

Music and more for the soul

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Cathedral Road: If anything could match Amyt Datta's thunder on the guitar strings at the St Paul's Cathedral grounds on Saturday evening, it was the madness of Arko Mukhaerjee's signature devil-may-care singing.

It's not been long since Datta formed ZIBA with Mukhaerjee, bassist Akash Ganguly, drummer Ritoban Das, and percussionist Deboprotim Baksi. Baksi was missing in action at the third and final instalment of The Soul Local, a youth festival organised by Calcutta Cacophony, a students' initiative to "hold on to the nostalgia of Calcutta". But the others more than made up for the void.

As Mukhaerjee belted out his trademark fusion folk songs — where West Africa meets the red soil of Birbhum and the evergreen *Dekho re nayan mele* and *Allah megh de paani* de get a rock-y twist — the guitar interludes left the youngschool and college crowd gasping in awe. They were not even born when Datta had already earned the status of a demigod of guitar among fans. Even one of the organisers — the oldest of whom is only 24 — admitted sheepishly, "I'm too scared to talk to him."

And yet, there he was, making a totally "different kind of music" than what he's known for. For Datta, ZIBA was a conscious shift from the serious rock and jazz that he plays. And did he enjoy playing before such a young crowd? "Absolutely," pat came the reply.

But the times, they are a-changin'. Many in the crowd said their favourite musical genre was dear old Bollywood. And Underground Authority, the alternative rock / rap rock band from the city, clearly seemed to be the favourite.

School students Shrestha Banerjee and Pritam Gain admitted that they had come solely to listen to Underground Authority. And their



(Clockwise from top left) Amyt Datta and Arko Mukhaerjee perform in the third and final edition of The Soul Local, presented by Calcutta Cacophony, on Saturday; the crowd at the St Paul's Cathedral grounds. Pictures by Anab Mondal

favourite band did not disappoint. Shirtless performances to songs like *Uda Punjab*, *Humma* and *Hogi subah* sent the crowd into a frenzy.

But The Soul Local was not only about music. It was about food, literature, art — anything that captured the "soul" of the city. There were stalls selling trinkets, posters, bags, memorabilia and, of course, food.

"It's great to have such a fest in Calcutta. It's very different," gushed MSc student Shivangi Banerjee. "I just love the ambience of this place," said Pritam Banerjee, an optometrist by profession who is not into Western music at all.

The open-air concert was, however, the biggest attraction. The Soul

Local was originally envisaged as a platform for budding musicians of the city. But by the third year, it was big enough to have names like ZIBA and Underground Authority on board, with around 5,500 passes sold, each modestly priced at Rs 100. The profits will go to Lions Club for charity.

The concert started with the band Enolaton — a clever reversal of "not alone" — with what they call "bleak rock" music. "It's Radiohead meets Daft Punk meets Nine Inch Nails meets David Bowie," grinned lead vocalist and composer Abhishu Rakshit.

The final slot of the evening was left for DJ UGain.

Starting from an Instagram and a Facebook page, Calcutta Cacophony

has indeed come a long way. In only three years, The Soul Local turned into a full-fledged youth festival. And yet, this is where they say goodbye.

"Most of the group members are students. Several of them are moving out of the city," explained Anurag Mazumder, the editor and coordinator of the organisation.

What was left unsaid came from none other than Datta. "There's simply not enough support for musicians in this city. We need support from all quarters, including the government," he said.

So, until that happens and we can have more such "cacophony" in Calcutta, we can only say, "Thank you for the music."