

Sounds Like Kottu



We judge food in terms of taste, texture, aroma and appearance. Sound is the one sense that always seems disconnected from what we eat, though perhaps a case could be made for the sizzle of onions going into hot oil, the crisp crunch of an apple, or the shattering sound of a papadam shell collapsing in your mouth.

Words Mizna Doray Photographs Mahesh Prasantha

In Sri Lanka, perhaps the strongest association between food and sound is the clanging tak-a-tak-a-tak of metal blades slicing and dicing kottu roti on a hot iron sheet. A percussion beat that has even inspired a hip-hop song that pays homage to the spicy Sri Lankan delicacy.

Often, you'll see a crowd gathered around a street stall, (where the preparation of kottu orders is a performance in itself), listening to the rhythms that are clattered out and then eating the results. Some exceptionally talented (and musically inclined) cooks even 'perform' to music. It's like going to a Rolling Stones concert and Mick Jagger baking you a cake!

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