

KAMO MAHARAJ

The Brahmin of Music

By

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Karamchand “Kamo” Maharaj is today one of the most versatile and distinguished Indo-Trinidadian musician living in Toronto, Canada.

His musical production include, The Innovation Series (1-4) , Aradhana with Gauri Guha, Sundar Soca and Indian Soca with the late Sundar Popo, Soca Dandiya, Madhur Bhajans, Horizons with Pakistani artist Musurrat, Petals for the Altar with Dr B. Doobay and Harry Panday, Sounds of Inspiration with Bhaskar Sharma, Ehsas and Muslim inspirational songs with Rajkumar Rizvi , In memory of Pundit Nirmal Maharaj, with Pundit Keso Rampersad and Shiva Yatra with Pundit B. Doobay .

Kamo has also produced and directed music for the Indo-Canadian film ‘Desh Vi Desh’ which was released in North America. He has also provided musical accompaniment to many international artiste such as the late Hemant Kumar, Jagjit Singh, Mehdi Hassan, Mussarat, Manna Dey, Karamjeet Singh and Rajkumar Rizvi. It was the late Hemant Kumar who said that “my thanks is not great enough for this Brahmin of music who hails from Trinidad “

Kamo plays a wide range of musical instruments including keyboards, wind instruments and rhythm. He plans to tour Trinidad for concerts with his band called Maharaj Innovations in the near future.

Kamo was born at 10 East Boundary Street in California and migrated to Canada in 1972. His father is the late Pandit Mahadeo Maharaj, his mother is Ramdularie Maharaj, they had eight children, three boys and five girls, all of whom has distinguished themselves in various professions.

As a child Kamo used to attend the Hindu Temple at Macaulay, Claxton Bay. At this temple there was a harmonium and tabla, he used to steal chances to learn to play these instruments.

Kamo recalls that there was a wedding in his neighborhood and the Dil-E-Nadan orchestra (as it was known then) provided entertainment, he stayed up all night listening to their music.

After this experience he asked the guys Bisram and Ramnarine Moonilal if he could play with the instruments and they obliged. He mentioned that they grew to like him and he became associated with them. With this association, he learned many techniques in music. Kamo recalls that several times he broke school and went to Gasparillo where Bisram and Ramnarine lived to observe and learn music. This was not formal training in music but it was invaluable.

His other influence was his Uncle Baldeo Maharaj who used to buy the Indian vinyl records and he used to insist that Kamo play the harmonica. A little later he appeared on Mastana Bahar playing the keyboards and after that he joined Harry Mahabir and the BWIA National Indian Orchestra. With this orchestra he used to play the clavolin. About one year later, two cousins and Kamo formed the Melobugs Orchestra. This started as an Indian band but the guys were competent musicians and could play any kind of music.

It is while living in Canada that Kamo's expertise was acquired. He says he was fortunate to be among people who knew music and they willingly shared their knowledge which he grasped the opportunity to learn.

Living in Canada has allowed Kamo to be exposed to the music of various communities such as the Gujaratis, Punjabis, Marathis and Pakistanis. This exposure has broadened his musical horizon. These other types of music that emanate from the Indian sub-continent are in demand and one has to learn to play it.

Kamo's favourite instrument is the tabla which he says has infinite qualities. However he was quick to add that it is the keyboards that he plays best. He enjoys playing the keyboards but states that nothing can beat the real playing of the actual instrument by a player when you can get the player's input and feelings. He added that with synthesizers you only get the ambience of the sound of the instruments.

Among the musicians he admires are the late S.D. Burman, and Naushad and Ramnarine Moonilal. Kamo says Ramnarine Moonilal is just amazing and stands out among the best of keyboard players he knows.

On chutney music Kamo says that initially he did not like it, not because of the idea but the quality which he described as "nursery rhyme music". However he says that chutney music has given Trinidadians a sort of distinct identity.

For future Kamo plans to release on more CD in the Innovation series. He also has about ten instrumental which is his own composition that needs some additional work, this he would also produce on a CD. He also has plans on doing a Bhajan CD dedicated to his late father. Another plan for the future is to arrange Hindu music with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Kamo is married to Chandra (Gosyne) and has two children, Sachin Dev and Ravi Shankar. Kamo has been flying the flag of Trinidad in Canada and is among the best if not the best Indian musician living there.

For his tremendous contribution this publication celebrates Karamchand Maharaj.

Interview, Karamchand Maharaj, East Boundary Street, California April 2005.