

chant master

Krishna Das may be American but his philosophy remains embedded in India. **Laura McCreddie** asks the man with two albums and a sellout concert what inspires his music

LM: How did you get into chanting?

KD: It all started in the 60s. Chanting didn't really affect me much when I first heard it. I'd met Ram Dass and done some work with him, which I enjoyed, but there was no connection on a deeper level. Then I went to India when I was 23 and, one day, as I was walking around a lake up in the mountains, I heard this chanting coming out of a temple and I was drawn to it. It was so powerful, I knew it was something that I needed to be involved with.

LM: Why did you finally decide to go back to America?

KD: Marharj-ji sent me back. He told me I had a lot of unfinished business in the US and, in many ways, I'd had enough of India. It was like water was pouring into me but not flowing through. I felt very constricted. So I went back to America at the age of 26 and completely freaked out.

LM: What do you mean, freaked out?

KD: I'd been in India so long I just wasn't attuned to the American way of life. I remember going to the supermarket round the corner from my mother's house and just starting to cry.

The sight of all that food that would be wasted really upset me.

LM: So how did you go from that state to the success you are today?

KD: It didn't happen over night. I went through a lot of bad stuff and it wasn't until 1994 that I began chanting publicly. Before that, I was just doing whatever I could to get by. I sang with Ram Dass for a while, got into trouble a lot, started a record company. Then, gradually, I realised that I had to sing for my own sanity. Part of this understanding was I realised that I need to sing with people. Singing on my own just wasn't enough. I think, until that point, I'd shied away from that responsibility because it meant that I would have to put my own arse on the line and commit 100%. The first CD I put out, in 1996, was simply a calling card to let people know what I was about. I am not trying to be famous, I just want to honour my guru. This is all his doing.

LM: How can it be all your guru's doing? Surely some of the credit belongs to you?

KD: The way it looks to me is I am just a bad, one-handed harmonium player. Everything else is what my guru makes it. Chanting is my *sadhana*; everything else is a bonus. Trusting in a guru takes away the anxiety and fear. All you have to do





is surrender. Now, all I worry about is having a good sound system and making the plane. I met my guru, Neem Karoli Baba, 35 years ago, and he has lead me to this place. My trust in him is not based on blind faith.

LM: *Do you ever worry that people won't respond to your music?*

KD: Everyone's heart is like a bee – it is drawn to something in particular. I accept that my music is not for everyone. It is slightly esoteric and not pop music. But whether people like it or not is not my concern.

I am there to share a moment with people and to make this kind of music available to them. I see it as a way of extending loving kindness to the whole world.

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LM: *How would you describe your philosophy on life?*

KD: To do the best I can at every moment, which means offering myself as much as I can to what I

am doing, be it cleaning the house or singing to an audience of people. I don't have a strategy; whatever happens, happens.

Krishna Das plays three concert dates in the UK this July in conjunction with Om Shop: Friday 4th July at Cecil Sharp House, Regents Park Road; Saturday 5th July at the Glastonbury Town Hall and Sunday 6th July at Cecil Sharp House. Tickets are £15 for the London dates and £12 for Glastonbury.

For tickets, call 01872 321 111 or log on to www.omshop.com Krishna Das's albums, **One Track Heart**, **Breath of the Heart**, **Pilgrim Heart** (all £12.90), and his live double album, **Live on Earth** (£15), are available from Om Shop.