

VARIETY

# Finding their niche in blues

Shaurya Kshatri catches up with the legendary Soulmate's Rudy Walling for a bit of bluesy catching up and everything music

**S**oulmate doesn't seem too concerned about releasing albums, or getting in the rat race, or making it to the top of the charts or any other commercial undertakings. The blues rock band from Shillong, India is happy to just make music and play for fans around the world.

And their February 16 concert—Soulmate Blues from Shillong—in the Capital was for their fans. In their first performance here in 10 years since they last performed in 2008 at the International Jazzmantra Festival, they wowed the Nepali music enthusiasts.

"We didn't expect that many people to turn up for our gig in Kathmandu, given the continuous downpour. Nonetheless it was a great crowd and we would love to be back for more shows in the City," Rudy Walling, one of the members of the band, shared about his Kathmandu performance with *The Himalayan Times*.

Formed in 2003 by Walling (guitarist, songwriter, and composer) and Iritri Kharbangar (vocalist and guitarist), the band continues to have a strong international following attracting herds of music lovers regardless of where or when they perform. Currently their line-up includes Len Walling on bass guitar, and Vincent Tariang on drums.

## As cool as Shillong

Soulmate has played plenty music since they started out nearly 16 years ago and although they have only released three albums in that span of time, they have kept themselves busy out on the road and experimenting with new.

"In India, Bollywood is the only thing that sells and for a band like ours who have found a niche in a genre like blues, making albums can be very expensive without much returns," confided Walling. Their last album, *Ten Stories High* was recorded in Yash Raj Studios in Mumbai, India and as Walling informs, the band has still not been able to compensate for the costs incurred in producing the album.

Yet they do not wish to



Rudy Walling

move to bigger cities or release back-to-back albums and make money like most other bands. This is perhaps why Soulmate has remained truly a homegrown blues band from Shillong—their attitude as cool and laid-back as the town from which they belong.

"We will not be able to write the same kind of songs that we do in a City as crowded as Delhi and Mumbai. We would simply lose our 'soul' from the cravings of the everyday life," opined Walling.

"The experiences we share with Shillong, our lifestyle there and the town's beautiful nature is what reflects in our song and we wouldn't want to lose that."

## Music for the soul

Like the place from where they come, the discography of the band isn't loud and maniacal but slow and exploratory. They view their songs as an escape from the harsh realities maintaining an apolitical stance.

"You turn on the news and there's nothing but stories of power struggle and

corruption. Media's role feels as if it's only to instil fear. But there are great things in life to look forward to," said Walling.

"I think it's upon us, musicians, to bring that side of life, to remind people that the world isn't always as dismal as it is mostly turned out to be," he added.

Back when the band was in its early days, struggling to find a firm footing in the "industry", there were only a handful of musical groups playing blues in India. In fact, Soulmate was the only blues rock ensemble to have represented India in the 23rd International Blues Challenge in 2007 amid 150 others from different parts of the world. It was from then that the band got the push it needed and with time got better and more confident with their playing.

The group used to play weeks on end at a restaurant owned by a "Silk gentleman". The place had become a sort of a training ground for them. And talking about the context he said, "Making music and then putting it out in front of millions isn't easy. Or at least it wasn't when we

started out."

He believes the young generation today is missing out on the hard work and effort. If one wants to get a sound of a horn or that of strings they can easily do so on a key board or a computer. "But the raw feel that comes while building something out of scratch seems almost unavailable in most of what we hear today," he complained.

The same rings true for the way people listen to music has changed. Before Spotify or YouTube, a CD album, a vinyl was extremely precious. People listened to each song there but now since there are too many options, if they are not hooked in the first few seconds of the song, they simply move to another. "This is perhaps why most of the current songs have become like 'fast food,'" claimed Walling.

## Tales from backstage

Playing music has taken Soulmate to the far reaches of the world and having played for as long as 16 years, not only have they been able to materialise dreams but also meet personalities who set them to chase those dreams in the first place.

"One moment that sticks in memory is the time we met Buddy Guy in his green room just before he went on stage," recounted Walling. They have even played with legends like Carlos Santana in 2012 at Delhi and jammed with contemporary artists like Robert Randolph and Joss Stone. The best part of music is to be able to enjoy it while it lasts. It isn't supposed to be about big ideas. As Buddy Holly had told the members of Soulmate, "It can be something as simple as a glass of whiskey or catching the eye of a beautiful woman."

# Smollett case to go before grand jury

Developments leave many baffled or outraged



Smollett

**C**HICAGO: Hollywood actor Jussie Smollett's case of homophobic attack will now come before a grand jury next week.

As per TMZ.com, a panel will hear the case, but it is not clear who is facing charges or what they might be.

Last month, the *Empire* star told the police that he was attacked on January 29 by men who used "racial and homophobic slurs" against him. Following an investigation, two brothers Abimbola and Olabinjo Osundairo were arrested by the police who viewed them as "potential suspects", but they were released due to lack of evidence. Law enforcement sources said that those men are staying somewhere around the Loop in downtown Chicago under the watchful eye of police so no one gets to them.

There was a national outrage in the US after Smollett said he was attacked followed in part by celebrities who spoke out loud and strong on

social media. But the outrage has now been replaced by surprise, doubt and bafflement as the singers, actors and politicians who came out in support of Smollett struggle to digest the strange twists the case has taken. Some conservative pundits, meanwhile, have seized on the moment.

The narrative that just a week ago seemed cut-and-dry has become messy and divisive—and it's all playing out again on social media.

Celebrities including Ariana Grande, Zendaya, Kerry Washington, Shonda Rhimes and Andy Cohen rallied behind Smollett immediately. They focused on the alleged hate crime as a microcosm for the ills of America in 2019 and how intolerance can lead to violent acts. Smollett's own celebrity and activism for the rights of the LGBTQ community helped raise the profile of the case even more.

But then published reports emerged that police believe Smollett may have staged the attack—something he has denied through his lawyers—or that a grand jury may hear evidence in the case.

Sceptics, including conservative pundit Tomi Lahren, seized on the doubts. "And Libs wonder why we don't believe their BS stories," she tweeted, and criticised those who used social media after the attack to push "the narrative (that) Trump supporters are racist homophobes". Author Roxane Gay tweeted the situation is a "mess" and a "travesty." "I thought no one that famous could make something like that up," Gay wrote. "The lie is damaging. The time the CPD has spent/wasted on this. The people who supported him." — [INSTAGRAM](https://www.instagram.com/leanonme)

## LEAN ON ME

If your heart needs a little mending, and your hands a bit of holding to get you through your mess, write to Abhyaya at [leanonme@themalayantimes.com](mailto:leanonme@themalayantimes.com) and she'll help you best



## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

It is your academic degree that opens doors of opportunity in the job market. But when it comes to actual working, most of the time it is skill that really matters. So, what do you think should be the criteria when hiring someone for a job, and why? Illustrate.

Send your replies in not more than 200 words by Friday, February 22, 2:00 pm to Features, *The Himalayan Times*, e-mail: [features@themalayantimes.com](mailto:features@themalayantimes.com)

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Soulmate performing at Moksh

## Eastman award for Roberts



prisma.com

given to honour contributions to the art of cinema. The George Eastman Museum in Rochester says it will honour the *Pretty Woman* and *Steel Magnolias* actress on May 2.

Past recipients include Lauren Bacall, Charlie Chaplin, Gary Cooper and Meryl Streep. Museum director Bruce Barnes cites the breadth of Roberts' career and roles over the past 30 years. She has earned a best actress Academy Award and three Golden Globes, along with more than a dozen other nominations.

The museum says it established the George Eastman Award in 1955 as the first retrospective award to honour film work of enduring artistic value. Tickets for the May ceremony go on sale on March 18. — [AP](https://www.ap.com)

**R**OCHESTER: Hollywood actress Julia Roberts will be this year's recipient of the George Eastman Award,

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## YOUR Real LUCK

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY:** This year, you can swing from one perspective to the opposite point of view and back again. If simple, you will want to relate to someone who enjoys your many facets. You are likely to meet this person closer to your next birthday. If attached, the love of you could flip from one interest to another. Life will be exciting. Trust VIRGO to be practical.

A baby born today has a Sun in Pisces and a Moon in Leo until 9:47 am, when the Moon enters Virgo.

**ARIES (March 21-April 19):** Some of you might put the finishing touch on a project. Others will enjoy their popularity, even if you feel a pull and tug from different people. Plan your weekend schedule with care. Tonight: A discussion might be serious, yet the end results are worth it. ♦♦♦♦

**TAURUS (April 20-May 20):** Your innate inclination is to stay close to home. Unless your workplace is "homey", you might be uncomfortable hanging there. As a result, grumpiness might become an undertone of the day. If you can work from home, do. Tonight: All smiles. ♦♦♦♦

**GEMINI (May 21-June 20):** Your unusual ingenuity comes through once more. Be willing to give 100 percent when dealing with real estate and/or your home. Be careful to keep your feelings clear; a misunderstanding could be painful. Give a loved one or associate space. Tonight: Hang with friends. ♦♦♦♦

**CANCER (June 21-July 22):** Refuse to allow another person to interfere with a project. Feelings run high. Others believe they have the answer. Understand the situation surrounding a work project. Follow your instincts. Tonight: Hang out. ♦♦♦♦

**LEO (July 23-Aug 22):** Be aware of the costs of proceeding as you have. Your emotions will push you into overindulging, overspending and not knowing how to get on your desired path. A boss could become aggravated at what he or she sees. You know how to handle this person. Tonight: Out and about. ♦♦♦♦

**VIRGO (Aug 23-Sept 22):** You could feel pulled in one direction and then another. Your fiery side could be triggered by a loved one's attitude. Do not take a child's or loved one's tantrum as seriously as he or she might like. This person might be letting off steam. Tonight: In the whirlwind of the moment. ♦♦♦♦

**LIBRA (Sept 23-Oct 22):** You might feel uneasy, as you sense an undercurrent among you. As hard as you try, you might not be able to discover what is going on. Do not let this situation bother you. Focus on a matter that you can deal with by yourself. Tonight: In the whirlwind of the moment. ♦♦♦♦

**SCORPIO (Oct 23-Nov 21):** Zero in on priorities. Your imagination flows into romance or affects how you eye someone in your daily life. You might hesitate to say what you want, though eventually you will reveal what is on your mind. Tonight: Let the fun begin! ♦♦♦♦

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22-Dec 21):** You might be on top of a difficult situation. Your ability to work through a problem might be heightened, as you see many contingencies and possibilities. Know that you are carrying a lucky rabbit's foot in your back pocket. Tonight: Take a leap of faith. ♦♦♦♦

**CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 19):** You see a personal matter in a far different light than those around you. Understand what is happening. Kick back, listen and perhaps ask a question or two to get to the bottom of a problem. Tonight: Speak your mind. ♦♦♦♦

**AQUARIUS (Jan 20-Feb 19):** No matter the issue or situation, you gain through one-on-one relating. The other party might reveal more of him- or herself in that atmosphere. You could be tired of feeling distant from a specific person. Tonight: Opt for togetherness. ♦♦♦♦

**PISCES (Feb 19-March 20):** Defer to another person. You might want to take a stand but feel as if it is not your place. Do it anyway. Others need to know where you stand. Tonight: If the invitation seems too good to be true, give up being a sceptic. Go for it. ♦♦♦♦

**Born today:** Sports commissioner Roger Goodell (1959), rapper/mental technician (1978), singer Seal (1963). By **Jacqueline Bigar**

The Stars Show the Kind of Day You'll Have: 5-Dynamic; 4-Predict; 3-Average; 2-Calm; 1-Omniscient

**Note:** Bigar's Stars is based on the degree of your sun at birth. The sign names (simply a label) and subscripts put on a set of degrees for convenience. For best results, readers should refer to the dates following each sign.



## SUDOKU-3529

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**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**

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**HOW TO SOLVE:**  
Every number from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the 9 vertical columns, in each of the 9 horizontal rows and in each of the 9 boxes