

Priti Menon: I am mad about music

THE SINGER TALKS ABOUT HER SOUND

by PRIYA MULJI

A NEW generation of singers finding the middle ground between the classical and contemporary has resulted in music that is bridging the gap between genres, generations and cultures.

Originally from Kerala and brought up in Mumbai, Priti Menon is one of those bright new talents in the music world. Heavily influenced by commercially successful stars like Lata Mangeshkar, Alka Yagnik and Kavita Krishnamurthy, the roots of the north London-based singer's style can be traced back to her childhood.

"My mother, father and sister are all musically inclined. As a child, I didn't pay much attention to music. I wanted to be out there playing with the other kids. But my parents were keen that I learn music and I started singing at the age of six," explains Priti.

Friendly and polite, the softly spoken singer learned Carnatic music for 12 years from her guru Indira Thampan before coming to London as a 21-year-old to pursue higher studies. Five years later, Priti reconnected with music after winning a popular singing competition and it wasn't long before she started making a name for herself with stunning live performances. She reckons the classical training she had as a child helped her get back into music quicker and make her the singer she is today.

"The training helped my breath control – it enabled me to hold my notes longer, produce a balanced sound while singing and most importantly, helped with pitch control. I'm very grateful to my parents and my music teacher for encouraging me to pursue music and helping me develop my voice over the years," she says.

The young singer is passionate about her craft and says that finding music again was like finding a missing part of her life. Priti is now looking forward to wider audiences listening to the soulful songs she has created, and having a beautiful voice isn't going to stop her from taking more classical singing lessons, she says.

When she is asked to name her greatest musical influences, Priti reveals: "Firstly, I have to say my parents because they are both trained classical singers. In the professional world, Chitra is undoubtedly the greatest singer of all time. She crosses genres from classical to musical theatre to pop. I also absolutely love listening to Adele, Beyonce, Rihanna, Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey. They are inspirational in their own individual ways. Among my peers, I like Shreya Ghosal, Mahalaxmi Iyer and Shweta Pandit, to name a few. Their music always lifts my spirits when I'm down."

Apart from doing live shows in the UK and India, Priti has recorded a number of interesting songs that range from a contemporary interpretation of spiritual lyrics to providing vocals for a Charles Bosco-produced track from upcoming Tamil movie *The Rajni Effect*. She has also done a stunning live session on www.indybrown.tv and started writing her own songs.

Priti has faced the same challenges that newcomers do, but advises others who are entering the industry to not give up on their dream.

'You have to make things happen'

"Music is difficult, competitive and very stressful. If you don't know where you want to end up or even how to get there, you'll be eaten alive. Stay involved in the scene and network with people at shows. Go out and actively make things happen. There's plenty of place in this industry for singers to be unique in their own way – gone are the days when reputed singers were typecast to sing in a certain style for certain personalities."

Priti is currently working on an interesting project with musical collaborator Priyesh Dhoolab. Like many singers, she is hoping to one day work with Oscar-winning musician AR Rahman. "He has always been my inspiration and to collaborate with him will be a dream come true. I grew up listening to his songs and have always dreamed of singing for him one day. I have had the pleasure of meeting him while he was on tour in London, thanks to a good friend Vijay Iyer."

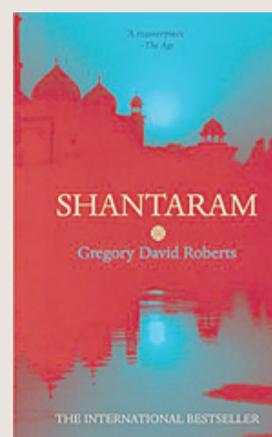
The classically trained singer ends the interview by explaining why she loves music. "Music says what words cannot express; it soothes the mind and gives it rest, heals the heart and makes it whole, flows from heaven to the soul. It's something that gives me a feeling of happiness that I cannot describe in words."

Visit www.youtube.com/pitny2000 or www.twitter.com/pritimemon85 for more.

Read of the week

SHANTARAM BY GREGORY DAVID ROBERTS

Don't let the intimidating length of this book scare you off. Based on a true story, the cult novel revolves around a man who escapes an Australian prison and boards a plane to India, where he ends up living in the slums of Mumbai, acting in Bollywood movies and becoming embroiled in the underworld. If you want to be transported into a completely different world, read *Shantaram*, which has quickly become many people's favourite book of all time. It doesn't look like the big-screen adaptation starring Johnny Depp will happen any time soon, so pick up a copy now.



Salman Rushdie literary visit

AWARD-WINNING writer Salman Rushdie is set to be one of the main highlights of the Jaipur Literature Festival in India this week. Putting aside the recent row over his visit to India, the *Midnight's Children* author will be in conversation with British-Indian novelist Hari Kunzru and will also take part in a discussion with writers Mohammed Hanif, Aman Sethi, Meenal Bhagel and Uday Prakash, which will be moderated by poet and writer Ashok Vajpayee. In the past the festival, which is held annually in Jaipur, has hosted a number of acclaimed authors including Orhan Pamuk, JM Coetzee, John Berendt, Kiran Desai, Christopher Hampton, Ian McEwan, Vikram Seth and Pico Iyer.



Akram Khan:

My inspirations

IF YOU want to get your creative juices flowing, then follow the simple steps ace dancer and choreographer Akram Khan uses. He recently revealed that the source of his inspiration is to collaborate with someone completely different, observe his surroundings and displace himself into a new environment. He also likes to find stories from different cultures and is inspired by different generations. Last, but not least, the British-Bangladeshi dance professional likes to let go of his subconscious.