

Perfectionist by Nature

By Sehar Zaman

Mohib Mirza has a knack for taking up roles that keep him from being type-cast as a hero; he refuses to follow the path taken by most actors who only wish to be cast as the romantic lead or if they are very adventurous, as a villain. Mirza in fact, relishes character roles and so endears himself to audiences who have begun to expect him to come up with something different every time he comes on screen.

One of Mohib's recent acting assignments was a challenging part in the film 'Insha-Allah', which he executed so ably that he earned a nomination and award in the International Film-makers Festival for Best Supporting Actor beating seasoned actors like James Tweety and Brian Capron.

When this interview took place, Mirza had been nominated but had not yet won the award. Not

surprisingly, he was very excited about the nomination, but what I couldn't help noticing was that he was also very confident about winning. There were no touching speeches about how humbled he felt being nominated and how just the nomination was enough for him and he didn't care whether he won or not. Without sounding cocky he made it very clear that he was sure of a win, although, I must admit, I had not been so sure! But, Mirza has proved his competence, and although this may be no Oscar win, we are sure this is only the beginning of great things to come

from this talented and confident guy.

Mirza's journey in the industry



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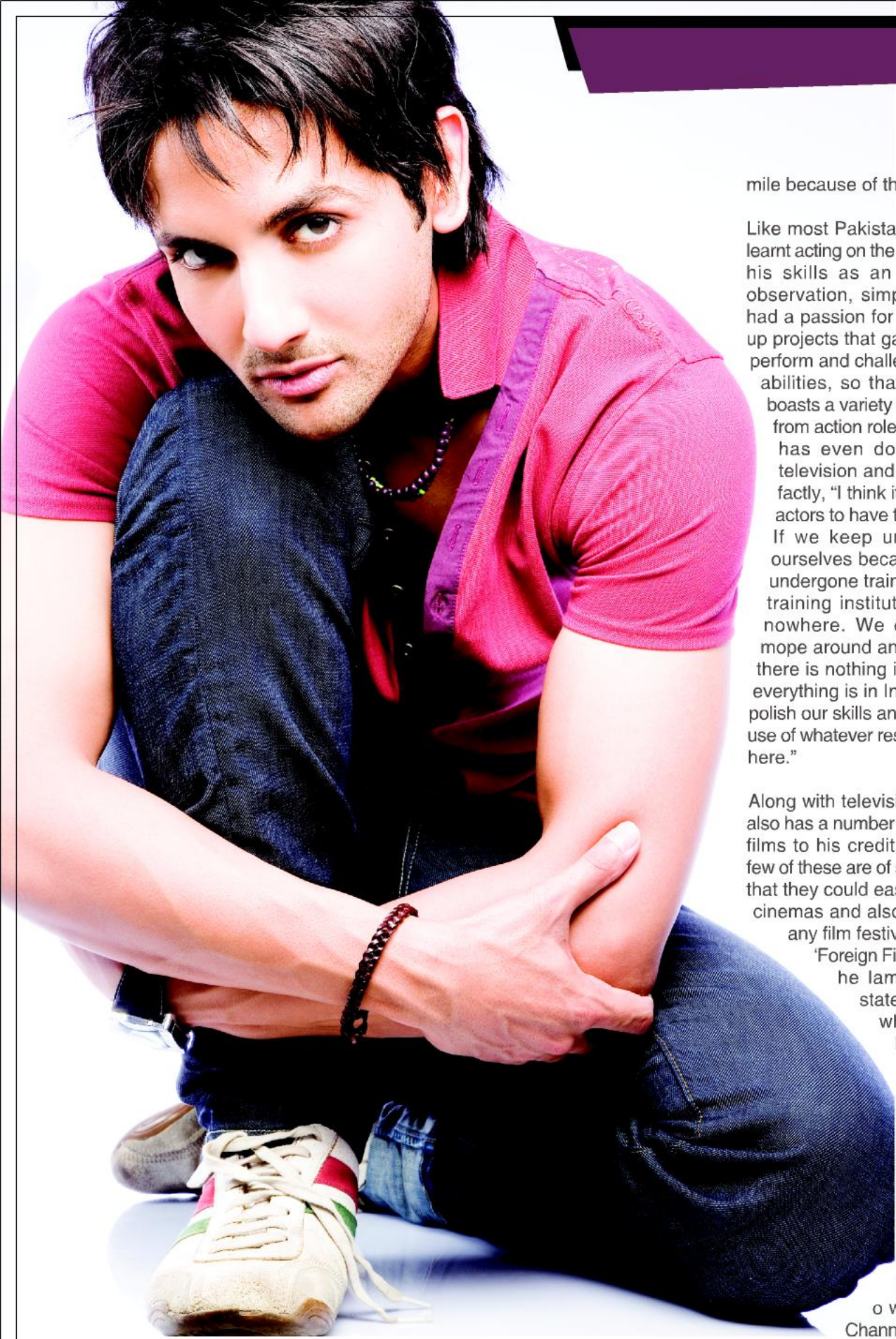
started with theatre in 1999, when he along with a few friends started a theatre company called 'Dramaebaz' while still at college. Typically Mirza, there were no altruistic motives for forming this company; rather it was to raise funds for his next semester's fees! With unabashed candour Mirza explains "I was doing my Bachelors then, and when I found I couldn't afford the fees for a semester my friends and I decided to do what we were good at to raise the money – drama! We sat down to write a play and ran it at the PACC for three days. The response we got was overwhelming, and instead of three, the play ran for seven days! We made thrice the amount of money we had expected to."

So, Mirza was able to pay his fees, but more importantly, he got spotted by Khalid Hassan, who offered him a role in his television play 'Fasla', making it his first tele-play – although the very popular 'Zebunissa' got aired earlier – followed by a chain reaction leading to more offers.

The switch from theatre to television was not an easy one for Mirza as he was used to performing on stage in front of an audience, while acting in front of the camera was a totally different ballgame. In fact, he rubbishes the popular belief that it is easy for a theatre artiste to make the switch from theatre to television and says, "There is a general perception that if someone has done theatre, they can easily act on television. This view might be popular because theatre actors have vocal training and can perform without a mike. Even if they have to whisper, they do it at such a scale that the person sitting in the last row of the

auditorium can hear them. They have to worry about entry and exit points and must have exaggerated body movements, so no doubt, theatre acting is more demanding than television acting. But, by the same token, I feel when theatre actors come on television, they tend to over-act. They are so used to performing for an audience that is at a distance that their facial expressions look exaggerated during a close-up. You can tell a theatre actor on television from a





mile because of this!”

Like most Pakistani actors, Mirza learnt acting on the job and polished his skills as an actor through observation, simply because he had a passion for acting. He took up projects that gave him room to perform and challenged his acting abilities, so that his repertoire boasts a variety of performances from action roles to comedy. He has even done hosting for television and says matter-of-factly, “I think it is important for actors to have the right attitude. If we keep underestimating ourselves because we haven’t undergone training from proper training institutes, we will get nowhere. We can either just mope around and complain that there is nothing in this country – everything is in India – or we can polish our skills and make the best use of whatever resources we have here.”

Along with television plays, Mirza also has a number of laudable telefilms to his credit. He believes a few of these are of such high quality that they could easily be shown in cinemas and also be entered for any film festival abroad in the ‘Foreign Film’ category. But he laments the sorry state of our industry where no one is bothered to do simple but crucial things like sub-titling that are needed for entering films in foreign festivals. “As an actor, I don’t even get the DVD of my own work! Channels have policies that forbid actors from entering their work in foreign

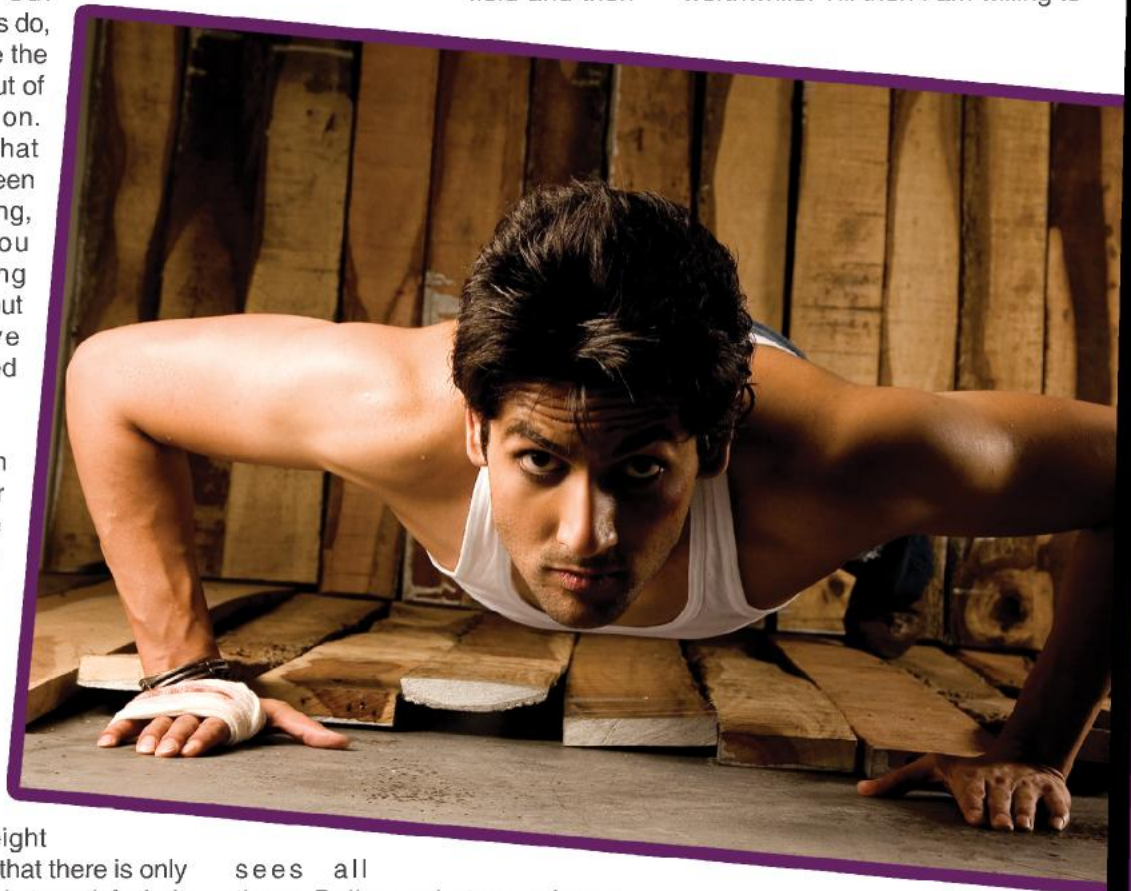
festivals as they have the copyright of their plays, so even if we wish to do the dubbing ourselves and send in these plays, we can't."

Like most actors for whom films represent the ultimate in acting Mirza also yearns for the revival of our film industry and feels that television can never take its place as it has too many limitations. He explains "Take the example of comedy – there are different categories of comedy that have emerged on television. There is the comedy that our telecom comedians do, and then there are the sitcoms coming out of Lahore, and so on. The problem is that categories have been given to everything, so how can you expect something creative to come out when you have compartmentalized everything?"

Mirza's own preference is for action roles and he has done some excellent and meticulous work with Shamooin Abbasi, taking up to 28 days to shoot a sequence that would normally be done in just eight days. But he feels that there is only so much they can do to satisfy their passion, as at the end of the day it all comes down to money since they have families to support. "Unless we are given proper budgets, we won't be able to come up with anything impressive and will have to make do with 'balloon walley ki bandook' for our action sequences rather than the real thing, thus compromising on authenticity" he rues.

Mirza believes that Pakistanis in general are to be blamed for the sorry state that our film industry and actors are in now, and elaborates "Even on Eid our channels show Indian material; shows that are even three to four years old are being aired, rather than promoting our own product, because the audience is happily willing to see it! Just think what a Pakistani professional actor goes through when he does not have a medium like films to display his talent, but still sticks it out in this field and then

industry, but Mirza has no aspirations of doing so – at least not in the near future. So far, his future projects only revolve around acting and he believes only those with the requisite background should venture into the challenging field of direction, "I will only become a director when I can afford to spend up to 12 days doing the same shot till I am satisfied with the results, and don't have to answer to anybody. I don't want to be told that I don't have the required budgets for producing something worthwhile. Till then I am willing to



sees all these Bollywood stars, who are already being given a lot of coverage by their own media, all over our local channels as well! It is bound to set their backs up." He is of the opinion that actors need to form a formal Association so that they have proper rights.

Most actors in Pakistan step into direction or production when they become recognized names in the

just remain an actor."

Well, even as "just an actor" Mirza has already made his mark and one is sure that in time to come he will excel in whatever else he chooses to try his hand at, be it direction or something else. ■

**Grooming & photography:
Maram & Aabro**