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## Featured: "If I'm good, I'll last." – Alokanda Dasgupta

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Petite, dynamic, talented and a fast speaker. That's Alokanda Dasgupta, a young music composer. Her tiny cap buzzes with quite a few feathers-assistant to music director and composer Amit Trivedi of award-winning movie 'Udaan' fame, on-and-off programmer for 'No one killed Jessica' and music composer for her dad's (filmmaker Buddhadev Dasgupta) film titled 'Woh'. **P S Bhavana** delves into her personality



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### ".... since I was five"

A persistent father, a rented piano that initiated a few classes rather early in life, a collection of nearly 3,000 music cassettes (which had "no Bollywood music - It was taboo") and a few wrong academic choices drove Alokanda to realise that music was indeed her first love. Says Alokanda, "My sister (Rajeshwari Dasgupta) and I kept learning music and playing the piano since we were five. But self-realisation happened much later."

### "I wasn't a performer"

"Then in teenage I went through a bad phase and wanted to leave the piano. I remember breaking down in a concert! This was when I met a 70-year-old Sri Lankan named Fauzia Marikar, a piano teacher. It was almost like a cinematic story (she grins). She told me that I shouldn't learn music for the degree but for the love of it. She made me realise that I wasn't a performer as I was shy and it was okay to not like performing. Suddenly I wasn't feeling guilty anymore! This pushed me to think about music theory but I started doing my graduation in English (sighs). In college although I took up film studies, I was missing formal music study. There are music courses in India but there is no academia that focuses on structured theory."

So against the wishes of her extended family, Alokanda applied to universities abroad. Meanwhile she started doing her masters in English ("at the insistence of her aunts"). Soon she made it to the York University, discontinued her masters and did her four-year bachelors in music in a span of two-and-a-half years.

### "I learnt on the job"

Once in the Canada Alokanda started missing Indian music and cinema. "Yes, I was doing a lot of Western classical and playing the piano but people wanted to know about Indian music. This made me polish my Indian music skills. But as I had no training in Indian classical music I stuck to the Bollywood genre. I saw both shallowness and extreme creativity in it. I loved films and I loved music. I made both click for me. But until the last year at the university I never tried my hand at composing film music. Then I did an interesting project with Xixela Franco, a Madrid-based filmmaker, where I used Indian idioms. Here I learnt on the job. Also I started taking composition lessons and did a thesis-like honours project in English composition." This took Alokanda's music grounding to newer heights.

### "I'm a confused person"

"Next, I realised I wanted to do Bollywood and world cinema after I watched the movie 'Aamir'. Well, I'm a confused person. So for me to know something for sure is great! And I knew I wanted to assist this guy who composed for 'Aamir'." But before she could react and find out more about Trivedi Alokanda had to rush back home to Kolkata to tackle an emergency-her mom was ill and later passed away. "I couldn't stay in Kolkata anymore so I shifted to Mumbai." And she played it by the ear and learnt the ropes. Let's say this metamorphosed her confused personality into a concrete one. Probably that's why she initially never banked on her famous father. "I never thought of Baba as my stand by. It didn't strike me then. I didn't want to start with his films."

### "It's not a woman's job yet"

"Today there are not many women music composers in India. Maybe women after a certain age may not have a singular focus anymore. In creative fields it is very tough to juggle professional and personal lives. It's the case with other professions too, but in music; work, time or people are not certain. It's tough to attain stability. This probably puts women out of this profession."

She flags up her Mumbai life and says, "When I was assisting Amit in 'Udaan', we had to wrap up late after working 16-17 hours at a stretch. I'd come back home at four or five in the morning. But I learnt a lot with Amit especially programming and



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sequencing, which I otherwise wouldn't have.

"There is no formula to get into this profession"

"People say loads of things like flirt, be prepared for the worse, pay up, and if you're a woman you may have to sleep around. But nothing like this exists. Simplest equation is; if you're good, you'll make it. If you're not you'll not. Even being the daughter of a famous person won't make me last long. If I'm good, I'll last. Although both my dad and I owe it to each other to use each other's talent, don't we? On a serious note, formal education helps but one has to have passion. In the end, it's all about love and practice."

"I was apprehensive coming back to Kolkata"

"Bollywood is not shallow as people think or even I thought. There is so much hard work, professionalism, composing, programming and the like that goes into it. The city taught me a lot in the little time I worked there. Yes, you cannot talk about music a lot as people here work a lot, but Kolkata is a different story. I was very apprehensive coming back. People in Kolkata know a lot about music but they are not as open to experimental music. Also I think Kolkata isn't very ready to accept a young female composer. It's difficult to break traditions here completely. All the same, it's too early for me to generalise about a city. I've been here just over a month!"

"I'm just a year old!"

"I've been in this industry for a year. If I get more work in Kolkata I'd like to incorporate something different in the scoring of music. I tried that in Baba's movie. He is a huge barrier sometimes because of his age and experience. He kept telling me 'in my movie I want a beautiful sounding song' but I wanted to experiment. Baba is fascinated by Purulia and shot there a lot. He used a folk song from 'Chau Naach' and got a folk singer to sing it. He strictly told me not to touch this song. Then secretly I used the lyrics (you see, I can't change them) and I re-did it. I played it for Baba and the team. They loved it and used it in the film. Baba was scared I'll take away the folk element. I didn't and he liked it. I wanted to prove a point that experimenting doesn't mean butchering. While 'Woh' falls into place here (there are three songs in the film), I'll go back to Mumbai to look for more work. Also I want to open an institute of my own where I can teach music theory." We say 'Amen'.



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