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United by Music

By Poonam Goel | Published: 04th December 2013 10:04 AM
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Music, as we all know, has no language. It unifies people across countries and cultures. It is this universal aspect of music that a new show at Delhi's National Museum celebrates. Bridging technology and culture, this unique multimedia exhibition seeks to unravel the mystique of music by exploring its scientific, artistic and spiritual dimensions and its reflections in the images of goddesses across Asian cultures.

Titled 'Musical Landscapes & The Goddess of Music: Recent Advances in Interactive Art', the exhibition has been mounted by Ranjit Makkuni, a celebrated technical wizard and accomplished musician. "The exhibition provides viewers with an opportunity to enter into the world of Asian music through electronic installations, digital images and recordings of performances by maestros," says Makkuni, who describes himself as a 'tactile, interactive and computing designer'.

"Music is essential to the ritual of temples, whether the altar bell, chants or prayers of spiritual seekers or as a sacred precinct for performance. In South and Southeast Asia, the temple may be seen as a buzzing musical instrument," points out the artist, an alumnus of IIT, Kharagpur and University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

The exhibition presents both traditional and new instruments based on the Indian sitar, Burmese saung harp, Thai xylophone, Korean kayagum, Chinese guzheng and pipa, Vietnamese dan tranh, and the Javanese and Balinese gamelan, among others.

New instruments with embedded computation demonstrate interactions through gesture, touch, pull, movement and gaze. In addition, through responsive computing, people by their position,

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gesture and movements control musical events in the exhibition environment. For instance, in the sculpture, Abstract Woman, there is embedded a representation of Sri Yantra, which, upon touch, plays back the 1,000 names of Goddess Lalita.

“People spend so much time interacting with the computer, but we are trying to create a richer experience so that modern society still has culture,” says Makkuni, whose works have been displayed at various leading museums and won top international awards for promoting culture, peace and environmental protection.

The exhibition comprises several sections, showing goddesses of music; forms and sculptures suggestive of the scientific and mythological imagery of sound; and the compassionate goddesses who listen to people’s prayers.

There are sections on Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and music; Kinayi, the angels of music, from Burma; and The compassionate figure of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara from Japan. There is also a section on breath, voice and healing, which explores the healing properties of singing and its relationship to breath.

“I try to explore innovative ways of building bridges between techno and traditional cultures. I believe engagement with culture is a valuable process to spark off technological innovation,” he says.

The exhibition will be on till January 16, 2014.

(Poonam Goel is a freelance journalist who contributes articles on visual arts for unboxedwriters.com)

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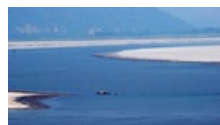
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