

DJ REKHA

Born in London, raised in Queens and Westbury, Long Island, Rekha Malhotra (aka DJ Rekha) is one of the pioneers of New York's South Asian music scene. As founder of Basement Bhangra, Bollywood Disco, Beat Bazaar, and co-founder of Mutiny club nights, she has been instrumental in introducing the sounds of Bhangra and British Asian music to North America.

Beginning her DJ career while still a student at Queens College, Rekha was drawn to radio through an interest in community activism. In 1994 she made an appearance on the Radio Bandung newszine, became a regular guest and eventually produced segments for the show. Community radio introduced her to filmmaker Vivek Bald who shared an appreciation for music coming out of the UK on Nation records (i.e. Fun da mental, Asian Dub Foundation). In November of 1997 she co-organized a fundraising event for a documentary Bald was assembling on the Asian presence in UK dance music which grew into a monthly event named for the film: Mutiny.

By that time however, Rekha was already well known for her involvement in another monthly event. In November of 1996, a "Dance India" showcase organized by the Ethnic Folk Arts center paired her with Toronto's Punjabi By Nature, and in February of the following year she opened for the group at SOB's nightclub in Manhattan. The club was so impressed by the hundreds who turned out on a Tuesday night that Rekha and her partner DJ Joy were asked to develop a concept for a regular night. One month later Basement Bhangra (named with respect for the basement parties where she got her start) was launched, with Bally Sagoo headlining.

For her role in creating Basement Bhangra, Rekha has been featured in the Village Voice, the New York Times, the Times of India and the Daily News, in addition to magazines like Billboard, New York, and Stress. Basement Bhangra and its founder have also attracted extensive TV coverage, appearing on Good Day New York, Shift TV and a PBS documentary entitled DESI: South in New York--as well as TV shows in Japan and Denmark and on Ciao, an international program aired in 60 markets worldwide as well as by National Public Radio network's 5 million listeners as part of a segment on Bhangra. Having celebrated 5 years of Basement Bhangra in April 2002, the capcit full show at the Roxy with Bhangra legends Balwinder Safri and Dhol Foundation attested to the staying power and still growing popularity of the landmark New York club night.

Considered by Jane magazine to be "among the genre's most important players in the United States" Rekha has also been pivotal in forging the international network that sustains Bhangra and other contemporary South Asian music. Accordingly her DJ itinerary includes not only New York and numerous cities across the U.S but also Bombay, New Delhi, Montego Bay, Toronto and London. Most recently, she travelled to Sweden to participate in the 5th anniversary celebrations of the Fargfabriken Museum in Stockholm.

At home in NY she's brought her distinct style of DJing to events like Brooklyn Museum's First Saturdays, Bronx Museums Bounce nights, Soundlab, P.S. 1's Warm Up and Central Park's Summerstage concert series and played alongside artists as diverse as the Roots, Rah Digga, and Duran Duran. But her musical influence in the city extends far beyond records she breaks as DJ. Through her production company Sangament (sangam is Hindi for confluence, a place where two rivers flow together) she has brought artists like Panjabi MC, Andy Smith, Bally Sagoo, Apache Indian and Asian Dub Foundation to some of the city's best known live venues (including Irving Plaza, SOB's and the Brooklyn Anchorage).

Having always viewed her involvement with music as inseparable from community activism, Rekha lectures extensively at colleges and institutions about Bhangra and South Asian cultural production. In May of 2000 she spoke about the evolution of Bhangra music for the Smithsonian Institute's first ever South Asian public program. She has also given a talk and demo at the Museum of Natural History on hip-hop and the South Asian music scene and has given numerous DJ workshops to youth nationwide, including the well-known Take Back the Decks. Your Attention Please, is her fundraising project that partners with organizations addressing such issues as human rights, domestic abuse and police brutality and gives her a chance to bring classical, non-dance oriented South Asian music into a club setting.