



Album: Namaste
Artist: Kenny G and Rahul Sharma
Release: Out now

One of the most unique musical collaborations of the year sees Indian classical maestro Rahul Sharma team up with saxophone legend Kenny G. The instrumental chill-out album is a nice mixture of jazz, soul and Indian classical with soothing songs that have a hypnotic quality about them. One of the stand-out tracks is a cover version of classical Bollywood song *Yeh Kahaan Aa Gaye Hum* from *Silsila*, which also has poetry recited by Amitabh Bachchan. This is an album for the music connoisseur.



EP: Power Trippin
Artist: RKZ
Release: Out now

One of the most exciting young talents in British music releases an explosive four-track EP that skillfully combines r'n'b, hip hop and dubstep. The turbo-charged lyrics are delivered brilliantly by RKZ on songs that will no doubt form a connection with younger listeners. The songs needed stronger hooks and in some instances there is just too much going on. This EP is like an out-of-control firework that is filled with enough sparkling moments to make you want to have another listen. Pick up this EP now.



Single: Touchwood
Artist: MoneySpinner ft Master Saleem
Release: Out now

Listen to this up-tempo song carefully and it has moments that will remind you of other hit songs. If you can shake that feeling of déjà vu, then this is a fairly decent single powered by the amazing vocals of a singer who seems to be going from strength to strength. On the downside, the hook could have been a lot stronger and the lyrics are rather cheesy. There is clever use of instruments on the catchy number that will appeal to most fans of Punjabi music. Check out this song with lowered expectations.



Single: Channa Tere Bina
Artist: Illmatik ft Manak-E & DJ Surinder
Release: Out now

This is a surprisingly good song that will grow on you after a few spins. There is a great combination of Punjabi vocals, English language hip hop and heavy western mainstream dance beats. The new age song will appeal to those who like their songs peppered with electro beats, but some of the lyrics are quite basic and at times, the music seems to be disconnected from the vocals. Those who have heard better songs in the similar styles won't appreciate it as much as those new to this growing genre.



Shivali's spiritual

THE *BHAJAN* SINGER TALKS ABOUT
HER LATEST SINGLE AND ALBUM

... devoted to the ... music cause

by ANJALI MEHTA

THE connection between spirituality and music has probably existed ever since the first musical note was produced.

That other worldly bond has found its way into different cultures around the world and stitched itself into the fabric of different religions. But the 'spiritual' music that once dominated the hearts and minds of listeners has increasingly become confined to temples, classical musical recitals and elderly artists.

Despite having the striking looks, voice and figure of a pop star, newcomer Shivali Bhammer is one of the few young stars who has embraced spiritual music and given it a contemporary edge. Taken from her upcoming (second) album *Urban Temple*, her latest single *Vaishnava Janato* is a soulful *bhajan* (hymn) that is cool, classical, contemporary and has bridged the gap between generations. The song is the latest step in the London-based singer's musical evolution and is helping to make spiritual music a lot more accessible.

Eastern Eye caught up with the unique singer to find out about her fascinating musical journey, her latest single, the challenges of covering one of the most revered spiritual songs of all time and the forthcoming album.

You have a degree in economics and philosophy, so what made you want to pursue music?

I am quite multi-dimensional in nature, which has its pros and cons. I want to pursue everything. Music is not something I actively decided to pursue unlike my degree, or my city jobs. It was an innate part of me that just needed to be expressed.

How did you zero in on your unique sound?

Every single individual has a unique sound, it is just a question of choosing to explore it and showcase it. I think we are sometimes afraid to be different, to stand up and take a risk, but that risk is the most honest we can be with ourselves and others. When you have that kind of honesty, the sound is completely unique and it is 100 per cent you. And being just you becomes addictive.

What inspired your debut album *The Bhajan Project*?

The sweetness of the Lord. I get asked this question often and my answer is always the same, because I just can't change who it was for. I started it just for fun, out of love for my beloved and it developed into *The Bhajan Project*. The response has been overwhelming and deeply humbling.

How have you evolved as an artist since then?

I have become a lot more serious. With my first album it was a bit of a gamble, just pure fun. With the second, there was a responsibility to enhance the sound quality, to make a different kind of impression and offer something new. This has made me even more committed than I was previously. I guess you mature and so does your work.

Tell us about your latest single *Vaishnava Janato*?

Vaishnava Janato is a very famous Gujarati *bhajan* written in the 15th century by a poet called Narsinh Mehta. It was one of Mahatma Gandhi's favourites and has become popular through that association. When you understand the lyrics, you are in awe of them. It basically talks of the virtues that a man should possess which makes him recognisable as a *Vaishnava* or just simply a man of God. Virtues such as compassion, love, honesty, sweetness in tongue and purity. It reminds you of your own ideal self – the person we are struggling to be, but who we have the capability to become.

What would you say was the biggest challenge of recording the song?

Its popularity. You are taking one of the greatest *bhajans* of all time, one that has been sung by the most well-respected singers, and trying to make it

your own. You have to be fearless and distance yourself from the normal questions such as, 'Am I good enough? Will it be liked? Will they get what I am trying to do? Should I have picked something else?' Instead you have to truly believe in the track, and want to offer it everything.

Who is the track aimed at?

Everyone and anyone. My tracks are always universal. To me, the point of a devotional song is to welcome everyone into that spiritual mood. I assume the track will attract more of a younger generation given its production and our general style with *bhajans*. However it always surprises me how many traditional *bhajan* listeners like our songs.

Why have you decided to do more spiritual songs as opposed to commercial ones?

It wasn't my choice, it was just what I was destined to do. I sang commercial songs for fun when I was younger with my producer Arjun, but it never was me. The minute I sang a *bhajan*, I was wholly in that moment; that was my personality. I am a spiritual singer because devotion and love are the two most important facets in my life. There are plenty of commercial singers, and why shouldn't there be? That is the path some people have chosen. I am sure I will sing a commercial song now and again if I truly believe in it, but my spiritual work comes first. This is my duty and my offering; I do not compromise it. Plus, to me, I am not even singing, I am just praising the Lord, and what is a greater pastime than that?

Tell us about your forthcoming album *Urban Temple*?

It is pretty edgy in sound – we have really experimented and pushed the *bhajan* boundaries. There are a lot of Lord Krishna *bhajans* this time, a couple of Lord Shiva also. I have chosen pretty traditional *bhajans* compared to the first album, but we have picked every instrument we could find that elevates our tracks and merged them. *Urban Temple* is about being different, it is about expressing your devotion in the most unique and personal way that you can. The album is also about growth. *The Bhajan Project* was just the beginning. *Urban Temple* states that we are here to stay.

Which of the songs on the album are you most excited about?

All of them. There is a track called *Shivoham* which has a very hip hop feel to it – at the start, you could mistake it for a Dr Dre track, but yet somehow it is soothing and captivating. Other tracks like *Mara Ghat Main Birajtha* takes you back to the homeland. It is very warm and infused with familiarity and love. However, *Vaishnava Janato* was always the track that set the tone and the path for the album. Once Arjun and I made this, we could see how the rest of the album would sound.

You work closely with [singer/songwriter] Arjun, what is he like to work with?

He is my best friend. He is incredible, and I am not being biased. He has this intelligence and a genius quality that just makes everything work. He knows how to steer things, and works very quickly. What would take most people weeks takes Arj a few hours. I don't know how to describe working with him because I do not see him as someone I work with. When we make music it isn't work, it's just play. It's immense laughter and fun. Arj is my brother and my blood, to work with him is always an honour, but more so, it is to feel true happiness.

Have you made a master plan for the future?

Well, my plan is to unleash *Urban Temple* on the masses and see what happens! My job is to push it as much as I can; the more people who connect

with devotional music the better. In general, I am a performer across the spectrum. I was a dancer first before I was a singer, so my master plan is to just focus on the arts and pursue effectively whatever comes my way.

What kind of music do you ultimately want to make?

The music that I am making. I want to make meaningful music, something that you don't just listen to a few times and then forget, but tracks that make you want to buy that album. The album that you will take out on a rainy day after weeks of not listening to it, and it will take you back to exactly where you want to be. Music that is timeless and as my mother says, 'evergreen'. I have albums like that – Lauryn Hill's *Miseducation*, NERD's *In Search Of*, Jose Gonzales' *Veneer*, All Saints' first album and Nitin Sawhney's music to *The Namesake*. I keep CDs because they are a gateway to somewhere magical. That is the kind of music I want to make, something that when someone is moving house or clearing out their bedroom, they come across *The Bhajan Project* or *Urban Temple* and think, 'no, this one I will keep.'

How important is performing live for you?

It is important but it is difficult when you are a devotional singer. I can't do the commercial gigs others can and with religious music, everyone is afraid that it will become political when you perform. I don't get it; devotional singers should be welcome anywhere; after all, we are all one! Religion does not discriminate, or at least I don't believe it does. But, of course, you won't be breaking glasses at a nightclub because it's not the right environment. With performing I have to be wary of the situation; it is important to me to connect with people directly, to sing with them live and to communicate. I always try my best.

Tell us something people don't know about you?

I am never as I seem. My best friend from primary school, Yael, always says that I have a way of surprising her all the time, even after 17 years of friendship. It's true, you think you know me, but then you don't – you think I wouldn't jump then I do, or you think I'll be the chatterbox in the room but I am the silent one. I am a paradox!

What are your biggest passions away from music?

I cannot imagine a life without dancing. I love kathak, ballet and Argentine tango; these are my three favourite forms of dance that I have done. I also spend a great amount of time writing – I have a blog on my artist page called *Into the silence* which has some quirky, funny but hopefully meaningful writing.

According to you, what is the best piece of advice you have received?

If you are worrying about people around you, or concerned with what others think, or are looking for the approval of those outside of yourself, you clearly have forgotten your path.

Who would you love to collaborate with?

Neptunes – what an awesome *bhajan* they would produce. Also Anoushkar Shankar, if she could produce a track and Lauryn Hill would sing on it with me (albeit with me training up a lot to match her). That would be amazing.

Finally, what is your idea of happiness?

Living fully and completely in the moment and accepting it with a still mind.

Vaishnava Janato by Shivali is out now. See www.facebook.com/shivaliartist and www.twitter.com/shivaliartist to find out more.

My Pod with Rara Loud



ONE of the best breakthrough acts of the year, pop duo Rara Loud know a thing or two about catchy songs. Anuska and Jaya went through their music collection to select six songs they love right now.

No Woman No Cry by Bob Marley: Do we need to say anything more? This is a classic 'chill out, relax and don't worry' track. The original line of the song is 'No, woman, nuh cry'. Nuh is Jamaican for 'don't', so what is meant by the lyric is 'No, woman, don't cry'. He is leaving and reassuring her that the slum they live in won't get her down, that everything will be alright and 'don't shed no tear'. We love the lyrics, they are so real.

Use Somebody by Kings Of Leon: The vocals are amazing and it's pretty infectious – it's one of those songs you just sing along to. The band has an art of slowing down in their tracks and then really attacking. It really brings out the rock chick in us.

Dil Luteya by Jazzy B feat Apache Indian: We absolutely love this track, it's just pure genius. When in the mood to party, this is the perfect tune to put on full blast and get the party jumping. Amazing song, amazing lyrics and beautiful powerful voices. We simply never ever get tired of this.

Cry Me A River by Justin Timberlake: When we first heard this song, I think we had it on replay about a zillion times. Justin Timberlake is the prince of pop and the collaboration with Timbaland produced an absolute masterpiece that is one of the ultimate pop songs.

Ha Dias by Luca Mundaca: This song is perfect to listen to on a warm breezy summer evening. It really helps you switch off and relax. It's exciting and peaceful at the same time. We love the lyrics translation – check it out, they are so real.

Man Down by Rihanna: She is one of the best female artists of all time. She can sing, she can move and does it all so well. Beautiful face, beautiful voice, beautiful music! She is a real star and shines through her music. We can listen to this tune whenever wherever; such a sound solid beat. Love it!

Bailamos by Enrique Iglesias: This song is extremely sexy; it's crazy good. The instrumentals of the Spanish guitar just makes you want to dance Latino style. The rhythm definitely takes over you. We have a habit of singing this chorus if it's on in the car. Its one of those songs that just sounds perfect every time.

Kiss Miss by Rara Loud: Yay, love this song. As soon as we hear it, we just want to dance to it. Hands in the air, closing your eyes; it makes us go crazy on the dance floor. It's a catchy, feel-good song that gives us an energy boost when we need it.

Who Is It by Michael Jackson: As with any Michael Jackson track, you instantly want to turn up the volume. The beat, baseline and instrumental are crazy. A classic tune for any one who has broken up with someone and wants answers as to why. It sounds extra great in the pitch dark too.

Lala Liar by Rara Loud: A strong, feisty aggressive catchy tune. It helps us get rid of anger and frustration. It is perfect to listen to when in the mood for a good workout or a good old boogie. Love the beat and really dig it.

