

The Story of The Shooting Stars

The *Shooting Stars* came into the music scene rather like a shooting star – an intense streak of light speeding across the sky – but instead of disappearing without a trace, the *Shooting Stars* left their mark in history as the first pop music group of the country.



The Shooting Stars were the first pop music group in the country. It was formed by four students of Majeediyya School.

Until the early 60's there were very few people who listened to English music. But with the introduction of the English medium in the 2 government schools – Aminiya and Majeediyya, children began to take an interest in English music. This was enhanced further with the establishment of Male Radio which began playing Hindi and English music constantly.

By the mid-sixties The Beatles, Cliff Richard Jim Reeves, the Shadows and the Ventures were quite popular in Male and youngsters wanted to be like them. Some copied their fashions and even their hair styles. A few even tried to copy their music.

Mohammed Shiham and Ibrahim Khalid (Ibrey) were among the first few who tried to learn the guitar. At the time there was a school teacher Mr. Lawrence from Sri Lanka who had a guitar. Shiham and Ibrey started visiting him at his home to learn to play the guitar.

Ibrey was a close friend of mine and my step brother Mohammed Badeeu. Around the same time a classmate of mine from Addu Atoll wanted to sell an acoustic guitar which he had brought from Gan- a British Air Base in Addu Atoll. My father bought it for me. As we would usually hang out at Ibrey's house I kept the guitar there. He used it to practice his lessons. I learned to play chords by watching Ibrey practice and from chord charts. Badeeu was interested in playing the drums. The 3 of them, Shiham, Ibrey and Badeeu decided to form a music group and brought in Khalid Mohammed another school mate, who was able sing English songs. Together they decided to form a Beatles style music group, with Shiham as the Lead Guitarist, Ibrey as the Rhythm Guitarist, Badeeu as the Drummer and Khalid Mohammed (Kurly) as the Vocalist and Bass Guitarist. Shortly after the band was formed Khalid went abroad on a training course and I began filling in for Khalid.

At the time they were calling themselves the Fowls but not many people approved of that name. Then we changed it to the Meteors. I didn't think even "Meteors" would have the desired impact when announced on stage. So I suggested the name Shooting Stars. I thought the long vowels had the right punch and rhythm and the band members agreed. Shiham and Ibrey also began taking lessons from Mr. Ibrahim Ahmed popularly known as Gini Dhonbe who had just attended a music course in India. He had a music group called Zamani Music which played mainly Hindi and Dhivehi music.

Zamani Music had their instruments in Ginrahige and Maajehige and we were able to practice on them. We did not have any electric guitars, amplifiers or other equipment.

I remember Shiham and I once rode from Maajehige all the way to my home humming a note from the piano and tuning the guitar to that note because we didn't have a tuner. Being students we could not afford musical instruments. Musical instruments were not available in the country anyway. So we had to more or less make our own instruments, with goat skin on drums, fishing lines as guitar strings and brass plates used by grandmothers to separate rice, as cymbals. These were the only instruments at home. Even when we were able to borrow instruments we had to transport them on our bicycles as there were no pickup trucks.

There were other difficulties such as the unavailability of records. Very few people in Male played western music. We had to borrow records from the few who had them. If we wanted anything recent we would have to wait till

someone who goes abroad brings a record when they return. Even then most people were reluctant to lend their records. I don't think any body would have lent us any records if they knew how we learned the songs on them. We had to learn songs from vinyl records by repeatedly playing a few seconds at a time and taking a few notes. We coined the term 'Lava Negun' literally meaning 'Song Lifting' which is a term commonly used by musicians today.

We also had a bigger obstacle than all these. The Headmaster Mr. Umar Zahir considered pop music as having a bad influence on children. Some of the band members were even placed under house arrest for practicing music. In spite of all that we were determined to make an appearance somewhere. Ironically we made our first appearance in a school concert.

We knew we would not be allowed to make an appearance in public as we were not allowed to even practice. None of the other band members thought it would be possible to perform in the school concert because they were sure the headmaster would not allow us. I suggested that we should write to the Principal Mr. J.V Hill (from Sri Lanka) asking him to give us an opportunity rather than asking the headmaster. The Principal was the Head of the academic side of and the Headmaster was in charge of the disciplinary aspects of the students.

Anyway we decided to write to the Principal. After an audition in school he agreed to give us 5 minutes but later our slot was increased to 30 minutes.

When the time came for our first performance we did not have enough equipment to give a performance even with some instruments being available from Zamani Music. We had to use a public address system from the Ministry of Home Affairs for vocals and a radio borrowed from Mr. Ahmed Zaki (who later became Prime Minister). We made that first public appearance in the school concert in March 1970. (Mr. Kondey Thutthu Manik and Seyboo Umar Manik would also lend us their amplifiers and speakers for our performances later on.) There were no pilot lights on these amplifiers and silent tuners were not available but we made sure that the audience did not hear any unwanted sounds such as checking the microphone.

Although there were many restrictions on dress codes and hair styles for school children we disregarded them for the concert. Just for the fun of it Shiham and I used food color to dye our hair red in our first appearance in the concert in 1970. Today it doesn't sound outrageous but we did it at a time when the Beatles were regarded as having long hair.

In the 3-day concert we began each show with Rock n Roll Music with our school friend Sami Ahmed compering the show.

After that concert the Headmaster assumed a different attitude and regarded us as a source of entertainment.

In the same year the Shooting Stars performed at Lonuziyaaraiykolhu (the south east water front of Male) in the first open air concert on 11th November, the second anniversary of the country turning into a Republic. As the sound was not enough for the huge crowd that gathered, the Headmaster organized a 10-day concert named the Beat Waves at the Odeon theatre, one of the two theatres in the country. The concert was a sell-out. Abdu Rasheed Husein introduced us on stage. Sami Ahmed and Nafiu Rasheed were the go-go dancers and Abdul Ghanee Moosa (Maizan Jani) performed some balancing acts. One of the performances of the concert was done exclusively for the President Mr. Ibrahim Nasir and his cabinet members. Immediately after that performance President Nasir sent his Aide to us asking for a list of instruments we needed. He brought the instruments from abroad and presented them to MajeediyyaSchool. Since then we have always been prepared for a 3-hour performance with a repertoire of 50 -60 songs. We made use of every opportunity to perform and everyone knew *the Shooting Stars*.

We were very popular and had always played to full houses but our fame was short-lived. *The Shooting Stars* had to disappear from the music scene when Shiham and Ibrey left the country for higher studies. (The late Mohammed Shiham popularly known as Naibuge Shiham studied music in Australia and to this day he is regarded as one of the finest and most respected guitarists of the country.)