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download central

GROWING UP as a rock music lover in Calcutta during the Seventies was a mixed experience. The city then was easily the throbbing hub of India's live music scene with many local bands, several of them very good and a few even spawning a cult of devoted followers. Like The Great Bear, some of whose members then formed High and, later, Shiva. But that was one part of the Cal rock scene – the gigs, usually at the Hindi High School Auditorium or Kala Mandir and then, some years later, at a venue curiously called the Ice Skating Rink, where I've never recalled anyone ever skating on ice.

But if the gig part of the rock scene was hot and happening, it was exactly the opposite when it came to building a collection of the music you liked. The record shops were full of the predictable chart-toppers, the same uninspiring fare that the state-owned All India Radio repeatedly played on *Lunchtime Variety* (weekdays) and *Musical BandBox* (Sundays). Edgier stuff you never got. Of course, you got the usual bands that everybody was listening to – The Beatles, a bit of Floyd, some Stones and The Doors. But in case your taste veered towards bands like Quicksilver Messenger Service, Moby Grape, Yes or the Grateful Dead, you'd have to depend on kind relatives (NRI wasn't a term invented then) visiting India who'd take pity on you and get a vinyl or two.

For a few of us, my friends and I, there was another alternative: a pudgy *paan*-chewing guy called Irshad who ran a totally illegal operation out of a cubbyhole on Free School Street. For anything between 40 and 100 rupees, he'd do a vinyl-to-cassette transfer of his cache of albums. The price depended on how rare the album was. You could get a *Thick As a Brick* (Tull) or *Morrison Hotel* (The Doors) for about 40 bucks but had to shell out a big one for, say, *Europe '72* (Dead) or a just-released *Blood on the Tracks* (Dylan). And then, we'd make more copies of that tape to be shared so that the cost could be split among friends.

Thirty years on, things have changed. The Internet makes it possible to get bands as obscure as you want them to be. A Glaswegian band called Dogs Die in Hot Cars? You got it. A concert that Gov't Mule played last Saturday at New York's Roseland Ballroom? It's just a click away. What's more, it's all legal and, very often, free!

So, instead of having a hoard of my music in discs, vinyls and

A CLICK AWAY

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A guide to some of the world's best music that's just a click away, legal and free!

An Equal Music

mp3 players or, even burnt conventionally on a CD and played on your stereo at home or in the car.) The Contrast podcast is the creation of a loose gathering of a bunch of mp3 bloggers who contribute music around a different theme every week. The Election Day theme was, well, Change. And the music ranged from American punk band, Rancid's *Tropical London* to Leonard Cohen's *Democracy*, with tracks from The Charlatans, Pink Nasty (aka Sara Beck from Wichita in Kansas), Ruut and others thrown in. Alas, it didn't have David Bowie's *Changes*. But it had Dudley Moore's (yes, the dude who got it going with Bo Derek in *10*) track, *Goodbye George*, a jazzy instrumental by the late actor who was also an accomplished pianist. Thanks to the Contrast podcast, I also discovered a new band called The Faint. Formed in Omaha, Nebraska, The Faint are an indie band that play a form of dance-punk. New Wave and very agreeable, if you're into that sort of thing.

Chris Anderson in his 2006 book, *The Long Tail*, talks about how the worldwide web makes it easy for marketers to sell customised products to the smallest niches of consumers. Well, today hundreds of highly talented independent musicians are increasingly using the web to reach their fans. This column will try to nudge you in the direction of the good music that lies there, under the radar.

(Go to hindustantimes.com for a clickable version of *Download Central* to stream or download the music mentioned in this column)

tapes, I woke up one morning to realise that nearly all of what I listen to these days is stored on disk drives – 250-gigabyte bricks full of stuff, automatically categorised, genre-wise, artist-wise, album-wise or even song-wise, depending on what you want, how you want it and when.

This column will focus on my continuous search for new music, using tools and media that make it so easy to do so. You'll probably not find bands and musicians that you've heard on commercial radio or watched on VH1 or the other music channels, but if you're as willing to experiment as I am, read on for a sample of what *Download Central* will be all about.

Earlier this month, on US Election Day, a feed from the Contrast podcast made its way into my playlist. (Podcasts, incidentally, are a kind of Internet broadcast that can be downloaded easily and played either on your computer or on portable

TODAY HUNDREDS OF HIGHLY TALENTED INDEPENDENT MUSICIANS ARE INCREASINGLY USING THE WEB TO REACH THEIR FANS



CASTING A WEB
The Contrast podcast's Election Day feed included The Charlatans