

# 'My life changed when I trusted my own song'

**Celebrated globally by fans including Cher, Deva Premal, 38, was influenced by the power of voice from an early age**



**Deva combines mantras with music**

I was raised in Germany in an unconventional, spiritual family. My mother is a musician and my father is an artist, who's been on the spiritual path ever since I can remember. He studied yoga and sacred scriptures, and disciplined himself to wake at 3am and meditate for two hours every day.

My parents used to sing the Gayatri Mantra – one of the oldest, most sacred Hindu mantras – to me when I was in the womb, and as I grew up we sang it together at bedtime, too. My father devised exercises for my sister and me to help us become more meditative and aware in our daily lives, so we weren't just running on autopilot.

## 'The Gayatri Mantra purifies not just the singer but also the listener'

or absorbed with mental 'chatter'. We were taught to say Sanskrit words like 'om' – the primordial sound of the universe, often used as a meditation chant – whenever we placed something on the table. And we'd say 'ram', which means God or existence, whenever we switched on a light.

When I was nine, I developed an interest in Christianity. I'd learnt the Lord's Prayer at school, and began saying it every night – secretly at first, because I thought my parents might disapprove. When my 'guilty' secret was revealed, my parents were absolutely supportive, even when I asked to be baptised.

But just before the baptism, my mother returned from India dressed all in orange. She'd become a disciple of the mystic Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who changed his name to Osho before he died in 1990.

I was keen to find out all about Osho through my mother, and

quickly realised his teachings were the right path for me. I didn't go ahead with the Christian baptism for that reason and, even though I was just 10 years old at the time, I started trying out Osho's active meditations, involving shaking, dancing and other kinds of cathartic movement.

I'd practise with my mother, but also with a community of his other disciples in Germany. I loved them and, although I was young, I saw in Osho's eyes what I later realised was unconditional love. I knew immediately I was to be his disciple.

Because I was underage I needed my parents' permission to do this, and again my father encouraged me. At the time, it was a life-changing commitment and not one to be taken lightly – it meant wearing only orange clothes, regular meditation and changing your name. So I went from being Jolantha Fries to Deva Premal, which means 'divine loving' in Sanskrit.

Yet again, I found myself being different from all my friends at school, but this time it was out of my own choice. I was never really picked on. 'Sannyasins', or 'orange people', as we were known in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, were quite common.

From then on, my life became centred around meditation. The mantras and other spiritual practices from my childhood fell away and were replaced with something I felt I'd discovered for myself.

By the time I was 17, I was spending as much of my time as possible at Osho's ashram in Pune, India. I studied different kinds of bodywork there, including shiatsu massage and reflexology, and it was there that I met Miten, my life partner, in 1990.

He's an English singer-songwriter who used to tour with acts such as Fleetwood Mac, Ry Cooder and Lou Reed, but he'd given up his hard-rock lifestyle for a new life in the ashram after becoming disillusioned with rock 'n' roll. Miten was moderately successful, but he felt empty inside and his marriage had broken down. He came to me for a shiatsu and reflexology session and we've been together ever



**Helping others find their voice**

since. Despite our age difference (I was 20 and he was 42), our hearts connected immediately.

He wrote and sang the most beautiful songs – I call them English mantras – and I began singing harmony with him. We ran joint voice and meditation workshops and released several albums, which we recorded ourselves and distributed among friends at first.

At that time I was very much in a supporting role: singing second voice, playing keyboards and co-leading workshops. I was really shy about singing alone.

Then one day, I heard the Gayatri Mantra my parents used to sing to me being sung by a friend in England. This mantra purifies not just the singer but also the listener and creates a sense of well-being in whoever hears it.

Knowing it so well, I was deeply touched and excited to hear it again. As soon as I sang it, all my shyness about singing alone fell away and my voice suddenly felt strong and confident. I'd found my voice, and the effect has been like a ripple moving outwards ever since.

I began searching for more mantras and soon had the material for my first album, *The Essence*, on which Miten sang support vocals. He worked with me on the music, but I came to the fore, rather than him.

Like all my albums – I've since sold 500,000 records worldwide – *The Essence* featured mantras sung in Sanskrit, the ancient holy language of India. We actually recorded

it in my mother's apartment in Germany, the same one in which I was born, where my parents had sung the Gayatri Mantra to me all those years before.

The album became very popular, especially as background music for meditation and yoga classes, which is where the pop diva Cher first heard it. She said: 'I drive my yoga teacher mad because it's the only album I want to listen to!' She even performed the Gayatri Mantra on her farewell tour.

I'd like to encourage everyone to find their own song, meaning their intrinsic individual creativity. Our creativity is so close to us that sometimes we tend to overlook it. We think that if it's easy, it can't be worth much, as if only effort creates something 'great'. Well, I have to say – in my case at least – that's not so. My whole life changed when I trusted my own song, which was simply to sing mantras. They were always there inside me – all I had to do was be open to them.

• For more information, visit [www.devapremalmiten.com](http://www.devapremalmiten.com). Deva Premal and Miten are giving a workshop and concert at the Mind Body Spirit Festival 2009 in London in May. For more details, visit [www.mindbodyspirit.co.uk](http://www.mindbodyspirit.co.uk)

