

Deva Premal & Miten Talk About Their New Album, *Songs for the Sangha*

You're releasing your new album, *Songs for the Sangha*, on 23rd June 2015. What makes it unique from your previous recordings?

Deva Premal: The English lyrics and the Sanskrit mantras really come together on this album. It's not a typical mantra CD with a lot of mantra repetition—it's an expansive, joyful celebration of the life that Miten and I share together.

Miten: What makes it more unique than other releases is that it's more of a band album. We've always collaborated with great musicians and striven to make our albums unique. For instance, recording with the Gyuto Monks of Tibet was pretty radical, and with jazz/fusion artist Kit Walker, and with rock producer John Leckie, who has worked with Doctor John, Stone Roses, Simple Minds, and Los Lobos.

On *Songs for the Sangha*, we are five individual musicians creating something new, together: Manose and his magical bansuri, Spencer Cozens from the UK on keyboards, Joby Baker from Canada on bass guitar, upright bass, vocals and drums, and of course Deva and myself. We came from four corners of the world to attempt to expand our horizons, musical and otherwise, and to explore unknown terrain.

This makes for an album that we can replicate, live. In the 22 years we've been sharing the mantras in concerts together, Deva and I have always focused on musical simplicity, inviting our friends in the audience to sing with us, rather than be passive participants, and rather than being led in a chant, as in the call-and-response style of kirtan. We like choirs, with everyone singing harmoniously together. With *Songs for the Sangha*, we have a great balance between the invitation to sing and the invitation to be uplifted and supported by some great music, too.

We'll be taking the new songs through Europe in 2015 and to America in 2016.

What inspired you to name the album *Songs for the Sangha*?

Miten: Our sangha is precious to us. Like I said, we sing together, and when you sing with thousands of people, you feel very connected. The word sangha, translated from Sanskrit, means "spiritual family," and that's how we see this album—as an offering, a celebration, a heart connection to our spiritual brothers and sisters on the Path.

We sang some of the songs on this album in Osho's ashram in Pune, India, and we wanted to share something of the ecstasy we felt during those darshans. Music is such a powerful healing force, and we saw many people—us included—

become healed and rejuvenated in spirit as a result of chanting these songs. It was time to share them.

Deva Premal: We've been singing them for the last 30 years!

Miten: The final concert we played on our 2014 tour was an open-air concert in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for 5000 friends. It was an incredible experience and a confirmation of just how powerful the mantras are and how they have impacted so many people across the world. Everybody chants—and sits in silence—with us.

Sitting in silence with so many people cannot be underestimated. It's the most powerful experience—even as much, if not more, than the chanting itself.

We all long for some respite in our daily lives, but where do we go to find it? Bars, clubs, movies, T.V.? We are seeing that many people around the world have found solace in mantras and chanting.

Deva Premal: We have become a sangha—the five of us in the band—and our connection is reflected in the music. We feel like we have made a gift to the worldwide sangha—to sing, celebrate, and to listen to in their cars, or on their earbuds as they walk through their cities, or while making love. *Songs for the Sangha* is the feeling of connection, the feeling of sacredness, and the feeling that music brings us peace and joy—and leads us, eventually, to an ecstatic experience of silence.

Where was the album created?

Miten: We made the album in nine days in a rented house in Byron Bay, Australia. Our producer, Joby Baker, came from Vancouver Island, Canada, with his portable studio rig. Joby is a Grammy-nominated producer, so when he said he wanted to record in a house rather than in the sterile atmosphere of a studio, we just went for it.

But there were cicadas and lots of birds around. There were cows in the meadow down from the house. He said, "It's okay, they'll be part of the soundscape."

There were times when we finished a take, and you'd hear, *M0000000000*. And we'd say, "Oh God, is that on the tape? It's the sacred cow! That has to be on!"

A cyclone came through when we were recording. The edges of it hit us, so the rain you hear on the tracks is the voice of Cyclone Marcia.

Can you talk about a standout mantra track on *Songs for the Sangha*?

Deva Premal: For me, the “Sarveshaam Mantra” is definitely a standout track. It is one of the most beautiful *shanti* mantras, or peace mantras. It asks that we all experience wellness and health and auspiciousness and abundance and fullness. May we all be happy, basically.

The chant is adorned by Spencer on a beautiful Steinway piano, along with a lyre—a stringed instrument from Crete that is played in the Armenian style by Udi Ben Knaan. We have created a tangible sense of longing, of prayer, that expresses the depths of the mantra.

What does the album sound and feel like?

Miten: To me the album sounds and feels just great. I would buy it just to hear Deva sing Sarveshaam!

What you hear on *Songs for the Sangha* is an example of the kind of diversity of spirit that you’d hear in the music in Osho’s ashram in the ’70s and ’80s.

Osho was not a traditionalist. He always encouraged us to play our own music. “Play who *you* are. You don’t have to copy the Indian tradition...”

He encouraged us to express ourselves unselfconsciously. That’s why on *Songs for the Sangha* we can go from a 14-minute anthem on the opening track, “Parameshwara Mantra / Deep in Love,” to something as powerfully stark and strong as the Sarveshaam Mantra and still maintain harmonious flow.

One day we’ll do an album of all those great Osho songs.

For Deva and me, chanting and singing is our life. We have been singing together almost from the first day we met. We’ll be celebrating 25 years together in 2015!

We look on the mantras as if we’ve been given a very precious plant to take care of—a plant so powerful that it heals others. And we see that our dharma in this life is to make sure that the plant is taken care of, that it has the right soil. We love to watch it flower and grow. We love to watch others who come for the healing power of its fragrance.

And that’s the way we see our life and our music. We’re messengers, flame carriers. And those who recognize the fragrance of these flowers join us on our journey. And those who don’t, simply don’t. And that’s totally fine!

But us—we’re hypnotized by the fragrance. We’re ecstatic just being in the presence of that sacred plant, and to be entrusted to take care of it. Well, that’s more of a blessing than we could ever have imagined!