

Best Kept Secret: DJ REKHA

By Easy Reader
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DJ Rekha is the maestro behind one of New York City's most successful club nights, Basement Bhangra, held the first Thursday of every month at S.O.B.'s. Even when business is slow, this is the one night that can always be counted on to pack them in. The sound is like *Soul Train*, South Asian style, roots bhangra mixed with the hottest rap and dancehall with just a dash of drum 'n' bass. She's even been known to bring in big acts from overseas like Talvin Singh, Bally Sagoo and Badmarsh + Shri. You can also catch her sound at the once-a-month Mutiny parties, which is where she goes when she wants to get subversive.

Mugshot caught up with DJ Rekha at her Brooklyn apartment:

Mugshot: What are the origins of Bhangra and how long have you been involved with it as an event producer?

Rekha: I started [Basement Bhangra] five years ago. It's focused on bhangra music, a music which comes out of Punjab, an area divided by India and Pakistan. It's a music that was brought over to the U.K. with the second and third generation South Asian immigrants. Basically, that's where it's produced. It's got a lot of reference to India and Pakistan but it's mainly produced [in England]. It's like modern dance music; Punjabi dance music, that's the best way to describe it. The tag line is "Basement Bhangra creates the ultimate urban vibe by mixing roots bhangra spun with a Hip-Hop sensibility." We use a lot of wax, we have doubles, we layer, etc.

It's a pretty eclectic audience. Mostly upwardly mobile South Asians, especially Indian and Pakistanis, it's made up of young professionals and college and grad students plus a good share of people who come for a musical mix you won't find anywhere else. With Basement Bhangra, people know what they're getting. The pattern has been set. With Mutiny, one of the differences is it's a collective. We have five DJ's and often guests. The musical landscape is much more

open. It's more experiential, very focused on the space. We always try to get spaces that have at least two rooms. The party has been in several spaces since it started. We're always looking for a space that feels underground, one that's not like "fancy club." We're looking for something that's very raw. The DJ's always front and center as part of the performance. The DJ is always in view. Musically, it's pretty eclectic. It's pretty much DJ's choice. We play a lot of drum 'n' bass. We also individually as DJ's incorporate lots of different styles. We've been known to play electro, sometimes techno, even more old school jungle stuff mixed in with underground hip-hop. A lot of tracks we create have that [South Asian] influence. That's definitely woven in and out of people's sets but it's also like, it's there and if it works, it works. It's not a requirement. It's also making music more organic than making it identity focused. Obviously, we're all South Asian. At the end of the day, though, you play music that's good, y'know?

Mugshot: How do you feel now that a lot of mainstream artists, even in rap, are using this like, umm...

Rekha: Ethnic spice?

Mugshot: Yeah. You see this Indian flavor popping up in a lot of commercial music.

Rekha: I think it's a good thing. It can only be a good thing. The way Hip-Hop is, it's like they're always looking for the next beat. If it's hot, it's hot and this music's hot. It was a matter of time before some producers got hip to the sound. I would hope that this just opens the door and it's not a novelty and it's done with respect and it opens the door for South Asian musicians that are actually making the music. One of the problems I have with Hip-Hop is some of the songs that have used other ethnic music, not just Indian music, haven't credited the original sources. That's the only criticism I have, though.

Check Sangament.com for more information.

