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Watch the good word

Amrita Gupta finds that for some artists, it isn't enough that the audience gets to hear and feel the music, they must watch it as well.



When "VJ" is the answer to "what do you do?" it's usually followed by: "which channel?" Karthik Sagar, or VJ KayCee begs to differ. VJ can also mean "visual jockey".

"A VJ is totally different from a video jockey [an anchor on a music network]," he clarified. "My job involves carrying a collection of visual clips - photographs, computer generated loops, flash animations or videos - to project them live on screen during a DJ set." Sagar, who performed with Brute Force's DJ Tuhin Mehta in the city recently, explained that while at a club you can hear and feel the music, the "whole idea here is to be able to see it

as well".

Mehta, who regularly incorporates visual elements into his shows, is convinced it "adds a completely new dimension to the performance". As far as he's concerned, it's especially useful when there's a need to introduce new music that people might not have heard before. "If the crowd doesn't recognise the sound, it can be hard to connect with at first. Captivating visuals work as a barrier breaker," he said.

The allure of the visual medium is nothing new. Ask video performance artist Archana Prasad and she will refer to the new opiate of the masses. "If there's a TV on, people will look at it. It's [visual media] hypnotic - it sucks you in," she pointed out. But for the visuals at a show to be in sync with the audio, and for them both to add to the mood, the VJ needs to "almost anticipate the DJ's next move", as Sagar put it.

This fortnight, Delhi's BLOT - Gaurav Malaker and Avinash Kumar - the duo who've become synonymous with using visuals during their performances, will play in town. Known as much for their minimalist and techno sound, as for the wacky footage it is linked to, Malaker said that Bangalore's clubbers can expect "something spontaneous, because as soon as we master something, we get bored of it".

Though the scene, as defined by BLOT, might be in an experimental stage, the use of visuals is not a new concept. Multimedia designer Kashyap Murali, who is currently working on reviving his pet project Autopilot, said his first attempt at this style in 2004 was an attempt to "bring the art galleries to the dance floor". During his Asian underground gigs, Murali projected video graphics to amplify wordless electronic music into what he visualised as something more meaningful. "The audience can then connect on two levels," he said.

Now, there are a handful of musicians who have taken to using imagery. Nikhil Narendra, "a laptop musician" who is the sound producer of The Manjunauts, an electronica artist collective, is one such. At their first gig at BFlat in July, The Manjunauts chose to go with a sci-fi theme, projecting clips from Doordashan's Giant Robot onto three screens while playing ambient soundscapes.

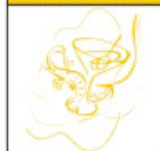
But initiatives like Autopilot and The Manjunauts are still uncommon. For KayCee, this has a lot to do with the thinking of club owners. "Their equation is simple: get the big DJ, pull in the crowds, make the moolah," he charged. What isn't accounted for, according to him, is increasing the budget for a visual artist. But there's a reason for this, argued BLOT's Malaker. "Most clubs don't have the funds to cater to the visual scene," he said. "They've just recently started investing in good sound systems, and now, for some reason, they concentrate on things like nice looking sofas instead."

And yet, many of these musicians, venturing into uncharted territory, feel this is the direction music and entertainment is going to head towards. "In the same way that MTV created space for music videos, what we need is an establishment in the gig sector that promotes visual jockeys as artists with creative license," said Autopilot's Kashyap.

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