

Tribute or Obituary?



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Aiyushman Dutta 3 August 2008 11834 views

Robert Zimmerman, better known as Bob Dylan, has probably never been to Shillong. In his half-a-century old musical career, quite a few birthday parties thrown in his honour worldwide. 35 of such event have been held in the quaint little town of Shillong as the Bob Dylan fest is held in the hill city May 24 every year. It started out as a small private celebration by Lou Majaw - lead singer of the Ace of Spades band and his friends in 1972 and grew into an annual event in Shillong, drawing fans from across the country and the world. On the motive behind the Dylan fest, quintessential Khasi-guitarist, Lou Majaw says, "I'm not star struck. But from the first time I heard Dylan, his nasal tone, as well as the richness and depth of his verse touched me. It's not a rock concert though, it's a celebration. We don't do it because we are fans, but out of respect and admiration for the man."

Same can be said about reggae artist Bob Marley whose fans in the hill city have taken it up to themselves to preserve his compositions. The 'Roots festival', initiated by local musician Keith Wallang, has been enjoying immense popularity since its inception and its fan following has increased considerably over the years. Both the music festivals have become high-profile affairs and eagerly awaited events in the music calendar of this corner of the planet. These two home grown festivals manages to adequately complement the visiting international groups

and keep the music quotient running in Shillong throughout the year.

Of late, the music scene in the capital city of Guwahati has taken a new avatar, which is commanding immense popularity amongst the music crazy people of the region. After rock, metal and hip-hop made inroads into the lives and hearts of the populace, a new fancy in the form of tribute festivals, which has enjoyed immense popularity in Shillong, has caught the imagination of music aficionados.

Shillong is no stranger to tribute festivals as can be noticed by the immense popularity which these two fests enjoy. Shillong and Bob Dylan are almost synonymous. One has to visit Shillong to see that. The immense popularity, which the Dylan fest has enjoyed over the years, has inspired another group of musicians and music enthusiasts in Guwahati to start a similar festival to pay tribute to another legend John Lenon. Dhruva Sarma, popular guitarist and members of Friends, said Lenon was a peace activist and his songs could inspire the younger generation to build a better and peaceful society. "The very idea of celebrating Lenon's birthday came from the popularity of the Bob Dylan fest in Shillong. Guwahati being the gateway to the region should have a fest like Dylan and there could be no other than Lenon. The great singer who died at the age of only 40 was a role model," he added.

Another entrepreneur has chosen his café to be the central motif in bid to pay obeisance to his idol, Jimi Hendrix. In November last year, Syed Wazid Ahmed organised a birthday bash for the legendary Jimi Hendrix on his 65th Birthday anniversary in his café which he had appropriately christened, Café Hendrix. The motive behind the celebrations was to unite the northeast through music. To quote Ahmed, "Music is a universal language. It's a language to win hearts. Music can rule the whole of northeast and we want to use music to unite the people amidst all the strife. The show is meant to unite the people through music and

make them relearn the values of love and compassion”.

Seeing the spate of these festivals, one wonders if this new trend of tribute festivals which has swept the region has any other hidden agenda. This question has come to the fore because musicians of the region have always been blamed for their failure to shell out their own compositions. Are tribute festivals, where musicians and bands play only covers, just a clever guise to hide the inability of the musicians to create their own stuff? Now, the twin cities of Guwahati and Shillong are two places which have always been haunted by the frustrations of musicians who in turn chose to drink their way out of reality that has smashed their dreams. Is this new trend just a form of diversion to the important question of originality which has become pretty loud at the moment?

The present musical scene which is but, a mere continuum of the past, where our musicians are more inclined to play covers instead of shelling out their own stuff. After all, originality is the moot word of all musical endeavours which want to show the listeners the way to the realm of dreams. Are these festivals really a mark of tribute to musical icons or are they obituaries marking the death of originality amongst the musicians? It is imperative that the musicians and music lovers find the answer to this very important question before they let the music play on.

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