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Today's Edition

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PLAY ME!

Three bands across generations collaborate on elektrik kool rock revue I, a concert in association with t2 on May 30 at GD BIRLA SABHAGAR, marking a new beginning for original music in calcutta



Picture by BishwArup Dutta

What started as a mission led by one man making a return to music has resulted in a movement fast gathering mass and momentum. The audience at GD Birla Sabhagar for Bertie da Silva In Concert last November proved that it would pay for a musical concert without distractions of the kind pubs and open-air venues provide. And as the music played by the St Xavier's College Dean of Arts Professor da Silva lingered, musicians listened up.

The idea that was kindled in that evening is now taking shape with Elektrik Kool Rock Revue 1, to be held once again at GD Birla Sabhagar, on May 30. "In the course of producing Bertie da Silva In Concert, we realised that it was possible to present quality music to audiences in a concert hall and that there is a large and appreciative audience ready and waiting for such shows," explains Patrick Ghosh of Hat Productions, an outfit that also crystallised after the November show.

Soon after, one sunny afternoon, Bertie, Patrick and Arka Das (drummer for the band Five Little Indians and part of Team t2), met at a tea stall near Chandni Chowk and decided "to do something".

That something, Patrick says, emerged as "a movement to recreate another space for the performance of original music which cuts across generations and tastes to carve itself a distinct and unique place in the creative arts".

"Why say nothing happens here? Let's make it happen," says Arka. The idea was to start small, create a buzz so that in the later stages it becomes a bigger platform with more bands, more fans and more music.

The idea developed as if by domino effect. Allan Ao of Five Little Indians (or FLI) recounts the first steps. "Arka and I talked about how we should be organising gigs ourselves and not just wait for things to happen. We met Neel (Adhikari; one of the twin frontmen of FLI) the next day and the idea to take this to Bertie was immediate. We always wanted to do stuff together, so it was quite cool."

And since the key word was "original", The Supersonics seemed a perfect fit.

The nature of the three bands that have joined Elektrik Kool Rock Revue 1 is testament to the durability of the plan — while Bertie's band is led by the 50-something professor, FLI is composed of rockers that have been around the band block for almost a decade and The Supersonics is a young act that has caught not only the city's but the country's ears since it was born in 2006.

Who's listening?

An oft-heard complaint is that the only available platform for live music in town is a pub, where the audience's prime concern is often not the music.

While these kinds of venues too are important — they keep the live music scene going, points out Bertie — it cannot be the only option. "There are a lot of people who would like to listen to live music outside of a pub. And there are a lot of people who don't like pubs who'd like to listen to music," says Bertie. "The November concert was a revelation in that it confirmed that there was an audience willing to pay for an evening of quality entertainment. The audience profile was an interesting one: it cut across age groups, classes and cultural backgrounds. So one thing was evident — if the music is of an

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international standard, the performer can be guaranteed the support of an audience," adds Patrick.

"This kind of a platform makes sense since people are paying to listen to music, and only the ones willing to listen will attend the concert," says The Supersonics' vocalist Ananda Sen. It's about time that such an event was organised in Calcutta, stresses Ananda. "We tried to organise something along similar lines with the Calcutta Rock Festival (held in 2007 at the Nicco Superbowl terrace) with Cassini's Division... but a bigger platform with more bands is necessary," he adds.

Music has the power to create its own listeners. "If there are good musicians who play good music, audiences will come and listen and come back for more," says Bertie. The audience for such music is growing. "It's culture. It doesn't matter if it's in English. All that matters is if it's good culture," he stresses.

Risky business

That it's a gamble is obvious. As Hat Productions points out, there is no organisation committed to or interested in producing music events. And events of such a nature are not considered viable or profitable.

The venue itself raises eyebrows. Three hours of rock music in a closed auditorium where people would remain seated instead of standing, drinking and head-banging? Not to mention, 30 original songs over three hours, of which at least half (if not all) are songs unfamiliar to the audience.

But the three bands aren't worried. "I remember when we were playing at Someplace Else, there was not even a single request for a cover song," says Neel of FLI. Agrees Ananda: "People are willing to watch and listen to original music, be it with Bertie's band or with FLI or with The Supersonics. We've been around for two years and there is a certain following. Some are now even familiar with our songs."

If original sounds can strike a chord in other cities, why not in Calcutta? "Delhi and Mumbai have such events on a large scale in an open-air venue almost every week," stresses Ananda.

Rock Revue 2 and 3 are already in the offing. And it may include bands from beyond city borders. "Now even though bands based outside of Calcutta want to play here, they aren't really dying to do so. And the same old venue of a pub is what balks them," says Allan.

"Caution: live wires." That's what a sign read behind the venue for the t2 photo shoot with all the musicians at Babughat. It was fitting. With three bands cutting across generations ready to collaborate and take a chance on the city music buff, the result is expected to be electric.

All About The Music

Bertie Da Silva and Orphic Hat

There's good news and bad. The bad news is that you won't be hearing all the songs you heard at the November concert. The good news? There's more! "The previous series was more around the acoustic guitar. This will have a more electric sound," explains Bertie.

Band favourites: Jonathan Ramgopal (on the keys) names Domino, Carnival and One Life written about 26/11 and Mumbai as his favourites. The trilogy of Shuffle, Husha Husha (We All Fall Down) and Flicker is another favourite, though it won't feature in this concert.

The Supersonics

They'll be playing all their best-known songs, most of which are from their soon-to-be-released album Maby Baking.

Band favourites: "Impossible to pick a favourite," they say.

FIVE LITTLE INDIANS (FLI)

Lots of songs everyone's excited about, with the band moving in from an acoustic to an electric set and showcasing a bunch of fresh tunes.

Band favourites: Washing Windows, which vocalist Sayak Banerjee describes as a tune "with a nice melodic feel" and a pretty story. "It's about this boy, a window-washer, who looks into a room and wonders," lets out Neel. There's Static, another layered song that reminds Allan of the resignation that comes with being in a relationship.

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Malini Banerjee*Do you think Calcutta has an audience for original music? Tell t2@abpmail.com*

Catch Electric Kool Rock Revue I at GD Birla Sabhagar on May 30, 6pm



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