

# Beyond the rock stars

What you see on stage is not the full story. A look at the people behind the scenes who give us some of today's best music performances

July 14, 2017 04:11 pm | Updated 04:11 pm IST

ANURAG TAGAT

COMMENTS SHARE



In his early 20s, Dhruv Jagasia had the best kind of conversation with one of the country's pioneering rock bands, Indian Ocean — a drunken, late-night one. The band had gone through about 15 managers by then, and drummer-vocalist Amit Kilam was still in the frustrating space of arguing over flight tickets with a gig organiser. Jagasia ended up being offered the job, even though he doesn't remember it. "The next day, when I woke up, I had eight or nine missed calls from numbers I didn't know. I called Amit and said, 'It's damn uncanny that people are calling me when I don't manage you guys'. He said, 'Yeah, I put your number on the website last night'. I asked him what I had to do, and he said, 'I don't know'. I said, okay, let's figure it out together," says Jagasia, who is part of a relatively new ecosystem — which includes recording engineers, visual artists, lighting engineers and more — that works behind the scenes to make sure the music and their aesthetic is the most important thing about a musician or band.

The shift began with the growth of music festivals and indie music going online. Bands not only realised they needed to sound good but, with YouTube being one of the best ways to disburse music, artists figured out they had to go beyond sappy narratives and multi-angle shots for their videos. Suddenly the once-miniscule indie circuit had become a full-fledged industry. However, it's fair to say that the progress hasn't exactly mirrored the West — considering the intricacies of our culture economy. There aren't as many good lighting designers or sound vendors, but managers are working to ensure they set a benchmark. The calendar's must-attend events — like Bacardi NH7 Weekender, the SulaFest and Magnetic Fields — are also testing grounds for production pros like Jagasia (who works with every artist on their setlist) and Mixtape (who plan specific audio-visual rigs for stages). And remuneration isn't bad either: they charge 15% to 25% as their commission.

Pushing Indian independent talent to a whole new level — from teaching them professionalism and business sense to amping up their stage production and the quality of their studio releases — these names are changing the way artists work across the country.

## Dhruv Jagasia - Artist and Event Manager, Founder at Big Bad Wolf (New Delhi)



"I've never had a plan for anything I did in my life, including my marriage," says Jagasia, the hardball-tossing Delhi resident who's been part of everything from Teamworks (organisers for the Jaipur Lit Fest) to NH7 Weekender festivals, and is now the founder of Big Bad Wolf. He and his team handle a diverse roster of artists that are arguably at the front of non-Bollywood music in India — Indian Ocean, fusion pioneer Karsh Kale, psychedelic/blues band Parvaaz, and more. Besides booking gigs and negotiating fees, his company also moulds artists' online and on-stage identities.

"I'm not interested in money. I'm interested in doing stuff that will ultimately get you money," says the 37-year-old. In fact, he told his latest signee, singer Kamakshi Khanna, that she needs to be prepared to earn lesser money. "I'm interested that whatever show we do, we do it with an idea that it's a great show," says Jagasia, who is working on a "very elaborate" plan for Indian Ocean's upcoming album, a Canada tour for Parvaaz and recording Karsh Kale's next album.

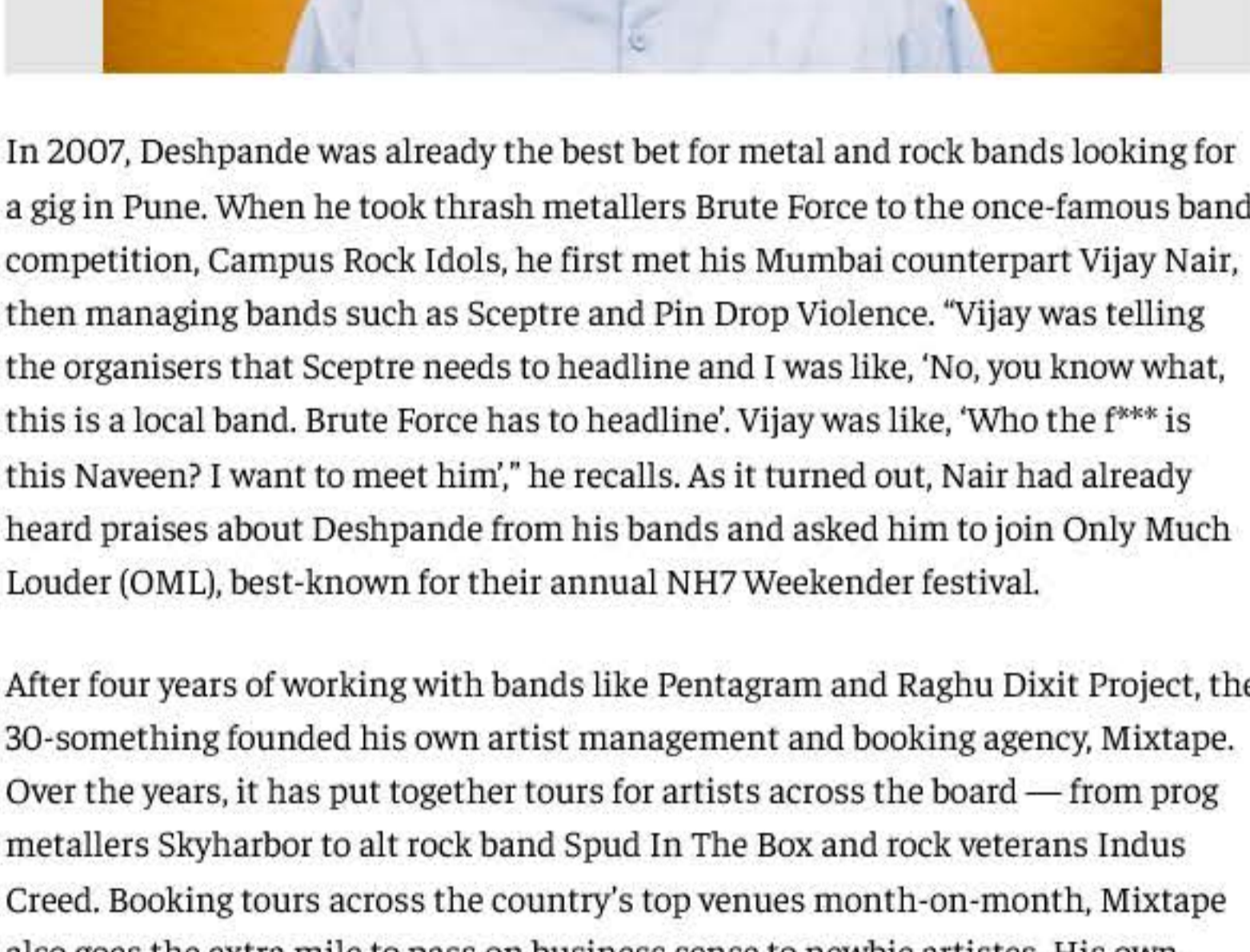
## Miti Adhikari - Live and studio engineer, mixing and mastering (Kolkata)



Adhikari returned home to Kolkata after nearly four decades of being an integral part of the UK music industry, and working with the likes of Nirvana, Foo Fighters and Coldplay. Now, at 61, he is the go-to producer for indie artists across the country. Among the noteworthy albums that came to the producer and mixing engineer's studio are *Maby Baking* by The Supersonics, Parekh and Singh's *Ocean*, and The Ganesh Talkies' *In Technicolor*. "When I mixed Menwhopause's *Easy*, the internet in India was pretty slow. The only references people had were classic albums they had heard on cassette or vinyl. Now people can listen to anything and bands often send me YouTube links with the expectation I will make them sound like these artists," he says.

A taskmaster, Adhikari prefers to record bands in one session, over two or three weeks. "The sound of an album then has a cohesion. However, the music biz economics means that, quite often, the album will be recorded in bits and pieces, as and when money and time is available." Catch his work on Bangla rock giants Fossils' new EP, Kolkata electronic/pop artist Suyasha Sengupta's Plastic Parvati project and Bengaluru electronic act The Burning Deck.

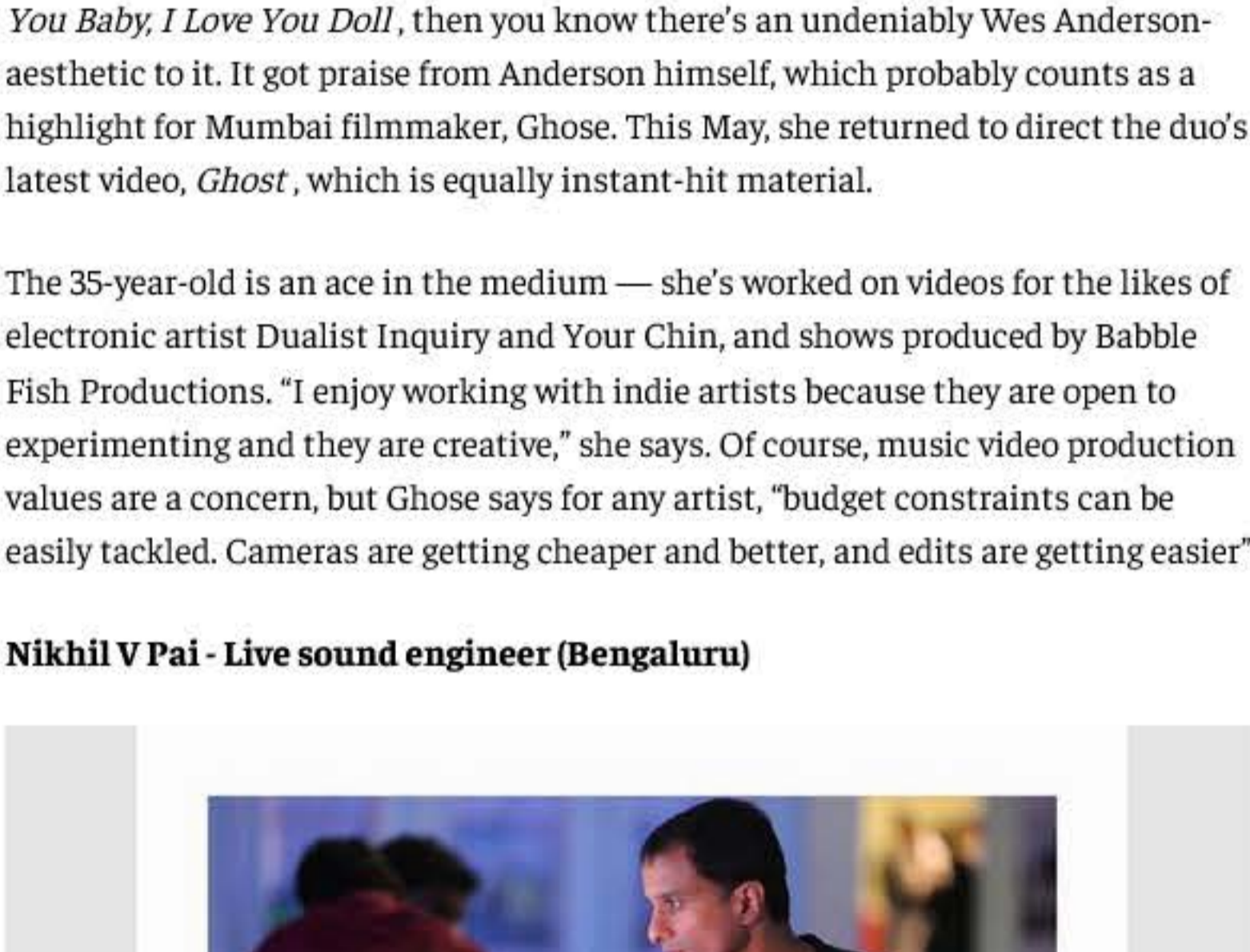
## Naveen Deshpande - Artist and event manager, lighting engineer, and founder of Mixtape (Mumbai)



In 2007, Deshpande was already the best bet for metal and rock bands looking for a gig in Pune. When he took thrash metallers Brute Force to the once-famous band competition, Campus Rock Idols, he first met his Mumbai counterpart Vijay Nair, then managing bands such as Sceptre and Pin Drop Violence. "Vijay was telling the organisers that Sceptre needs to headline and I was like, 'No, you know what, this is a local band. Brute Force has to headline'. Vijay was like, 'Who the f\*\*k is this Naveen? I want to meet him'," he recalls. As it turned out, Nair had already heard praises about Deshpande from his bands and asked him to join Only Much Louder (OML), best-known for their annual NH7 Weekender festival.

After four years of working with bands like Pentagram and Raghu Dixit Project, the 30-something founded his own artist management and booking agency, Mixtape. Over the years, it has put together tours for artists across the board — from prog metallers Skyharbor to alt rock band Spud In The Box and rock veterans Indus Creed. Booking tours across the country's top venues month-on-month, Mixtape also goes the extra mile to pass on business sense to newbie artistes. His own interest, however, lies in making sure that Indian bands go abroad and ensuring every band looks great on stage.

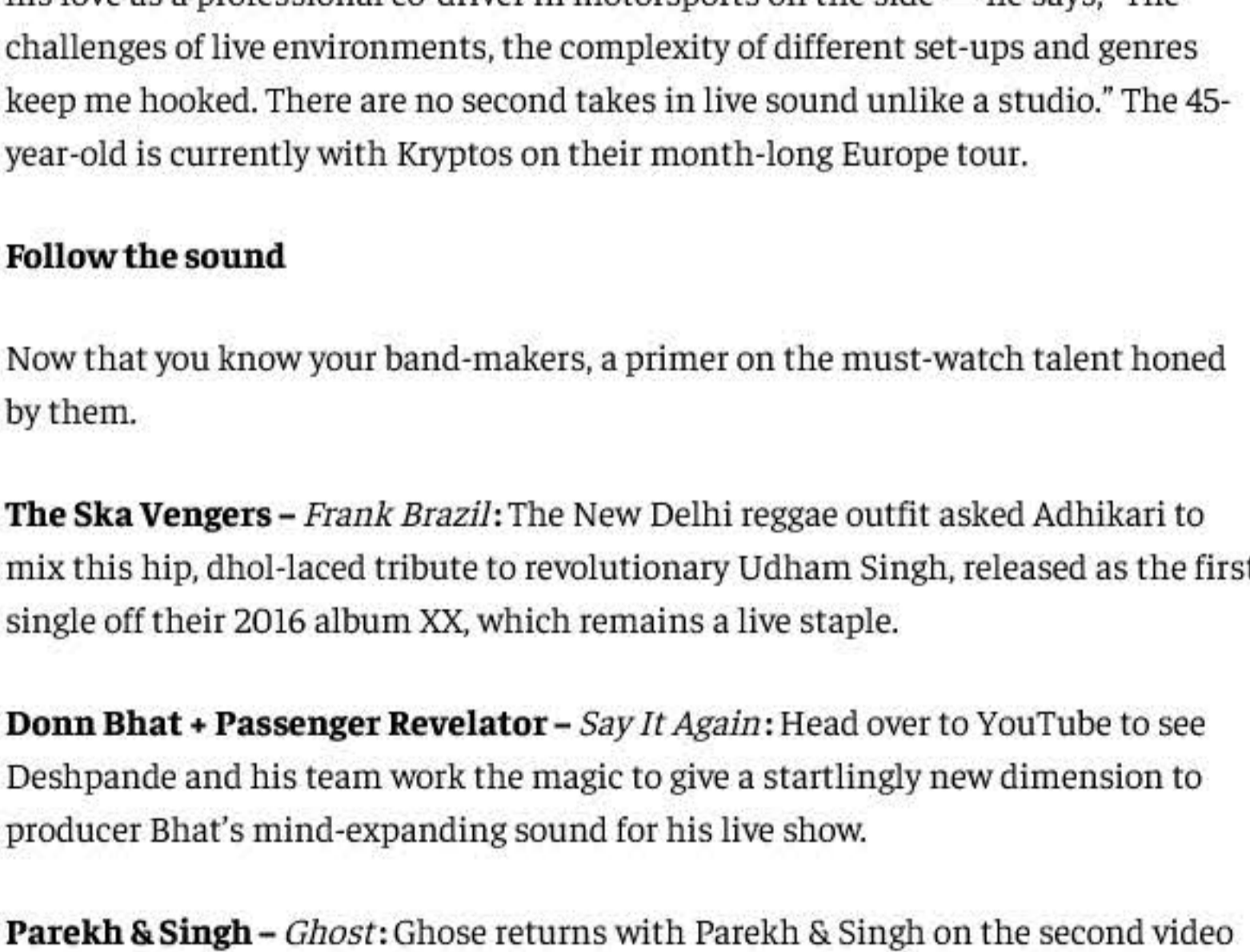
## Misha Ghose - Music video director, filmmaker (Mumbai)



If you've seen dream pop duo Parekh & Singh's 2016 video for their hit song, *I Love You Baby, I Love You Doll*, then you know there's an undeniably Wes Anderson-aesthetic to it. It got praise from Anderson himself, which probably counts as a highlight for Mumbai filmmaker, Ghose. This May, she returned to direct the duo's latest video, *Ghost*, which is equally instant-hit material.

The 35-year-old is an ace in the medium — she's worked on videos for the likes of electronic artist Dualist Inquiry and Your Chin, and shows produced by Babble Fish Productions. "I enjoy working with indie artists because they are open to experimenting and they are creative," she says. Of course, music video production values are a concern, but Ghose says for any artist, "budget constraints can be easily tackled. Cameras are getting cheaper and better, and edits are getting easier".

## Nikhil V Pai - Live sound engineer (Bengaluru)



At the annual metal gathering, Bangalore Open Air, earlier this month, old school metallers Kryptos took to the stage with a sound so ferocious, one would dare say it's the best they've sounded in their 19-year-run. They owed it (at least in part) to sound engineer Nikhil Pai, who has handled the console for everyone from guitarist John McLaughlin and Bollywood composer Amit Trivedi to Carnatic prog band Agam.

Pai, who started off in 1995 as a bassist and singer, switched to sound engineering because there was money in it. Three thousand gigs and 25 years later — honing his love as a professional co-driver in motorsports on the side — he says, "The challenges of live environments, the complexity of different set-ups and genres keep me hooked. There are no second takes in live sound unlike a studio." The 45-year-old is currently with Kryptos on their month-long Europe tour.

## Follow the sound

Now that you know your band-makers, a primer on the must-watch talent honed by them.

**The Ska Vengers – *Frank Brazil*:** The New Delhi reggae outfit asked Adhikari to mix this hip, dhol-laced tribute to revolutionary Udhham Singh, released as the first single off their 2016 album XX, which remains a live staple.

**Donn Bhat + Passenger Revelator – *Say It Again*:** Head over to YouTube to see Deshpande and his team work the magic to give a startlingly new dimension to producer Bhat's mind-expanding sound for his live show.

**Parekh & Singh – *Ghost*:** Ghose returns with Parekh & Singh on the second video of their recently-released album, *Ocean*, fabulously telling a story about a girl, her imagination and her dog.

**The Local Train:** If you want to see Pai in action, you might as well see him elevate New Delhi alt rockers, The Local Train — ensuring their arena-rock sound makes for a rousing experience.

**Indian Ocean – *Tandanu*:** Their last album was a collaboration heavy affair, aided not just by the musicians themselves, but also Jagasia, who is seen in behind-the-scenes clips on YouTube.

## Testimonials from the stage

**Khalid Ahamed (vocalist and guitarist, Parvaaz) on Jagasia:** We signed with Big Bad Wolf this April, and it's been a great experience. Tour plans have been formulated for the next six months and we have long-term and short-term goals in place.

**Nischay Parekh (guitarist, Parekh & Singh) on Ghose:** I came across Misha's video for Your Chin, made on Powerpoint, and her quirky sensibility was a nice quality for us to tap into. After we shot the videos, we feel like we can have a visual vocabulary that we can expand on.

**Tony Das (guitarist, Peepal Tree, Thermal and a Quarter) on Pai:** He is a consummate professional. He'll be clambering over gear and crawling under stages to get the job done. But perhaps, most importantly, he loves the bands he works with.

**Anup Kutty (guitarist, Menwhopause) on Adhikari:** We'd been looking for someone to mix *Easy*, and we were given *Maby Baking* by The Supersonics (which Miti had worked on). It was a great album and we got in touch with him, had a few conversations, and he sent us a mix of *Can't We Be Dreaming*, which blew our collective heads. Next thing we know, I am in London in his den, TopStep Studio, watching him make the album what it became.

**Donn Bhat (guitarist, producer, Donn Bhat + Passenger Revelator) on Deshpande:** Naveen is an amazing lighting engineer. From the beginning, he had this idea that he wanted to try out something cool for our music. We didn't know what we were trying, but we did speak about the songs. I sent him the songs beforehand, so that he could get a vibe for it, just the tempo and texture. It was all him, after that.

## Latest News

- 9 mins ago - Other States: Assam CM meets Kuki insurgent groups with peace plan in Guwahati
- 51 mins ago - Other States: Three injured in fresh gunfight in violence-hit Manipur
- 1 hour ago - Other States: Railways gears up to tackle Cyclone Biparjoy, several trains cancelled in Gujarat
- 1 hour ago - Mumbai: 48-hour curfew lifted from clash-hit area in Jalgaon

READ MORE STORIES

The Hindu	Group News Sites	Other Products	Popular Sections
About Us	The Hindu	RoofandFloor	News
Code of Editorial Values	BL on Campus	STEP	India
News Archive	Sportstar	Images	World
Sitemap	Business Line	Classifieds - Digital	Opinion
Print Subscription	இந்து தமிழ் திணை	Classifieds - Print	Editorial
Digital Subscription	The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy	Bookstore & Special Publications	Business
Subscribe to Newsletters	Frontline		Sport
Rss Feeds	YoungWorld Club		Karnataka Assembly Election 2023
Readers Editor - Terms of Reference	The Hindu E-Paper		
	BusinessLine E-Paper		
	Crossword+ "Free Games"		
Contact Us	Coupons		
Contact Us			
Social Media			
Advertise With Us			

## Trending on thehindu.com

Manipur violence | Mother, son burnt alive, BSF jawan killed; Centre sends additional troops as crisis soars

23-year-old found murdered in Bengaluru flat, police searching for her friend

Centre urged to allow takeover of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant by SAIL, says its Independent Director

A climax at the summit: on the World Test Championship in London today

Speculation rife about Sachin Pilot floating new party

## Trending on our Group sites

Cabinet approves ₹89,000-cr revival package for BSNL

BYJU's sues lenders for 'predatory tactics', misses \$40 million payment

Failed ideas of Jawaharlal Nehru

No, Nehru did not mishandle Kashmir

'Embarrassing', 'feral', 'disrespectful': French Open fans under fire