

yoga

JOURNAL

FREE!
Strength-building
yoga class
see page 88

meditate
for a **calm,**
clear mind

5 poses to **soothe**
allergies

Restorative
power of silence

Mantra goes
mainstream

What is true
commitment?



Move to the music
10 poses + 10 songs = joy!

HEALTH FITNESS FOOD MEDITATION HOME WORK NATURE RELATIONSHIPS SPIRITUALITY

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moved by the music

From devotional chants to hip-hop raps,
rhythm is rocking the yoga world.

As a kid, I was a punk rocker, whiling away my teenage angst in San Francisco nightclubs, listening to loud, angry bands whining about the ills of society. But I spent equal time in one of Swami Muktananda's ashrams, sitting in the great meditation hall, surrounded by altars to yogic saints and deities, and chanting *Om namah shivaya* by the hour. Though I was fully engaged in both the nihilism of punk rock and the bliss of chanting, it was a lonely time. I didn't feel there was anyone with whom I could share both spheres of my existence. And I never felt quite at home anywhere. Which is probably why the convergence of music and yoga that is happening right now is rocking my world.

When musician Michael Franti sang "Sometimes, I feel like I can do anything" as I pushed up into my fourth Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose) near the end of a sweaty class that he had accompanied with a live acoustic set, my heart was set ablaze. "And, sometimes I'm so alive," he sang for Wheel number five—and his playful energy seemed to lift my torso to the sky.

When I first heard MC Yogi, a hip-hop performer and Ashtanga Yoga teacher, mixing a rap about Shiva the Destroyer with a devotional round of the Sanskrit chant *Shiva shambo*, I felt I'd come home. While I'd already made my peace with being the me who loves to dance to wild music and the me who loses herself in asana and *kirtan*, I never dreamed that I'd get to share both with a whole community of music-loving yogis.

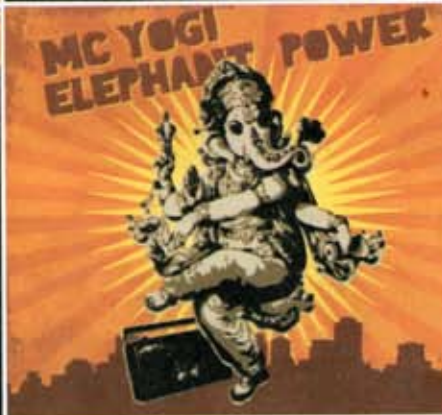
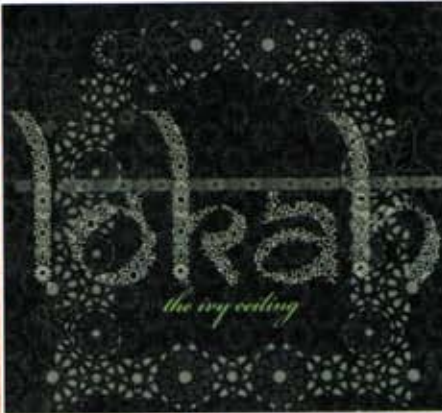
Welcome to that world. In these pages, Los Angeles writer Neal Pollack dives into the burgeoning scene of asana classes accompanied by live music, to explore the power of the vibe ("*Let the Music Move You*," page 72). Music writer Alan di Perna chronicles the rising trend of spiritual music that's edgy and even danceable ("*Hip, Happening, and Holy*," page 87). Yoga teachers Nicki Doane and Eddie Modestini offer a Home Practice accompanied by rollicking tunes ("*Rhythm & Poses*," page 63). And, since even a rockin' yogi does not live by rhythm alone, there are some great suggestions for practicing silence ("*The Quietest Revolution*," page 17) and learning to meditate ("*Presence of Mind*," page 66).

I appreciate the quieting, contemplative practices as much as the energizing, rowdy ones. And my practice includes both. If you tend toward one or the other, I hope this issue inspires you to try something new. And, you know, rock on. ❖



PHOTO: DAVID MARTINEZ; STYLIST: LYN HEINEKEN; HAIR/MAKEUP: BETTEN CHASTON; TOP: MINAWEAR; PANTS: ELISABETTA ROGIANI

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When Terry McBride started taking yoga classes four years ago, he was surprised that even he—the CEO of a

record label—had a hard time tracking down the esoteric mantra music that kept him grooving through his vinyasa flow.

So the Nettwerk Music Group founder (who has managed the careers of pop artists like Sarah McLachlan, the Barenaked Ladies, and Avril Lavigne, and is pictured here with the Grammy he won in 1997) started his own kirtan/yoga-music label. Already, he's signed much of the Western kirtan community, including Bhagavan Das, Krishna Das, Reema Datta, Donna De Lory, Wade Imre Morissette, David Newman, Jai Uttal, and Wah! to his Nutone imprint.

And he's dreaming of a mantra music festival, similar to the Lillith Fair shows he produced in the '90s. In the meantime, he's been busy opening a chain of yoga studios, Yyoga, in Vancouver, Canada, where he lives and practices, often to mantra music. "I believe that the more this music is heard by a wider audience, the better place the world is," he says. "Just as the more people who practice, the more we have a better world."

hip, happening, and holy

Mantra music gets beat savvy in the yoga studio and on the stage.

BY ALAN DI PERNA

"Om namah shivaya" as a pop hit? "Bolo ram" as a trendy ringtone? Well, things haven't gone that far, but mantra music is certainly bursting out of yoga studios, intersecting with cutting-edge music genres like world electronica, pop, and hip-hop—and hitting the dance floor.

Devotional mantras have been part of the yoga tradition for thousands of years, but **Western mantra music**, chanted today by such veterans as Jai Uttal and Wah! as well as by new artists like Lokah and MC Yogi, is expanding its horizons like never before. And, as these beat-savvy artists mix timeless Sanskrit mantras with inspiring English-language lyrics, the music is reaching beyond the *kirtan* (call-and-response chanting) scene and entering into the ears of all kinds of yogis and hipsters on the lookout for the next big thing.

"I feel we're on the precipice of a new movement of conscious sound and conscious music," says Nicholas Giacomini, the yoga instructor and devotional

MORE ONLINE Read about McBride and mantra music at yogajournal.com/mantramusic.

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hip-hop artist known as MC Yogi. He's a prime example of the new movement. On his deliciously funky rap album, he mixes rap rhymes that recount the myths of Hindu deities like Ganesh and Hanuman with chants sampled from the recordings of kirtan greats such as Krishna Das. Performing live, MC Yogi gets a crowd pulsing their fists skyward to the beat and singing refrains like "Ganesh is fresh." When he says, "We're going to sweep the nation with this conscious music," it's not hard to believe him.

ELECTRIC SLIDE

It all started a couple of decades ago, as the yoga tradition took hold in America and Europe. Western yogis began to experiment with chanting mantras in ways that reflected the popular music styles they grew up loving. Yogi artists like Krishna Das and Jai Uttal began holding kirtans at a handful of spiritual centers and yoga studios like Jivamukti in New York City. The sound was steeped in traditional Indian music, with prominent harmonium and tablas, but underneath, listeners could catch cadences, harmonies, and melodies derived from rock 'n' roll, mid-'60s girl groups, Motown, and reggae.

By the early 2000s, mantra singers such as Snam Kaur and Deva Premal began to substitute soft New Age synthesizers for the Indian harmonium. The sound was less traditional, but the underlying mood of meditative devotion was palpable. It wasn't long before yoga teachers began playing this music in class, becoming the main channel through which this eclectic genre was heard.

Since then, mantra music has become an ever-expanding style, as at home on dance floors as in yoga studios. Jai Uttal, who has been a pioneer of the mantra-fusion movement and has experimented with all manner of styles in which to express his devotion to God, went so far as to release an album of club remixes of his earlier recordings. On his latest album, *Thunder Love*, Uttal has brought an entirely new flavor into the mix. Brazilian music, rather than Indian, becomes the "folk" music in the album's bold new synthesis, and Uttal skillfully blends this

fresh strain of indigenous rhythm with production techniques and digital sound treatments that wouldn't be out of place on a Radiohead album. (He even goes out on a limb, multitracking his son's toy instruments and digitally manipulating his dotar, a Bengali stringed instrument.)

Even yoga teacher and performer Wah!, who is perhaps best known for her soulful rendition of the Gayatri mantra and other meditative music, is experimenting with electronic club rhythms. "A while ago I was listening to a lot of Asian underground artists like the Bombay Dub Orchestra, DJ Pathaan, and Talvin Singh. And I just felt, 'Oh, if only they had some real mantras in there,'" says Wah! So, she took matters into her own music, and the downtempo influence is notable on her latest release, *Love Holding Love*.

"My approach is exploring spiritual music through a lot of different styles," she says. "I used to play yoga studios with a percussionist playing small hand drums, but as I got onto bigger stages and into festivals, a hand drum just didn't cut it. To really fill up a big stage, I needed a full drum kit. And that brought other rhythms—hip-hop beats and disco. There's a feeling of celebration that's creating this new style of music. As the energy—the *sbakti*—builds, you want to just bust out."

HITTING THE DANCE FLOOR

Another of Wah!'s key influences is producer and DJ Cheb i Sabbah, known for fusing traditional Indian music and spirituality with electronica on albums such as *Devotion*. In his music, contemporary synthesizers and bass guitars merge seamlessly with traditional performances by some of India's finest players and singers. "Making a good marriage of Indian classical music and electronics is what really brings it into today," says Sabbah.

The result is great mantra music that's as popular on the yoga circuit as it is in the club scene. "To me, you can't really separate the sacred and the profane. They're two sides of the same coin. And both Hindustani, or North Indian, classical music and Carnatic, or South Indian, music have always included devotional

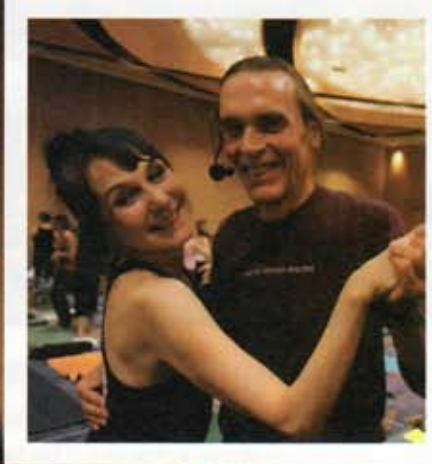
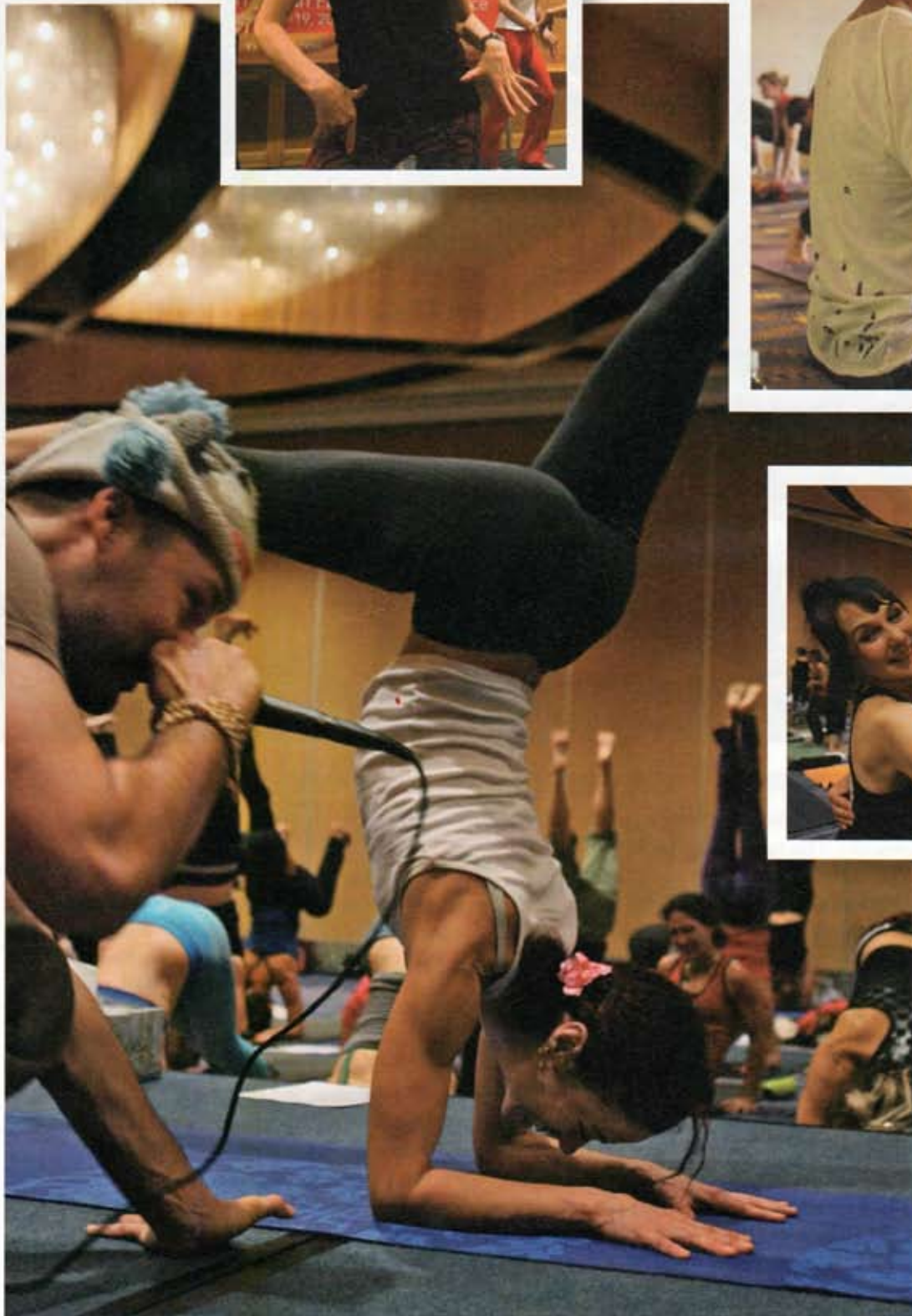
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music. So who's to say what's spiritual and what's not spiritual?"

Uma Nanda Saraswati and Sri Michael Shlofmitz of the mantra duo Lokah play with the same question. They, too, have used electronica—along with digitized vocals—to get people moving to mantra. But they've also incorporated a heavy pop influence, with artists like Russell Simmons and Sting making guest appearances on their CD *The Ivy Ceiling*.

"I wanted to take my love of mantra and fuse that with music that is really hip, cool, and happening so that kids can groove," says Shlofmitz. "It's really appropriate in the modern era to bring ancient wisdom together with modern sounds."

But if you strip away all the futuristic grooves and textures from recent recordings by any of these mantra artists, you're left with the pure devotional essence of that person's voice. "If people feel the leader has a true spiritual connection, it doesn't matter what the musical flavor is," says Wah!, adding that you can feel the years of meditation in the voices of some kirtan leaders. When you've got that authenticity underpinning everything, there's no limit to where modern mantra music can go. And, once you hear it—or even better, move to it—it's hard not to be thrilled by this mantra-fusion scene. That must be why these artists are growing ever more popular, and traditionalists seem to forego negative comments. "The response," as MC Yogi describes it, "is just so overwhelmingly positive and loving."





practicing to Prince unnecessary at best and generally disrespectful or unyogic. Ross disagreed. Living in Los Angeles, he saw his students driving to the studio with stereos blaring or arriving in class wearing headphones. Music was an integral part of their lives, and it seemed almost unnatural for them to do yoga in a silent room. So Ross started adding the funk to his class, and now he can't imagine teaching any other way. "Have you ever watched a movie without music?" he asks. "It's the same with yoga." Music is the score of the practice, letting you forget your personal drama, he asserts. Also, it's fun, and to Ross's mind, yoga should be fun.

a practice DVD with Spearhead leader Michael Franti, often invite musicians, including MC Yogi and Lokah Music, to perform at their workshops. The modern mantra musician Wade Morissette has accompanied classes taught by John Friend and Baron Baptiste.

Franti, who has recorded a half dozen studio albums with Spearhead and two solo albums, acts like a bridge, connecting the worlds of yoga and music. His Power to the Peaceful festival in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park attracted 50,000 fans in 2008, and the free outdoor asana practice there drew nearly 1,200 yogis. Franti boasts of visiting a different studio nearly every day when he's on tour—making a yoga connection on an intimate level in every town in which he plays. He has accompanied classes taught by Gannon and Life as well as by Nicki Doane and Eddie Modestini (see "Rhythm & Poses," on page 63). When the touring schedules of teachers and musicians intersect, Franti accompanies a workshop, and the teachers repay the favor by leading his band in a happy, sweaty practice. The shared love of music and yoga creates a palpable synergy and sense of community.



Clockwise from upper left: Sharon Gannon, Jai Uttal, MC Yogi, students dancing, MC Yogi raps to a forearm balance, Gannon and David Life, all at Yoga Journal's San Francisco conference.

"I don't think every single yoga class should be a dance fest," says Doane. "Sometimes it's a distracting element when you're trying to get into your own stuff. But in terms of opening people into a heart space, yoga and music complement each other beautifully." Music takes people out of their heads, she says. It allows them to calmly focus on their breath, no matter the location. Since befriending Franti, Ziggy Marley, and other musicians, Doane's found herself teaching yoga in beer-soaked bars, backstage green rooms, and the parking lot next to the bus, drawing in musicians from other acts and even fans.

Of course, not everyone sees a place for music on the yoga mat. Dedicated Ashtangi Edie Brickell, leader of the New Bohemians and the wife of Paul Simon—who was introduced to yoga by her friend Sting—isn't interested in playing or listening to live music at yoga classes. She doesn't bring music into her own practice, because she finds it distracting. Yet Brickell still attests to how yoga and music work together. "Yoga nurtures my artistic life in the same way that it adds to all of my life by just making me feel better," she says. "Yoga and music both allow you to feel and express your own rhythm."

And for many people, practicing in silence is key to finding that internal

UNPLUGGED

Now, in the iPod era, it's rare to find a yoga teacher who doesn't use background music at some moment in class. Live music is the next wave. High-profile yogis are forming cultural and economic alliances with musicians. Shiva Rea, who was at the vanguard of teaching asana accompanied by live music, offers her Trance Dance (think nightclub rave, minus drugs, plus yoga) with mix masters like Cheb i Sabbah and DJ Dragonfly. Jivamukti's David Life and Sharon Gannon, who created



rhythm & poses

Move to the music with this energizing practice set to a happy beat.

For yoga teachers Nicki Doane and Eddie Modestini, **music and yoga** are two great tastes that taste great together. “They go together. Yoga can open up the physical body. And music keeps you engaged vibrationally. It’s uplifting and inspiring,” says Doane. The teachers are so enamored of the combination that they frequently use music when they practice to recharge from their busy schedule of parenting, traveling, and teaching. Naturally, they select fun tunes to enrich and enliven the yoga classes they teach. The duo encourages you to practice to music you enjoy.

To get you started, they created the sequence on the following pages and infused it with some of **their favorite songs** to make you feel alive and connected to your true nature. The pace and feel of the songs match the tone of the sequence. When you start the accompanying playlist, warm up with Sun Salutations. The musical wave will carry you through the asanas: standing poses to ground you, backbends to open your heart, and a twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana) and supine poses (Supta Padangusthasana and Supta Gomukhasana) to bring your spine back to neutral. When you hear the song “One Step Closer to You” picking up speed, start to emerge from Savasana and notice the world around you. You’re sure to feel elevated. DIANE ANDERSON

songs

BE THE CHANGE - MC Yogi
(Elephant Power)

ROCK ON, HANUMAN - MC Yogi,
featuring Krishna Das (Elephant
Power)

I GOT LOVE FOR YOU - Michael
Franti and Spearhead (Rebel Rockers)

A LIFETIME - Ziggy Marley
(Love Is My Religion)

SNOW (HEY OH) - Red Hot Chili
Peppers (Stadium Arcadium)

BEACH IN HAWAII - Ziggy Marley
(Love Is My Religion)

I'D HAVE YOU ANYTIME - George
Harrison (All Things Must Pass)

TOLERANCE - Michael Franti and
Spearhead (Yell Fire!)

LOVE IS MY RELIGION - Ziggy
Marley (acoustic version from Love
Is My Religion)

ONE STEP CLOSER TO YOU - Michael
Franti and Spearhead (Yell Fire!)

MORE ONLINE To link to the playlist,
go to yogajournal.com/multimedia.