

rock the mic

Karachi sees a plethora of musical talent and comic acts at Open Mic Night

Saba Imtiaz - Karachi

It's a clear sign - that Karachiites are absolutely starved for entertainment - when what felt like a mad crush of 300 people are squeezed into the cozy space at **The Second Floor** for Open Mic Night. The revival of the event (which has seen great stand up comedy acts and musical performances in the past) saw over a dozen acts performing in the space of two and a half hours. And it was a perfect dose of musical styles, genres and comedy.



The crowd - comprised mostly of teenagers and 20-somethings (though one did spot Rohail Hyatt in the melee as well as several older couples), looked like they were having an absolute blast despite being hard-pressed for places to sit.

Emceed by Omar Bilal Akhtar of Aunty Disco Project, Open Mic Night showcased some interesting musical acts that are making their way up. Take for example, Flam, who opened the event and had great musical harmonizing. This band has also opened for Ali Azmat recently at Bahria University. Waqas Jamshed is another singer to watch out for - he did an interesting cover of 4 Non Blondes' 'What's up', a rather apt tribute to the socio-political state we live in. And perhaps what added to the line-up were the interesting band names that seem to go hand in hand with underground bands. Acts including Spoonful, Gunaah and 7 on 3rd performed - and while 7 on 3rd did a number of cover songs, they hilariously sampled Britney Spears' 'Gimme More' as they switched between songs.

On the other hand, Haroon Shahid, of Sangeet Icon fame - did a Maroon 5 cover (prompting Omar to call him Haroon 5), as well as an original (which he says is inspired by Naseebo Lal) called 'Pyaar ki gundayri' - and this tongue-in-cheek number has great potential. Haroon's definitely someone to keep your eyes out for.

Girl Power

However, what struck out the most was the number of girls performing. While a decade ago, only a smattering of girls would even show up for a concert, now there is a plethora of female talent that is rocking the mic. Open Mic Night was no exception - a girl called Saman did a cover of The Corrs' 'Radio', Shaz (who has previously done a song that had Iraj featured in the video) performed her song 'Jalan', which was a rather heartfelt song with a great melody. Shaz is also working on an album - yet more good news for the music industry. Sara Memon - more popularly known for her work as a radio DJ - had ended up doing an acapella version of 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' the roughest time performing, since Omar who was playing the guitar blanked out (much to the crowd's amusement at his constant apologies!) But her cover of Anna Nalick's 'Breathe (2 A.M.)' was a pleasure to listen to. The original song is beautiful and showcases vocal talents brilliantly, and these are the songs that people should cover if they want to show what they're really made of. Rachel and Danish (who both worked on the Chicago musical) covered Alanis Morissette's

'Uninvited' and while it was a good cover, it was too much alike the original to really gauge how the duo made it their own.

The Aunty Disco Project ... and tabla beats

The Aunty Disco Project took the stage with a Dave Matthews Band cover, as well as a new original song, that definitely has great commercial value with its simple sing-along lyrics. One of the highlights of the show was NAPA table graduate Allan Simon performing with ADP's Yasir Qureshi, which saw the boys bringing the house down with their fusion piece combining body percussion, traditional tabla beats and the Arab-fused darbouka sound. They had great synergy and one looks forward to seeing more collaborations like this coming out from events such as Open Mic Night.



Though it was surprising to see how many bands used the darbouka in their act. ADP may not have the commercial success yet, but they've clearly sparked a trend!

The double act: Sami Shah and Ishma Alvi

The stand-up comedy acts were great fun. Sami Shah was his usual amusing self. His stand up comic act has been improving rapidly since he first started, and at this show he had the audience in fits with his commentary on watching foreign releases in cinemas, particularly Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull - as well as his saga of working out at his gym, with a trainer who offered to inject steroids and who waltzed up to him doing - we kid you not - a bhangra move. Sami's surprise of the evening was his wife Ishma doing her first stand up act (Ishma used to perform with Blackfish once upon a time), and she got probably got even more laughs than Sami (who chastised the crowd for hooting for his wife!) From her gym experience (a depiction of a woman who had clearly no idea how to work out, to not having a trainer but a 'Gym-ayah' instead) to the real truth about being pregnant (telling off her husband for saying "'we're pregnant', when in truth its 'I'm pregnant, and you're watching me'") to the indignity of it all - from aunties thinking a expectant mother's body is up for grabs to having to quit smoking ("I miss it so much I sometimes wish I could give birth to a big giant cigarette!). Sami and Ishma were an absolute riot - and as Omar Bilal Akhtar said as they went offstage, 'that kid's going to be so talented!'



Please don't stop the music!

As one sat there looking at the amount of talent that come to the limelight over the space of a few hours, and at the hordes of people swarming around, it was a reminder, yet again, of how important these events are. This is a nation starved for entertainment - and like the survivors of Titanic - clinging to every last bit one can find. And the fact that there are spaces like **The Second Floor** where these events can happen is a blessing in itself. The success of Open Mic Night should bring hope to those who shy away from performing citing the security situation, and in the oft-over-repeated words of Rihanna: "Please don't stop the music"