**Mr.Mark Uddin**



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Interviewed by: Jamil Iqbal

Mark was one of the members of Joi Bangla Sounds formed in 1986. Joi Bangla Sounds was an offshoot of the League of Joi Bangla Youth organisation. It was formed to give an identity to the British Bengali youths.

**Mark Uddin & Hasan Ismail  
  
Q: How would describe your music?  
Mark Uddin**We don’t do music anymore. But if you are talking about, like “Joi Bangla Sounds”, I would have describe it as an East-West cross over basically.

**Q: When you say East-West crossover, what do you mean?  
Hasan Ismail**Music from the East, like Bengali music, Pakistani music and Western obviously Western music, could be hip-hop, could be pop.  
  
**Mark Uddin** If you talk about us, we are talking about like, Bengali music, and hip hop house music from the time like 1986 and onwards.  
So you would say it was more Asian, emphasis more on Bengali as the Asian sides, also we are using Indian music or Pakistani or any other Asian influences as well as western music. Western music is of all sorts, for us at that time, because we were youth, we were obviously into hip hop, I mean the house music and the influence was from everywhere.



**Q: Your music reflected multiculturalism.  
Mark Uddin**Yes, it is true to a certain extent; because, we were mainly dealing with bringing the Asian sides, really. But yes it was multiculturalism, because the same thing was happening with other groups in East London; like in Brixton, it was happening there for the Afro-Caribbean people, they were doing the same thing. It was generally happening at that time; the experimentation with the music.

**Q: What prompted you go into this?  
Mark Uddin**We were still the old part of ‘Joi Bangla’ (League of Joi Bangla Youth) youth organisation, and what basically prompted us was the fact that we were looking at the youth and seeing that we really don’t have an identity, because we were Bengalis but we were also Londoners with Western origin. And there was a kind of confrontation at home, because parents having an attitude wanting you to be in that one-way and being that way was a conflict of your self when you are on the streets with your friends.  
**Hasan Ismail**It is also because we had an ideal as well. Obviously grown up all our life in London, we enjoyed western side of going out and listening to English music, we also had our Bengali identity everyone need to keep, which we were very proud of. So we decided to mix both kind of cultures together and still keep both kind of identities and both lifestyles as well and show it through our music.  
  
**Mark Uddin**Basically we were saying to the youth as well, you can be a westerner Bengali, and lot of the people, even among our own youth, in that time didn’t have anything to say that they were proud of Bangladesh for. All you got in western media was Bangladesh is a poor country, that has famine and things like this. When you are asked things on the street, you are asked to be proud of something, if you don’t have the knowledge, your history; you got nothing to be proud of. So it’s a way of imparting information, imparting sense of identity as well about what their parent were on about.  
  
**Hasan Ismail**So getting them interested in their own kind of cultures as well through the music. What was Joi Bangla about was to bring that music, and give them interest to find out what it was all about and about our youth life.  
  
**Mark Uddin**So that they could start to realise, here is a place where we can find out information, they are doing what we like and they are seeing it was creating an identity for the London Bengalis basically or Western Bengalis.  
  
**Q: How did it all started?  
Mark Uddin**We were interested in music it was just seen sensible. We were also involved in youth work and Joi Bangla Sounds. Sooner or later, when you are in things, you always put what your talents you have to it. At that time we were going through musical, that’s why we were mixing about, we used to make taste for ourselves. And it just progressed on that, and then the politics of organisation came into it and it gave it even more meaning. It also gave us a little bit more of identity to do something that we were feeling good about it.  
You are pointing to the music with no essence of meaning or anything, for us, anything we were doing had a good meaning and it was there for people to grab hold of and take wherever they want to go with it. And it became inspiring to a lot of youth.  
  
**Hasan Ismail**To take music to our community events, festival, melas and .We were playing out there all around the area.  
**Mark Uddin**There was a band, but that wasn’t our side, the Joi Bangla Banned that was Ansar’s side, that’s another thing.  
**Hasan Ismail**Because this is a way of tapping into the creativity of your youth and the people around you in your community. So that you can bring them out and give them to pass on the sense of identity in sense of learning. It also encouraged the youth and now I I see sound systems and people I knew grown up now who were involved in those things. That may gave them ideas at that time and it was very positive thing to do like DJ and Bengalis were into like Harun who got the youngsters to get into music  
  
**Mark Uddin**It was a modern Identity, something modern and something here and now, it wasn’t something that was like the youth could identify on both the levels. And at the same time we are giving them information about their country, their parent’s country of origin and things like that. So that they could then, if they wanted to go back and in turn, then they could probably ask their parents certain questions and things and make an interest. Show their parents their interest. They can’t show an interest if they don’t know anything to begin with, or don’t feel inspired in that sense. So that’s what it was doing, giving a sense of identity to the youth in this area.  
  
**Q: Do you think the fusion of East-West music contained traditional Bangla music or it contained pop Bangla music?  
Mark Uddin**I wouldn’t say it was one or the other. I would say that we took inspirations from our culture on all levels, be politically, or musically or poetically. We used traditional music; actually we took Folk music, Baul music, Sufi music etc. That was important to get a cross identity, was not good just taking Bengali pop record, one it didn’t necessarily work with western pop records, because it was on different beats. That was one main problem. And two, Bengali pop record at that time, the young youth and the western youth were into. Plus there were more kind of meaning for them.  
  
**Hasan Ismail** It was mainly traditional kind of Bengali Folk music, our village music with the tablas, sitars which blended well with the music we were bringing out.  
  
**Q: Tell us about festivals and melas?  
Hasan Ismail**We participated different festivals and melas all over the country including Bradford, Birmingham, Leicestershire, Liverpool and Manchester.  
  
**Mark Uddin**We went to places where there were Asian communities who were hearing what we were doing, so obviously they would want to book us and play out there. These were park festivals, in the summer times. That’s purely because that’s why they were out, people were hiring us and what we were doing here and there and that was purely not because of our politics, it was because of the music. It was through word of mouth. Then everything joins in that the way you open the doors into the youth. And once you are in, eventually those doors are open, and everything else can come through or come out of it. Which was the whole point of Joi Bangla.  
  
**Q: Where did you get all the music from at that time?  
Hasan Ismail**Harun’s dad was a musician so obviously he had lot of records; all kind of Bengali stuff, old records, and lot of trial and error. The first we tried to mix was with Michael Jackson’s “Billy Jean”  
**Mark Uddin**At that time what we were doing was a big pioneering in that level. Because it wasn’t even happening in Indian circles, but then it soon did and some other sound systems coming up to us saying, “You are the pioneers” Some of the other sound systems know that Joi Bangla were the pioneers in sound mixing.  
  
**Q: To buy all these musical instruments, where did you get all that funding, or was it personal?  
Mark Uddin**We were not necessarily buying lots of musical instruments, what we were doing was taking people who were in the community. The Bengalis love flute playing, they love singing, they love putting things together. So your community has all those things, it is recognizing them and recognizing that they are there; they can do all those things. There were keyboard players in them. That’s how the band came about to play. When the band was playing, nobody actually got funding for his or her instruments. They were actually had their instruments themselves, the guitars and the synthesizers and so on  
  
**Hasan Ismail**Most of the time we were mixing from old records. So we did not need so much of instruments. We were not rich and we used our initiative.  
  
**Q: Ansar Ahmed Ullah mentioned that you are a dancer, how did that …  
Mark Uddin**No that was to do in special show; we were doing the special show. Because all things end up culminating in things. So we ended up doing special show. And we created an idea of dancer. It was only couple of occasions. We did it in local school, community centres and theatres and it was purely the start of sending messages of Joi Bangla, Bangladeshi identity in East London. It was rehearsed before the actual show. We did a show on TV in Network East (BBC). We were in the front cover of City Limits magazine.  
  
**Q: What sort of music you listen now?  
Ismail Hasan**I am much older now, so I listen to all sorts of music now. Because of that, my musical experience is open to everything. I listen to the African music, French music; music is music, it should be listened to. Music is not bad; yes there are bad times to listen to it. So it’s all about your mood. That’s music.  
  
**Mark Uddin**Obviously sometimes have preferences, but in general music is music, during that time we started to deal with proper musicians, so that gives you the experience of life when you go out listen to musicians then so gives you that sort of things doesn’t make you turn off to listening to proper musicians. It enhances it.  
  
**Q: you both grew up in Brick Lane, what do you think of Brick Lane now? Cultural wise, music wise, what has changed?  
Hasan Ismail**Everything has changed about Brick Lane. It has become a place for Bengalis to come to find what ever they need. They come from all over Britain and they find their music here, their food here, their groceries here. Brick Lane now is a very meeting place, coming here at the weekends; you will see everybody from everywhere else in Brick Lane. You will see it’s multicultural and it is very vibrant now as well, with all the artists around, all the venues, all the bars and galleries. It’s very buzzing area now, it’s a completely different area. You will find travellers, tourists, and you got all sorts of people. It’s a very trendy place now.  
  
**Q: Is the transformation good?  
Hasan Ismail**Of course it’s good. It’s good for businesses, it’s good for our own people who like to find who ever they were. Music, the clothes, the shops. People are interacting with all sorts of people, people from all over the world, from all walks of life, from all types of works; coming here buying goods from there, eating in the restaurants, talking to our people, traditional Bengalis, this will give them insight to our people, kind of culture they have, how our live as well.  
  
**Q: Have you put an impression on the young generation with your music, which you started in the late 80s?  
Mark Uddin**Yes, I think on the young then. Because we were in touch with them, they did have left their marks with the youth of today. Because, I am no longer really involved with the youth in that sense today. They has obviously, because they have their DJs now, they play their music; they make their own music. So obviously, they get start something. They gave them assertiveness; they started to feel proud therefore they could be assertive and they feel no more guests now.  
  
**Hasan Ismail**The role of Bengali DJs now have improved. We have Bengali DJs now.  
  
**Mark Uddin**That also goes down to people who were listening and learning at that time. Now they are grown up and have kids. How do you think they are interacting with their kids? This is going to be completely in a level, different level to how they reacted with their parents. Because they are here now, they are going to sustain, they are now understand what are the things their parents valued, keep them passed mum and equip their kids not to feel like they are guest here. The Bengalis are now able to stand up for themselves and not feel as though they will have to be put down and not do anything. Before they would be attacked or abused and generally put their head down and get out of the way. And not want to deal with it, now you can’t do that, because they have their identity, they have their identity about themselves in London and about themselves as Bengalis. Which is what we wanted really.  
  
**Q: Has the music, which you started in the late 80s, has changed your outlook of looking at things.  
Mark Uddin**Of course, yes, it was an experience, so obviously the people I now.  
  
**Hasan Ismail**How they affected, the people were surprised at how you could make music like this and there are people listening to your music and asking what was all about. So we explained about identity and being Bengali and also being westernised as well.  
  
**Q: What do you have to say to the younger generation now?  
Hasan Ismail**Just to be proud to be a Bengali.  
  
**Mark Uddin**Be proud that you are Bengali and you are in London and always make the best where ever you are, be progressive.