

Time to give peace a chant

MUSIC

Jill Fraser

DEVA Premal entered the world to the sound of her father singing an ancient chant. Late last year she sat at her father's bedside singing the same chant as he took his final breath.

"The circle is complete," Premal calmly says.

The chant, the Gayatri mantra, was made famous by Cher during her 2004-2005 farewell tour after she became hooked on the haunting strains of Premal's and partner Miten's recorded version.

The chant is said to purify all who listen to it. Translated, it means "May all beings on earth reach enlightenment".

Premal and Miten have set ancient Eastern mantras to music and made them popular. Chant, she says, is to "nourish the soul".

Premal says listening to pop music severely upsets her equilibrium — she bristles as soon as she hears it.

"I was sitting in a taxi recently and the radio was going relentlessly in the background. I could feel my nervous system start to jangle," she says, laughing. "I began to develop this annoying itchy, scratchy feeling almost immediately.

"If chant was played on the radio — and it doesn't have to be our music — and people started singing it instead of the latest pop song, they would experience a transformation that would enhance their lives."

IN CONTRAST to the former rock 'n' roll life of London-born Miten, who toured with Fleetwood Mac, Ry Cooder and Lou Reed, Premal was raised in an atmosphere of stringent spiritual discipline.

"It was a very strict upbringing. No television, no Coca-Cola, daily meditation and yoga. It wasn't all sweet and incense-filled," the singer says.

Premal and Miten met at an ashram in India. She was 20 and he was 42. Their relationship soon extended to the stage.

"Singing for us is like making love," Miten says.

Premal studied violin and piano as a child but not until she teamed with Miten did she consider exploring her voice.



Putting mantras to music: Miten and Deva Premal have made Eastern mantras popular. Deva (below) has an aversion to pop.



"Deva's sound comes from a huge well of stillness," Miten says, explaining his partner's aversion to pop music.

"But I still love rock 'n' roll. It's in my blood."

Premal and Miten describe their music as "an expression of spiritual devotion through song and

chant". They have been living and playing together since 1991, and have released a string of CDs along the way.

"Our music is born out of meditation and a celebration of life. It's not a matter of entertaining people," Miten says.

"Then I realised how empty and unfulfilling that world was. There's no doubt we're riding on the wings of these chants. We've been travelling for 15 years and in all that time we've missed only two concerts due to illness.

"No matter how tired I am, every time I chant in concert I find I am rejuvenated by the end."

DEVA PREMAL AND MITEN

Where: Camberwell Centre, Camberwell Rd, Camberwell, tomorrow
Tickets: \$35
Bookings: ph: 9844 5379 or www.chriswhooper.com.au