

MAGNETIC FIELDS 2017



Image credit: Piyush Goswami

Its feet shuffled in the desert sands. There were bells around its hooves. When dawn broke, we caught a glimpse of its striking silhouette against the hills. An old man steered his camel cart towards unpaired muddy roads. In shifting sands, they disappeared into clusters of nomadic settlements singing tunes of lore.

Through narrow streets obstructed by barriers and animals, we drove towards a 17th century palace where thronged travellers from all over the country every year. Centred around the theme 'we are all connected', the fifth edition of *Magnetic Fields Festival* celebrated the union of philosophy and science apparent with the laws of attraction. It was in this unity that revellers found themselves attuned to the music emanating from the walls of the palace.

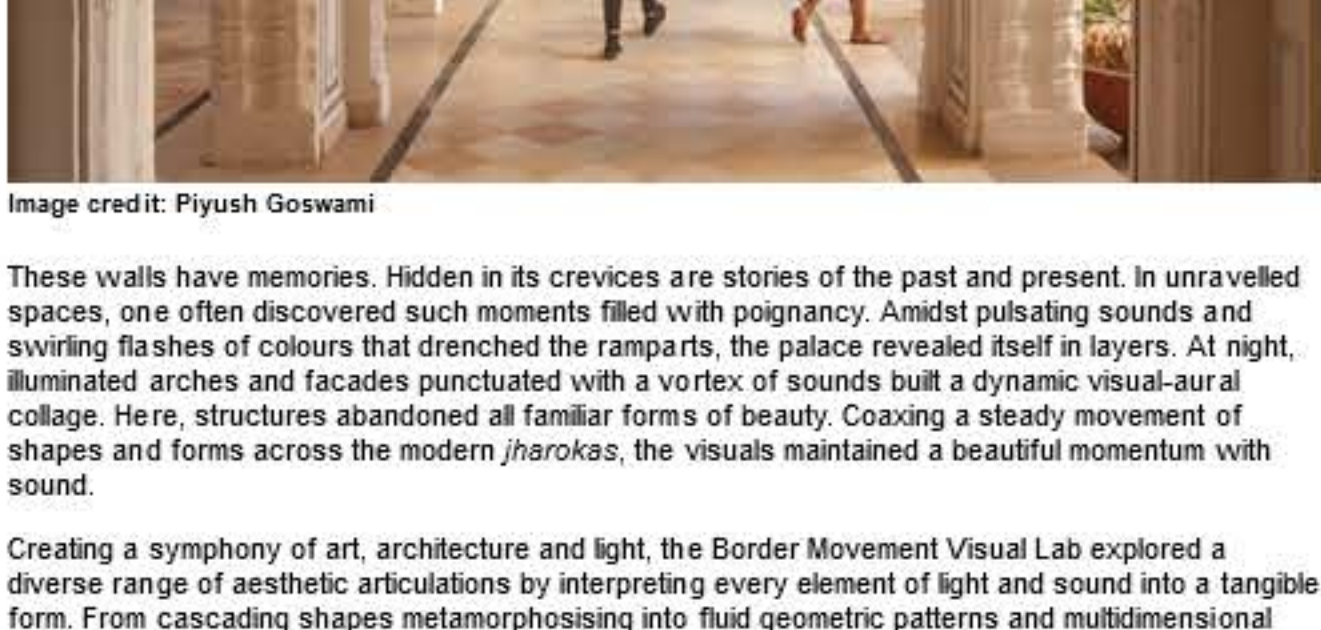


Image credit: Piyush Goswami

These walls have memories. Hidden in its crevices are stories of the past and present. In unravelling spaces, one often discovered such moments filled with poignancy. Amidst pulsating sounds and swirling flashes of colours that drenched the ramparts, the palace revealed itself in layers. At night, illuminated arches and facades punctuated with a vortex of sounds built a dynamic visual-aural collage. Here, structures abandoned all familiar forms of beauty. Coaxing a steady movement of shapes and forms across the modern *jharokas*, the visuals maintained a beautiful momentum with sound.

Creating a symphony of art, architecture and light, the Border Movement Visual Lab explored a diverse range of aesthetic articulations by interpreting every element of light and sound into a tangible form. From cascading shapes metamorphosing into fluid geometric patterns and multidimensional ornate structures, the curation of visual content at *Magnetic Fields Festival* offered an experience immersed in multi-sensory delight.

While visual production and coordination was managed by Amandeep Pablay – Naveen Deshpande and Ground Kontrolle handled lighting design and direction. On live VJ sets throughout the festival were Nikunj Patel (Studio Moebius), Lalindra Amarashekara (Cyber Illusions) and Nishant John (VJ Zombie) who also worked on creating artistic masterpieces with illustration and animation along with Anjali Karunathilake (Cyber Illusions) and Ayangbe Mannen.



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In the inner palace courtyard where the narrow staircase led to the dungeon, sheets of paper fluttered in the afternoon breeze. Amidst sculptures celebrating the power of imagination, uniting wanderers with sources of higher consciousness, and ancient games, hidden in the corner between sonnets of unrequited love and tales of betrayal were verses that read 'While walls separate windows tell stories. What if you had walked into a parallel story of this land, lost in time, and through the windows be connected to the present...'. *Magnetic Words* offered such parallel portals into timeless stories of meaningful encounters, ancient art forms and spirituality. As promised, the palace dungeon was transformed into an incubator of laughter and intrigue.

Through a festival collaboration with *Photographing the Female*, Sarah Halund explored unique perspectives on female identity by engaging with young girls and women from Alsisar. The collective offered them an opportunity to experiment with multiple media of visual story-telling. Displayed on the walls were scenes that caught their attention. From prayer rooms and makeshift shelters, clay pots stacked in a corner to the wrinkled hands of a mother, these photographs meant something to them. One could tell. In tiny frames, they captured moments that offered a glimpse into their lives.



Image credit: Piyush Goswami

Beyond the Bedouin tents, as installations rose in tandem across the venue, the festival opened with *Boxout Soundsystem* comprising DJ MoCity, MadStarBase, Rohan Kale, Abhi Meer and Dualist Inquiry. Showcasing a refined collection of sounds that spanned across continents with a dedicated focus on alternative and underground, the online radio station dabbles with diverse genres ranging from grime, techno, drum n' bass, dub, reggae to electronica. Weaving piquant rhythms with classic soul, the five-hour performance at the *Renault Desert Oasis* stage celebrated the symbiotic merge of forgotten traditional gems with contemporary classics apart from paying homage to numerous artists including the pioneer of Afrobeat Fela Anikulapo Kuti and Brazilian vocal ensemble Trio Teruna.

At sunset, Luxembourg producer *Sun Glitters* wove an intricate web of musical textures through a series of orchestral curves ebbing and waning in gentle streams of melody. Reigning in passages of fervent tones, the artiste explored soundscapes that were both contemplative and strident. Accompanying him at the *Bira91 South Stage* for two tracks was *Napoleon Gold* who played at the festival last year. Spreading the message of oneness through peace, love and equality, the set also contained some of Victor's finest compositions including 'Together featuring samples of Charlie Chaplin's speech from *The Great Dictator* (1940) — *I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone, if possible...*

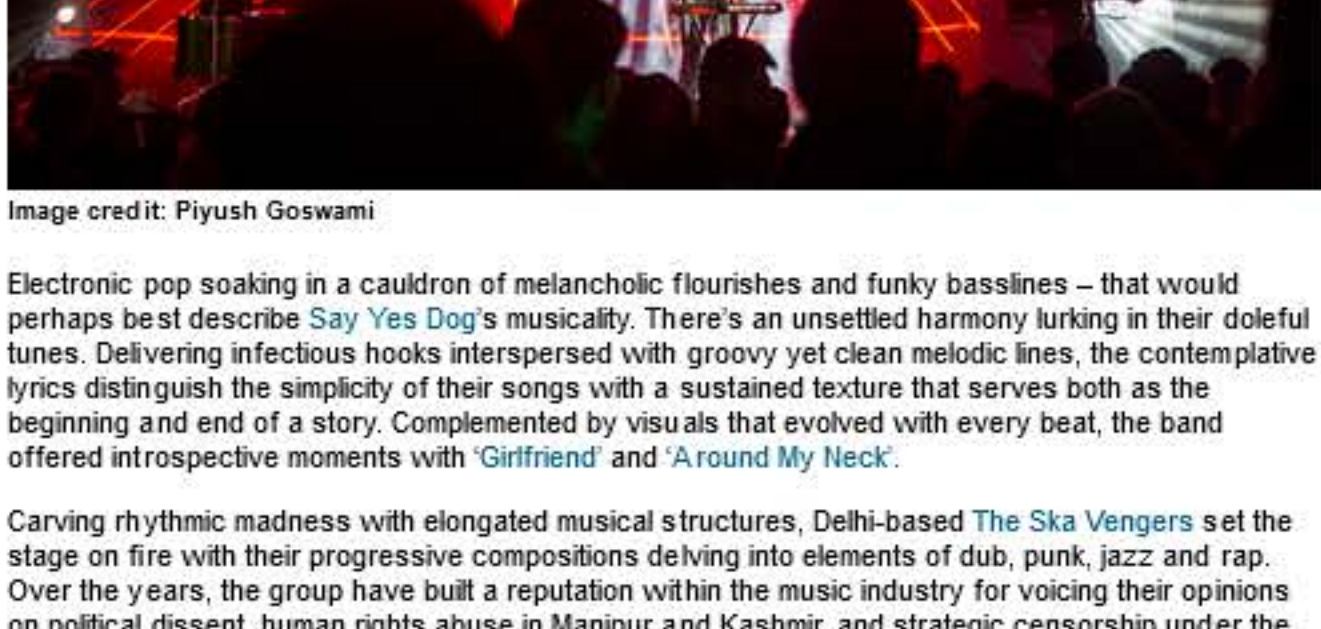


Image credit: Piyush Goswami

Electronic pop soaking in a cauldron of melancholic flourishes and funky basslines – that would perhaps best describe *Say Yes Dog's* musicality. There's an unsettled harmony lurking in their doleful tunes. Delivering infectious hooks interspersed with groovy yet clean melodic lines, the contemplative lyrics distinguishing the simplicity of their songs with a sustained texture that serves both as the beginning and end of a story. Complemented by visuals that evolved with every beat, the band offered introspective moments with 'Girlfriend' and 'Around My Neck'.

Carving rhythmic madness with elongated musical structures, Delhi-based *The Ska Vengers* set the stage on fire with their progressive compositions delving into elements of dub, punk, jazz and rap. Over the years, the group have built a reputation within the music industry for voicing their opinions on political dissent, human rights abuse in Manipur and Kashmir, and strategic censorship under the current government. Expressing their concern over state-sanctioned surveillance, Aadhar and the rise of radical nationalist outfits in the country, the group performed popular tracks like '111' from the album 'XX'. The troupe were accompanied by legendary trumpeter Kishore Sodha who was also a part of R. D. Burman's orchestra, and Sonny Singh Brooklynwala (*Red Baraat*) on dhol.



Image credit: Piyush Goswami

Playing a four-hour vinyl set on the final day was *Bass Foundation Roots Sound System* – brainchild of Delhi Sultanate. At the desert stage, hung above the system was a crimson banner that read *The people united shall always be victorious*. In his own words, "The BFR sound system was built to challenge India's narrow club culture and dependency on venues and sponsors by taking reggae (a genre historically painted by social, political and cultural dialogue) directly to the people." Sporting the slogan 'No human is illegal' on his shirt, Sonny joined the crowd moving to some timeless classics by Leroy Sibbles and Donovan Germain. The BFR book stall featured literature by revolutionaries and progressive thinkers sharing ongoing struggles of the oppressed communities. On display were also translated works of Dalit poets like N. D. Rajkumar, and books by Gauri Lankesh (*Who was assassinated in Bangalore*) and the N. D. Rajkumar, and books by Latin America Eduardo Hughes (*Galeano*).

Bending soundscapes with a palette of evolving textures and contrasting tunnels of melodies, *Essara* brought the roof down at the *Bira91 FreeFlow Garden*. Experimenting with a kaleidoscope of sounds, the artiste broke musically free of constraints or definition throughout his set thereby transcending boundaries and conventional perceptions of genre.

In the courtyard at the *RBMA North Stage*, environmental toxicologist, music producer and DJ Jayda G's soulfulness shone through as she set the pace for the night with her elegant take on disco and house. Shifting territories with uplifting and warm tunes, the artiste managed to imbibe soul into the atmosphere throughout her set. Integrating light and sound in perfect harmony was the visual crew who captured the crux of her musical identity through amber streaks and scattered psychedelic patterns.

On Saturday, unleashing a labyrinthine of his raggas onto the dance floor was *Mandova* popularly known by his stage name *Teavs*. Concise melodic progressions dotted his set as he created an ambience laced with subtle sonic shifts and nuance. Closing the *Bira91 South Stage* was *Four Tet* who played a live set comprising some of his popular contemporary classics including 'Two Thousand and Seventeen' featuring a lonesome santoor that enveloped the track in poignant melodic fragments.

Setting a rowdy momentum with unabashed tunes was *Special Request*, an alias for house and techno maestro *Paul Woolford*. Influenced by the unruly conventions and norms of UK pirate radio stations, the project captured the raw visceral energy of illegal air waves. Combining modern aesthetics with murky jungle bangers, the artiste explored diverse moods throughout his set. *Ben UFO* on the other hand threw unexpected twists drawing attention to the restless undercurrents of distorted rhythms lurking in his set.

As the sun set on the final day, *Komorebi* — the ambient dream project of Tarana Marwah — wove a beautiful journey layered with hypnotic melodies all through her performance. *Komorebi* has two meanings: the interplay between light and leaves when sunlight shines through trees, and the melancholic longing or nostalgia for a person, place or thing that is far away from you. Creating sonic worlds that were a mesmerising blend of both definitions, the artiste traversed through eccentric tones and textures inspired by Japanese anime.

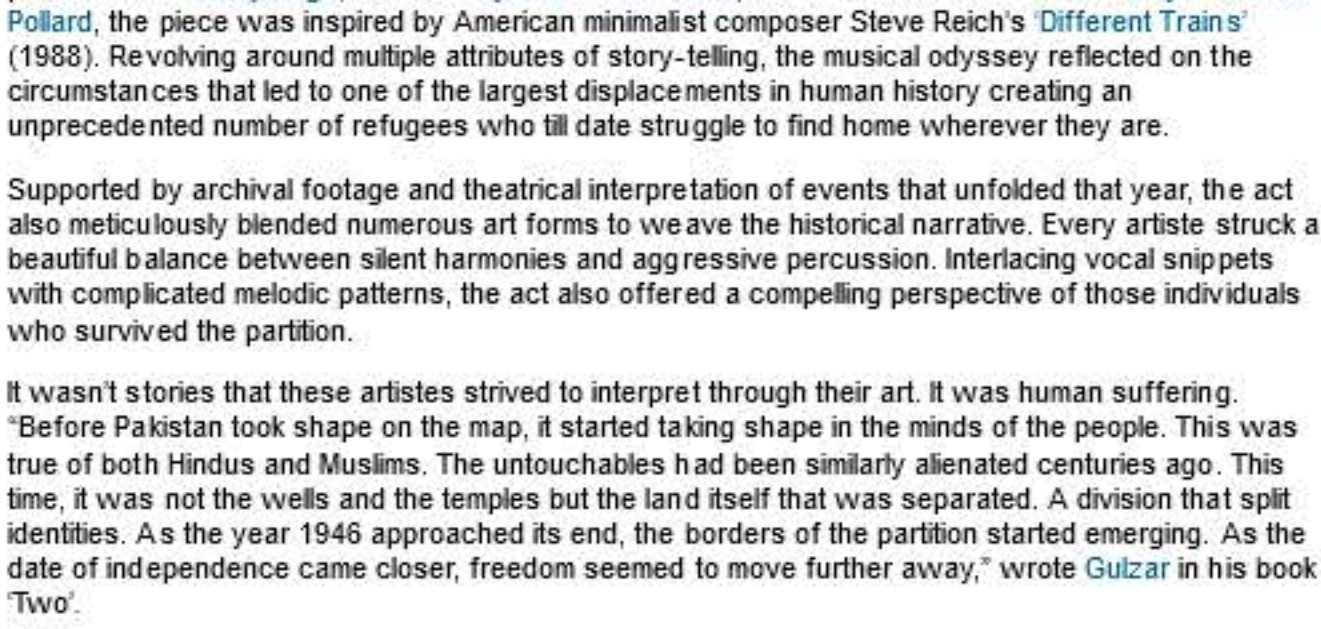


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The penultimate act on the *Bira91 South Stage* was a multi-dimensional audio visual composition commemorating the 70th anniversary of independence and partition titled *Different Trains 1947*. A collaboration between *Ninja Tune's* Actress, Jack Barnett (*These New Puritans*), Sandunes, percussionist Jivraj Singh, vocalist Priya Purushothaman, and filmmakers/Artists Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, the piece was inspired by American minimalist composer Steve Reich's 'Different Trains' (1988). Revolving around multiple attributes of story-telling, the musical odyssey reflected on the circumstances that led to one of the largest displacements in human history creating an unprecedented number of refugees who till date struggle to find home wherever they are.

Supported by archival footage and theatrical interpretation of the events that unfolded that year, the act also meticulously blended numerous art forms to weave the historical narrative. Every artistic struck beautiful a balance between silent harmonies and aggressive percussion. Interlacing vocal snippets with complicated melodic patterns, the act also offered a compelling perspective of those individuals who survived the partition.

It wasn't stories that these artistes strived to interpret through their art. It was human suffering. "Before Pakistan took shape on the map, it started taking shape in the minds of the people. This was true of both Hindus and Muslims. The untouchables had been similarly alienated centuries ago. This time, it was not the wells and the temples but the land itself that was separated. A division that split identities. As the year 1946 approached its end, the borders of the partition started emerging. As the date of independence came closer, freedom seemed to move further away," wrote Gulzar in his book 'Two'.

And, *Different Trains 1947* perhaps best captured what partition gave us – an illusion of freedom.



Image credit: Piyush Goswami

Closing the stage with panache and impeccable style was *Khruangbin* — a psychedelic trio whose inspiration primarily stems from the 60s funk scene prominent in Thailand, 1970s Persian rock music, and 1980s Algerian symphonia. Comprising Laura Lee on bass, Mark Speer on guitar, and Donald 'DJ' Johnson on drums, the Texan trio are all set to release their second album 'Con Todo El Mundo' (With All The World) this month. Combining a dash of disco, soul, and Balcanic music, the band played a largely instrumental set replete with spacious tonal melodies, delicate tempo changes and piercing rhythms set on the backdrop of a dreamy psychedelic soundscape.

Through a surreal construction of rhythms and layered sounds, *Four Tet* enthralled the crowd with a four-hour set at the *RBMA North Stage*. Tumbling around popular compositions, the artiste explored a collage of luminous overtones showcasing his musical acumen and technical finesse. In synchronising rhythm, the visual team created a perfect background through colliding patterns. At times, trypsinising through desolate sounds, the set offered an insight into Kieran's extraordinary control and skill in articulating a meditative sonic journey. Amongst the crowd favourite were 'Ba Teaches Yoga' Kishore Kumar and Lata Mangeshkar's 'Main ek Disco Tu ek Disco', and tunes by Daphni who couldn't attend the festival this year.



Image credit: Zacharie Rabehi

In a sea of sand amidst barrels of wood fire, the crowd then flocked to the *Renault Desert Oasis* Stage one set at this hour, the dense fog lingered in the air gliding the vast desert in a haze of silver. The venue had transformed into a mystical oasis with the clamber of the peerless sands resembling movements of a delicate flame. At dawn, *Ben UFO* took over the decks with *Four Tet* joining him for a back-to-back set. The morning witnessed smashing hits like Tessela 'Hackney Parrot' (10 Ton Mx.) and Lemon D 'This is LA'. Like sparring demons, the artistes pushed sonic barriers beyond realms of familiarity.

As the festival came to a close, stalls and structures disintegrated before our eyes. The lingering odour of burnt wood wafted through the air. Everything seemed different that morning. Gliding through the desolate courtyards, deconstructed art installations and the crowded street were a community of spirited revellers bidding their farewell to a three-day ode to artistic expression, music and human spirit...

written by Akshatha Shetty

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