



NAVEEN DESHPANDE

Director, Ground Control

(Lighting Design and Visual Specialists)

Director, Mixtape

(Artist Management and Event Conceptualizers/Promoters)

ETA SPOTLIGHT is a heart-to-heart with industry professionals from across Asia, as they discuss their foray into the business and their journey thus far, while sharing their honest opinions about key aspects like market trends, technology, upskilling and more...

Brief about yourself. Your Name and nickname within the industry if any, Job Appointment or Expertise, are you working for a Company or are you a Freelancer.

My name is Naveen Deshpande and I am the founder and Director of 2 companies i.e. Mixtape: One of India's leading artists booking and touring agency and Ground Control: A leading Lighting and AV design company. Through Mixtape and Ground Control, I've had the pleasure of working with some of the best talent, festivals and experiential events across the globe.

What got you interested in getting into the industry? When did you first get involved with the industry?

Back in 2007, I used to manage a band called Pentagram, and I used to keenly observe Roosevelt D'souza who was the band's Lighting Designer (LD) at the time. I

guess that's what really got me inspired with the lighting world. It was quite special to have him on board at the time, especially because back then the country barely had a handful of professional lighting designers. Post 2010 Roosevelt got busy touring with Bollywood acts and the band had no one to fill that gap. I saw this as an opportunity, and quickly jumped on existing consoles / set ups at venues initially, which was for just Mixtape's set of artists that the company managed. Later on in 2012, I was in London for a holiday and I wrote to Avolites requesting them for a formal training and certification at their HQ. They were extremely kind to waive off my fees and allowed me to finish my certification, while giving me access to practice every day till my time in the UK. And then the rest, as they say, is history.

What do you feel about the industry?

I believe we've seen a lot of growth as a fraternity over the past 10 years or so. I see a lot of artists now have LD's as part of their touring crew (which until a couple of years ago was pretty non-existent). So that's definitely a good development.

On the other hand, I do feel that we've been slightly behind in terms of keeping up with the developments in technology. But I guess that has a lot to do with demand and supply. Branded fixtures vs regular run-of-the-mill fixtures has been a never-ending discussion; but I believe it's only a matter of time that vendors and event companies will wise up to channelling their investments in the right direction.

What is your most memorable experience and why?

There are quite a few; but the most memorable by far is my stint of being the LD for guitar legend Steve Vai at the NH7 Festival. I had the pleasure of doing 2 shows with him; and a couple of weeks later he wrote me a personal email thanking me for an excellent job on both of his sets in India. Another noteworthy experience for me was the opportunity to work with DJ EZ and Fatima Yamaha at Oya Festival, Norway. Both artists are still in touch with me, and have expressed their desire for me to tour with them in the EU and UK.

What was your worst experience and why?

It's funny actually; I'm doing this interview while returning from a cancelled show. Nothing can be worse than not doing a show!

How exactly has the evolution in technologies impacted your line of work?

The introduction of pre-visualization has definitely been a great boon for our industry. In India, set-ups happen pretty much a day prior to or on the day of the event; giving us a very small window to do our thing. However, with softwares like Vectorworks, WYSIWYG, MA3D and many more, we now can save on a lot of time and plan in advance; this is quite crucial especially if you are a touring LD.

What are the products / technologies that are absolutely crucial to your workflow? Do you have a personal favourite among them? If so, please let us know why.

I have been making a slow move to MA Lighting technology in the last year or so and that has been a key product for me in terms of achieving a lot of my design ideas and also simplifying my workflow.

In your line of work, have you noticed any new trends in terms of workflow / technologies etc that you feel could revolutionise the future for specialists like yourself? If so, please let us know.

My partner at Ground Control, Satvinder Singh, recently introduced me to RDM (Remote Device Management). And I've learnt that RDM enabled lights offer a plethora of benefits, the best of which includes the capability to control the 'addressing' of every light and changing modes directly from the operating console. This actually ends up minimizing set-up time to less than half; and I really believe this could be a game changer for the Indian market.

Do you have any Hobbies outside of work and what is it?

I really love travelling and I'm fortunate that my work has made it quite easy :) I also enjoy playing Chess and Snooker.

Highlight any professional training or certificates.

I am a certified engineer by Avolites as well as grandMA.

What did you do during the COVID-19 period?

I always wanted to dive into the visual world and during the pandemic I started fiddling with Resolume (VJ software). I have been on a tour lately as a VJ and it's been super fun and exciting to learn and understand that aspect of illumination and visual technologies.