

# EDITORIAL

Exams are the worst. I said it as a kid, I say it now, and will continue saying it. I mean, what even is the purpose of exams?

Being mid-way through exam week, I've been served with an extra helping of cramming this week, and all I've been able to think is what it means for me. As always, I'm well prepared for some, and not as much for others. However, one thing remains constant. In about two weeks, I will not be able to sit for the same exam again without having to prepare all over again.

If all that is being "learnt" during the exam is just rote memorising a bunch of words, only to forget in a few days, I don't really believe we are taking away a lot from it, or that we're gaining any tangible skills (apart from being able to work through exam anxiety).

Maybe this just sounds like a rant from a sleep deprived student, or maybe I have a point. Guess we'll never know.

-- Syeda Afrin Tarannum, Sub-editor, SHOUT



## PLAYWATCH

### MUSIC



# The Eccentric Visual Kei Scene in Japan

## SABIH SAFWAT

Visuals have an undeniable effect on how people perceive music. Album art, music videos, and even the way band members look and dress up shape the image of their music.

There have been movements in the past by musicians who put emphasis on visuals to establish identity, especially back in the 70s – glam rock, hair metal and Goth rock being the most prominent ones. Visual Kei was inspired by these genres too, to varying extents.

Visual Kei is a movement among Japanese musicians that lean on fashion and imagery to reinforce their identity. The artists use heavy makeup and flamboyant costumes for their concerts and music videos. Preferences vary from artist to artist; some take to dark, gritty, in many cases grotesque makeovers, while some opt for colourful and dazzling looks. Although, the androgynous aesthetics of a lot of them tend to put some people off.

The artists' musical styles hugely affect their looks, too. It's quite common for Visual Kei musicians to customise their fashion to suit the theme of the album they're currently working on or touring for. Symbolism is also practised by some to connect their music to their visuals.

Calling Visual Kei a genre is not quite accurate as the bands in the scene don't share any particular musical trait. Visual Kei groups have explored many sounds: alternative rock, punk rock, Goth rock and heavy metal in the 80s and 90s. The last two decades have seen a wave of heavier bands leaning towards metalcore, nu-metal, deathcore, power metal and

many others.

The founding bands included X Japan, D'ERLANGER, BUCK-TICK and a few others. They started out as independent bands with a love for shocking visuals, and their subsequent commercial success helped establish the Visual Kei scene.

I've spent a sizable chunk of my teen years listening to Japanese music, and almost half the Japanese musicians I love are from this scene.

There's Dir En Grey, the metal monsters dabbling in the darkest forms of poetry and imagery. Versailles, the symphonic metal band whose members dress up like French nobles and write songs on empires and vampires. The Gazette, full of energy and aggression. Lynch boasts some of the most well written power ballads in the scene. There's sukekiyo, whose avant-garde music is the epitome of macabre beauty. Plastic Tree, melting the listeners' hearts with their white soundscapes – gentle and soothing at times, playful and catchy otherwise. The list goes on and on.

The scene, unlike the ones that inspired it, is quite alive in the present. Although the golden age for Visual Kei has passed, many of the bands that have initiated the movement are still going strong. There's always room for fresh blood, and the most important thing of all, the scene still has a loyal fan base.

*Sabih Safwat hasn't been able to find, in the last six years, music that sounds moderately similar to and even remotely close to as amazing as sukekiyo's. Help him out at [sabihsafwat@gmail.com](mailto:sabihsafwat@gmail.com)*



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