

▶ culture curry

LANDSCAPES TO SOUNDSCAPES

Swiss pianist,
composer and
'sound architect'
Dominique
Barthassat
creates surreal
visuals of Indian
landscapes
using different
layers of sound

VISHAV

If one could actually see the music, rather than just hear and feel it, it'd perhaps look like the 'Dawn on Ganga', or a 'Celebration at City Palace', or perhaps a walk around 'Humayun's Tomb'. These three were among the eight visuals that Swiss composer and pianist innovator Dominique Barthassat created on Monday evening at Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre, using nothing but sounds.

In a dialogue between the piano and recorded sounds, Dominique made his audience travel to the Ganga, the City Palace in Jaipur, Jal Mahal, Hawa Mahal and Jantar Mantar, Humayun's Tomb, Rock Garden, Srinagar and Mumbai — the inspirations behind the eight parts of the

Indian Suite that he played. And in all those musical escapades, it was hard to tell if the music created the surroundings, or if it complimented them.

"The idea is the evocation of different landscapes using corresponding 'soundscapes'. And those soundscapes are created by using different layers of sounds that can vary from various Indian instruments like sarod, tabla, santoor etc, to the sounds of the surroundings of that landscape, natural and otherwise," says Dominique.

Based on *ragas* and orchestrated as a symphony, the soundscapes interacted with the piano that alternated between the plucked chords and the keyboard.

Dominique, who is often called a sound architect, lived up to the title as he created a whole structure of sound that could be visualised just by listening. And architecture plays a dual role in his performance. First is the architecture of the place that different parts of the suite are inspired from. And the second is the architecture that he then creates using different layers of sound.

"It starts with a single base sound over which all the other layers are built. And then those different sounds are

relayed through different speakers. Now all those speakers have their own trajectories and the way those trajectories overlap creates a fusion of those sounds generating new experiences. The intention is to create a whole world of sounds around the audience," explains Dominique.

While the performance on Monday used only two speakers, it was an introduction to what the master composer plans to bring in a series of five monumental scores of sound architectures next year.

Dominique explains, "While two speakers are enough for an indoor performance, the next year performances will be held in different ancient monuments all over Delhi and will use a minimum of eight speakers. Also, people will be free to move around, being able to visualise and live the different experiences created in different spaces over the venue, just like you live different experiences in different spots when you visit any architectural monument. In case of sound, it'll happen because the trajectories of different speakers will overlap in different combinations and proportions at different spots."

"The intention is to create a whole world of sounds around the audience"

The idea is the evocation of different landscapes using corresponding "soundscapes"

DOMINIQUE BARTHASSAT

