

The music never stopped

EYE CULTURE

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One worries a bit whenever aging punk rock stars perform. Wouldn't the passage of time have taken the edge off their teenage anthems, softened their Kohl-lined scowls, and blunted their spiky hairstyles? It was easy to question whether Green Day, in their 50s now and playing at the recent Lollapalooza India 2025, would sell angst as convincingly as when they first belted out "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" and "American Idiot".

As it turned out, the band's pet themes of urban alienation and problems with authority are still relevant two decades later. Even with restrained pogo-stick jumping and a slightly predictable setlist, Billie Joe Armstrong was able to move today's teens and 20-somethings, as also 30-somethings nostalgic for a simpler time. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

What hasn't stayed the same is the fact that mainstream international acts are now frequently adding Indian cities to their Asia tour itinerary. Lollapalooza, a multi-stage music festival which is in its third edition in India, chose the country as one of its eight locations worldwide. Earlier this year, there were big-ticket performances by Dua Lipa, Coldplay, and Ed Sheeran. In May, sounds of "Welcome to the Jungle" and "November Rain" will reverberate around Mumbai's Mahalaxmi Race Course, when

Guns N' Roses revisit India after a 12-year gap.

This may be less for the love of Indian fans, and more for the love of economics. Fans have wanted this proximity for years, but their fervent pleas for global mainstream musicians to stop at home had rarely struck a chord before. Now that there is a large pool of young Indians (65 per cent of the population is under 35) with an improving ability to pay for experiences, performers can't continue to skip India in favour of Tokyo or Sydney. BookMyshow, the ticketing platform behind a lot of big gigs in India, has seen profit grow by 18 per cent in 2024.

It is an interesting age for live music. "Concert economy" is a buzzword for governments and tourism boards across Asia, looking to attract domestic and overseas fans. As much as it boosts accessibility to have artists play in one's own country, skyward prices can put such experiences out of reach for many. Let's not forget: India's consuming class—the likely market for such events—is only about 130 to 140 million people, according to a recent Blume Ventures report.

Apart from show tickets, fans often spend on travel, accommodation, refreshments, merchandise, new outfits and makeup. To enter Lollapalooza for a single day, it costs ₹6,999, with more exclusive tickets priced at ₹14,999. Hearteningly, children under 5 could attend for free, an opportunity many actually used to bring their toddlers along. On the way back from the venue, cabs were charging double the usual fare. Of course, all

this is still more affordable than going to a foreign country to see one's favourite band.

The event experience—which can involve toughing it out in sweaty, dusty, blindingly sunny conditions with no parking and messy restrooms—doesn't always feel premium. But stage performances are now tricked out in a way we were not used to in India: Monumental animated visualisations, blimps floating by, someone in a bunny suit launching T-shirts into the crowd. Brands also seize the chance to try and get noticed, setting up interactive games and giving away collectibles designed for social media sharing.

Just as India draws bigger international stars, the star of Indian artists has been rising elsewhere too. Hanumankind, one such emerging name, rapped several unreleased tracks while the Lollapalooza audience waited impatiently for his global chart-topping "Big Dawgs". Many left soon after to make their way to the Green Day stage, missing his latest "Run It Up", a thumping track featuring beats of the traditional chenda drum. "I get it, I'm here to watch them too," the rapper admitted gleefully.

Later, when the show-stopping punk band from California called two fans to the microphone to perform the refrains of "Know Your Enemy" and "Dilemma", one could tell the young hopefuls had been brushing up on lyrics like high-spirited front-benchers. The crowd sang along earnestly too. Whatever the modern accoutrements of the evolving concert experience, the purest part is only this: The music.