

Harmonica maestro thrills Guwahati at music society launch



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Aiyushman Dutta 17 April 2009 16757 views

In a defining moment for the regional music scene, the Rockarolla Music Society – the first comprehensive music and Art society of Northeast India – was officially launched at Hotel Landmark on Sunday with an international concert. The highlight of the show was a performance by New York-based Chinese Harmonica virtuoso JIA-YI HE, besides performances by ABIOTENESIS and STRANGE FREQUENCY. While ABIOTENESIS is the only Indian experimental rock band to have been nominated for the prestigious Grammy Awards, STRANGE FREQUENCY is a new musical concept from the hills of Shillong.

The crowd at Hotel Landmark that day was kept spellbound after witnessing Jia's exploits with the harmonica. Armed with an array of harmonicas of different shapes and sizes, Jia amply showed the immense potentialities of the harmonica as a musical instrument, which till now, had been languishing in the shadows. Not surprisingly, a number of Harmonica players appeared from several nooks and crannies of the State. One such enterprising harmonica player Dr. Angshuman Bhagowati, who came all the way from Tinsukia to attend the concert, said, "I had never expected to witness a harmonica player of Jia's stature in the State. But when the Yahoo harmonica group (India) posted a scrap on the upcoming festival and I got in touch with Aiyushman of the Rockarolla Music Society, I knew the moment had indeed arrived. Hats off to Jia for a fabulous concert!"

A very humble and unassuming man, Jia-Yi He has received numerous awards in international festivals and competitions in England, Germany, Israel, Japan and United States. He has served as a member of the judging committees in the Asia-Pacific Harmonica Competition in Taiwan, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Besides appearing as a soloist with the China National Symphony Orchestra, China National Ballet Symphonic Orchestra and the Nassau Pops Symphony Orchestra, Mr. He has recorded harmonica music for a number of movies, radio stations

and CDs. While he was invited to perform in the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations, the New York Mets had also chosen him to perform a pre-game show at Shea Stadium in 2007. Currently, Mr. He is a harmonica teacher at the Turtle Bay Music School in New York City.

The show had earlier witnessed a performance by STRANGE FREQUENCY, a new musical concept from Shillong. Led by bassist Larry and with Noel and Rupert, this closely knit trio was a welcome change from the rock-centric outlook of Shillong bands. In fact, Noel, who was highly creative with the drumsticks and kept improvising throughout the show, ensured that the mesmerizing quotient of the band remained constant throughout. However, the highlight of the show had to be the performance by Abiogenesis, the experimental band from Nagaland which is currently blazing across the international circuit.

For those who don't know, Abiogenesis is the only Indian experimental rock band to have been nominated for the Grammy awards. Besides creating a perfect fusion of western rock with Naga tribal beats, the band has successfully managed to showcase the best of regional sounds in front of a global audience. They have developed their own brand of music - which they like to call 'Howey music' - and have invented the bamhum - one of the very few musical instruments to have been developed in the world over the past century. Watching the performance that day, Guwahati-based journalist and music critic Aiyushman Dutta said, "One cannot say that the band is ultra-refined or polished in terms of global music, but I can definitely say that they play "high" music in terms of skill and technical exactness. Their captivating "strangeness" in terms of previously unheard of sounds is actually their strength, an enchanting appeal to world sojourners, to earnest seekers of roots and homelands. Abiogenesis is non-imitative, totally original, rooted in maturity and unashamedly innovative - qualities that will carry them a long way."

Sunday's concert was special on many counts. Never before had so many musicians, music lovers, artists and creative professionals got together to form a music society in the State as well as in the region. Chairman of the society and former Assam Director General of Police DN Dutt said, "What makes it even more interesting is the fact that one of the main objectives of the society is to bridge the difference between musicians of different and diverse genres. In fact, we have successfully managed to bring musicians of three different generations together on a common platform."

The Rockarolla Society is a group of musicians, writers, artistes, journalists, theatre workers, sportsmen and working professionals from various disciplines brought together by the love for music and Arts. "Formed with the basic objective of promoting good musical forms and local talents, the society also aims to bridge the gap between different musical genres and art forms. The basic objective of the society is to instill the love for Arts and a spirit of receptiveness towards new ideas and Art forms among the people of the region," said Deepak Sahney, the president of the society.

The show also saw the release of Northeast Beats – the first music-based Art journal of Northeast India. DN Dutt said, "Every region of the country is blessed with creative and talented musicians and artistes. But what makes the Northeast special is its diversity. Northeast Beats is the first comprehensive reference guide for music, musicians, literature and anything related to these two fields in Northeast India. I am sure the magazine would be able to make a difference in the music and literary scene of the region."

Northeast Beats editor Rashmi Narzary said, "We want to lay more emphasis on research work on our traditions and cultural heritage and a

lot of work in this regard is already on in various parts of the region. We are lucky to have the support of some musicians and activists who are already working tirelessly for the preservation and propagation of Northeastern folk traditions,” said Narzary. Stating that the formation of Northeast Beats was a defining moment, she further said, “Though there are a lot of creative talents in Northeast India, it is imperative that all artists, and not only musicians, develop a spirit of tolerance and receptiveness towards other musical and Art forms and genres. Further, it is imperative that contemporary musicians are in touch with their roots and are aware of their identity.”

The first issue of the Northeast Beats newsletter was formally released by King of Tripura Pradyut Manikya Debburman while veteran classical musician Rajeswar Bordoloi was felicitated by the society for his immense contributions to the field of music in the region. City-based music promoter David Koch said, “The importance of music in Northeastern society cannot be undermined. Every aspect of our life is filled with music and it is imperative that we give a definite form and pattern to our musical leanings and pursuits. Since ours is an endeavor driven by passion, we look forward to your support and patronage in order to ensure that Northeast Beats is able to sustain itself and also to help prove that music can break indeed break barriers!

With the formation of the Rockarolla Music Society, the day is not far when we can call Northeast India the real music capital of the world!

Aiyushman Dutta

Journalist and Founder Secretary, Eastern Beats Music Society.

BY AIYUSHMAN DUTTA

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