



**“Understanding the philosophy of
Contemporary Indian Rock Bands
through their Visual Representation”**

Submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Master of Design Degree in
Visual Communication as

Special Project

by

Saurabh Tewari

Second Year

of Masters in Design

Visual Communication Programme at

Industrial Design Center,

Indian Institute of Technology - Bombay,

Mumbai, INDIA

Guide:

Prof. Ravi Poovaiah





Abstract

Indian music and visual communication has developed through ages. It always incorporated western and technological influences to create new forms. Similarly, with the rise of information technology and knowledge sharing at the speed of lightening, the new forms are emerging. The idea is to look into the mentioned fields in the present scenario, cumulatively and then simultaneously.

The contemporary music scene in India is an ocean itself. The rock music has also found its way and scope within a larger domain of “music from India”. The musicians are attempting to communicate not just musically but also visually. So, the research attempts to understand the philosophy of contemporary Indian Rock Bands through their Visual Identity and Representations.

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources.

I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Signature:

Name of the student:

Roll No.:

Date:





Approval Certificate

The Visual Communication
Special Project entitled

**“Understanding the philosophy of
Contemporary Indian Rock Bands through
their Visual Representation”**

by **Saurabh Tewari, 08625803** is approved
in partial fulfillment of the requirement of
the Master of Design Degree
in Visual Communication.

Guide: Prof. Ravi Poovaiah

Signature & Date:

Acknowledgement



**I would like
to thank:**

To my parents for giving me a musical upbringing and supporting in continuing my formal studies.

To IDC, for creating a system where a student has a freedom to chose any area to work on.

To my Guide, Prof. Ravi Poovaiah, who carefully listened all my points and provided all possible guidance.

To Aman, a musician and manager of www.underground.in, who keeps me updated about the latest happenings.

To Jishnu Dasgupta, bassist of the band Swarathma, for providing elaborations and insights on album art ideas.

To my friends at IDC, my night-shift mates at studio who prepared cups of tea for me and never hesitated in asking about project's status,

and last but not the least,

To all the independent musicians and the bands, whom I met and heard during the course of this project.

Contents



Introduction	1
From Mohiner Ghuragoli to Swarathma: A Journey of Album Art of Independent Indian Rock Music	3
Position Framework	4
Understanding the sound	
Swarathma	5
Cassini's Division	7
Demonic Resurrection	9
Avial	11
The Circus	13
Summarized Table	15
References	17



Introduction

From Mohiner Ghuragoli to Swarathma: A Journey of Album Art of Indian Independent Rock Music

Indian culture(s) have been primarily an oral culture, tracing it is a challenge in itself as it is not connected through obvious continuations. Similarly, our music has also a long history and its forms and styles have been changing with time and space. With the dimension of time and space, last century saw different tangents of media and technology amalgamating to create dynamic possibilities.

The case of indigenous Rock music in India and its representation through their album art has also seen a similar growth pattern. With the sole cause of experimenting with the western music and attempts to fuse it with Indian ragas added with (at times) local issues created a new genre of music in India, their representation of record cover or album art was also different from typical Bollywood albums. Though the amount of production was no comparison to the mainstream Pop productions, but there was no compromise on applying creative energies for its visual representation. Like the music, the representation also tried to be away from the mainstream.

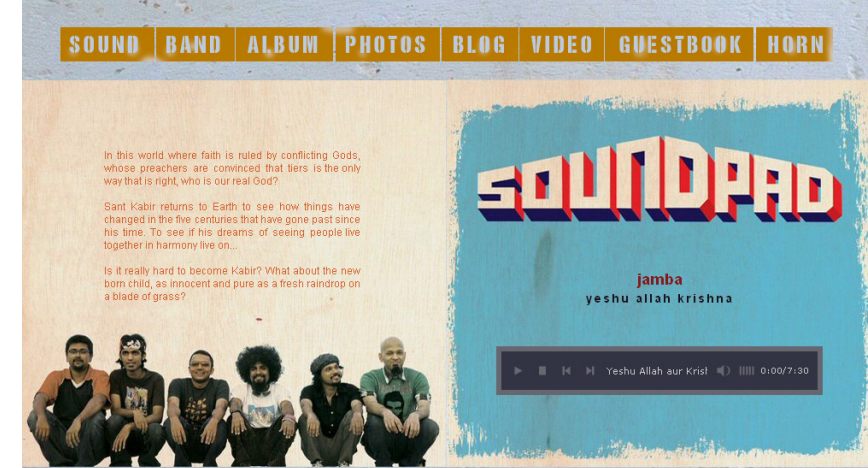


Simultaneously, it also attempted not to be totally western.

With the arrival of MySpace and SoundClick, the geographical boundaries are vanishing. One can only identify the original location and the meaning of sound through listening and understanding it. The album art, which always enhanced the meaning of sounds, has surrendered to the ready-made fancy visual templates provided by these sites.

So, the research attempts to **understand the philosophy of contemporary Indian Rock Bands through their Visual Identity and Representations.**

In the year when this project is being carried out, the conventional visual representation of a rock band has moved from its typical identities like logo and album art. In the age of music piracy, the online presence is more relevant where the bands get an opportunity to know their listeners and an actual data of hits and plays. It is imperative that listening is open, accessible and free. The bands consider it as a publicity medium for their live acts and a channel to reach out more sponsors. The cutting of physical albums is a niche audience who loves to pay for what they listen.



So, a web site, its navigation and experience becomes as important as the established form, i.e. the Album art. The research also considers the overall visual appearance and certain visual/functional elements into consideration which defines the Visual Representation for the bands.





Position

In this project, five bands of different genres and different zones are chosen to understand the state of rock sound in India. The bands are selected on the basis of their explorations, experimental nature and unique vibes about their sounds. The logo, web sites and their album covers are considered as visual representations of their typical sound.

1. Swarathma (Folk Pop Rock)
2. Cassini's Division (Psychedelic Rock)
3. Demonic Resurrection (Metal)
4. The Circus (Alternative & Funk)
5. Avial (Malyalam Nu-age Metal)

All these bands are from different locations and directions from India. They are chosen to represent their claimed genre of music.



Process

The process of decoding their sound is developing an understanding through:

Looking at the Cover

Form Colour, Picture

Structure Pattern, Grid

Texture Surface, Treatment

Type Logotype, Symbol, Identity

Meaning Explanation

Overall Understanding

Predicting Music, selecting a song

Synchronization

The synchronization between the picture, prediction and the produced music by a band.



Swarathma

Genre Folk Pop Rock
Origin/Base Bengaluru
Year started 2003
Language Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi & English

The word “swar” means sur or a musical note and “athma” means soul. By its name, it looks like a soulful band. They grouped in 2003 with Vasu Dixit as their vocalist. They regrouped to form a more serious group in 2008 and launched their first album with the musician Vishal Dadlani.



Looking at the Cover Form and Structure

The debut album cover illustrates the caricatured portraits of six members of the band, and does not indicate about their role in the band.

Texture

The illustration style has its connotations from paintings on vehicles like truck, auto-rickshwas, painted by locally popular street painters. When compared with actual faces, the portraits are little disproportionate, further confirming it to be belonging to the unique genre of local painters. They are full of basic colors and tones.

Type

The logo, Swarathma, is centrally placed and suggest it to be little flowy and vernacular. The “a” is characteristically visible. One can associate it with a Dravidian script's circular counters.

Meaning Explanation

The six caricatured images communicates a feeling of ‘fun’ in their music. Also, through their illustration style they look more like modern vernacular bunch of people. Their logo strengthen this observation.

Predicting Music, selecting a song

Description of the band and the songs is placed inside its cover. The page which describes the song 'pyaasi' has a photograph or a reproduction of a painting on a truck or vehicle. The Floral pattern, colours used and its illustration style confirms the fact. The lyrics of the pyaasi are handwritten, the inconsistency within same letters proves it not to be a typeface, and gives a feeling of poetry with a personal touch.

The presence of a girl's decently ornamented face enhances the meaning of the lyrics. The eyes of the girl suggest that she is waiting for someone and the eagle is expecting someone as a prey. The image is parallel to the message of the song, in which mother earth is expecting rain and asking mankind to stop fighting for more water.

Synchronization

The song pyaasi starts with a rhythm of acoustic guitar and a delayed rift from electric guitar which is Carnatic in nature, with a backing bass as prominent as funk. Both the instruments create a light feeling. The first vocals of Vasu Dixit sounds like a typical folk singer with high pitch. Later, other instruments, saarangi, drums and percussions join to create a rich experience. The variety and sources of the instruments itself makes the composition very confusing for defining a genre, but the overall binding through vocal's language and words, its meaning, can qualify it to make it an Indian Folk Rock composition.

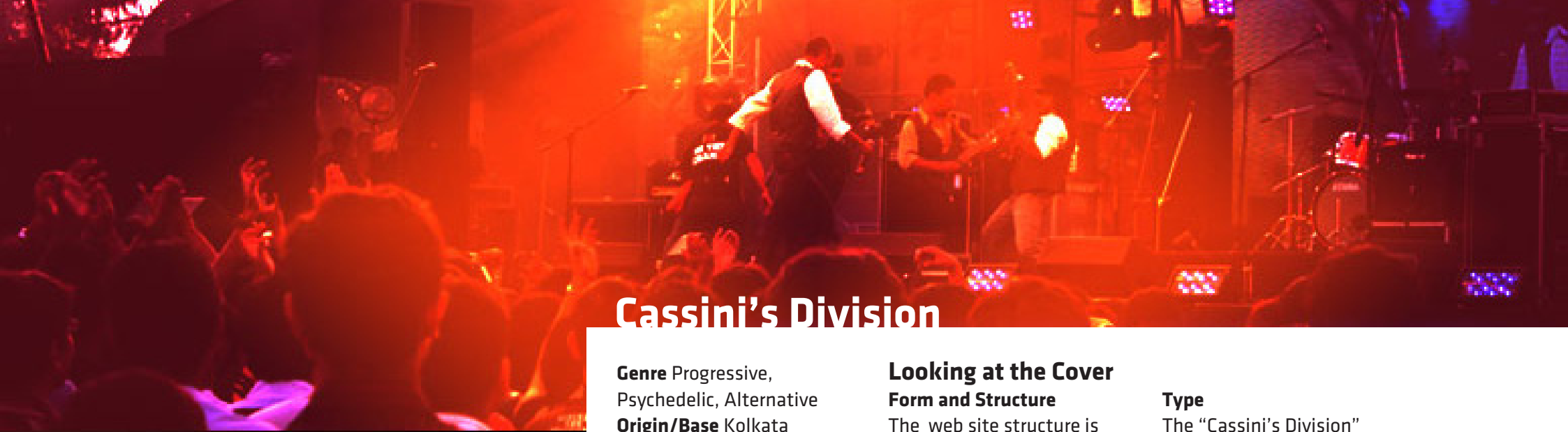


Coming Back to the Visual Representation

The medium used of popular art in designing band's visual identity is justifiable if we compare the richness and folk nature of its sound. However, the viewer can relate it to a song played in trucks. But the sophisticated packaging and roman typography contradicts the assumption.

Overall Understanding

Overall, there is feeling of pop, local, kitsch, hand painted, colourful, folk nature of the band of the sound of the band is suitably represented through its visual representations. The feeling of folk or 'from the people' is well communicated through its 'truck-art' styled album.



Cassini's Division

Genre Progressive, Psychedelic, Alternative
Origin/Base Kolkata
Year started 1999
Language English

This band is one of the biggest psychedelic and progressive acts from Kolkata. The city of joy has always offered amazing musicians to the world, but a level of 'underground' popularity achieved by its phenomenal. Till now, Cassini's Division have not attempted to cut an EP. They intend to reach more audience through their web site. They are also the runners up of Channel [V]'s Launch Pad.

Looking at the Cover Form and Structure

The web site structure is pretty much like a regular blog. The colours are dominantly red and black. The background shows some human nerve like bionic forms and structures.

In the other picture featured at the site, there is a spaceship is landing or say crashing an ancient city. The architectural appearance suggest it to be Roman city. The space-ship has the band's name over it.

Texture

The surface appearance looks dark but glossy.

In the other picture, there is a metallic feel to the spaceship landing.

Type

The "Cassini's Division" logotype is squarish and aerodynamic at edges. It looks futuristic.

Meaning Explanation

With the overall appearance of the web site is dark till now. The spaceship suggest that they have a futuristic approach in a traditional society.



Predicting Music, selecting a song

The appearance set by the band looks dark, glowy and futuristic. So the expectation from the music is it to convince the meanings it produces, through its songs. Here, the song 'VoiVoid' is taken for further analysis. The song is from the viewpoint of a famous model's murderer. The idea by the band is to illustrate the murderer's state of mind when he killed Jessica Lal. The concept looks little uncomfortably true and dark.

Synchronization

The song starts with an aggressive rift of distorted patch with an electronic guitar. With one bar completed, the drums and the bass contributes to make an introductory section. Gradually they make it more ambient to launch the vocals. The harsh and wicked vocals sounds like some shouts from drunk or mad man. Lyrics suggest it to be a narration by doped person who wants to shoot someone for his unknown satisfaction. The bass and pinchy guitar flicks contribute towards the meaning of lyrics. The bass creates a nausea at the first listening with drums at non-regular cycles making it more ambiguous.

The later interlude suggest a continuous electronic scratching which contributes to its alien nature.

The continuous scream of the protagonist and a rap saying "I am the life and death of the party, I'm psycho android" suggest it to be illustrating a self-obsessed and out of mind killer.

The song ends with a sound of gun shot, abruptly.



Coming Back to the Visual Representation

There was no dedicated visual for this song in particular, but the concept and its execution seems perfect if seen from the murderer's point of view.

The representation with black and red as dominant colours is appropriate. The spaceship example becomes contextual with their songs attacking or landing in an established Bollywood typed music industry. The overall theme, which was suggested was comparatively glossy. The sound of this particular song was harsh and pinching.

Overall Understanding

Listening back other songs makes one aware of the versatility of the band within the domain or genre they try to portray as a band. Some song had bassy punch and some were melodic too.

Overall, there is harshness and aggressiveness with a simultaneous bluesy and ambient feeling. The band seems to be experimenting with different sounds ranging within the domain of Hard Rock.



Demonic Resurrection



Genre Heavy Metal
Origin/Base Mumbai
Year started 2003
Language English

This band comes from the city of 'metalheads', Mumbai. Of all the genres of Rock, Metal is its the most appreciated and cheered version in the city. Its also a paradox to the city which houses the film industry, Bollywood. Due to its 'underground' popularity, Metal has been able to find a big niche dedicated audience.

DR or Demonic Resurrection is one of the modern Heavy Metal Bands from Mumbai, which is headed by the famous demonstealer. They also produces for other bands of similar genres.

Looking at the Cover Form and Structure

The album 'The Return to Darkness' illustrates a city which is on grid plan. It looks like a modern city with skyscrapers. The theme of the web site is black.

The DR symbol is a Chakra with sharp tornadic edges.

Texture

The image of the city is looking apocalyptic and dark. The city looks monotonous and destructed. The darkness and harshness is visible throughout in their visuals.

Type

The "Demonic Resurrection" logotype is actually an anagram. The use of anagram is common by metal bands throughout the world as it provides multiple meanings, one of them to lure Satan too.

Meaning Explanation

As the overall portrayal is dark. Most of the metal bands portray themselves as Satan worshippers. The use of words like "the return of darkness" makes this fact visible for this particular group. The use of anagram, the use of futuristic apocalyptic graphic and the a prominent colour of dark colours, the band deliberately want to align themselves as a metal soul.





Predicting Music, selecting a song

The image projected by the band looks strongly dark. Their logo is also a typically metal anagram. So, their music should be with heavy bass, pinchy tones and punchy rhythms.

The song taken here is “the unrelenting surge for vengeance”. The songs name also suggest aggression and an action.

Synchronization

The song starts with a high tempo drum beat. In the half bar only it is joined by power chord. The intro looks more like an explosion. One can find a rhythm only after six-seven loops. The vocals join the intro with a growl which is difficult to understand in first listening. Later, a listener comes to know about the vocalist’s calling for Satan to bring a change in the world.

The sound is like a sharp cutter with harsh rhythms. Here, the Chakra or the symbol of tornado, which is the symbol of the band can



be felt.

The vocals are continuously growling and urging for surge for vengeance. For a worldly person with colours, this harsh song’s feel and meaning can be ridiculous. Metalheads will find an association with the sound as it lies in Metal’s typicality yet bring a newness through its beats and rhythm

patterns.

Coming Back to the Visual Representation

The feel of the song is very dark and harsh. The greenish black treatment gives a humid and underground feeling to the song. More than a Metal Song it looks Black Metal through its representation. Though, with a high tempo, the sound is more like a power metal

song.

Overall Understanding

Overall, there is feeling of metal in the video and the sound with a robust, harsh and loud music.

Avial

Genre Alternative Malayaali
Rock

Origin/Base Kochi

Year started 2003

Language Malayalam

This band is one of the bands who strictly limit themselves to express in Malayalam, their mother tongue. They believe they can express their feelings better through their language. Their decision can also be seen as a contribution to the regional rock scene.

Looking at the Cover Form and Structure

The web site structure is like a regular blog, with all options visible at the same time.

The background colour is back with some dynamic illustrations, with a natural setting, flashing through the header.

The band members are wearing black attire with their instruments. They are standing on a catamaran.

Texture

The water colour based illustration gives it a unique feeling within the bands representation. The flat and a layered style gives it a vector feel.

Type

The “Avial” logotype is roundish. It looks like an there is an attempt to make it like Malayalam script.

Meaning Explanation

The illustration indicates its setting in a coastal region like Kerala. The water colours used are as rich as naturally visible coastal region. They also provide a washed-out and humid feel.





Predicting Music, selecting a song

The band members's attire creates a curiosity as they are not wearing the traditional attire of the state. It looks like they are modern metal followers, the full black, representation of themselves.

With the instruments they are holding it looks to be a typical rock act. Again, the setting creates a curiosity about their music when they claim to sing in their mother tongue, Malayalam.

A popular song, Nada Nada, is taken here for the analysis. The official video shows a man briskly walking and running with anger in eyes.

Synchronization

An electronic patterned rift starts a song with a loop of 3 continuous bars. In backing vocals, there is one typical telephone exchange sound of requesting to wait. With bass and lead joining with 4th bar the sounds become heavy. In the 7th, the vocals join with a high pitch intro. The vocals are very folk in nature. The rhythmic electronic pattern gives way to a turn table scratching.

The chorus 'Nada Nada' becomes a signature pattern after going through a progression in scales. The set -up is installed in the backwaters of Kerala with coconut trees and fishermen nets. The song, literally means to 'walk walk'. Also,

the five member band is shown in snippets singing in a studio, sailing in a catamaran or walking with the protagonist.

The second interlude has just a play and jam of bass and turn table. With the second verse, pitch of the vocals goes to a higher scale with all instruments making it denser in intensity. The aggression level is highest in this part of the song.

Lyrically the song is based on 'Veer Rasa', which is actually an emotion of aggressive bravery. The singer is asking people to stand up and start walking towards their goal. With the lyrical understanding, the objective of music is justified.

Coming Back to the Visual Representation

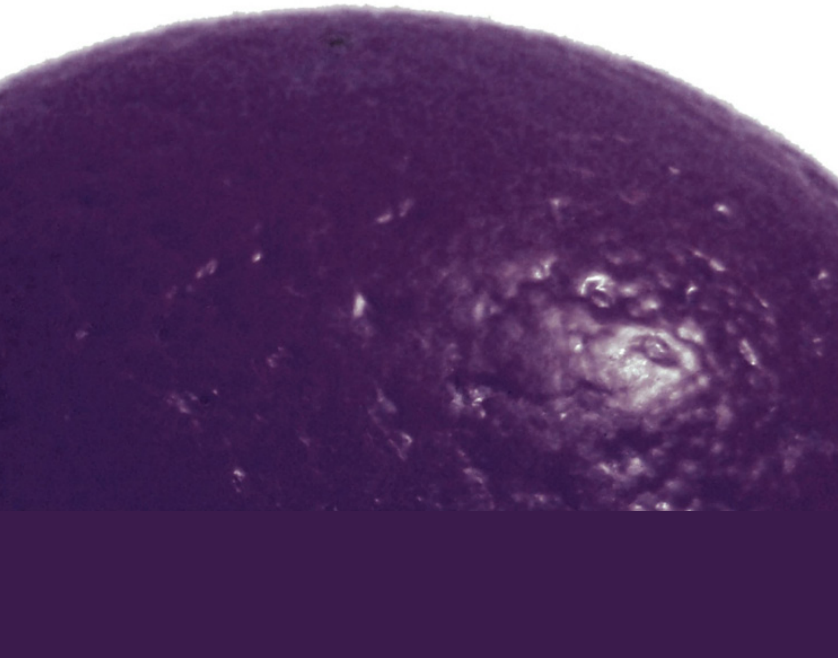
The mystery of eclecticism and confusion of the environment and the characters of signature caricatured visual is now resolved after hearing the sound. There is a clear division between their approach towards music and the background and sound they produce. A heavy black sound in a colourful context can be heard, yet they set themselves there with the language and emotions they use.

Overall Understanding

These men are experimental in creating a sound which has western influences, yet they do not want to leave the spirit of Malayaali culture behind. The fusion technique is very transparent as there is a bold difference between their music and folk. Though, the spirit remains same there is a treatment of Nu-age Metal with vernacular vocals.



thecircusfromspace



The Circus

Genre Funk, Alternative

Origin/Base New Delhi

Year started 2007

Language English

The Circus released its album, From Space, in the year 2010, three years after they grouped and started jamming. Through these years they participated in College Festivals, and made it to Channel [V]'s Launch Pad. After their success in the television series, they started taking their music professionally. They were recently signed by a niche rock music label, Grey and Saurian.

Here, their only album, From Space, is taken as their visual identity.

Looking at the Cover Form

The cover has a close-up of a violet coloured spherical ball/orange. The white background then makes it eye-pleasing and eventful.

Structure

The close-up of a spherical violet orange shows some uneven depressions on its surface.

Texture

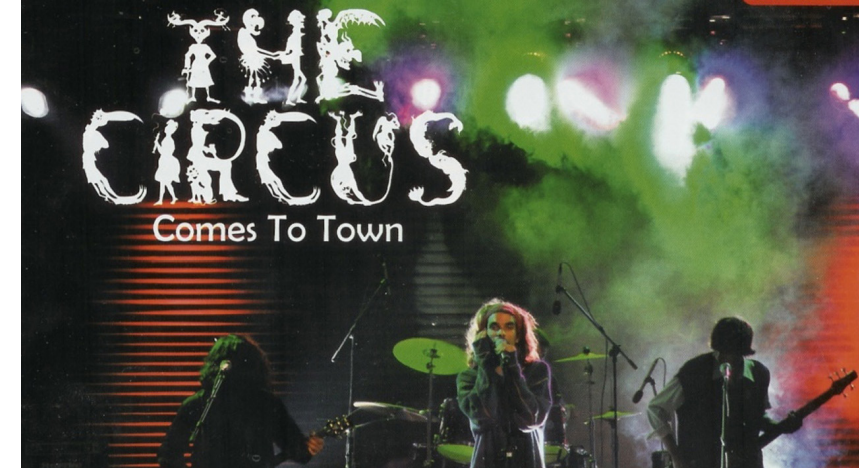
The visual is minimal in nature. It is photographed with some blur, which may be intentional. The surface treatment is minimal.

Type

The squarish type used in the logotype shows the contemporary and forward nature.

Meaning Explanation

The two Violet and Orange colour oranges creates a surreal and unusual feeling. The violet coloured sphere can also be seen as an alien planet with some craters on its surface. The name of the album 'fromspace' accentuate this meaning.



Predicting Music, selecting a song

The appearance set by the band looks quirky, glowy and happy. So, the expectation is some bright and punchy music.

Here, the 'F.O.P.S' or the 'Full ON Party Scene' is taken for analysis. This song is also the favorite of the band and features right on top of musical web sites' chart.

Synchronization

The song starts with an electronically produced rift by bass player with an odd count drum beats. In the third bar the electric guitarist joins with a distorted rift. The bassy parallel start creating a groove with drummer.

Gradually, they all create an environment where one listener is compelled to bang his head with the groove. Suddenly there is an abrupt scale change with guitar and the Vocalist start to scream. With every line there is a change in pitch of the vocalist which further creates the platform for the backing vocalist to join. The song changes the moment backing vocalist joins in. The bass becomes heavy

with each bar and intensity of beats increase without a change in beat count.

The bass patterns used in this particular song is exceptionally heavy in the later part. The guitarist shows his chords and lead skills with progression and the drummer improvise and articulate the beat intensity with time.

Overall, the song has different moods ranging from gentle requests to harsh orders. The lyrics are weird with no apparent connection between words, but they make sense with progression. This song can be classified as progressive though its chord and beat structure.

Coming Back to the Visual Representation

There was no dedicated visual for this song in particular, but its name stands for representing an elated state, The song has got structure but its uneven nature within, makes it weird for a first time listener. The visual representation of the album had the uneven surface of the spherical violet ball/orange. May be it has its connection there, as one can find an overall structure of the sound but details are really uneven, loud and quirky.

Overall Understanding

Overall, there is a feeling of eclecticism, randomness, chaos and yet a structure. There is also a skill demonstration skills like distortion, pinchy tones, heavy and complex bass lines in different bars. Looks like every member in band gets his space to show his talent with the instrument. Also, there were consistent alien sounds penetrating through listener's mind.

The sound of this circus is of very new kind and looks like they love to experiment.

Summarized Table



Band	Swarathma	Cassini's Division
Location	Bengaluru	Kolkata
Genre	Folk Pop Rock	Psychedelic, Progressive Rock
Language	Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi and English	English
Form	Colourful, distorted	Futuristic
Structure	Organized	Organized
Texture	Kitsch	Dark and Glowly
Type	Eclectic	Squarish
Meaning Explanation	Fun, modern but vernacular	Futuristic
Predicting Music, selecting a song	Eclectic, personal, from earth	Dark, Alien
Synchronization	Through music and lyrics both	Through lyrics and distorted electronic sounds
Overall Understanding	Pop, local, kitsch, rock, folk and colourful	Experimental, Psychedelic and Progressive



Demonic Resurrection

Avial

The Circus

Mumbai
Metal
English

Kochi
Alternative, Nu-age
Malayalam

New Delhi
Alternative and Funk
English

Grid and symmetric
Tornadic
Dark
Anagram, typically metal

Confused
Organized
Natural
Vernacular

Out of this world
Geometric
Uneven
Forward looking

Apocalyptic

Confused

Quirky, glowy and happy

Heavy and harsh

Powerful, heavy and loud

Heavy, futuristic, uneven and weird

Through growling vocals and loud backings

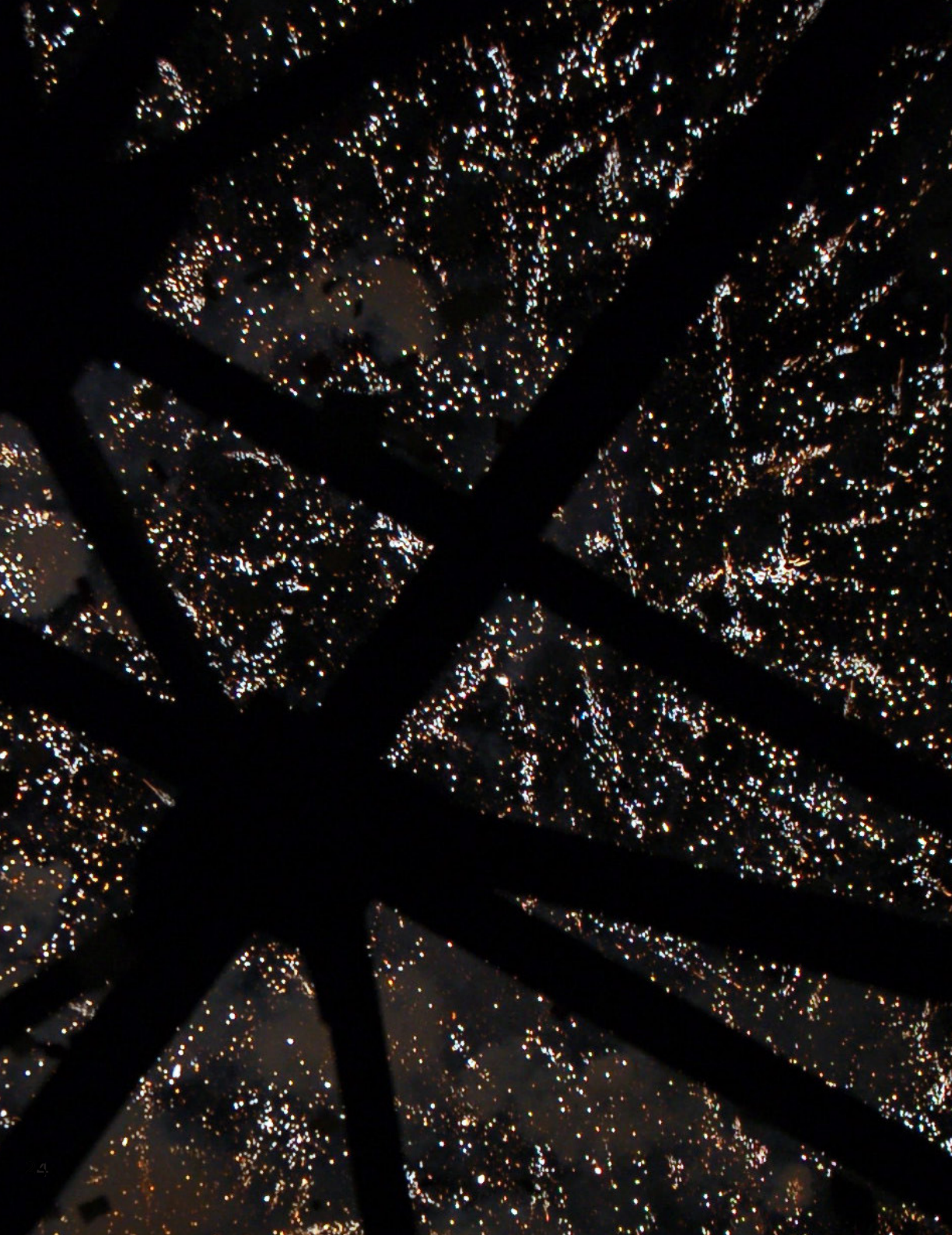
Through lyrics, appropriate tune and heavy music

Through colloquial words and random futuristic sounds

Power metal, harsh and loud

Alternative and progressive

Progressive and experimental



Information Web Sites as on 15.07.10

www.reverbnation.com

www.last.fm

www.myspace.com

www.theunderground.in

www.indiecision.com

Band Web sites as on 15.07.10

www.swarathma.in

www.casinisdivison.com

www.demonicresurrection.in

www.phat-phish.com/avial

www.thecircus.in

Image Credit

All Illustrations Symbols and Logotypes are property of their respective bands.

Demonic Resurrection photograph belong to the Demonstealer Records. All other live shots belong to the Author.