

Health & Lifestyle



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Earth Angel

By Clive Simmons

"I grew up with mantra," Deva Premal says, "and ever since I was in my mother's womb, I was surrounded by mantra. My whole childhood was coloured with that devotion. Then I moved away from it. I needed to find my own connection to them, and when I connected with music, they came back into my life again."

"It's beautiful singing these potent songs. It's natural for me. My voice sounds full when I do that, and I enjoy the silence which follows."

"I wake every morning feeling like I'm living in a miracle, where spirituality, creativity, work and love, have all come to mean the same thing. My life has been shaped by mantra, and I have become their servant."

The woman they call an "earth angel" is talking to me about the meaning of mantra in one of the few moments of free time she has on her current European tour.

Right now, Premal is a hot commodity. Cher, in the midst of a European tour herself, uses Premal's music, to augment various parts of her own show, and has promoted her work in

the US, where Premal is now a big star. Her four solo albums have sold _ million copies worldwide, and her autobiography, *More Than Music*, is soon to be released.

Born in Nuremberg, Premal was raised in a "spiritual" family, and was, she says, introduced at an early age to chanting and meditation.

"My father has been a big influence in my life," she says. "He has been on the spiritual path ever since I can remember, studying yoga and the sacred Scriptures, making it his discipline to wake every morning at 3am for two hours of meditation. He speaks of himself in the third person; taught himself Sanskrit; and introduced mantras to the family."

"As I grew up, he devised exercises for my

sister and I to help us become more aware. For instance, we were taught to say 'om' (the universal sound of existence which contains all the mantras in it) whenever we placed something on the table, and 'ram' (which means the personification of perfection) whenever we switched on the light.

"It was not the usual life-training for young German girls in the '70's, but as I grew older and became more self-conscious, I dropped these practices. Now, I see how valuable they were.

"The lesson of it was, I think, to be in the moment without preference of what the moment should look like. These exercises help me to be in the moment, and that is quite a task



"We play for the silence that follows the chant. Without the silence, you get only half the story."

Divine Loving.

"So, once again, I found myself being different from my friends at school. But this time, it was out of my own choice. From then on my life became centred around meditation. The mantras and all other spiritual practices from my childhood fell away, and were replaced with something that I felt I had discovered for myself."

By the time she was seventeen she was living at the ashram, and during the ensuing years there she studied shiatsu, reflexology, and cranio-sacral balancing and massage.

It was in 1989 that another singer, Miten, was invited to join a band, Ah This!, who were about to embark on a tour of meditation centres around the world, and during a photo session, the photographer jokingly remarked that there were no blonde women in the photo. Miten said that he would go and find one, and the girl that he brought back from the ashram was Premal. They fell in love and started living together, and when he went solo she became his backing singer.

Six years ago Premal released her first album, *The Essence*, to critical acclaim and great commercial success especially in England, America and Scandinavia. In 2000, she released the album, *Love is Space*.

"*Love is Space* has become my personal mantra," she says, "reminding me that Love is all and that all is Love. This is the message at the core of all mantras."

"All of history has been bloody. That's our basic challenge on this planet. It's difficult to love everyone. I live a peaceful life, but sometimes, I feel a separation from others. Even though I don't have enemies between countries or religions, people around the world are starting wars. So, to start the peace sometimes can be a challenge. Being human means comparing ourselves with others."

"Osho lived in the moment, and I'm working on that one too. But acceptance is what I have to learn most. I can live without preference. You know the way you would like things to be. I think music helps with that. It makes you silent, and that's when you accept."

In the liner notes to the album, she refers to Osho as her "spiritual master and guiding light", saying that he has blessed her life with

"Divine Presence." I asked her in what way his guidance has helped her.

"He was the ultimate rebel genius," she says. "He grew up in a family of ten children. Even as a child, he would push the limits, and later, he devised his meditations. He knew what the Western mind needed. His whole life was a rebellion, and he never compromised. He was always speaking out; never playing it safe. He always spoke his truth."

For Premal, speaking her truth comes with music, and for her, it has a spiritual resonance. "We play for the silence that follows the chant. Without the silence, you get only half the story. It's like the hook or the climax of a good story when you come to that point of 'Ah, yes.' The silence is there because it exists in the music. In fact, it exists everywhere. It just needs to be recognised. And it is a great healing, if we give ourselves the chance to tune into it."

"It is really the reason that I sing - to bathe in silence. It's my nourishment. It's what keeps me going. For me, there is nothing more precious than having sung with an audience ecstatic with bliss, and entering into the deep space that the mantra brings - so deep that with closed eyes, you really feel as if there is nobody there at all: no audience, no performance, all personalities dissolved."

"You say that you find *Chidananda* peaceful but that you hadn't read the words. Well, what they mean is not important. The Sanskrit is very peaceful; very transforming. Their science is that certain sounds create certain effects on the chakras and body parts. All the syllables in Sanskrit are designed to have a certain effect on the body and its energy centres. They purify the listener as well as the singer. The mantras are a lot like tuning forks. I regard it as medicine. We don't need to know what the ingredients are, as long as it heals us."

Premal has to go. She has to do a soundcheck for tonight's show in London. But, she says, she wants to say one more thing.

"I would like to encourage everyone to find their own song," she says. "I don't necessarily mean music when I say 'song.' I mean our intrinsic individual creativity. Our creativity is so close to us that sometimes we tend to overlook it, even devalue it. We somehow adopt the attitude that if it's easy, it isn't worth much. As if only effort makes something great."

"My whole life changed when I trusted my own song which, in my case, was to sing mantras. They were always there inside me. All I had to do was be open to them."

by itself... So, from an early age, I got a different perspective; of the bigger picture.

"As a child," she says, "all I wanted was to be 'normal', but with a father like mine, I really didn't stand much of a chance. We were vegetarian, and to this day I don't eat meat or fish, and I grew up without TV or any of the usual social trappings. I remember sitting down to meals on cushions cross-legged, eating from a round wooden table that my father had made, and here I was, a young girl just wanting to be able to bring friends home to a 'normal' house with normal leather couches, a TV and normal parents."

"At the age of nine, I developed an interest in Christianity, and began saying the Lord's Prayer every night, secretly at first, because I thought it may be forbidden. My fears were unfounded, however. When my guilty secret was revealed, my parents showed no sign of surprise and were absolutely supportive, even when I asked to be baptised. I was always encouraged to be myself, and to have my own experiences."

"Anyway, just before the baptism, fate stepped in, and my mother returned from India as a disciple of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho).

"I was 10 years old at the time, and began experimenting with Osho's active meditations. I just loved them. I knew instantly that I was to be his disciple."

"In those days, becoming a Sannyasin was a life-altering commitment, and not to be undertaken lightly. It also required the wearing of red and orange clothes, a mala, and regular meditation practice. I also adopted the name, Deva Premal, which was given to me by Osho, and which, translated from Sanskrit, means