Werner and Andi Toma.

They were said to be the first to spread the word abroad about Germany's booming electronic music scene, which had long since emerged from the shadow of its overlords, the band Kraftwerk.

Music at Galadari

Klaviola at California Grill

A duo breaking barriers through the Piano and Viola, making a mesmeric difference in Classical Music.

Galadari Hotel has arranged to provide Piano and Viola music at the hotel's roof top restaurant. California Grill to be performed by Klaviola on Friday nights.

The hotel will have creative dancing Chef Anushan Perera at the Grill to serve its patrons.

Paul Pereira plays Piano on every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sundays. Ernest Francis perform on Tuesday evenings.

Dinesh Hewage, Rasika and Nuwan Vithanage of "Klaviola" have been performing for many years and their music has been enjoyed by many. The reviews indicate them as a classically marvellous band.

Rasika and Nuwan are members of the Sri Lanka Symphony Orchestra from 1997 and 'Krasna' String Chamber Orchestra from 1999. Rasika learnt oriental music from his childhood under the guidance of his father D.A. Hewage and moved on to western classical music under Ananda Dabare.

Nuwan is a member of Sri Lanka Symphony Orchestra since 1997 and 'Krasna' String Chamber Orchestra in 1999. He studied western music at St. Sylvester's College and Kingswood College in Kandy.

He learnt Piano under Mangalika Fonseka and Bridget Halpe. He directed music for children teledramas, "Danga Malla" and "Anne". He has directed much for short films and stage plays. "Sellam Gedera" is one of them. He received Best Music Director Award at the All Island Drama Competition in 1995.

Aquarius at Margarita Blue

Aquarius will continue to perform at Margarita Blue of Galadari for the festive month of April, said Galadari Food Beverage Director Ananda Warakawa.

The band's bassist Benji Ranabahu said they have extended their contract with the Galadari Management and added, "we feel quite at home with the hotel staff and its facilities."

He said, he will play with the same band members except one addition.

Mano, formerly a member of Wildfire has joined the band.

"He will be on saxophone and keyboards," said Benji. The two girls from Philippines , the front line singers of Aquarius Apple and Ice will also continue to perform with the band. The band's line up is Benji Ranabahu on bass and vocals, Shiran Munasinghe on drums and vocals, Dhanushka Jayasekera on lead guitar and vocals, Ray de Silva on Keyboards. They are scheduled to perform on April 2,3,4 and 5 at Margarita Blue. Benji said they have special arrangements to perform on April 16, 17,18 , 23, 24and 25. You can enjoy a wide variety of somgs, rock, blues ,pop, R and B , country and many more at Margarita Blue with Aquarius to take over.

Aquarius: Shiran Munasinghe on drums and vocals, Ray de Silva on Keyboards, Apple on vocals, Benji Ranabahu on bass, Ice on vocals, Dhanushka Jayasekera on lead guitar and vocals and Mano on sax and Keyboards.