

# WHEN HYDERABAD FOUND ITS 'SOULMATE' IN A SHILLONG BAND



**THE FOUR BLUES MEN:** (From L-R) Vincent, Rudy, Leon and Rudy

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They have a simple musical motto — “Blues is my business and the business is good”. Probably the first Indian blues band to write their own music, Soulmate is a household name among fans of the genre who have long craved India’s answer to the blues. After 14 years in the indie music circuit, the Shillong-based Soulmate today is hailed as the best Indian name in the world of blues.

“If you ask me, Soulmate can rock even a baby shower,” said 48-year-old cinematographer Nassif Ahmed, who has been keenly following the band since their inception in 2003. And that’s exactly what they did at a popular brewpub in the city on Saturday. Belting blues’ varied styles — from boogie, travelling blues, 12-bar blues, swing to laid-back mid-tempo guitar-driven instrumentals, their set had everything to satisfy even the most critical of a blues fan.

It was a thin crowd for a Saturday, but it didn’t matter to Rudy Wallang, Tipriti Kharbangar and Co. From the first four-count, they were right on the money. Aptly accompanied by Rudy’s sons, Leon and Vincent, on bass and drum respectively, if you were to close your eyes and listen to their set, it was impossible to gauge their desi-ness as their sound is as professional as any blues band from the genre’s home in the US.

“The only thing I knew about the band is that they have opened for Carlos Santana. That was enough to pull me to this gig. And so far they have been exceptional,” said Anand Raj, a 24-year-old IT professional, who was at his first Soulmate gig.

**TOURING BLUES**

“The last few days have been very hectic for us. We’re on an eight-city tour of the country and just arrived in Hyderabad this morning from Bengaluru. Early morning flights are the worst, but we can’t help it as we have back-to-back shows,” said Rudy as he stirred his drink just minutes before going on stage.

Soulmate has performed in Hyderabad a couple of times earlier and they have

some fond memories of the city. “I remember we were here some time last year. Though blues here is at a nascent stage, Hyderabad has been receptive to the genre and our sets,” said Keith Wallang, Rudy’s brother and manager of the band. “It’s good. Because we love it and that’s what we do for a living,” added Rudy.

Touring has always been Soulmate’s strong point. Their brand of music has found them fans in even the most unexpected of places around the country and their gig calendar is pretty packed.

All through the conversation, Tipriti or Rudy as she is commonly known as, sat with her head buried into her phone. The fiery vocalist, who otherwise is a bundle of energy on stage, seems little off to us. “How are you, Rudy?” we asked. She looked up and gave a weak smile. “I am seriously sleep-deprived, dude. But it’s going to be all fine after today’s set as our next gig is in Goa on the 26th and we have four days before that. It’s all part of the game, you see,” she said with a smile.

**BRINGING THE HOUSE DOWN WITH THE BLUES**

But once on stage, all the tiredness seemed to vanish and the feisty, gritty Rudy, that her fans know her as, was at her best — dictating terms on the microphone and accompanying her bandmates, especially, the cool-head guitar exponent Rudy. And it was eclectic. The time they broke into *Set Me Free* from their second album *Moving On*, the already tipsy gathering was on its feet and jiving. Next came *Blues Is My Business* from their debut album *Shillong*. A crowd favourite, the funky guitar riffs and Rudy’s powerful voice in this one never fail to garner appreciation and it was no different on Saturday.

“There are a few new songs in the pipeline, but currently we aren’t thinking of another album. The focus now is on touring,” said Vincent, adding that blues drumming happens by chance to him. “Initially, I wasn’t a blues drummer. But, one day, dad (Rudy) asked me to jam with him on the blues and here I am today,” he revealed.

“We might have to come back again to Hyderabad in a couple of months, as talks are on about another gig here. It would be wonderful to gorge on delicious Hyderabad food once again,” said Leon, packing his bass guitar.

As the crowd shuffled towards the exit gate and the pub wore a deserted look, we asked Leon what he would be taking back from the gig in the city. “I think Soulmate has added a few more names to its fan list today,” he said, signing off.

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— KEITH WALLANG, *manager of Soulmate*

## On a musical odyssey



**Ameya Dabli and Dada JP Vaswani**

Internationally acclaimed singer Ameya Dabli launched his music album *Ekam Satt* — *One Truth, One Humanity, World Music* at the hands of global humanitarian and spiritual leader Rev. Dada J.P. Vaswani as part of the latter’s centenary birthday celebrations in Pune. The album is available on all digital platforms through Times Music. Inspired by respected Dada’s message of selfless love and service for humanity, the album features the works of legendary poets and saints such as Kabirdas, Mirabai, Narsinh Mehta, Guru Nanak Dev, Khwaja Garib Nawaz, Buddha, Tukaram, Tulsidas, Gospels and others.

Given the continuous stress and turmoil that individuals across the globe face, there is an urgent need for each of us to pause, reflect and connect with each other, cutting across our religious, social and cultural beliefs. The album’s songs focus on this precise theme that eventually it is a ‘one world family’ and showcases the best of sufi, folk and contemporary world music across different genres. The album has foot-tapping numbers covering Indian and international musical forms to appeal to audiences across age groups. With an aim to spread the message of love and unity across cultures and society globally, Ameya Dabli and his business partner Purvi Soali quit their successful corporate careers to become social entrepreneurs.

A versatile singer, Ameya has performed over 1,500 concerts across 15 countries. The music from the album is already a rage with live renditions by Ameya across 25 locations including large corporates like Aditya Birla Group and at the Indian High Commission in London. He is currently touring India, US and Dubai for his other musical concept ‘Heart 2 Heart’ covering melodious *ghazals* and folk music.

His 10 city ‘Heart 2 Heart’ tour covering melodious *ghazals* kicked off in Mumbai yesterday and will further move to Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and other cities.



The launch was attended by a large number of people

## Rhythm of raag Pahadi meets the romance of Bihag and Madhuvanti



The tremor in his hands, caused by Parkinson’s disease, was hard to miss as Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia took to the stage at Shilpa Kalavedika on Saturday night. But neither his advancing years nor the strains of the degenerative disorder had any affect on the notes flowing out of his flute as the Padma Vibhushan awardee gave Hyderabadis a rare glimpse into his prowess.

Bringing down the curtains on the Hyderabad Arts Festival, the wizard transported the audience to a meditative world of tranquillity with the *dhun* of his *bansuri* that lingered even after he had stopped playing.

Opening with *Madhuvanti*, a melodic early evening *raag* of *Todi thaat*, he played a soulful *aalap*, traversing through the lower octave with ease, as he explored the myriad colours and moods of the romantic *raga*. His senior disciple, Vivek Sonar, followed him with remarkable sensitivity. The detailed *aalap-jod-jhala* unfolded the beauty of the *raag*. Two virtuoso artists of percussion, Pandit Bhawani Shankar and Pandit Ramkumar Mishra provided *pakhawaj* and *tabla* accompaniment with admirable restraint, without drowning the melody of the flute in the rhythmic beats of the percussion.

Next up was the night *raag*, *Bihag*. The maestro created a somber *dhun* on his *bansuri* with delicate touches on both the *madhyams*, escalating its magnificence.

The lilting *dhun* and beats of *Pahadi* that followed was an exquisite contrast after the romance and solemnness of *Madhuvanti* and *Bihag*. The magic of his *phoank* put the audience in a trance as the mystery and charm of the hills

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