

Moonlight sonata in Mumbai

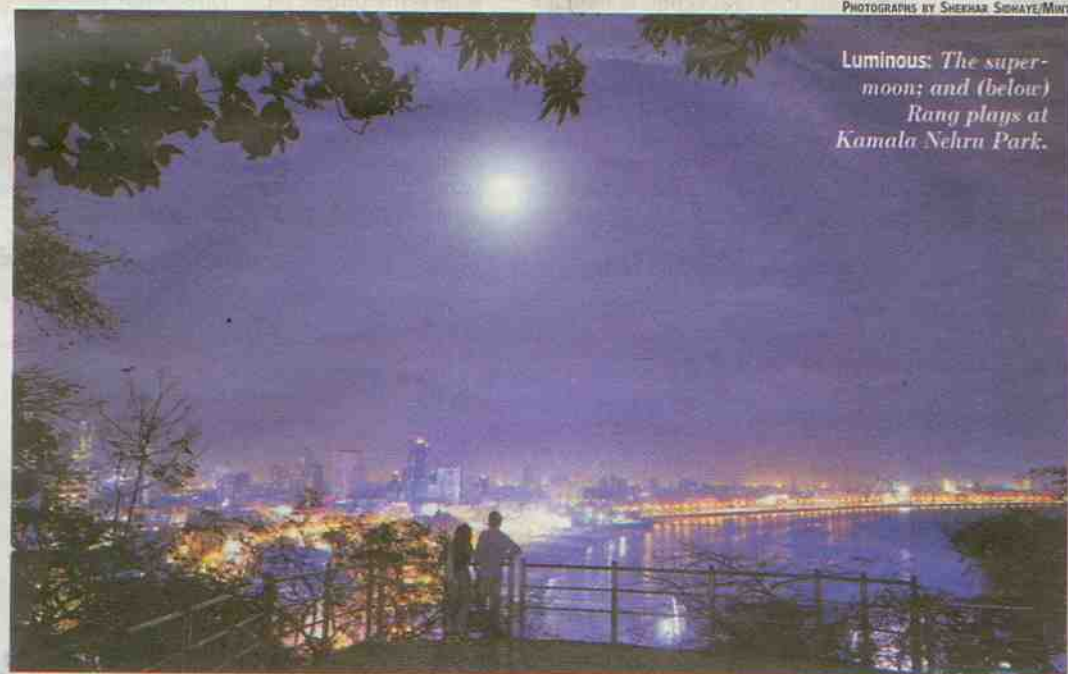
Rare and free gigs in the outdoors bring the city's parks alive with music and cheer

To attend a concert on a Saturday afternoon on Holi weekend during the city's bizarre mid-March heatwave on Malabar Hill, where there are more trees than people anyway, comes perilously close to suffering for someone else's art.

But having attended Dischordian and Rang's performances at Kamala Nehru Park last month, I can report with the conviction of the pilgrim: Reader, the Bandstand Revival Project is worth it. An initiative of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the project, now in its third season, lures local bands and artistes out of their natural habitat to perform outdoors. This year, they will host concerts at Dadar Chowpatty and Bandra's Carter Road.

I am delighted to revisit last season's sole venue, Kamala Nehru Park, which every schoolchild in Mumbai visits at least once, for the pleasure of crawling up the Old Woman's Shoe. The park is several degrees cooler than the city outside, and as you peer over the railings at its southern end it's not hard to believe that you're summering on the slopes of a modest little hill station—until you cast your gaze further down and take in the shimmering silver crescent of Backbay, Marine Drive curved sleekly around it.

Under the spreading boughs of a cannonball tree in the amphitheatre at the park's westernmost end, we sit down to listen to the three-man band Dischordian. I last heard lead vocalist Garreth D'Mello in a stadium full of screaming rock-heads: There is still something about his voice that recalls Eddie Vedder jumping off a steel girder. But in the drowsy sunshine, as a rather unlikely crowd gathers slowly, no music is too incongruous.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHEKHAR SORAYE/MINT

Luminous: The supermoon; and (below) Rang plays at Kamala Nehru Park.



Their alt-rock draws only a small complement of the sort of fans you might find at, say, their Blue Frog gigs. Pensioners on their evening walk drift in; sneaker-shod joggers and child hawkers stop what they are doing. A few people look like they've stopped off before the evening's parties, and there are at least two who could only have trooped in from a day at the bank. "This song is called *Bucket of Blood*," D'Mello announces.

I turn and ask the elderly couple across from me if they're enjoying the show.

"Very much," smiles Katie Panthaki, who lives in Mazgaon. "We

read about it in the papers, so we came by to see what was going on." The Panthakis do not wave their arms in the air when the bands ask us to, but I see them applauding sedately at the end of each song.

The sun sets by the time Hindi-rock group Rang take the stage, and most of us realize that the excursion has an added advantage; this also happens to be the night of the supermoon, the biggest full moon in 18 years.

"How are you all doing tonight?" lead singer Ronit Bhattacharya asks. We are too few and too diverse to chorus back in one voice. I try for a headcount; surely

there aren't many more people here than you would find squeezed into a BEST bus during peak hours. It is a moment to savour, early in the season; project manager Stuart DaCosta tells me that last year's finale had more than 2,000 people packed in this space.

Mumbai's film industry invented cities where heroes sing in public. Listening to Rang funk up A.R. Rahman songs under fairy lights and an enormous moon, there is a glimpse of that world, unfettered by bureaucratic control and social disapproval, where music is not occasioned by a festival or a public procession or, indeed, a Bollywood film shoot. We just happen to be here on a moonlit summer evening, the leaves of the cannonball tree falling into our hair and laps, listening to the music.

We are doing quite well tonight.

The Bandstand Revival Project is on every Saturday till 28 May at various venues across Mumbai. Today, the MCGM band, Ankit Dayal and Vasudha Sharma perform at Kamala Nehru Park, starting 5.30pm. For the full schedule, log on to on.fb.me/bandrevival

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