



ALL ABOUT THE GROOVE

How one DJ brought global beats to Dhaka

It's hard to picture the city's nightlife without the thumping beats of electronic music that now energise its party scene. However, rewind to the late '90s and the scene didn't exist. It all started with a group of youth known for crafting the perfect mixtapes for friends. One such individual, Ali Arsalan, now known as RCBD, went from curating birthday playlists to igniting a movement that would put Bangladesh on the global electronic music map.

In 2007, after returning to Dhaka with a degree in construction management—far removed from music—Ali Arsalan was asked to DJ at Le Saigon, which was back then a restaurant known for its lively parties. With just a laptop, an iPod, and a basic mixer, he dived into the world of live DJ-ing.

"The biggest happiness lies in making even the stiffest person in the room dance to my music while aiming to leave them with memorable tracks they'll replay for months" — RCBD

RCBD truly discovered electronic music during a trip to Barcelona in 2010. At the time, he was all about hip-hop, but a spontaneous trip to the Sonar Music Festival changed everything. Watching Brazilian producer, Amon Tobin perform inside a 3D cube was nothing short of life changing. The experience ignited RC's desire to bring the electronic music culture to the Dhaka crowd.

Determined to make it happen, he began reaching out to artists he admired and listened to on SoundCloud, and to his surprise, Phonique—a Berlin-based producer and one of Europe's most renowned house DJs—was the first to respond. This serendipitous moment marked the birth of "Strictly," RC's first exclusive party, a massive hit that introduced Dhakaiites to a new wave of music.

Back then, about 30 to 40 per cent of the crowd was really there for the music, while the rest were drawn by the event's exclusivity. After that first success, RC knew he had to keep things special. He decided to host three or four *Strictly* parties each



year, bringing in top-notch artists but keeping it fresh and not oversaturating the scene.

As the opening DJ at every *Strictly*, RC takes his role very seriously, ensuring the warm-up set sets the right tone for the night. He's seen other organizers bring great DJs to Dhaka after him, only to have them thrown off by mismatched set times. RC's approach to music is meticulous and dynamic, ensuring that each set is uniquely tailored to the event's vibe. With a library of 10,000 house tracks and 12-14 hours of music in his pen drive, he avoids rigid playlists, instead improvising and curating

fresh sets for each event by reading the crowd.

The evolution of the house music scene in Bangladesh, especially Dhaka and Chattogram, has been nothing short of remarkable. Where once there were just a handful of enthusiasts, today the scene has expanded to embrace hundreds of fans, fuelled by the rise of streaming platforms that have broadened its reach and popularity.

Modern house music has also evolved to incorporate diverse influences, from rock and hip-hop to pop and unconventional samples, making it more engaging for a

wider audience.

One of RC's standout achievements from recent times has been bringing the duo Double Touch—a live electronic duo based in Sydney and Los Angeles, to Dhaka in April 2024. This act was particularly special because it served as a bridge, connecting the established house music scene with a broader audience.

"Every time I've brought someone, the real interest for me has always been the networking. When one DJ has a positive experience, it opens the door for several others. You also have to let them perform the way they're meant to. If I'm opening and the floor's still empty after an hour, I'll remain in second gear, even if that means staying in the second gear longer than planned. My job isn't to take it up to fourth or fifth—that's for the main act," RC explains.

RC envisions innovative approaches and expanded opportunities for the scene's growth. He suggests that 5-star hotels could play a pivotal role by hosting open nights on off-peak days like Monday or Tuesday or creating purpose-built spaces inside as a commonplace, offering it to local artists and adding new revenue streams for young DJs for showcasing their talents and gaining exposure.

In the future, RC ambitiously wishes to host performances by renowned bands like LCD Soundsystem, known for their electrifying rock and dance sets. His dream is to see a band play a continuous mix from start to finish, creating an incredible atmosphere where people can dance non-stop.

"My dream is to see a band play a continuous mix from start to finish, in our town, creating an incredible atmosphere where people can dance non-stop," RC reveals.

This vision reflects his commitment to fostering a vibrant, open-minded cultural scene for more people to explore and enjoy diverse musical experiences.

By Tazri Marwa Ahmed
Photo: Courtesy