

ON CAMPUS

Graduate makes robotic bandmate

What: MISTIC 2007

Where: Philip T. Young Recital Hall

When: Thurs. Nov. 29 @ 8 p.m.

How Much: Free

Sam VanSchie

Local fusion group the Karmetik Collective has a new member — one with 12 arms and no chance of dropping out due to relationship or drug problems.

The multi-instrumentalist robot is the brainchild of Ajay Kapur, a recent graduate of UVic's interdisciplinary PhD program. He combined electrical and computer engineering, music, computer science and psychology into one degree.

"You can't just be good at one thing," said Kapur, sitting cross-legged in a nest of wires to demonstrate how the custom-made sensors on his electronic sitar make the robot beat drums and bob its head.

Kapur programmed the robot to play East Indian beats to compliment the sounds of Karmetik. Other composers are writing new software that will teach his robot different rhythms and challenge the machine's design.

"I need somebody to break it so I can make it better," explained Kapur, who completed his undergraduate degree in computer science

at Princeton before coming to UVic in 2004. Kapur founded the MISTIC collective and concert series on campus.

MISTIC (an acronym for Music Intelligence and Sound Technology Centre — though the university hasn't officially reorganized it as a centre yet) is a collective of music technology students and professors who, at their annual concerts, push the boundaries of musical performances.

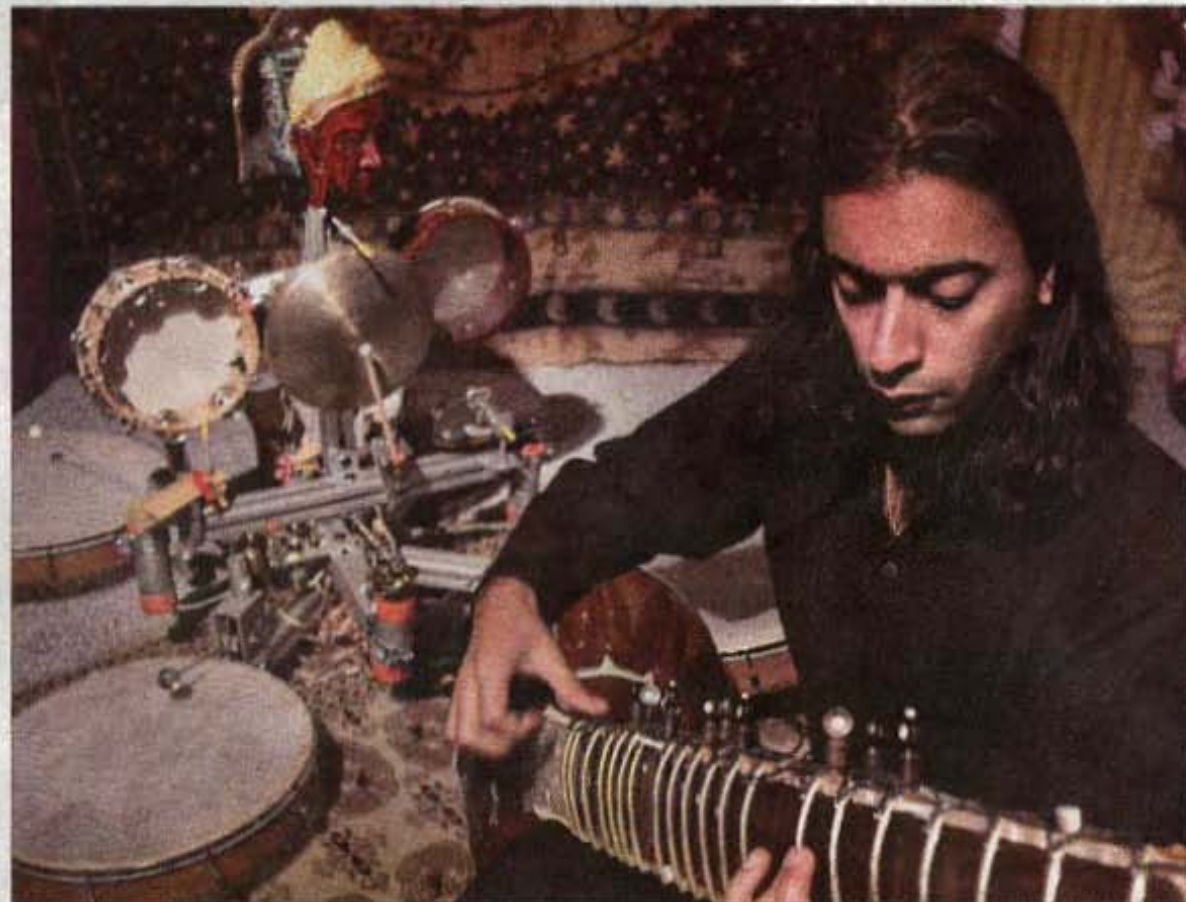
This year one of the composers will perform in absentia, having sent his music electronically to the collective. Sounds will be represented visually on screens behind the performers by live video DJs.

Kapur is catching international attention for the work he's done while at UVic.

"He energized the program," said Andrew Schloss, one of Kapur's doctoral advisers and a fellow composer who will also be performing on Thursday. "He's pushing [music technology] into the mainstream."

A film crew from the Knowledge Network will be at the concert to collect footage for a documentary on music technology, which Kapur has been interviewed for.

In Canada, only UVic and McGill offer undergraduate degrees in music technology. Here, students



JOSH SZCZEPANOWSKI PHOTO

Ajay Kapur's 12-armed bandmate never misses practice and helped Kapur earn his doctorate.

mix courses in computer science, engineering and music to get the distinction.

"It's unusual to have ongoing collaboration between three depart-

ments," said Schloss. "People get so into what they're doing that they don't necessarily know what's going on in other departments."

In the new year, Kapur will take

his robot to India and Singapore before moving to L.A. for a teaching job at the California Institute of the Arts, where he will teach students to write software for the robot.