

RAVI PRASAD

MALBAR EXPERIENCE

A mix of Carnatic, Maloya and 21st century electronic influences, Malbar Experience is a concept created by Ravi Prasad who has been building bridges between musical genres for decades, in collaboration with Oskar Vizan, the album producer.

He went to Reunion to meet the musicians “Malbars” – the descendants of the engaged in the nineteenth century to work in the plantations of the island. The fusion of these different elements, traditional Indian music, the Malbar and the electronic, makes this project unique.

Ravi Prasad is an eclectic and dynamic artist. His unique musical journey is fuelled by a deep rooted Indian tradition which ventures into contemporary creations and collaborations that mix Indian Carnatic songs and polyphonics with jazz, flamenco, experimental electronic music and dance, leading to entertainment duos or groups or creations of symphonic dimensions.

Oskar Vizan is a composer/producer based in London. Throughout his extensive career he has developed a consistent world of electro-acoustic soundscapes materialised in a long list of solo projects and collaborations. He has worked with renowned international artists such as Talvin Singh, Martin Glover “Youth”, Sultan Khan, Sarah Mclachlan, Sussan Deyhim, Miguel Bose, to name but a few. His work amalgamates a wide array of styles and media, international touring, production, film, commissions, etc.

“Malbar Experience” – The History behind the project –

“Malbar Experience” is a new show-challenge directed by the composer, singer, instrumentalist and stage artist Ravi Prasad, for whom musical creation can not be confined to the work of a band. He feeds his inspiration of his meetings with the musicians of formations, cultures and sensibilities as diverse as enriching.

“Everyone is invested, the exchanges are made permanently. There is no leader, and it is thanks to that that the creation exists “, he says, surrounded by his accomplices musicians involved in the adventure. More than just creativity, the bold project “Malbar Experience” is about performance.

Reconcile in the same show very old Carnatic songs of South India, the classical vibrations of the violin by Frédéric Morel (also orchestrator and composer), the harmonies of Raju's harmonium (teacher, composer and interpreter of Indian music in Reunion), the melodious contortions of the accordion by Aldo Ledoux (2000 gold medal of the National Union of Accordionists of France, "tapokèr" in the soul), the roll of the percussions of Gilbert Mariapin (protagonist of 'an evolutionary Reunionese music, he' hits' for several Reunion groups), the muted tones of Kiki Mariapin's bass (author, composer, performer and improvised music trainer), Oskar Vizan acoustic-electronic soundscapes (Producer and composer based in London), all gracefully sprinkled with the talent of his orchestrator, also on flute and percussion, Ravi Prasad, and you will get "Malbar Experience ".

Back to the source

Seduced by the interpretation of Ravi Prasad at the 2001 Festival of the 38th Ruggeri of Grenoble, its director Benoît Thiebergien invites the artist to propose "a project that would be close to his heart". It is from this heart-banyan, whose arteries join relentlessly its land of origin, that immediately germinates the idea of a work around the theme of "malbars". Originally from the north of the small region of Kerala, in the South of India, "malbaresity" is inherent to her daily life, appearing on every street corner.

"At home, every five hundred meters, the word malbar appears in big letters on every storefront. We have the "Malbar-Café", the "Malbar-Hotel", the "Malbar-Video Library" ... "The many meetings he has been able to make in the last five years with" Malbars-Reunion "established in France have also expanded his inspiration.

"They are sometimes more Indian than me," he says, "that's what made me want to take this path." Path – if not gateway – of the Indian exile who can thus cultivate, on the plots of his adopted land, the offerings of the memory of his ancestors: the "Ravi Prasad Experience". Trained in the traditional music of southern India, Ravi Prasad has set as "artistic conduct" to meet other musical inspirations which, conciliated with the influences of his own roots, allow him to forge a musical identity.

At the edge of the project, Reunion, as a matter of course, appears as "the" land of welcome, the ideal place of pregnancy to carry out such a challenge. In December 2002, Alain Courbis, director of the Regional Center for Contemporary Music of La Réunion (PRMA), took note of the project. Neither one, not even two, with the enthusiasm and fervour that characterise this

“Che Guevara of local music”, the director of the PRMA offers again to open the doors of his residence-creation to accommodate the work of Ravi Prasad. “Everything went naturally,” says Alain Courbis, because even if the means to implement for the realisation of such a project remain colossal, the aspirations were common, “everything flowed from source”. It is assured that the public will welcome the show, “I am confident” he says, with a broad smile, leaving some impatience to lift the mystery that hangs over Ravi’s “Malbar Experience”. Prasad.

Develop and export Reunion music

The objective of residencies-creations, set up for six years by the PRMA, is to allow the development of local music, among others through the export. Many efforts, logistical and financial means, are necessary to achieve this.

The PRMA was able to count on the indispensable support of the Departmental Office of Culture (ODC), the Art Methis Festival, under the leadership of the Talipot Theatre, the Department of Reunion, the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DRAC) , and the city of Saint-Denis, to achieve the project “Malbar Experience”.

Alain Courbis also highlights the investment of Ravi Prasad’s production company, Archipel Production, which provided the largest amount of funding research; and “to top it all, we will have a record to keep thanks to Image Production and the work of Thierry Hoarau who prepares a work of twenty-six minutes on the residence.” The contribution of the increasingly successful local music community, opening up its large outward-looking pond, remains the key to the success of such a project. “Reunion music is in full swing,” notes Alain Courbis, “for five years, production has increased fourfold.”

“Meetings of different cultures”

This observation is all the more encouraging for the PRMA that it can not ignore it and tries through its residencies-creations to promote musical expression in our island, while the dissemination and production of shows remain at the responsibility of partners dedicated to the same cause. “The residency-creation, one per year, is intended for artists accompanied by a project to allow meetings of different cultures and musical sensitivities,” adds the director of the PRMA who finds that the term of residence is today a little “overused”.

But no need to justify when you see the success of previous projects. The meeting between the American guitarist Bob Brosman and René Lacaille resulted in a tour that has lasted for three years; Just last week, they were in

Holland. The jazz-maloya fusion of Olivier Kerourio and Danyèl Waro gave birth to an excellent album distributed in many countries around the world.

Recognition

We wish the same success to the “Malbar Experience” which will already participate in the next edition of the festival Les 38ème Rugissants de Grenoble, to the festival Africolor in France and will return to its point of source, with a tour in India scheduled for December 2004. “We really gave ourselves the means so that this project lives, that it is of quality and that it knows the most possible longevity, and for the happiness of everybody”, adds Alain Courbis , “An album is planned for next year”.

To conclude, Kiki Mariapin wishes to thank the PRMA for this recognition that it brings to the Reunion musicians, who need exchanges and musical meetings like those of the “Malbar Experience”. “These varied experiences allow us to break away from the routine of local music and it is in this context of special creation that mobilizes a lot of energy, that complementarity takes place with musicians from different worlds. Thank you again, “he said, addressing Alain Courbis.

“The first artist is the audience”

Ravi Prasad has made his mantra – sacred phrase – that he repeats very often, a sign of modesty and his desire to go to the public, and that the public also comes to meet them.