

Stylishly Spiritual

Donna D'Cruz's Rasa Music Label Sparks the Divine

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Mount Kailash meets Madison Avenue in Rasa, a company that — in the words of its marketing materials — “exists to expose that magical place where Sensuality, Spirituality and Style converge.”

The company is the brainchild of Donna D'Cruz, a model-deejay-entrepreneur born in the ancient city of Chennai and now happily settled in New York City, the cradle of modern commercialism.

Best known as a music company (“The Gift of Love: The Love Poems of Rumi,” by Deepak Chopra, Madonna, Demi Moore and others, is one of their top sellers), Rasa has now branched out to offer a line of designer candles and aromatherapy products as well.

Although D'Cruz was born in India, she grew up in Australia, and still retains an Aussie accent.

At first, she explained, she channeled her love for Australian folk and contemporary world music into a record label called Australian Music International (AMI is now a sister label to Rasa).



Entrepreneur Donna D'Cruz heads Rasa, a New York record label specializing in the stylish and the spiritual.

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Rasa's releases include Deepak Chopra's tributes to Rumi and Tagore; dance compilations; and soundtracks to films such as *Ayurveda: The Art of Being*.

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"It was 1991, and I was sitting in my office thinking, 'why are we doing only Aboriginal and cross-cultural Australian stuff?'" D'Cruz recalled in a recent phone interview with **IndiaWest**. "I thought we should be able to branch out to other things, including Eastern philosophy — though not necessarily Indian."

But it was Indian philosophy — especially the concept of *rasa* — that most piqued her interest.

Most people will tell you that the word *rasa* connotes a feeling of enjoyment or devotion derived from music. But according to D'Cruz, "The word literally means juice, or sap. There are nine stages of *rasa*, and each has a different color, tone and emotion. There are *rasas* of love, greed, avarice ... and the word *rasa* can also mean an 'aha' moment, when the listener and the word are one."

Working from the point of view that music should uplift the listener, D'Cruz searched out the types of music projects that would fit Rasa's philosophy.

She hit the jackpot with one of the company's first releases, "The Gift of Love: The Love Poems of Rumi," in August of 1998. The album featured the ecstatic poetry of the Persian poet being read by Hollywood luminaries and friends of Deepak Chopra over a soothing New Age beat. Though a few listeners snickered, many more snapped it up by the crateload, making it one of the decade's hottest-selling New Age titles.

In October of 2002, the label released a follow-up called "A Gift of Love II: Oceans of Ecstasy," featuring the love poetry of Rabindranath Tagore read by Shekhar Kapur, Antonio Banderas, Christy Turlington, Sinead O'Connor and others. Each of the "Gift of Love" albums includes detailed and informative liner notes about the poetry.

Other Rasa releases include

"Deepak Chopra: The Soul of Healing Meditations" ("No experience necessary. Requires no incense, no concentration, no painful sitting positions, no saffron robes, chanting optional," read the liner notes); "RasaExotica" I and II, energetic compilations of dance music from around the world; and "RasaMello" I and II, divine chill-out tracks.

Several Rasa artists have appeared on "Buddha Bar" and other compilations put out by other labels.

Rasa's soundtrack to Pan Nalin's fascinating documentary *Ayurveda: The Art of Being* features soothing classical tracks and vocals by Vidya Rao incorporating Sanskrit shlokas which were researched at the Vaidya Puranchand Malviyajee in Varanasi.

D'Cruz so admires the work of Paris filmmaker Pan Nalin that she is also putting together the release of the soundtrack to his next film, *Samsara*, a sensual love story set on the Tibetan plateau. Rasa's releases can be found in New Age bookstores, such as the Bodhi Tree in Los Angeles, and mainstream outlets including Virgin Megastore, Barnes and Noble, and Borders Books and Music.

Sure, spirituality is stylish. But doesn't that mean that one day it can fall out of style? "Spirituality is not a fad," said D'Cruz. "You can't fake it. If anyone thinks it's a fad, then that means it must have reached a certain level — it's becoming more mainstream."

The marketing materials for Rasa spell out the company's mission, too: "For too long, spirituality existed on a cushion in an ashram. For too long, spirituality meant austerity and denial of the senses. Rasa dares us to think and live differently and embrace a new paradigm where one's inner Buddha can chill out, do yoga and continue to work, play and flourish in the present world."