

MASTANA BAHAR AND THE MOHAMMEDS

EAST INDIAN TALENT UNEARTHED, BY RAFI MOHAMMED

Sham Mohammed established the television show *Mastana Bahar* on Trinidad and Tobago's only television station TTT in 1970. The show quickly became the most potent vehicle for the promotion and propagation of local East Indian talent and culture. This was done only eight years after the arrival of television in Trinidad and Tobago. Whilst Sham's elder brother Kamaluddin Mohammed was the pioneer of East Indian radio, Sham was the pioneer to television.

Sham initiated what is the longest running locally produced talent competition on television as the show is still broadcast every Saturday on the Government Information Channel. *Mastana Bahar's* major aim has always been to bring to the fore the tremendous wealth of talent that exists in our country up to today. By so doing, the best talent in the various art forms of singing, dancing and music are promoted and broadcast. Indian religious and traditional practices are inextricably bound to our cultural upbringing like Biraha and Qaseeda singing. *Mastana Bahar* has also provided an excellent vehicle for the exposure of these forms of culture.

The show features a very transparent entry requirement where prospective contestants are required to attend auditions that are held throughout the country from where the finalists for the taping of the preliminary rounds will be selected. The first four placed winners will then move on to the semi-final rounds. The winner of each of the semi-finals will then be selected to appear in the grand finals. All second place winners are also pooled together to give another opportunity for one of them to be added to the final round. The show lasts for usually 39 weeks each year. It must also be noted that because of the popularity of the show, a specific show called *Children of Mastana Bahar* catering for children 16 years and under, was created by Sham's son Jamal who was appointed Minister

of Communications in June 2012.

A most popular feature of the weekly show is the pick-a-pan contest during which an audience member is asked to answer a question. If answered correctly they will be asked to pick one of three pans – one will have a booby prize of no value, another a small cash prize and the other pan a more substantial prize called the jackpot. If the jackpot is not won the amount is carried forward to the next week.

Over the years many current big-name artistes have emerged through *Mastana Bahar* like Sundar Popo, Raymond Ramnarine and Michael Salickram.

Mastana Bahar continues to provide a national stage for our local singers, dancers and musicians. The show is currently produced by Sham's eldest son, Khayal Mohamed. ■

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Photograph by Stephen Broadbridge