

Soulful Lou



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Syed Miraz Ahmed 23 June 2011 10353 views

Soulful *Lou*

“When things get too real...take a little time to dream.” Well! This is exactly how Lou Majaw much like what he said got himself to travel about 40 years of his life, through Laitumkhrah mornings, Shillong winters, Kolkata sojourns, stage performances and more. He is a story of man's tryst with life. A story of a man's life with life. The intrinsic passion he came to be known for. The love he has earned for strumming his guitar and singing gleefully.

Lou is popular, a name not just reckoned for his amiable nature, signature fashion or any thing else; but how the poet in him made it worthwhile to sail 40 long years through the wilderness of his share of life itself.

Music has been from yore a part of the NorthEast Indian cultural milieu. Recent times have seen a number of young jump into the music fora but the times when Lou took to music was much different. Lou was born the year India announced itself independent into a humble Khasi family. Making music a career was debatable. Despite his appetite he could not afford to buy a guitar or even a radio. Eventually during his boarding school days music grew close to him and by the 60's a self-taught Lou hit the stages of bygone Kolkata - a man destined to strum and sing albeit adversaries of sorts.

He has earned global recognition for annually organizing Bob Dylan's *Birthday Concert* ever since he first started it on 24th May 1972 when he was aged about 25 years drawing large crowds even today. *Dynamite Boys*, *Vanguards*, *Supersound Factory*, *Blood and Thunder* and *Great Society* are bands he voiced for. Most striking about Lou Majaw's compositions are that they are all about positive vibes and relate to the humane side. His renderings leave everyone happy.

40 years is no small time and only a person with integrity and dedication can last out. Lou has it in him to settle anywhere beyond NorthEast India with his talent for the matter but his home turf allures him more than any thing else; his love for his mother keeps him shuttling between Shillong and his live performances. He has succeeded in allowing famousity to find him but it did not really blind him. He is better identified as Lou Majaw from Shillong rather than Lou Majaw the guy from Shillong who belts it out in New Delhi or Mumbai or Bangkok or 'someplace else.' Shillong gave him to be what he is as a performer and nothing about the way he carries himself has drastically changed so far. I have memories of him taking the same road from his rented residence walking down the slope of Nongrim Road that meets the main road past the city bus stand when I would call out to him as I usually did the moment I saw him any where about: "Hey! where are you goin Uncle Lou...?" He would spare no time to raise his hand as always in gesture and answer with a bright smile on his face: "Yeah... I'm just rolling down the street man." "How are you doing?" He would query back continuing to walk his distance and end saying. "May God Bless you." This is the kind of a star Uncle Lou is. Approachable. Recognizable. Respectable to one and all and nothing in the times to come shall rob him of his gentle demeanour.

My baby-introduction to Lou took place towards the fag end of the 70's when he came to my residence, Bow & Arrow Cottage at Nongrimbah in Shillong to celebrate my birthday along with his friends. I have ghost memories about it but my mother keeps on telling me even now about how he strummed and sang. Later on he became my backdoor neighbor during the 90's at Laitumkhrah Police Point to my surprise or maybe I should term it luck and then on through my teens I would come across him more than just often.

Months back during The Asia Literary Festival at Don Bosco Institute I opportuned to interact with him comfortably. On his arrival I was taken aback to learn that he had an ailing back. I hurried to meet him and found him lying on a dormitory bed. He smiled the moment he saw me. "Hi! Man?" he exclaimed and extended his right arm to shake my hand lying all the while. I asked him how he was doing. "I'll be fine in a while man, get me some water," he replied. I arranged water to help him down his medicines and after about half an hour or so we had Uncle Lou on stage - solo.

At the terrace dinner overlooking the quiet wintry Brahmaputra, I momentarily sat across him for a chat. Between talks he said: "Don't be sad man." "You are lucky man, you have a house to call your own while I don't even have one." Uncle Lou does not have a permanent house address because he keeps shuttling regularly. Hearing him my grief lightened to a degree. Lou's lyrics relates to the heart and the emotions permeate all. Sometime after I bade the performer goodnight.

Early June I hit upon long time senior friend and Brand Consultant Aniruddha Talukdar when Lou dropped into our conversations. He proudly mentioned about his association with a close to conclude circuit event at India Club which will feature *Lou Majaw & Friends*. I gladdened to know that I shall chance to meet him again. Evidently its about the bard in him, his music and his performance *Soulful Spirit* toured with to select venues like Narengi Oil Club (Narengi), Kaliyani Club (Numaligarh Refinery Ltd.), Guwahati Town Club (Guwahati), Zaloni Oil Club (Duliajan) and Champa Club (Bongaigaon Refinery Petrochemicals Ltd.) since 12th March. *Soulful Spirit* is an event of **Spirit Underground** - a stage conceived by Radiant Manufacturers Pvt Ltd.,(RMPL) to celebrate and introduce to people classes of acclaimed artistes. It is also a springboard for the aspiring young as well.

World Music Day: 6pm: I hurried up the flight of steps to the third floor Goswami Lodge – an apartment adjacent Vivekananda Kendra overlooking a swelling river. (there is only one river we so frequently talk about; its the ageing River Brahmaputra) Lou Majaw arrived sometime ahead and was half reclining on a bed when I entered his room. Aniruddha efforted to re-introduce me to Lou when Lou laughing out loudly said: “Who this guy? I know this guy man. I know him from the time he was small.” I smiled and asked “ How are you, Uncle Lou?” “I’m fine. Don’t call me Uncle Lou. You are grown up now. Call me Lou Majaw.” Lou does not wield complexes and converses easily to one and all. His back got better, he looked energetic since I last met him and so have the performances improved as he informed. He dug into some notorious Indian variety of a sumptuous plate of *Chowmein* the house-boy got him while we sipped the *red tea* he ordered – the finest beverage type we get here made from the completely oxidized bud leaves of *Camellia sinensis*.

Meanwhile at Hotel Blue Moon *Friends* Noël Karthak Lepcha (Percussion), Barry Kharnaor (Lead), Rupert Nongkhlaw (Bass) and two other guests took time to freshen up before the customary sound check at 8:30 pm. Noël, Barry and Rupert are members of a well known Progressive Rock Band of Shillong called *Midnight Garden Factor*. Formed in the Autumn of 2007 the band opened for *Mr. Big* a few years ago in Shillong and was crowned *Meghalaya Icon* in 2010. Lately they came to terms to perform alongwith Lou which they immensely enjoy.

About 9:15 pm Lou was driven to India Club to a congested space between two tennis courts which actually has been the frontage of the Club since long. With time club members and guests poured in to celebrate World Music Day and Lou’s 40th year in the Music Industry showcasing *Lou Majaw & Friends*. Lou started his performance with a brief on the significance of World Music Day. Also known as *Fête de la Musique* it is a global attempt to make all possible genres of music accessible to the public. Lou warmed up to the people by rendering an old Dylan favorite *I’ll Be Your Baby Tonight* which set in the mood. His compositions *Oh Most Beautiful* and *Sea of Sorrow* established the poet-bard in him while other numbers showed how good a performing artist he is. The wholesome convention of the lucidly performing musicians exhibited reserves of expertise to keep a crowd together for long and longer than can be anticipated. Their power house performance made entrepreneur and club member Swapnil Bharali ask for all time favorite *Wonderful Tonight*. *Lou & Friends* readily obliged and closed in after a magnetic two hour gig for dinner.

On the sidelines Barry and Noël confessed that the intensity of thrill never dived down in all the performances. Their sincere passion for performance was seen all through. Aniruddha holds that Lou being a brand himself has been able to sustain the Events Industry and it is because of him people find meantime employment and it has all been a one man's quality to be able to bring together people who wait upon to make an event to live by. *"If you cannot be what you want to be...why not try and be what you are?"* he ended quoting from Lou's number *Soul on Fire*.

Efforts to promote, patronage and popularize a kind of music or any worthwhile event for instance cannot materialize and gather force if not for wholesome corporate and private industry supports which help grow even though episodically. Music in order to become a thriving industry looks up for such uplifts to sustain its genre smoothly and Radiant Manufacturers Pvt Ltd., has ventured to do its bit for music and music lovers in this part of the world.

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