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Deva Premal

Finding Silence in the Song

by Prem Ishu

Deva Premal's latest album *Embrace* was released in May and has been garnering rave reviews by the new age music community. This marks the third release by this remarkable vocalist from Germany. Together with Miten, her partner of 12 years, she is taking the world of new age music by storm! Her ability to transcend the mantra to a new level is incomparable. She has a unique loving approach to an old form and the result is like nothing in the musical marketplace today. Her songs are as addictive as a hook laden pop song and almost subliminally you'll find yourself calling to the Divine anywhere from your car to the shopping mall.

Deva Premal was born in Nurnberg, Germany in 1970. Her mother is a musician, and her father an artist who also plays hand drums. She was raised with a deep spiritual awareness by her parents from the day she was born. Her father gave Premal and her sister exercises to help them be conscious of their actions and staying more aware in the moment. Simple tasks such as saying 'Ram' when she turned on a light or saying 'Om' when she placed something on a table helped shape her and give her a sense of the divine. As a child of the '70s her familial upbringing was anything but typical. "Well, I longed for normality actually. My father was pretty eccentric, so I was sometimes shy to bring friends home. I would have liked at least a TV in the house. I mean, we never had chairs for instance. We always sat cross-legged on the floor and we were vegetarians—no fish, no eggs—and I still am. I still haven't tasted meat and fish."

Being classically trained on violin and piano as a child she often felt limited by the rigidity of the classic styling. It wasn't until she met her life partner Miten that she truly began to explore the world of unmapped music and her style started to blossom. She began to find herself when she broke free of the structure that accompanies classical music. Her mother, a gifted musician in her own right, was very supportive of all musical endeavors she chose to follow.

Chanting mantras with her father was the norm for this gifted songstress growing up. "I grew up singing mantras. The 'Gayatri Mantra' as my goodnight song. I was chanting mantras while walking with my father—it was a familiar thing from early on. But it wasn't until recording *The Essence* that I really found my voice. Until then, I was Miten's back up singer. [That was] beautiful, but it was important for me to find my own voice and my own 'song'—my own expression. The 'Gayatri Mantra' opened this door for me." Interestingly, there has been

speculation that a 45-minute remix of the 'Gayatri Mantra' and a *Buddha Bar* type chill out mix of the 'Gayatri Mantra' are in the works as well. This will definitely be something for the hardcore Gayatri fans to look forward to.

With so much exposure to song and chant in her early life, it seemed a natural progression for music and mantra to fill her life as a full time career. When she met her life partner Miten in 1990 in Pune, India, things really began to blossom for her musically. "We actually met while I was learning Shiatsu and fell in love. There was no music involved. It wasn't until 10 months later that we first sang with each other, and Miten could hear the potential. And from then on it organically evolved that we started singing together."

They did their first event in 1992 and have been traveling and spreading a message of love and healing since. Together the two of them have taken the modern mantra to a new level of awareness in the public and are delivering a much needed message of spirit and healing in a way that the world can embrace. "I never decided to become a musician or make it my full time career," reflects Premal. "It is really a gift this whole thing, and none of my doing. Not that I haven't put all my energy into nourishing it, but I never pushed for it to become successful. That's the part I like. And I think that part can be an inspiration to others. To follow your heart's calling, rather than creating something you think others would like."

Their musical odyssey together essentially began with Premal and Miten conducting voice and chant workshops called "The Power of the Voice: From Song into Silence." These full day workshops offer the opportunity to find your voice as a powerful healing instrument while losing yourself in the beauty of meditation and chant. They now conduct the workshops world wide including an annual 9-day holiday group in Corfu, Greece, where attendees free themselves and their voices in a celebration of chant and meditation. Other events are held in the Bahamas, where participants not only participate in song and chant workshops but can swim in the ocean with the dolphins.

With the release of her third album *Embrace*, Deva Premal sits poised to break through to new dimensions in her musical career. She and Miten have taken a somewhat unconventional road when it came to their music and have chosen to release them on independent new age record label/distributor White Swan Records. It hasn't hurt them one bit. In its first month of release, *Embrace* sold over 8,000 copies. Since the release of *The Essence* in 1998, it has sold over 80,000 copies and averages 1500 copies per month. 2000's *Love Is Space* surpassed *The Essence* in its first year sales and is set to exceed it with over 40,000 in sales to date. She affirmed "It's so good to be making our own movie; that is making the soundtrack to our lives and sharing it with friends. We make our own decisions and mistakes too, but that's part of the game. I'm not an ambitious person. We take care to water the plant, make sure it's happy and watch it grow."

If you've been fortunate enough to see these two perform in concert you might be surprised to hear her ask for silence without applause. "Without that silence," explains Premal, "you only get half the story. It's like the hook or the climax of a good story. The silence is there because it exists in the music. It just needs to be exposed. It's healing us if we allow it to be there. The sound of clapping destroys the healing vibrations, and one of the main reasons Miten and I sing is to bathe in the silence. For me there is nothing more precious than having sung with an audience, ecstatic with bliss and then entering the deep silence the mantra brings. So deep, that with eyes closed you really feel there is nobody there at all, all personalities dissolved for a tiny sacred moment. This is more rewarding than clapping." Then she adds with a smile, "But I don't want to sound too serious about it all, because sometimes the outbursts of clapping are so full of love, it's almost overwhelming when so much love and gratitude is expressed."

Another group to take notice of the meditative qualities of Premal's music is the yoga community. Miten stated, "When we released *The Essence* things really took off. Suddenly we

were embraced by the yoga world, and I didn't even know there was one. Now I do, and it's a beautiful Buddhafield unto itself." Even Cher has become an avid fan of their music insisting that her yoga teacher play *The Essence* when teaching her postures.

Embrace shows remarkable growth not only on her part vocally, but also in the recording production. The new recording hits a perfect blend of the traditional sounds of Eastern instrumentation with an authentic deep ambient groove that is so intoxicating and prevalent in today's music scene. About the trilogy of CDs she explains, "We intended *Embrace* to be an extension of *Love is Space*, which in itself, was an extension of *The Essence*, and this is the result. I knew we had some great material, and I knew I was singing better and with more confidence, and I was totally looking forward to recording with Vandan (Kit Walker) again. What we didn't expect, was for it to take such a long time to complete. It was an intense album to make, because we were striving for perfection. We felt a responsibility to all those people who had been so touched by the two previous CD's, so we really put everything we had into making *Embrace* as beautiful and as up-lifting as possible. We were a close team. Miten and Vandan producing, Paul White mixing—it was an incredible journey and a great exercise in trust."

On *Embrace* you may recognize the distinctive vocals of Jai Uttal featured on "Om Ram Ramaya." His instrumental work on the dotar is peppered throughout other tracks on the album as well. Premal muses, "Jai is such a sweet soul. It was very nice working with him. We had some good laughter together. Kit had just reclaimed his original sannyas name, Prem Vandan, and Jai immediately christened him 'Prem Daddy.' What a cool name! And it stuck. I think you can see his credit on Jai's new album, as Prem Daddy Vandan. Jai is a musical genius."

The fact that Premal and Miten have been touring for the last 10 years with only short breaks here and there, means they're really not sure where to call their permanent residence. Choosing instead to let 'home' find them wherever they find themselves. When she and Miten are not touring, they often go back to Germany to stay with Premal's mother. They say this is about the closest they come to having a home base. They do admit though that their true sanctuary is the van they travel in which is also known as "The Mantra Mobile."

Not only is *Embrace* out in stores, but a live album called *Satsang: A Meditation with Deva Premal and Miten* is hitting retail in July as well. "We are always asked for 'un-plugged' versions of the mantras. It just grew out of that really. We decided to record a few satsangs, with an engineer who could take care of the technical side. Miten had many songs that people have been asking for that weren't on CD, so we decided now's the time. It's a live album with the mantras and the songs together, which at the same time, can be used for meditation. It's a beauty. I love it."

Deva Premal attributes her development and success primarily to her beloved partner Miten. She steadfastly exclaims, "Without him, there would be no Deva Premal." She means it too. He certainly found a budding flower and helped her to unfold into the exquisite blossom that has become Deva Premal.

Deva Premal and Miten can be found weaving their musical tapestry throughout the U.S. in June and again in October and November. To find out more information on their tour and workshops or simply to learn a bit more about this delightful team, visit them at <http://www.mitendevapremal.com>.