

Northeast has the voice for Europe



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The music scene of the region seems to be only getting with each passing day. With a number of musicians and bands from the region making a mark in the national as well as international level, people all across the world have increasingly started regarding the region as a music hub. Coupled with the rage of reality shows and talent hunts on Indian television, music competitions and auditions seeking to bring out hidden musical talents from the region have become a common phenomenon.

But last week an audition of a different kind was held in the city. I am talking about the Northeast India auditions for the Suncane International Music festival of Montenegro. A pop music festival held every summer in Herceg Novi, the Montenegro music festival is a global event that sees performance of over 1000 songs by singers from across the world, 200 hours of live telecast and telecast in over 50 countries in Europe and around the world. Though a craze in the entire Balkans, the festival, till now, has largely remained an European affair, with the best song of the festival being selected as the region's 'Song of the Summer'.

But this year, for the first time ever, bands of Northeast India have got a chance to feature in the festival. Opening its doors to musicians of the Asian subcontinent for the first time, the organisers recently shifted their focus to India, with the intention of picking out a band from our very own Northeast. Accordingly, the Honorary Consul General of Montenegro in collaboration with KMP Skale, the organizers of the Suncane Skale International Music Competition and festival, organized the first-ever Northeast India rounds of the festival in Shilpgram last week.

And just to prove the extent of the organiser's seriousness to pick a Northeastern band, the Hony Consul General of Montenegro-India Janice Darbari had also landed in Guwahati. In an exclusive discussion soon after she landed in Guwahati, she tells me, "Being an Indian, I am trying my level best to send an Indian band to represent the Southeast in the competition. But from the entire country, I believe that a band and musician from the Northeast will be selected." Dwelling on her interest in the region, she says, "Prior to starting the ground work of this competition, I heard from many quarters that Northeast is the place from where we will get our voice. I don't want to be proved wrong and I have decided to hold the auditions first in this part of the country. Even if the talent we find is not perfect, we will provide him with the necessary grooming required to take part in a competition of this magnitude. We will we move to other parts only if we don't get out voice from here."

Around 19 bands from different parts of the Northeast had taken part in the competition that day. An expert panel of judges, comprising veteran guitarist Utpal Barsaikia, harmonica player BB Hagjer and Khasi musician Rangdap, were given the responsibility of picking out the best. Among all the participants that day, Dimapur-based singer Aloba Achumi and 'Girish Karnad and the chronicles' from Sikkim were shortlisted. The other bands who participated were Summer Salt (Meghalaya), Silver Tears (Ghy), Dark Horizon (Ghy), Useless Project (Ghy), Dementia (Nagaland), Melodrama (Nagaland), Aberdeen angus, Divine Connection, Pip of the Fourth Mother (Meghalaya), D'Illuzion (Assam), Moanungsang (Nagaland), Freddie's Nightmare (Mizoram), DOTH, Digital suicide (Guwahati) and Eden band, High Fidelity and The Verbs from Meghalaya.

Though a small country, Montenegro is highly popular among celebrities, with the area being the favourite haunt of Hollywood stars. Just if it interests you, pop diva Madonna had her 50th birthday celebrations there while parts of the iconic James Bond flick ‘Casino Royale’ was also shot there. After the competition, Janice tells me, “The first round of the festival is over but the search is still on. I urge all bands of the Northeast to come out and take the region to the international level. Maybe the world will be able to see and appreciate a new art form through your efforts.”

Despite her hectic schedule, Janice Darbari still squeezed out time to go to Kamakhya because, as she said, “it is like gaining your source of energy”.

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