

MUSIC

She can fill arenas. She refuses to bow to political pressure. She believes that music is a changemaker. She will be taking the Science City stage on February 11 for the third edition of Emami Cultural Fiesta, in association with t2. She is... **Sona Mohapatra.**

Let's hear it from the 39-year-old singer with hits like *Bedardi Raja*, *Jiya laage na*, *Piya se naina*, *Ambarsariya*, *Dil aaj kal*...

Calcutta has a special place in your heart and you count Kallol Datta and Eina Ahluwalia as friends....

I am in awe of the sheer breadth of Bengali culture, be it in art, music, literature, film, couture or cuisine. I'm also amazed at the very real, unpretentious connection the people of Calcutta have with this culture. Intellect, wisdom and expertise are still valued highly... and that's rare in our increasingly commercial world.

Singer, songwriter, performer... which of the three challenges you the most?

It would have to be the performer as it includes every aspect of my personality and skills, and is easily the most exhausting and rewarding. Be it social media, studio or stage, my abilities as a performer are what help me express myself.

What do you look for in a Bollywood project before signing on?

For me, it's always about the melody and lyrics. If I connect with those, I can really make the song my own. Bollywood is just one of the many avenues available to an artiste today and while it does help raise your profile, it isn't my only aim. I love re-inventing folk music and making pop records as well, so those are on the anvil for 2016!

You've lent support to Muskaan, a nationwide initiative about cleft deformities. With a million problems around us, which are the causes closest to your heart? Being connected to social issues is



SONA MOHAPATRA HAS A DATE WITH YOU AT EMAMI CULTURAL FIESTA, WITH t2

What Sona Mohapatra in concert

When February 11, 6pm onwards

Where Science City

What to expect You can expect a bunch of fresh new material added to the favourites. You can also expect an exciting, pulsating live band and a treat for the senses

something I try to do on a regular basis. I really believe fame is a privilege and must be put to good use. Women and children's issues along with issues of culture are subjects closest to my heart. I am raising funds for an NGO, PTRC, working for mental wellness. In a country of one billion we have only 4,000 professionals who can help such patients and the scary part is that this condition afflicts 20

per cent of the population and as per WHO, it will soon overtake cancer and heart diseases as the biggest cause of death.

I'm also helping raise awareness for the fast disappearing traditions of Indian weaves via my project *#CelebrateIndianWeaves*. We must make our traditions 'cool' again and in this movement, I believe,

Bengal can truly lead the way as individuality is still celebrated in Bengali culture.

Are you counting down to *Tere Bin Laden 2* (releasing February 26), the music for which is from your home production, *OmGrown Music*...

Ram (Sampath) has composed and sung the song *Itemwaale* for *Tere Bin Laden 2*. We're proud to be associated with this film which is a really funny satire on the times we live in. We also have *Raees* in the works, as well as many other projects. These are exciting times at OmGrown Music!

You have been married to Ram Sampath since 2005.

How has the relationship evolved?

Being married has only freed me and I feel fortunate for that. Ram and I are extremely busy professionals, so we cherish the time we spend together. Our mutual interests overlap from the professional to the personal, so we're rarely out of sync with each other... I think I've made him more punctual and he's made me more relaxed.

With an academic background in engineering and MBA, what made you chuck up a marketing executive job and move into music?

My journey to the arts and entertainment world has been serendipitous. I worked as a marketing manager for five years before quitting to become a singer. My parents always stressed on the importance of a good education, including a sound foundation in Hindustani vocal and for the most part, I agreed with them. I was a good student and did my B'Tech (Instrumentation & Electronics) and MBA on merit. It was only when I

moved to work in Mumbai that I even entertained the idea of cutting a vocal demo and approaching music directors. The journey since then has been magical, but I wouldn't trade my education for anything in the world.

Your sense of style is distinctive. What fashion trends are you big on at the moment?

My style is another means of expressing myself artistically, creatively and culturally. I don't really follow trends to be honest. But yes, some friends whose advice I take seriously include Kallol Datta, Atikaa Ahluwalia and Meghna Bhalla.

I don't go often enough to Bhubaneswar but I love the street food there. Chhena Poda Pitha is absolutely the best sweet ever invented and I enjoy the highway stopovers to eat this and lots more yummy food! — What she misses most about Odisha

After David Bowie passed away, you posted a *Let's Dance* mix on your Facebook timeline. How did he influence you?

He's an icon of individuality and true personality. He also made very complex and experimental art but packaged it very glamorously. It's something very few artistes have pulled off.

He was always re-inventing himself and I admire that about him. This mix you saw on Facebook was actually an official reworking of the track with me singing the desi Hindi parts mixed with Bowie's vocals. Some issue between the music label and Bowie's management ensued and it couldn't get a proper release in India.

Finally, what makes Sona Mohapatra such a kick-ass woman?!

In my humble opinion — my conviction and tenacity.

Mathures Paul

Do you agree with Sona that Chhena Poda Pitha is the best sweet ever? Tell t2 @abp.in