

issue 3

serendipity

Aspirational. Inspirational. Sri Lankan.

Hip Villas Lunuganga

Inside Bawa's private estate

New fiction Trussed

Of Elvis, hoppers and
astral projection

A journey in the mind Inside Jaffna

With pictures by
Dominic Sansoni

Delon The Connector

Plus Krishan, Ranidu and more
in our music feature



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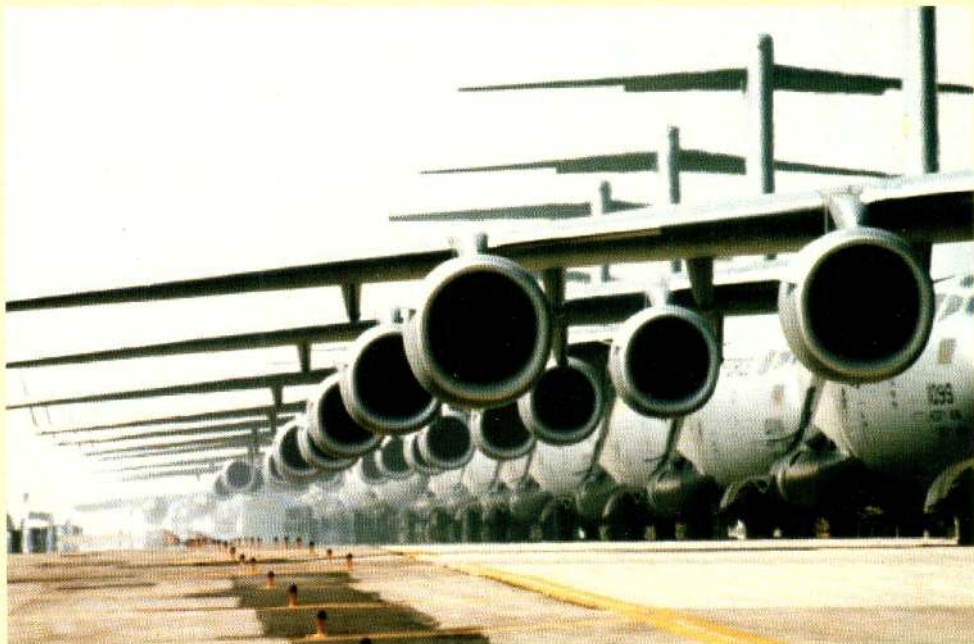
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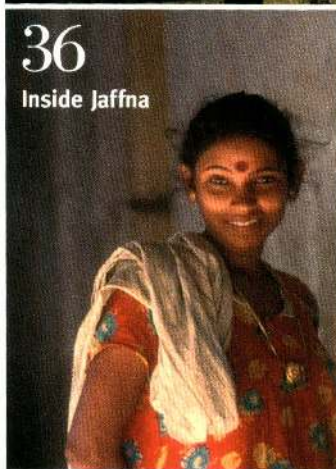
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through unity we
grow strong".



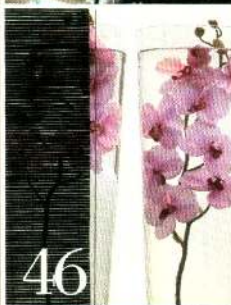
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Lets start this issue with a thought.

Sri Lanka is no longer just an island in the Indian Ocean.

It's also this vast, sprawling global village of over 400,000 people living across the world, this network of friends and family living from London to Singapore, from Washington to Brisbane. And we're proud to be the only magazine that tries to link these scattered communities and reflect their joys and successes.

That's why we're excited to present our music special in this issue where you can check out interviews with some of the hottest rising stars from LA to New York to London. Meet Delon, Krishan and Ranidu - names you're going to be hearing a lot in the future.

We also get an exclusive first look inside the private estate of an inspiration from an older generation; Geoffrey Bawa was Sri Lanka's pre-eminent architect and his country estate Lunuganga was his tour de force. A labour of love that was his retreat from the world, it has now opened as one of the world's most stylish boutique villas.

I've been a fan of Dominic Sansoni's work ever since I opened up a magazine at the age of eleven and was transfixed by a beautiful photograph of surf spread like lace over a golden beach. That's why its an honour to be able to feature his wonderful pictures of Jaffna, along with Prasanna Weerawardane's evocative words about a journey to a city which has been a symbol of our fractured nation – but which could still be a beacon of hope for the future.

And continuing our mission to bring you the cream of contemporary Sri Lankan fiction, we're delighted to introduce you to the work of Shiromi Pinto, whose debut novel 'Trussed' will no doubt leave you panting for more.

From our family to yours, much love,

Afdhel & the Serendipity Team

feedback@serendipitymag.net

serendipity

www.serendipitymag.net

Published by Diasporic Media Ltd.

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London W23EA

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Where to find us



IN THE UK

Serendipity can be found at the following Sri Lankan restaurants in London:

- Sekara, 3 Lower Grosvenor Place, Sw1
- Paradise, 149 Westbourne Grove, W11
- Nirvana, 119 Shirland Rd, Maida Vale, W9
- Jaffna House, 90 Tooting High Street, London, SW17
- Prince of Ceylon, 39 Watford Way, London, NW4



IN SRI LANKA

Serendipity can be found at the following fine establishments:

- Barefoot
- Odel
- Cinnamon Grand Bookshop



letters

Dear Serendipity,

I read your article on MIA with interest. I cant tell whether she's a musical genius or a one trick pony.

Yours,

Confused Toronto, Canada

Dear Confused of Canada,
We cant figure it out either. That's why we want to interview her. Can anyone help us get in touch using 'non-official' channels?

Dear Serendipity,

I love your mag but I cant find a copy! Where do I get them in London?

Yours,

**Dr. Lasitha Wickremege
London, UK**

Dear Lasitha,
We're concentrating on Sri Lankan restaurants around Greater London – see the opposite page for a more detailed list. And if you're a Sri Lankan restaurant or business and want to get copies for your customers, please contact us on feedback@serendipitymag.net

Dear Serendipity,

A friend of mine forwarded on your email version to me here, deep in the darkest depths of the USA. I just wanted to say keep up the good work, and thanks for putting together such a cool mag. I loved Janaka Jayasingha's piece on 'Going Home' (so funny, so true) and the pictures and reportage in your tsunami retrospective by Shehani Fernando sent shivers up my spine.

How do I make sure I always get a copy?

**Ramani Siriwardene
Connecticut, USA**

Dear Ramani,
Glad you liked the contrast – we're always trying to bring you the best in both intelligent features that make you think – and stuff that makes you smile.

To ensure you always get a copy, just send an email to 'subs@serendipitymag.net' and we'll put you on our e-mailing list.

Dear Serendipity,

I just wanted to say that its great to see a magazine out there that's doing its best to promote a positive view of Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans. I was sick of the rags you get in London, all they seem to do is recycle the same political propaganda and AFP reports on how the Paddy crop is doing. Congrats to you on showing the world what a sexy, successful and interesting bunch of people Sri Lankans are!

Yours,

**Philip Jeganathan,
Cambridge, UK**

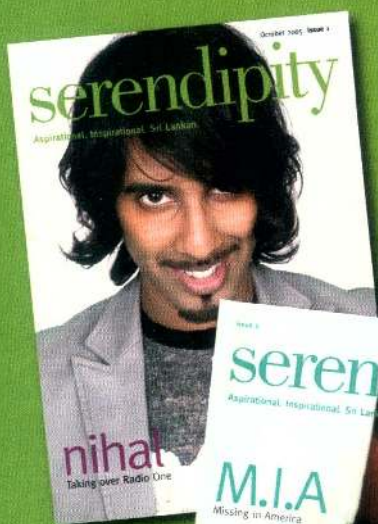
Dear Philip,

Thanks for your kind words. But you're still not getting the sarong.

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letter will win a beautiful
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Aspirational. Inspirational. Sri Lankan.



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kothu

What's on our radar screens...

BOMBAY BRONX

We gotta give props to our Editor-At-Large, Nihal's latest venture – Bombay Bronx, the Album. For those of you who have checked out his rammed club night of the same name at the Notting Hill Arts Club, with MC's battling '8-Mile' style in Punjabi and some fresh urban flavours, the album delivers more of the same. Including, we may add, tracks by 2 of our interviewees in this issue's music special: Ranidu (Page 22) and Krishan (page 20). Launched in London, Delhi and Bombay, its already gone Top 5 in India. Not bad, Nihal malli.



TANK

Tank is an ultra-hip design and ideas firm based in Singapore, the brainchild of Sri Lankan Shiran Sooriya-Arachchi. They've got a diverse portfolio encompassing the worlds of three dimensional design – architecture, interior, and industrial – and two dimensional design – print, interactive, film and television. They've just got the commission to design the new Art, Design & Media Library for Nanyang Technical University in Singapore. We'll be covering them in more detail in an upcoming issue, but for now whet your appetite at www.tank.com.sg

MEGA MALAAI

Serendipity was hanging out at the Mega Malaaai 2006 at the packed to capacity Hammersmith Palais in February. It was great to see so many

fine looking brothers and sisters, dressed to the nines, enjoying the cultural show which featured everything from some off-the-hook B-boy dancing to karate demonstrations set to the theme from 'Enter the Dragon'. Congratulations to the Imperial College International Tamil Society for putting on such a slick show.

KING'S BEER

Serendipity wets its lips in anticipation of a new Sri Lankan beer that has just been re-launched. From the same brewers who make Heineken, King's Beer has been overseen by a master brewer from the company, who's ensured that it adheres to the highest quality standards. And it tastes great too. If other 'niche' bars like Red Stripe from Jamaica, and Asahi from Japan can make it globally, here's hoping King's will follow in the footsteps of those other esteemed Sri Lankan beers like Lion Lager and Ceylon Pride, and soon be taking the world by storm too.

Tell us what's making your senses tingle, email us at: letters@serendipitymag.net





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Colombo launch party: Tantra

It was a balmy night, with just the right combination of friends and family when Serendipity launched in Colombo in December, with a party at the sexy and stylish Tantra Bar. As the breeze blew in from Galle Face, guests nibbled on canapés and sampled mojitos, caparinhas and Slave Island Iced Teas into the early hours of the morning.

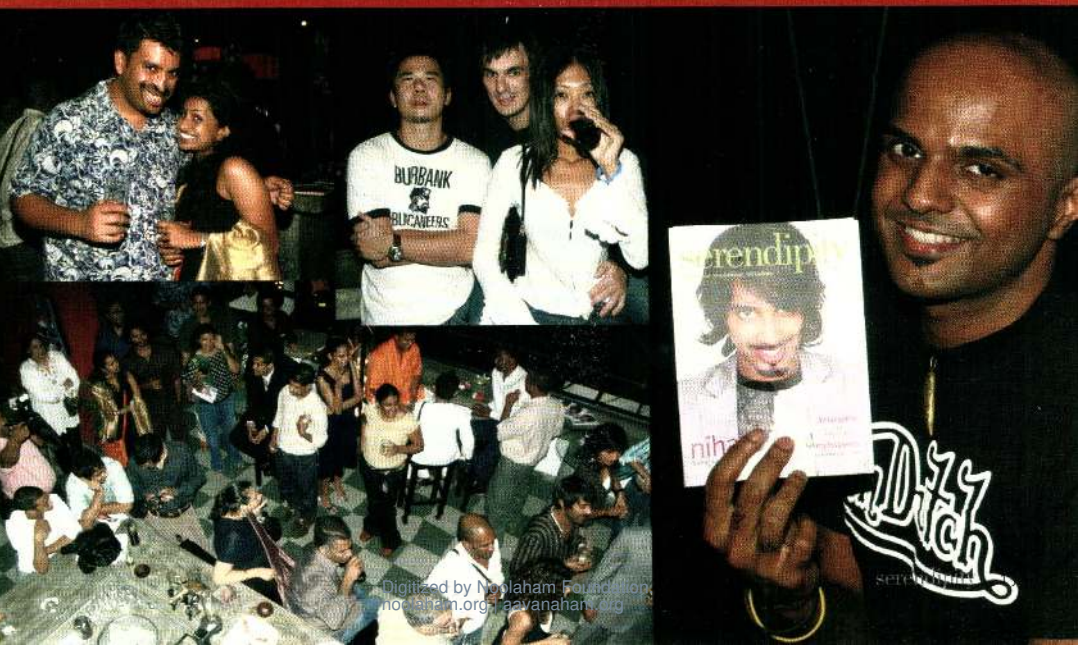
The night had a great serendipitous vibe, Sri Lankans from all over the world meeting each for the first time. Musicians talked to businessmen, poets chatted with professionals... exactly what Serendipity is all about.

Guests included Dominic and Nazreen Sansoni, the powerhouse couple behind cultural mecca

Barefoot; Yasmin Cader, from the newly re-launched Cinnamon Grand and advertising guru Neela Marikkar.

Our cover star, Delon chatted with DJ Nihal about hip hop and tings, and Serendipity was especially pleased to welcome fellow magazine editors Nimmi Harasgania (from Adhah and Machang) and Deshan Tennakoon (from Leisure Times), who along with his wife, theatrical dynamo Tracy Holsinger, rounded out a crowd of Colombo's cultural cognoscenti.

All in all, a great way to introduce ourselves to Colombo... thanks to everyone who came down and made it a marvellous night.





The Joker

Serendipity gets a call from our mate Janaka. ‘Come to Forest Hill’ he says, ‘I’ve found a Sri Lankan stand-up comedian’. Disbelieving him, we scoff. ‘There’s no such thing as a Sri Lankan stand-up comic’. Yet, curious, we drive out to the comedy club upstairs at the Hob, and some hours later we’re confronted by this amiable, friendly young man with a magnificent mullet hairdo.

Its frizzy, it sprays out all over the place and it makes him look like the bastard love child of Krystal Carrington from ‘Dynasty’ and Justin from the Darkness. ‘632’ he says, deadpan. ‘632... most people have just one bad hair day...’ The audience explodes into laughter and doesn’t stop for another half an hour. Meet Rohan Agalawatte, the world’s first (to our knowledge anyway) Sri Lankan stand-up comedian.

Over the course of his gently meandering show, he delivers finely crafted, beautifully delivered killer one liners that combine the laconic precision of American genius Steven Wright and the surreal observations of Eddie Izzard. We won’t give the show away, but there’s one line involving unicorns that is pure comedy genius and that we’ve been quoting for weeks. He’s warm and funny, interacting with the audience in a way that is both avuncular and lacerating at the same time. We caught up with him for a quiet chat.

Tell us a bit about your stand up career
I've been going for about 5 years now. I've played the Edinburgh Festival, the Leicester comedy festival, and lots of other venues around the country. Including Jongleurs, and the Avalon University Network. I've had my stand up broadcast on BBC Radio (7) and my sketches on BBC Radio 1. I am currently developing a TV sitcom.

What made you get into stand-up comedy in the first place?

The long hours - sometimes I have to work at least 20 mins.

Do you have a full-time job?

Yes.

What do your parents think about this job?

What they don't know won't hurt them, and they can't disinherit me.

What do you love about doing stand up comedy?

The fame, the adulation, the travel. The motorway cafes are things of beauty. Beauty I tell you.

Who are your comedy heroes?

Eddie Izzard. Woody Allen, Steve Martin

What's your favourite Sri Lankan thing?

The Sarong.

Is there a website or somewhere people can go to for more information?

They will find me listed in TIME OUT or in their horoscope.

What the press say

"Despite sharing his name with a region of Middle-Earth, Rohan has nothing to do with Lord of the Rings, unless you count a mane worthy of an Elven Chieftain. What he does do are deft, daft puns in a laconic style out of the Steven Wright book. Genuinely funny, and distinctly different from most of his peers"

The TIMES.

"loads of potential"

The STAGE

The Connector

Words: Soharni Tennekoon

Pix: Alefiya Akbarally

Raised in LA, Sri Lankan hip hop artist Delon has fused nature with nurture to produce a dazzling debut album, released on his own independent label, Ceylon Records.

Growing up in a society alien to his roots, Delon has seamlessly assimilated the cultures around him into his persona to an extent where his music mirrors his multiflavouring upbringing.

The album entitled *The Connection* tells the story of the familial connection between Indians, Sri Lankans, and Africans. Deftly mixing in elements of soca, salsa, and traditional Sri Lankan music, with overtones of Kanye West and the Neptunes, the album generates a killer sound. But to Delon, his Sri Lankan identity is the essence of his music and his songs are heavily inspired by his roots.

And lyrically, hip hop clichés of money, cars and loose women, have been replaced by an inventive take on cultural/music-based unity. “Rap music is such a powerful tool and, if used to educate, can help change the world,” he says.

Delon is refreshingly grounded and humble

despite his highly accomplished CV and Billboard chart success (Debut single ‘Calor de la Salsa’ went to No. 24 and there’s rumours of a Grammy nomination). Serendipity digs a little deeper to discover the truth about this walking success.

How and when did your love of hip-hop come about? And is it true that you weren’t exposed to TV or radio as a kid?

When I was 12 years old, I was exposed to radio, just not TV. It was at that time that I became a DJ, because at home I had nothing else to do but play basketball or play music.

What was the first album/record you bought?
TI, Urban Legend.

Who would you say are your favourite artists?

Dead Prez, Mos Def, The Roots, Jay-Z, Outkast (Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik) >>



Have you always loved performing?

Yes, I used to crack jokes and make everyone in the family laugh. I also used to sing - when I was a child we had school concerts and I sang in them.

Tell us about your background

Grew up in Los Angeles and Sri Lanka. School time was in Los Angeles and summers and Christmas in Sri Lanka. I started DJing when I was 12 and began rapping at 15, began producing at 19 and everything else has really been history.

By what are your lyrics inspired?

Bringing unity.

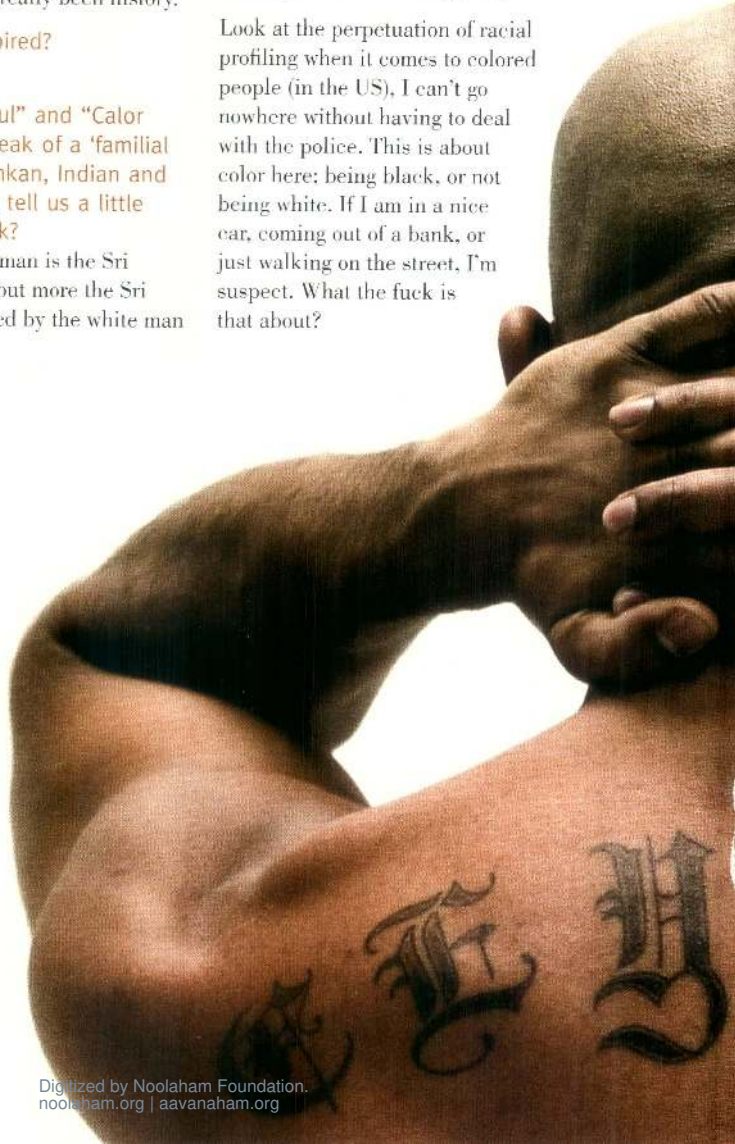
Your songs “Music 4 Da Soul” and “Calor De La Salsa” are said to speak of a ‘familial connection’ between Sri Lankan, Indian and African cultures - could you tell us a little about this cross-cultural link?

Well, it’s simple - the African man is the Sri Lankan man, and the Indian, but more the Sri Lankan, as we were not invaded by the white man as quickly.

See, we are island people; we have been inhabited by everyone at some time. Africans in Africa consider me African. The funny part is, that through the hundreds of years of rule by the “white man” they have got us to believe that we are NOT what we are. “Divide and Conquer”, the famous words of Alex the Great. We even have Swahili in our language, which is testimony to our roots. And this is looking at the subject in a race point of view. If you take the question to the States you see something else.

Look at the perpetuation of racial profiling when it comes to colored people (in the US), I can’t go nowhere without having to deal with the police. This is about color here: being black, or not being white. If I am in a nice car, coming out of a bank, or just walking on the street, I’m suspect. What the fuck is that about?

**“I teach unity,
through unity
we grow strong.
I am a black
Sri Lankan,
an African, an
Indian, a Latino.”**



I teach unity, through unity we grow strong. I am a black Sri Lankan, an African, an Indian, a Latino. Latin culture is so close to ours, after the 150 years of rule by the Portugese, you have words we use that are Spanish, like camisa, zapato, mesa. My island is a special island, with heritage much deeper than what the eye can see.

What message do you hope to get across through your music?

Have fun, be about yours, and understand the truth.

Your song "Lifetimes" speaks of racism - have you experienced a lot of this in LA?

What about within the music industry itself?

I have received a lot of racism in Los Angeles: getting hand-cuffed for running out of a bank, to getting guns pulled on me and police asking me if this is my car,

to actually pulling me over for no reason but to search my car for drugs. It's bullshit. No; racism is the industry.

So what advice do you have for other Sri Lankans who want to do what you do?

Keep hustling and be real.

What do you love about Sri Lanka?

The food, the people, everything!

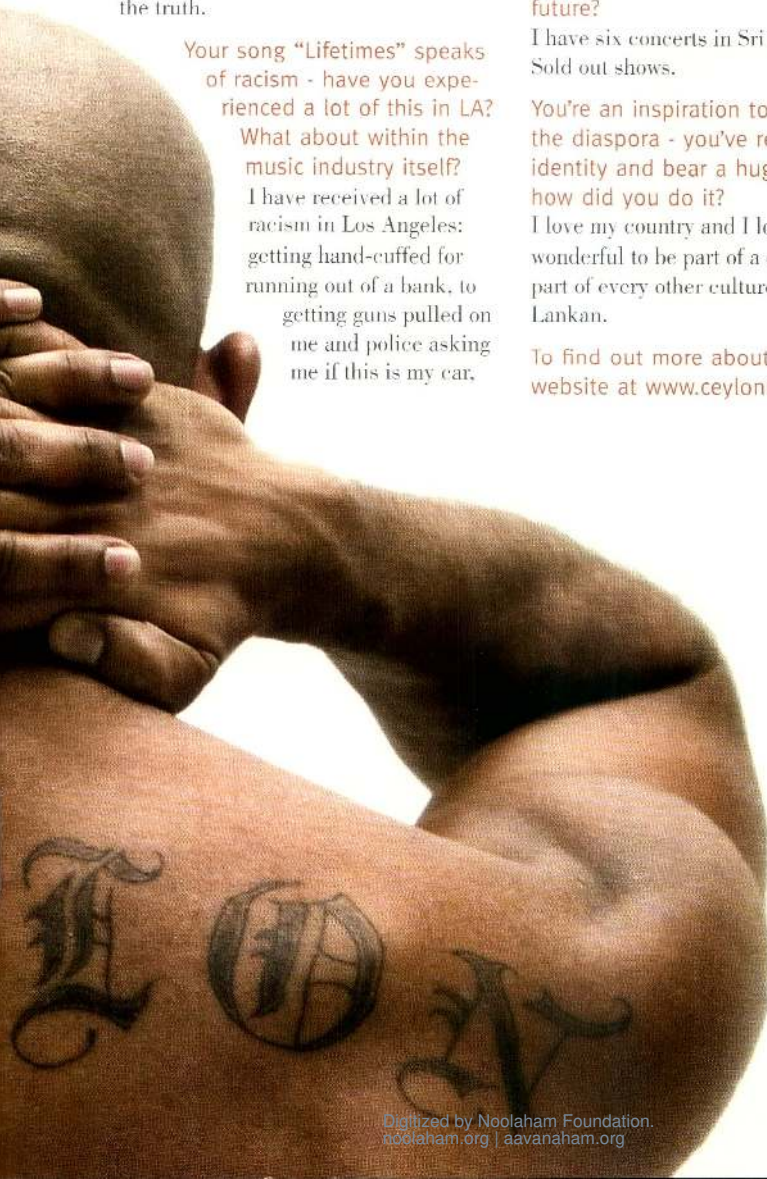
Any plans to tour Sri Lanka in the near future?

I have six concerts in Sri Lanka in December. Sold out shows.

You're an inspiration to younger members of the diaspora - you've retained your cultural identity and bear a huge sense of patriotism; how did you do it?

I love my country and I love my people, it is so wonderful to be part of a culture that is a piece in part of every other culture. I'm proud to be a Sri Lankan.

To find out more about Delon, visit his website at www.ceylonrecords.com





“I want to be the voice of a certain community”

The Player

Words: Soharni Tennekoon

Pix: Prashanth Visweswaran

Serendipity is a big fan of Krishan Maheson, the tall and rangy lyricist and vocalist whose lushly produced debut ‘Asian Avenue’ is the first Tamil hip-hop album out of Sri Lanka. It’s being released internationally by Universal Music, from Sri Lanka and India to Singapore and Malaysia. We caught up with this future M.V.P. for a quick chat.

When/how did your love of hip-hop come about?

When I was 15, I started off with my brother Gajan – we formed ‘Urban Sounds’. Our first track was ‘Smooth Flow’ with Rukshan Dole. And then we started making our own original hip-hop music. We were inspired by Brown Boogie Nation and Rude Boy Republic. Then my brother left and he worked for Bathya and Santhush. From there onwards I started working with Iraj, and we did a track called ‘Roots’ in about 1999/2000. From then on I’ve been working with Iraj. I helped him on his debut album. I launched Tamil rap music in Sri Lanka and did a song called ‘J town story’.

And from there onwards I wanted to do my own thing as I wasn’t getting much credit for what I was doing so I thought of moving out on my own and that’s when I started on ‘Asian Avenue’, which was the first Tamil hip hop album out of Sri Lanka. And it was the first album to get a Universal distribution label. It was quite a challenging project as I had very little time. I had to

come here for my studies. I had only a couple of months to do this project.

Who was responsible for the production & lyrics?

Sarjun Saleem, Yohan Rajapakse, Rukshan Mark and Nissal helped produce it. Iraj produced one track on my album. As far as lyrics are concerned, I wrote most of them, and Amalan and Ram Victor helped out. The whole album was done within a span of 3 months. I was working at the time and so I quit working and worked on the album.

What're you up to at the moment?

I'm in my final year in business and marketing at London Metropolitan University. Just finished some of my exams. But I'm doing some performances in the near future: I'm performing in Paris on 19th February and doing the Asian Avenue launch concert in Sri Lanka in June. I did a few shows in London too – I did a guest appearance at the Imperial College Tamil Society and the Tamil Youth Function in Greenford.

So tell us about the album 'Asian Avenue'

We shot a video in London and it's getting a fair amount of airplay on local TV stations and we're signing up with TV stations in England like TTN, Vectone and B4U Music. It's already released in Sri Lanka. We're hoping to launch the CD here. It was launched in Sri Lanka and India and will be released in Singapore and Malaysia. 'Asian Avenue' has a video CD plus an audio CD with a documentary on the making of an album.

Who are your influences?

Local artists (and the artists mentioned earlier) and Tamil artists like A.R. Rahman and Yuvan Shankar. In terms of international music A Tribe called Quest and Tupac Shakur and stuff on the commercial side.

If you could be any artist for a day who would it be?

Tupac.

Really? Why?

Because he was such a controversial figure; he was a voice for a whole community. And I want to be the voice for a certain community. But I don't

want my music to get too political.

What about your song 'J-Town story'?

J town story is a peace song, but from a Tamil person's perspective. It talks about what they have to go through, as a Tamil person, because of the ethnic conflict. It's a one-sided perspective of the ethnic conflict. It caused a lot of controversy. The state channels (in Sri Lanka) didn't want to play it. But YA TV ran interviews about the song and then people started to be more open about it.

How do you like living in London?

There's a lot of opportunity over here. Career-wise, music-wise. But I haven't studied the market here so I wouldn't know how to approach it, which I'm still learning.

If you could live anywhere in the world where would it be?

Sri Lanka. That's home y'know? Wherever you may be, at the end of the day, you want to go where you belong. Family, home, the weather, everything.

Anything new to look out for?

Yeah Sarjun is helping me produce some new tracks, we're going to release them as singles and they're in English unlike 'Asian Avenue' which is trilingual (Tamil, Sinhalese and English). It will probably be released in the next 2 months in London.

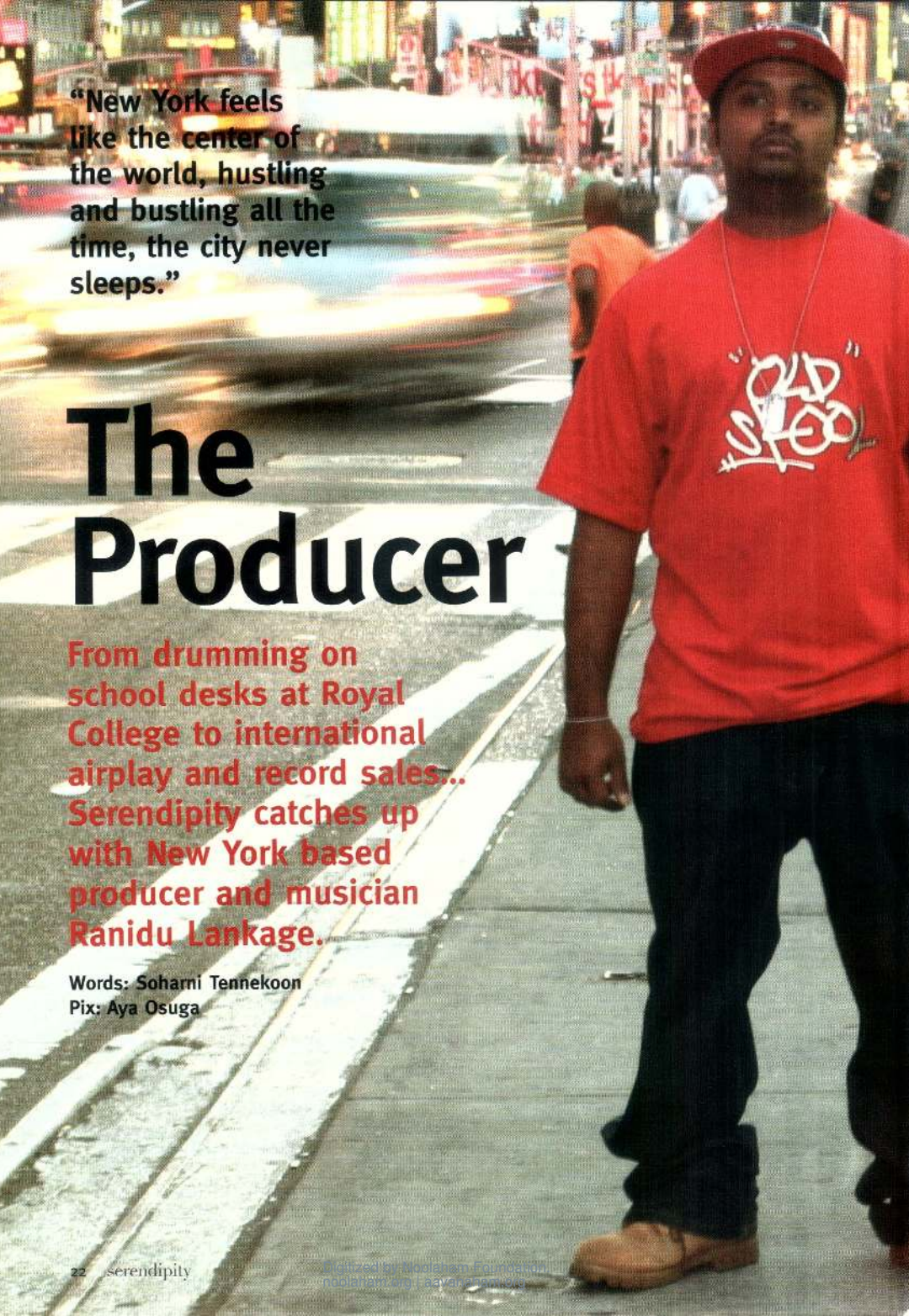
'Asian Avenue' is available in Sri Lanka and India and online at www.me.lk

You can also check out Krishan at www.krishanlive.com

Win a part in Krishan's next video!

SL2UK is one of the leading websites for young Lankans in the UK and they've teamed up with Krishan to offer you the chance to be in his next video.

If you think you have what it takes to be a 'video hottie' then visit; www.SL2UK.COM

A man wearing a red t-shirt with a white graphic that says "OLD SCHOOL", a red baseball cap, and dark pants stands on a city sidewalk at night. The background is a blurred street scene with lights and traffic. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

"New York feels like the center of the world, hustling and bustling all the time, the city never sleeps."

The Producer

From drumming on school desks at Royal College to international airplay and record sales... Serendipity catches up with New York based producer and musician Ranidu Lankage.

Words: Soharni Tennekoon
Pix: Aya Osuga

When did you first fall in love with hip hop?

I think it happened when I was around 12-13. Me and Iraj always used to be in to music and we started playing keyboards when we were quite young. But what got us really into hip hop was playing drum beats on the desks and pencil cases at intervals at Royal College. Some buddies of ours used to rap and I used to sing hooks as well. It was the start of a long lasting love for hip hop that culminated in our first on stage performance which was at a school talent show- and the song we performed was the fugees 'Ready Or Not'

Who are your favourite artists ?

That's a really hard question. In terms of hip hop- I love artists/ beatmakers such as Timbaland, Kanye West, Pharell Williams, Scott Storch, Lil Jon, Missy Elliott, Swizz Beats, JD and Just Blaze. I also love rappers like Jay Z , Tupac, Biggie and Ludacris.

I am also really into smooth R'n'B and I love Alicia keys, Mario, Mariah and many more.

In terms of the desi scene I got luv for what Rishi Rich, PMC, Raghav and the crew have done for the scene by taking it to the main stream. I love asian influenced hip hop and RnB I think its got so much flava.

In terms of pop musicians I greatly respect A.R Rahman for his work. Also in Sri Lanka I respect Ranga Dasanayake because he honestly is the most talented musician I have seen in a studio. My man Iraj is also someone who I got respect for in terms of coming up with all the biggest hip hop/ pop songs in Sri Lanka in the last year and half.

What are you listening to right now?

Lots of Asian RnB like Rishi rish, Jay sean, Raghav and stuff on the Bobby and Nihal show on BBC Radio One!! I think I get most of my latest asian R'n'B tunes off that show. I think its been the single most influential radio show in the desi urban scene. Plus Nihal is my Sri Lankan bombastic brother!!! I also listen to mainstream hip hop on BET and MTV jams.

Who has influenced you musically and lyrically?

Well I don't write a lot of my lyrics because when I do its so personal and deep that I feel naked. I am more inclined to thinking about a certain picture or mode when I compose and use it as a base to write the music and collaborate with writers to create the idea.

What do you miss about Sri Lanka ?

I miss everything about Sri Lanka. I miss my family, my best friends, the culture, the community, *the food, The beautiful weather, the beaches, the soul, the resilience in the face of adversity, even the pain and obstacles I had to fight growing up and in music...* I truly miss everything... I love Sri Lanka and it will always be my home no matter where I am and no country will replace Sri Lanka in my heart as my motherland. Things might not be perfect there but we don't realize what we have until you are in another part of the world. Thing might seemingly be better off outside of our shores but let me tell you once you get out there and see what the world has to offer you often wish that Sri Lanka didn't have this completely unwanted war going on. Because if we didn't have it, I think Sri Lanka would truly be heaven on earth!!!

What do you like about New York?

It feels like the center of the world. Hustling and bustling all the time, the city never sleeps. You get in the subway and hear 10 languages spoken in one carriage. And I feel like it is the face of America as the land of opportunity. It is also where most of the biggest business in the world takes place and its undoubtedly one of the most amazing places in the world to live in.

To find Ranidu's music: 'My album is sold in Sri Lanka through Ransilu enterprises and I believe some websites are selling my music online. Also our song 'Ahankara Nagare' can be found in record stores around the world on Essential Asian RnB on Outcaste and also in India on Asian Flavas Vol 1 on HOM records. Some of my tracks which I have collaborated with iraj on are up on iraj's website www.irajonline.com.'



hip hotels:

Lunuganga

garden of dreams...

Words: Afdhel Aziz

Pix: Dominic Sansoni

Called 'The World's Most Stylish New Destination' by GQ magazine, Serendipity gets an exclusive look at Sri Lanka's newest and most discrete luxury villa hideaway – Geoffrey Bawa's former country estate, the magical Lunuganga.





“Walking through Lunuganga was like walking through the gardens of some Italian nobleman of the Renaissance”

Some years ago I was privileged enough to be allowed to visit Lunuganga. At that time, Mr. Bawa was still in residence and visitors could only walk through the grounds in the afternoon hours when he was taking his siesta. We were greeted by members of his staff and then assigned a rather unusual tour guide – a dog. Somehow this did not seem out of place at all and we spent a pleasant couple of hours being guided at a meandering pace by our canine companion, a black Labrador, who seemed to know the gardens intimately.

Walking through Lunuganga was like walking through the gardens of some Italian nobleman of the Renaissance, one blessed with exquisite taste and an eye for magnificent vistas and intimate, sylvan glades. His landscaping showed a gift for turning the wilderness into a series of fascinating rooms, furnished with elegant statuary and giant stone masks. The whole place is redolent of calm and serenity. This labour of love began some fifty years ago when Bawa brought the property after some arduous wrangling with the previous owner. Over time, it has become his piece de resistance, an ‘infinite garden of the mind’, and it was indeed fitting that it was here that he was cremated when

he died at the age of 83. It makes a fittingly noble resting place.

From December 2005, individuals will be able to stay in one of 6 en-suite bedrooms available in the house, the studio or on Cinnamon Hill or rent the whole property in its entirety. It is perhaps the most magical garden retreat in the world.

“This is how I found it, abandoned and uncared for, one of the most exciting moments was the opening up of the vistas, not based on pre-arranged formality, the garden planned itself”
- Geoffrey Bawa

Geoffrey Bawa is regarded not only as Sri Lanka’s premier architect but certainly also as one of the most important Asian architects of the Twentieth Century. His gift for blending Modernist principles of space, form and function together with Sri Lankan construction methods made him someone who’s unique influence was always recognizable – whether in designing the monumental splendour of the Sri Lankan parliament or designing the most intimate of personal residences.

Bawa’s family history shows a typically Sri Lankan conflation of cultural and racial >>



“Bawa’s designs have inspired legions of Sri Lanka’s architects”

influences. His father, “Benny” Bawa, was a lawyer of Muslim descent and a prominent King’s Counsel, his mother a lady of impeccable Dutch Burgher ancestry. Born in 1919, he was educated at Cambridge as a lawyer, but only became an architect in the 1950’s at the age of 38, after studying at London’s progressive Architectural Association as a mature student.

Bawa remained a Modernist at heart but showed a unique flair in merging indigenous building styles and techniques into his work, creating a style that was uniquely his own. Above all, he believed that a building only really came to life when the core concept was introduced to the context of its surroundings. Out of this was generated what he called ‘the genius of the place’ – that mysterious, unquantifiable quality that gives a building its distinctive atmosphere and personality. He believed that a building’s true significance lay in the hearts and minds of its users and that this would change and evolve with time.

Bawa’s designs have inspired legions of Sri Lanka’s architects who have in turn gone on to have an impact on the way generations of Sri Lankans have lived, worked and played. In celebrating the islands rich history and cultural diversity he developed a unique new architectural vocabulary that truly evokes ‘the genius of the place’. No other architect has done more to shape the way Sri Lankans live and work and relax. For this he will always be respected, admired and loved. And if you want to immerse yourself in his imagination, and see the world through his eyes, there is no better place to do it than Lunuganga.

Thanks to Serendib magazine where portions of this article first appeared.

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Ugly Babies

Words: Shehan Karunatilaka

One Sri Lankan man's valiant trek through Europe. 36 days, 11 countries, 1 pair of sneakers. I'm glad I did it, but I'm ultra glad it's over.

They say hearing about someone's travels is like looking at someone's baby pics. Only marginally less interesting. I'm showing you my babies anyway. So you can see how ugly they all are.

Travel Tips

The first thing you do on arrival is grab at leaflets, maps and brochures to find what's worth seeing. But you need to wade through mountains of advertising fluff to get to any truth. Not unlike the catfood leaflets I wrote to finance this jaunt. I have now tasted my own medicine. And it is poison.

I met Scott the Scot in Rome and I asked him to compare Edinburgh with Glasgow. "If yae wann tae see Art, Architecture and Culture, go tae Edinbo," he said. "If yae wanna git rat-arsed and tickle some fanny, come tae Glasgow."

If only the Lonely Planet were that concise.

Good habits

I've been out of bed well before 7 a.m. every day. This ain't because of any new found zest for life. It has to do with ventilation

Dorms stuff 6-10 people into a room. In big cities like Amsterdam, Berlin and Barcelona, they pack up to 20. The windows only open a few inches to prevent drunks from throwing objects or themselves outside.

All this means you wake to a room teeming with warm carbon dioxide, sweat and nocturnal farts. No matter how rancid the showers are, you run for them, just to taste air that hasn't been filtered through another human.

Cartoon Food

In Prague the menu comes with cute cartoon renditions of the dead animal you are about to de-

vor. Duck Curry has a shot of Donald; Chicken Chausser has Tweety Pie; Pork Chops, who else... Porky Pig.

I order Garlic Rabbit and Venison Steak. Because they have pictures of Bambi and Thumper next to them. And the thought of them skinned and skewered for my pleasure makes my mouth water, my stomach rumble and... I won't go further south.

Who knows? If Sewer Rat Burger were marketed with shots of Mickey and Minnie, it may yet become a delicacy.

Balkan Humour

The train to Sarajevo stops at 18 checkpoints between Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. At the first, a Croat military policeman bangs on my door, salutes and demands my passport. "Sri Lanka..." he sneers "You help Serbia in war?"

How do you answer that one? It's taken me years to fathom who the Serbs, the Croats and the Bosnians were. And decades to figure out who the bad guys were. (Hint: All of them) If I answer yes, and he's Serb, maybe I get a chauffeur-driven tank ride around the Balkans. If he's not, maybe I get ethnic cleansed and chucked in a mass grave.

"Sri Lanka... no fight...no Serbia." I stammer, hoping that sounding like a gimp would bridge the language barrier. He slaps my back so hard I feel my shoulders dislocate and roars with laughter. In other words, he has been, as the English say, winding me up, or as the Sri Lankans say, taking me for a bite.

There are 17 more stops on that train. That 'joke' is replayed no less than 4 times. First thing I do when I get home is get my shoulders x-rayed.

My biggest shame

A rainy night in Salzburg. I miss my train, arrive at the Hostel drenched and exhausted. Two Danish girls take pity and invite me to empty a bottle of Chardonnay with them. The light dims, conversation flows, they lean in closer... before I know it, I'm signed up for... a Sound of Music tour.

Four hours on the Fraulein Maria bicycle ride, >>>



traipsing through flower gardens, castles, streams. The tour's full of middle-aged women, families, camp men, silly girls and a few other bewildered heterosexual guys.

The bus driver has just one CD on loop. Guess which? A bit of Radiohead, perhaps? The first Black Sabbath record, maybe? Nope. You know the album I speak of. Edelweiss, Doh-a-Beer, Yodelay-Hi-Ho, Have you met a bitch called Maria and 20 other golden greats.

And at the climax of the tour, they drive up that hill, we get out, the ladies put on nun's habits, spread their arms and screech, "The hills are alive..." Sounding and looking nothing like Julie Andrews. I should've walked into the mountains with whatever was left of my dignity. But then I realize... I look kinda cool in a nun's habit...

Going Dutch

He's an aging busker. I say I'm on my way to see Tracy Chapman play at the Paradiso. He says I may not believe him, but he slept with Tracy Chapman 20 years ago. I reply, he may not believe me, but I cried myself to sleep listening to Tracy Chapman 20 years ago.

Now sad, corny wordplay hardly qualifies as high wit. But in an Amsterdam hash bar, even a grunt can come out sounding like the collected works of Oscar Wilde. He bursts out laughing and buys me drinks for the rest of the night.

He tells me how he slept with Suzanne Vega, Sheryl Crow and Eddie Brickell. How he gets high with Crosby, Stills and Nash. And every time Neil Young comes to Amsterdam, they go to the red light district together.

I end up missing the Tracy Chapman gig. It's not often that you hear stories taller than your own. It's not often that in the land that invented the term "going dutch", someone pays for your drinks all night.

Ying and Yang

Some days you're surrounded by Bosnian urchins threatening to pelt you with fruit unless you hand over your camera. Other days, you're on a

French beach, sipping Sangria, surrounded by a sea of topless women.

Travel impresses on you the ying and yang-ness, the sometimes-you're-the-hammer-sometimes-you're-the-nail-ness of it all. No matter how much you plan, some days will rock, some will stink. You go with the flow.

To think that after growing up surrounded by temples, I had to visit a topless beach to understand the essence of Buddhism.

Best Argument

Was it on metaphysics in a Parisian cafe over a cask of rouge with beret wearing socialists? Or on global politics in a seedy Berlin nightclub with chain-smoking drag queens?

Neither.

It was in a family hostel in Vienna, over a jar of marmalade with 4 Austrian kids, ages 8 - 12. The topic? Was Prisoner of Azkaban a superior work to Goblet of Fire.

These kids were virtuoso musicians on a school field trip to Salzburg who spoke 4 languages fluently. Who, despite my best efforts, managed to convince me that even though Azkaban boasted circular time-travel plots and characters like Sirius Black, Goblet was in fact, quote, da shit, unquote.

More Smart Kids

In the Gaudi museum. He looks like he's been breast fed till the age of 10. He runs around like he owns the place and speaks as if everything he says is of great import. In other words, a typical American.

Opinion is mixed on Antonio Gaudi. Some say genius. Some say Gaudy. I reckon he's pretty cool. End of Art history lecture.

"Mommy, I want to be like Gaudi!" screams the kid as I picture his severed head hanging from one of the Spaniard's turrets. His mother, in the typical schoolteacher tone that parents of obnoxious kids have, replies, >>

“ But honey, what do ya wanna be? A painter, a sculptor, an architect...?”

I visualise her skull dangling next to the brat’s, when the kid comes out with the most brilliant justification for human ambition I’ve ever heard. “ I just want to do something that people look at and go... WOW...”

I gaze at the lump of lard in awe. Don’t we all?

Sri Lankan Story

Two Argentinian girls tell me of their visit to Sri Lanka. They like the country, but can’t stand how the men ogle. Especially the manager at the resort they’re at. He gawks at them sunbathing and scribbles in a notebook. When they catch him, he grins.

On their last day he gives them an envelope and asks them to open it in their rooms. It contains an illustration of him as a two-tongued monster, performing oral sex on each of them. He’s captured their nakedness in startling detail. The caption says, “If you like this, meet me on beach tonight.”

They lock their doors and check out of there at dawn. I’m amused but can’t help feeling sympathy for my fellow Lankan. The muppet probably still believes that the way to a woman’s heart is through pornographic hand drawings. Bless.

Stereotypes

People think of Germans as humourless, closet fascists. What scheisse. I found them warm, smart, funny and surprisingly egoless. And more than willing to confront their past.

Tiny example. Outside Humboldt University, in the square which once held Nazi book burnings, there are now stalls selling those same books at half price. There’s a little memorial with a quote from German author Heinrich Heine, written a century before the rise of the Third Reich.

“If you start burning books, soon you will be burning people.”

Now that prophecy (a) makes Nostradamus look like a two-bit sarsthara karaya and (b) tells you that it is possible for a society to address its past and learn from it, no matter how bloody or horrific.

Out of all the capitals I visited, Berlin is the only one I’d seriously consider living in.

Truth Hurts

Ibiza is Sodom and Gomorrah with chavs, spice girls, lads and slappers. It’s my last stop and I’m knackered. So I decide to walk around and people watch. The only problem with people watching is that other people watch you. A chav points at me. “Look, it’s a black Bob Geldof!”

I go to the nearest WC and look in the mirror. Goggle eyes, unshaven jowls, scruffy hair, slouching shoulders, crumpled shirt. The cretin was right. If I were fairer, I could’ve organised Live Aid.

That’s all folks

If that was exhausting to read, be glad you weren’t there. And be glad you’re not here now. I’m about to take my socks off for the first time in 36 days. I may require a chisel.



Shehan writes ads, plays bass, dances like a moron and lives in Colombo. His favourite Sri Lankan things include Portello, Unawatuna, karola, pirated CDs, and procrastination. He hopes to venture east, once his bank account has recovered from recent haemorrhaging. Send porn or abuse to shehankaru@yahoo.co.uk

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A member of citigroup

inside Jaffna

Words: Prasanna Weerawardane

Pix: Dominic Sansoni

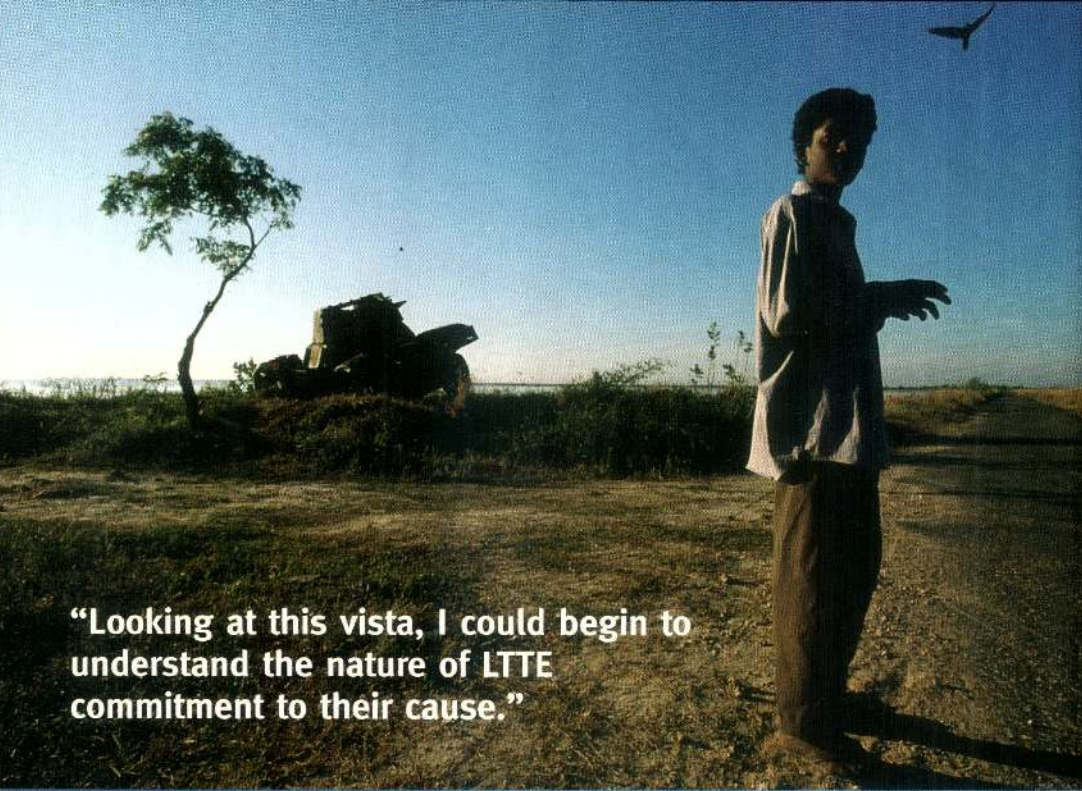
Growing up in Colombo in the far off 60's and 70's, Jaffna was a curiosity to middle class Sinhalese like me. Then came the war, and Jaffna was centered on our radar screens, but it was a no go area. There was a curtain of palmyrah, razor wire and anti-tank obstacles over the north. Now peace had arrived, and the chance to visit Jaffna had come.

Of all the journeys I had made in Sri Lanka, this was the most emotionally charged, a journey to a war which had just been halted. It was a journey that I will not forget. The dust of the north has been shaken off my footwear and clothes, but etched in crystal are the memories of Jaffna.

It was a glorious sunset, an orange backdrop to a masterwork by Cezanne. I was about to capture it on film when I realised we had company. A little girl with large eyes had stopped by us. "Which country are you from?" she asked me in Tamil. "Colombo". I said. "No!" She said shaking her head emphatically.

The fact that I was dressed like a typical tourist with a camera dangling round my neck, here on a dusty road in the Vanni jungle made me quite exotic. But I was from Colombo - a foreign country to many people in the north. >>





“Looking at this vista, I could begin to understand the nature of LTTE commitment to their cause.”



We had got to Anuradhapura and Vavuniya with time to spare. My partner, Jenny and I were travelling together. For her it was work, and for me the very first visit in my 40+ years. Vavuniya was just another small town now. Three cheerful young men manned the LTTE checkpoint at Omanthai. There were many heavy vehicles waiting to be processed. A large number of vans and buses were waiting to be checked, returning from Jaffna.

We had lunch at Killinochi, at the LTTE café, next to the Govt.Vet's office: delicious food, Jaffna style. It was packed out with diners, but pretty orderly. I wondered how many of the young guys serving were cadres. Was it possible that the waiter who brought our meal had exchanged his cyanide capsules for dishes of brinjals? I would have loved to have found out. This was the only canteen between Omanthai and Jaffna, and it was good barometer of civilian traffic—right now traffic was very heavy indeed. It was hot, the heat being punctuated by a dusty wind. Back on the approach to Jaffna, occasional patches of scrub on the roadside. We passed the bombed out remains of the Paranthan Chemical Works. Walking by the roadside was a male LTTE cadre, a 4-pack of grenades for his RPG strapped on his back. It was a sobering reminder, if one needed it, that this peace was still on a hair trigger.

We arrived at Elephant Pass, the white sign now obscured. It was an immense vista. On both sides of the road, shimmering in the heat, was a flat plain broken up by occasional clumps of Palmyrah and scrub. Here and there lay rusting and broken bits of metal: the detritus of war. This was the scene of climactic battles, of great heroism and carnage. Given the immensity of the Army camp, it was hard to believe that it could be overrun. But overrun it the LTTE did, at the third try. Looking at this vista, I could begin to understand the nature of LTTE commitment to their cause. I also wondered about the wisdom of having a camp, however fortified and seemingly impregnable, in the middle of enemy territory. Didn't just such a scenario occur at Dien Bien Phu, that debacle for French forces in Vietnam?

The French, the middle of their fortified camp on a mountain, were laid siege by General Vo Nguyen Giap, Commander of Vietnamese forces, and after a fierce battle lasting days, overran the camp in spite of reinforcements rushed by air. Elephant Pass too, couldn't be supplied by road, the SLAF being the only lifeline. What a military debacle this had been.

The whole area on both sides of the road was mined. There were two wrecks of armored cars by the roadside, and buses from Colombo had stopped. It was a Kodak moment, people posing for snaps on them. Didn't they realise the danger from mines? The rusting remains of an LTTE barricade-busting truck were enacting similar scenes. It was like these people had a death wish. Apparently very much in demand were the signs put up by the army, UN etc warning of mines present. Visitors from Colombo and elsewhere loved to pull them out for souvenirs. Another example of the famous happy-go lucky approach to life we exhibit regularly. Not very smart, though.

The sunbaked, arid grey sand of this stretch held many secrets for me. Years ago I had watched the cinematic masterpiece that was Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, his makeover of Hamlet, and there was a signature scene of his which remained rooted in memory: a climactic battle in slow motion, the soundtrack being a low key orchestral dirge. Explosions, bodies flying through the air, horses screaming, flashing swords, pikes and all the gory panoply of war. Looking at this wasteland at Elephant pass, if I shut my eyes I could imagine such a scenario, magnified a thousand times. The chatter of AK 47s, the howl of RPGs, the thunder of artillery, and the anguish of thousands dying. All in slow motion. This was our version of Flanders Fields, that charnel house of World War I, in the mud of Belgium. How many bodies lay beneath these sands? What tides of blood had washed over these arid wastes.

Jaffna city seemed green, in spite of war damage: skeletons of bombed out houses in narrow streets. The size of the roads and houses reminded me of Trincomalee: this would have been a city in >>>

“Walking down the narrow streets, white sanded, past houses both decrepit yet quietly substantial, I had a sense of otherness. This was not a city in the mainstream of Sri Lanka in the 21st century.”



a time warp had the tragedy of war not occurred. Now it was a city warped and scarred by war.

We found our guesthouse, run by a very nice lady, Mrs. Manoharan and stretched our legs. The street we were in was very green, lots of trees, and all the houses except at the very end were intact. There were other guests as well. Another vehicle from Colombo had arrived just before us, and disgorged four people, who got the best room in the house, with an attached bath. But our room was okay, although small. It looked out into a wide balcony into which I wandered: in a reddening sky, fruitbats were flying home, their sharp-edged wings outlined black against the setting sun.

We went for a short walk. There was a medium-sized Hindu temple about two streets down, opposite which was a crossroads. There was an army bunker here, with the house behind pocked with bullet holes. The streets were full of people on bikes and on foot. A few 60's and 70s era Austins were on the road. Looking as we did, and me wearing shorts, we stood out here. People gazed at us. It was not an unpleasant sensation, as is usual when one gets stared at, more a sense of wisfulness. Visitors from another country. It was noticeable how many bunkers and barriers remained in the streets here. Back in Colombo, security barriers were a distant memory, but here, the reality was of a city still under siege.

Dinner that night was rice and seafood curry, with Brinjals and murunga, Jaffna style. Delicious. There was a power cut early evening which lasted for over an hour. It had been a long day, and we slept early, woken intermittently by power cuts. It was good to be in Jaffna, this city which still seemed to have a sense of bygone grace: a grand old lady who had seen more destruction and death in two decades than most countries would see in a 100 years. A tribute to the human spirit.

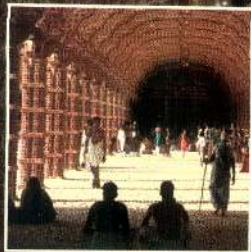
I woke up to a clear and cloudless sky: the morning light was bright and clear, marvellous for photography. It had been a night of dogs barking incessantly, beeping of trishaws and bikes. The sounds of peacetime. A radio from next door was blasting out Tamil devotional music. Jaffna had

woken up long before I did.

Breakfast was thosais and curry, the thosais paper thin, with a superb kiri hodi. I ate like one possessed. My partner had work to do in the Katcheri, leaving me to wander around in the morning. Our guesthouse was close to the Nallur Temple. Perhaps I would take a walk down there. I saw the other guests who had come yesterday, and started talking to them, a middle-aged couple. They were from Colombo as well, accompanying their two cousins who were visiting from USA. The lady was dissatisfied with what was on offer for sightseeing in Jaffna. She said "there's nothing to see": what did she expect, Disneyworld, with Prabhakaran togged up as Mickey mouse? It was like she had no idea of the history of this city, of what had happened here. Stifling my urge to point her in the direction of Florida, I set off on my amble.

Right at the bottom of our street was this small shrine to Thileepan, the LTTE martyr who fasted to death during the IPKF time. It was his death anniversary, and every street and wall had tributes to him. The LTTE remembered their dead well. Walking down the narrow streets, white sanded, past houses both decrepit yet quietly substantial, I had a sense of otherness. This was not a city in the mainstream of Sri Lanka in the 21st century. This was a page from an old, old illustrated book from a bygone era: when Sri Lanka was whole, unfractured, innocent of wholesale massacres, burning libraries, burning bodies and the lexicon of war. I had the strongest feeling that this was what much of this island was like long ago. In houses such as these, generations had lived, dreamt and died, their passing adding to the rich tapestry of culture and life that had been Serendib.

We arrived at our destination, the Vishnu temple of Point Pedro. Turning a corner we came into a dense throng of people. This was Sunday, the last day of the temple festival, and it was a big day. A water bowser was slowly wending its way through the narrow roads, spraying the heated road with water. It was incandescently hot now, close to >>



“From what little I had seen of Jaffna, it would thrive and prosper if left alone by opposing forces. It had a vitality and resilience which shone thorough.”

mid-day. There were rows of stalls selling food, flowers, incense and whatever else.

The kovil was huge, and quite stunning; the main gopuram rose up into the blue sky, its tiers packed with figures and ornamentation. Pale orange, white and touches of blue were the primary colours. At its base were depictions of Hanuman and Sugriva, perhaps, and at the pinnacle was Vishnu. The structure which housed the Vel-cart too was huge, like a mini-airplane hangar, tastefully adorned in mythical motifs. The cart was a covered chariot, in a light mahogany colour, heavily decorated.

All around, passing to and fro, were waves of humanity, the ladies dressed in their Sunday best. We parked under the shade of some giant trees on the perimeter, and got out. It was then I realised the point of paying penance to a God. The white sand underneath was hot enough to fry eggs. And meanwhile there were thousands of people who seemed not to notice. I had to do a frenzied hiphop routine to take photos; my God was my camera, I would gladly pay penance to capture this scene. It was from another world. All it needed was a few conch shell blasts and an entry by the divine charioteer himself: I could well believe that he was just about to take part, with an entourage of mythical beasts. To cap it all, was this extraordinary vignette in front of the Gopuram. Mounted on a trailer was this contraption made of bamboo and wooden strips, like a small crane, with a small shrine at the apex. Dangling from this on four strips of rope, was a man with hooks driven into the flesh of his back. In a white sarong, with a garland around his neck, carrying a trident in his right hand, he hung a few feet above the heads of the onlookers. Here was the epitome of penance.

It was easy to imagine that the people living in the middle of such stunning beauty were very lucky. But this was a tough land, it's fruits hard-won, the people smoked dark by the sun. Great sunsets and wildlife didn't feed hungry stomachs. They didn't need a war to impose suffering-it had always been a part of the equation for the villages

here. The war had increased that factor exponentially. If these regions were to develop, it would need a massive effort by all those concerned with life here. The LITTE had to be an integral part of this. But there had been so many failed promises before, with the billions of aid funds being either misspent, wasted, or gone astray. With the expectation of globalisation now paramount worldwide, how could villagers in the Vanni fit in, when the daily struggle to survive was the need of the hour?

From what little I had seen of Jaffna, it would thrive and prosper if left alone by opposing forces. It had a vitality and resilience which shone thorough. Given time and an equal playing field, it could outstrip Colombo in importance, with it's proximity to India. The Vanni was vast, and it's resources could be vast as well, given a bit of fine tuning. It should not be done by ham-fisted technocrats from Colombo, but by its own people, who needed a little help to help themselves.

We left, and I looked back at the dusty red road leading into the jungle shrine. Small boys crowded around a van going in through the barrier, trying to sell peanuts. Past Vavuniya, nearing Anuradhapura, we slowed just by the 2nd Battalion Army Engineers HQ, where the memorial to their fallen is erected. The names were many, but still a miniscule number of the total fallen in this war. Santayana's reminder that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it came to mind. It is time to make a new history now, of renewal and rebuilding. We may not get another chance at it.

Prasanna Weerawardane is now working at Angkor Wat in Cambodia as a Field Archaeologist for a New York-based NGO, World Monuments Fund. He says 'My partner, Jenny, is partly Tamil, and helped me to open my eyes to what it meant to be Tamil in Colombo post 1983. She has been a great influence on me since 1996. I guess I have tried to stay objective and maintain some sort of Sri Lankan identity, rather than being Singhalese, which to my mind is rather limiting.'

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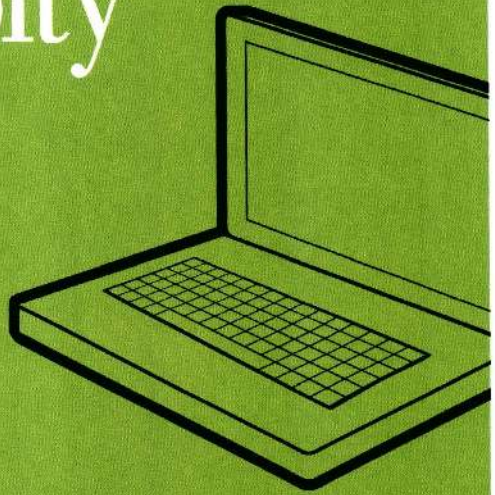
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Oasis of Calm

**Meet David and Sharon Tissera
- the young Sri Lankan couple
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Graduating from King's College London, David Tissera is a professional dentist with almost ten years in private practice in London. He feels the increasing popularity of dental spas is driven by the desire to focus on what the patients want – peace of mind.

He says ‘I think attitudes in dentistry have changed and it is now all about delivering dentistry in a stress-free way. Having visited lots of spas, I found that treatments like massages and aromatherapy were conducive to relaxation but very few people were taking that approach in London.’

Sharon Tissera has a background in fashion, having graduated from Central St Martins with a degree in Textile Design. She has a successful business designing concepts for clients such as Kenzo and Calvin Klein. With clients in New York, Paris and Tokyo, she works long hours and as such appreciated the promise of a dental spa.

‘I’m a stressed out, highly driven person so I value the time I get in spas, to look after myself and re-energise. When David and I started talking about setting up a business, we realised that there was a lot of potential in creating something unique for Londoners.

David also has extensive experience with nervous patient programmes. ‘At Aura we believe in taking a holistic approach, creating a climate where we use the five senses to alleviate stress and deliver calm. It’s about taking the elements of dentistry that people find stressful – the sounds, the smells - and turning them on their head. We want people to feel relaxed from the moment they step in through the door.’

The attention to patients is also seen in details like opening hours. ‘It’s not about churning out patients like a factory – it’s about taking the time to get to know them and their needs. That’s why we have opening hours to suit our patients – like on Saturday mornings and weekday evenings.’

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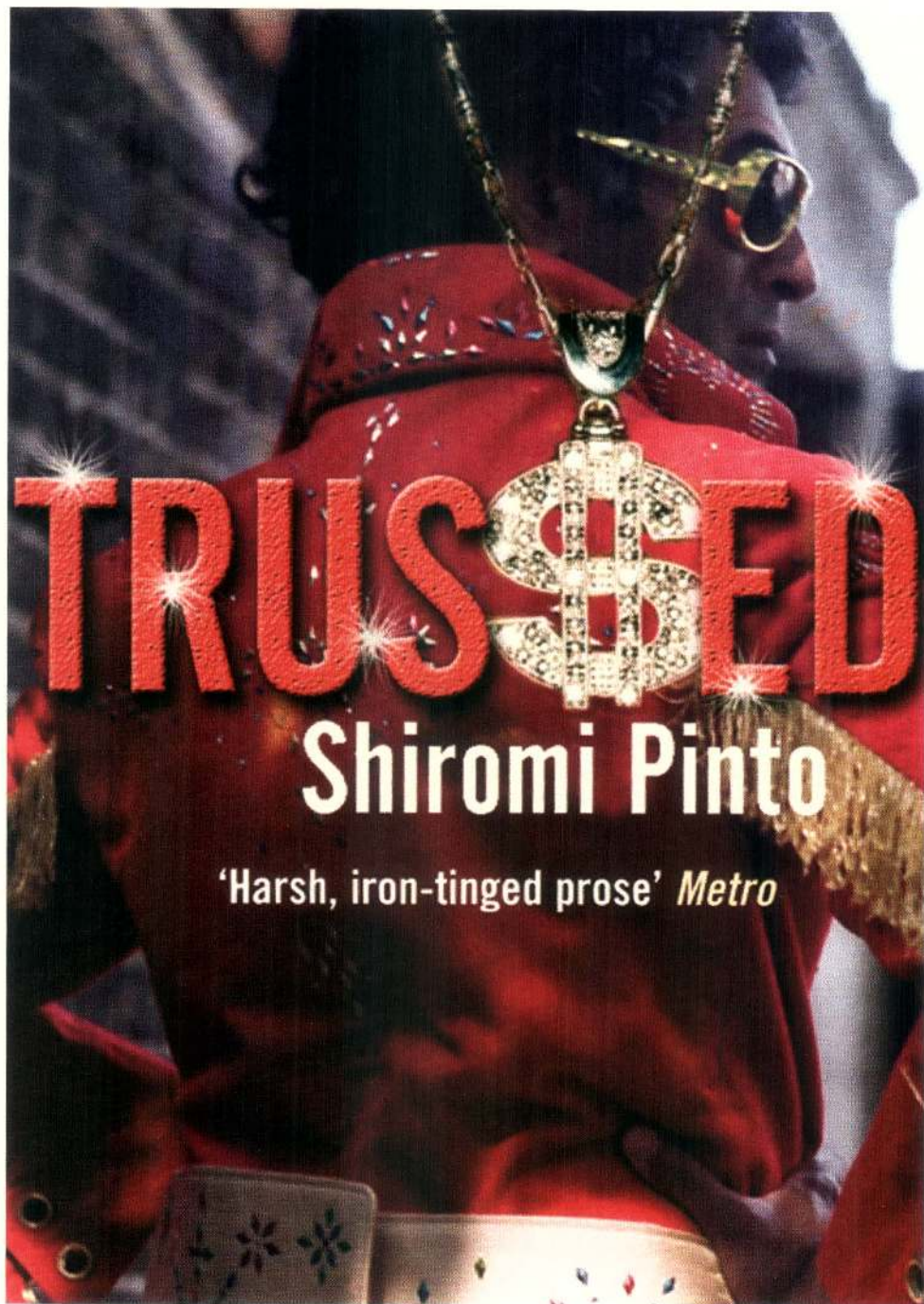
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TRUSSED

Shiromi Pinto

'Harsh, iron-tinged prose' *Metro*

Serendipity is proud to introduce you to the work of sizzling new talent, writer Shiromi Pinto. Of Sri Lankan descent, she was born in London in 1971 and raised in Montreal where she studied religion and non-Western histories in Canada. After doing an M.A. at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, she traveled widely, directing a short educational film in Mali amongst other things. She has written numerous short stories and now lives in London.

Her debut novel *Trussed* reads like a cross between Elmore Leonard and Monica Ali. It's the tale of three vibrant characters, each richly characterized, whose paths cross in perverse and compelling ways. There's Asma De Zoysa: by day she's a 'good Sri Lankan girl', living with her aunt and uncle in South Harrow, scouring the Guardian newspaper for jobs. But by nightfall she turns into Vinda (short for Vindaloo), a dominatrix who gets paid for her relationship with Derek the human rights lawyer, a relationship based on pleasure and pain.

Then there's her cousin, golden-voiced Angel, an Elvis impersonator who arrives in London on the run from America, carrying with him an opulent secret; one of the King's original black and red jumpsuits, as dazzling as the sun, studded with rhinestones, rubies and garnets.

'The cape pulsed on Angel's bed, capturing and ricocheting light across the room. He was still stunned by its opulence, still forced to catch his breath. And next to it, fringed and carefully embroidered: the black and red jumpsuit. Part matador, part Cisco Kid with an Amerindian flavour, the one-piece was a triumph of fine needlework and intaglied leather. Angel gazed at these treasures, sighing. He could see – feel – Elvis' breath rising from their jewelled skins.'

But Angel has no time to revel in the glories of the costume for too long – for on his trail, is Regis a relentless bounty hunter; phlegmatic on the outside, but volcanic on the inside, battling his own demons as he navigates the streets of London in search of Angel.

Sassy, flamboyant and hugely enjoyable, *Trussed* marks the arrival of a major new talent. Serendipity caught up with Shiromi recently to talk about hoppers, astral projection and Jesus.

What made you pick the subject matter you did?

Trussed really began by fluke. I was walking through Russell Square one day and saw one of those prostitute postcard adverts on the sidewalk. All I could see were the words: 'hotter than a vindaloo' and I thought, I really can't let this one go. When I got home that evening, I began writing what would later become the book's opening scene.

Vinda

My arm. My arm rises and falls, rises and falls. I can feel the sweat building under the skin of my thighs. My arm. It refuses to tire. It falls with mechanical regularity, like a well-wound metronome.

'Vinda', he says. 'Vinda, you're a – ' He is trembling. I am a wall and my breasts are towers.

'Shut up!' I am standing over his cowering body, knees apart. His pale flesh shivers. He is moaning. I force a stiletto heel into his forehead and hear his knees crack against the laminate floor. He whimpers.

'Feels good, doesn't it?' I whisper. 'Like a cold, hard silver bullet.' His belly-button dilates and constricts in time to my mental metronome. I remove my foot, sneering at the vague, trapezoidal hollow left on his skin. His eyes are wide, almost panicked. He is moaning and slavering and telling me he wants to suck my heel.

I turn around and thrust my buttocks toward him. 'Tell me I have a nice arse,' I growl. I can feel his eyes roaming over the leather seat of my pants, devouring the mottled flesh which squeezes out from underneath and through my netted tights.

His voice is tearful. 'It's gorgeous,' he says. I feel something wet touch my right buttock. >>

“Didn’t I tell you?
I’m immortal.”



'Don't touch,' I shout, snapping round to face him. I thrash my whip on the floor, sending tiny dust moats scrambling. Every man hath his sword upon his thigh. He blanches. 'Did I say you could touch me?' Another crack of the whip. 'Did I?' He knots himself into a foetal tuck. His blue-white skin is creased pink and is as slick and fragile as an unbaked meringue. 'Answer me.'

'N-n-no.'

'Say you're sorry.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Louder.'

'I'M SORRY.'

I pat his head with a gloved hand. 'Naughty boy,' I say, pouting. 'And if naughty boy stays naughty, Vinda will be back.' I glance at my watch – a few minutes after 9.30 – and peel off my gloves. I can feel the muscles in my cheeks tensing as my lips pull apart to form a grin.

He staggers toward the couch where his trousers are lying and fumbles through the pockets. 'I have to give you something,' he says. 'Something for ...' His breath is laboured. The air in the room is suddenly cool and his skin prickles with tiny studs like a plucked chicken. I nod, counting eighty-five pounds before folding it into my wallet.

What interests you about the characters?

I love how imperfect and complex they are. Flitting from Vinda to Angel to Regis - getting inside their heads and finding out where they were going - it was so liberating. I have a particularly soft spot for Regis. Of the three, he's the one I miss the most. I find myself walking around London from time to time, looking at the Thames or something through his eyes, and feeling little pangs. But then I picture him kicking back in his LA flat with a glass of rum and Coke and I know that he's doing just fine.

Regis

Regis sipped at his rum and Coke, trying hard

not to look at his watch. He examined what looked like fine white powder on the backs of his hands: dry skin. He felt himself de-hydrating, felt his eyeballs shrinking in their sockets. He put down his drink and picked up the water instead. Some six hours had elapsed since he'd left LA. And exactly six weeks since he'd left Audrey. He sighed, rubbing a hand along the back of his head, feeling the bristles prick his palm. Audrey Kim with her short bob and short legs and expert manipulation of seaweed and glutinous rice. He had left her in their Burbank apartment wound in white sheets next to a shaggy-haired surfer named Finnegan. When he found them crouched against one another, deep in sleep, he thought his skin would fall off. Without a word, he closed the door quietly, wrote a note to Audrey which he blue-tacked to the bathroom mirror, and left. He spent the night in a bar in North Hollywood, staring into a single glass of rum and Coke. He blamed himself.

When he returned to the apartment she was gone – her clothes, her creams, her hand-blown glass bong – everything was gone. The bed had been stripped, the place aired out. It was as if she had never been there. Regis slumped on the couch, felt embers in his eyes. Through the pale, muslin curtains – the one thing she had left behind – the sun shone unbearably bright. He stared at the little cactus across from him, rising plumply from a white porcelain pot. And then it happened. Everything around him cracked like ice, splintered into jewelled fragments, glinting shards. Regis' head fell back against the sofa. His chest tightened, rocketed with spasms. And tears spilled over the tops of his big cheeks, into his ears, down his sideburns, into his collar.

What writers have influenced you? Who are you reading at the moment?

James Joyce, William Faulkner and their literary offspring - think Toni Morrison - are technically brilliant. I am so grateful to writers like them who pushed the boundaries of language and liberated us from the shackles of overbearing punctuation, syntax and, more importantly, linear narrative. I guess the one writer who made the prospect >>

people

of writing a potential vocation for me (rather than a furtive pastime) was Michael Ondaatje. His poetic prose style slipped right under my skin and remains there, even today. At the moment I'm reading an old Granta collection of essays called 'What we think of America' which was published about a year after 9/11.

What are your favourite Sri Lankan things?
Machang, where do I begin?! Speaking of which - yes - vernacular Sinhala is so rich in poetic expression and bawdy humour and is so fabulously untranslatable - I love it. There are plenty of other things: the sun melting into the Indian ocean as viewed from Bentota beach, the Gallery Cafe for aesthetic and gastronomic bliss, Sigiriya rock for its immaculately manicured claws and ... old style hoppers. I say 'old style' because on my last visit to Sri Lanka, the only hoppers I came across were wimpy, anaemic, miniature things made from wheat flour. Is there anyone out there who can tell me where I can get a good old fashioned hopper in Colombo?

What would you want on your tombstone?
(slightly morbid I know, but...)
Didn't I tell you? I'm immortal.

Whats the most over-rated virtue?
Immortality (... wait a minute, that's not a virtue, is it?)

What is your most treasured possession?
My laptop. I've had nightmares from which I've woken up screaming. 'Don't take my computer!'

Who or what is the love of your life?
See above. Also, my other half. He knows who he is.

Which talent would you most like to have?
Is astral projection a talent? As a child, I tried very hard to project myself all over the place (mostly the ceiling). Needless to say I failed.

If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what would it be?
I know I said I was immortal, but as we're dealing in conjecture here... a galah. It's a type of pink and grey cockatoo native to Australia that likes

to hang upside down from branches and make a racket. They mate for life.

What is the quality you like most in a man?
A sense of humour.

What is your motto?
Work, work and then work some more, but never, never eat crap.

What are you working on next?
Something to do with architecture. If things go to plan, I'll be travelling a lot over the next few years.

Who is your favourite hero of fiction?
Jesus

Angel

Angel breathed Elvis for the first time in the summer of 1977. It was a hot summer, full of The Muppets and Little Rascals re-runs – this last, a show he didn't usually get to see except that this summer he was in Ottawa with his parents and his brothers, visiting his grandmother and two aunts: the spinster Queenie and the young and very pretty Delia. Angel was eight years old. He had been at his aunts' since the end of July, and only the other day, Delia Aunty and Uncle Percy, her husband, had taken him and the family to Niagara Falls where they poked their heads through a rocky crevice and screamed as water pummelled their eager faces. Angel grinned at Delia Aunty then, blushing at her perfect teeth and thick lashes. When she smiled, Angel felt something warm and slightly sweet flutter in his stomach, and imagined it was freshly baked white bread.

Then night turned into day and the 15th became the 16th August. Angel was playing with his brothers, Michael and Francis, in the basement, having retreated into its cool darkness to escape the rising humidity (Matthew, the eldest, was thirteen and didn't have time to play stupid games with his little brothers. Instead, he spent most of his time slumped in front of the telly). They were running around in circles playing

fireman. Angel taking up the part of the siren, Francis the part of the fireman, and Michael the fire. They did this for a full fifteen minutes before collapsing into a panting heap. Angel needed the toilet and excused himself, trying hard not to inhale the hot air that met him as he made his way up the stairs. When he opened the basement door, the harshness of the sunlight hurt his eyes. He paused, blinking for a minute, then frowned.

The house was strangely quiet. He peeked round the edge of the door into the living room, but no one was there. He peered into the kitchen. No one there either. Forgetting his bladder, he crept upstairs to where the bedrooms – and the television – were. The tv was in Delia Auntie's room, which was right at the top of the landing. Angel went up the stairs on hands and knees, digging his fingers into the chocolate shag of the carpet. When he got to the top, he slid to the right of the doorway, casting an eye into the room. They were huddled around the television – Matthew, his parents and grandmother, Auntie Queenie, Uncle Percy and Delia. And she was crying. Angel ran into the room and put his head in his aunt's lap. From the corner of his eye, he could see that Delia's face looked bruised. Tears ran from her chin onto his temple. Angel was speechless.

'Ayyo,' she wept. 'Oh Angel. He's dead. He's dead.'

Angel was confused. Everyone else just stood, expressionless, staring at the tv. He turned to his brother.

'Elvis,' whispered Matthew. 'Elvis died today.'

Angel wanted to ask who Elvis was. But when he looked at the television, the words stuck in his throat. He saw a man in a leather jacket, juddering his hips and singing deep soulful notes into a microphone. It was electrifying. Angel was transfixed. His mouth fell open and notes started pouring into it, coating his tongue and tonsils like honey. He remained like that for hours, watching tribute show after tribute show,

swallowing lyrics. When he went to the bathroom that night to brush his teeth, he closed the door against the sobs of his aunt, clasped the toothbrush to his lips, and sang. In the morning, he walked into Delia Auntie's room, stood at the foot of the bed and sang Love Me Tender.

First Delia Auntie looked shocked, her red and swollen eyes bulging slightly at the sound of her nephew's quavering voice. Then a smile spread across her lips and she held a hand out to Angel, urging him to come to her side. Despite her red, creased face, Delia looked beautiful. Her hair spilled in dark curls down one shoulder, the straps of her nightdress a shiny pale green against the light brown of her skin. But Angel didn't move, delighting instead in that breadly sensation that started to fill his stomach. He kept singing, until his mother and father and brothers and grandmother and Auntie Queenie were gathered around him, quiet, awed, incredulous. When he finished his song, Auntie Queenie declared it a miracle, lit a candle and made everyone recite one decade of the rosary. As Angel prayed he knew that something inside him had changed forever.



Trussed will be available in bookshops from 1 March.

You can also order directly from the publisher. To order a book by credit or debit card please call Serpent's Tail on +44 (0)800 916 8603 Free delivery on all orders worldwide still applies. For overseas, try Amazon.co.uk

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THU 11 - MON 15	1st Test - England v Sri Lanka Lord's, London
THU 18 - SUN 21	Sussex v Sri Lankans County Ground, Hove
THU 25 - MON 29	2nd Test - England v Sri Lanka Edgbaston, Birmingham
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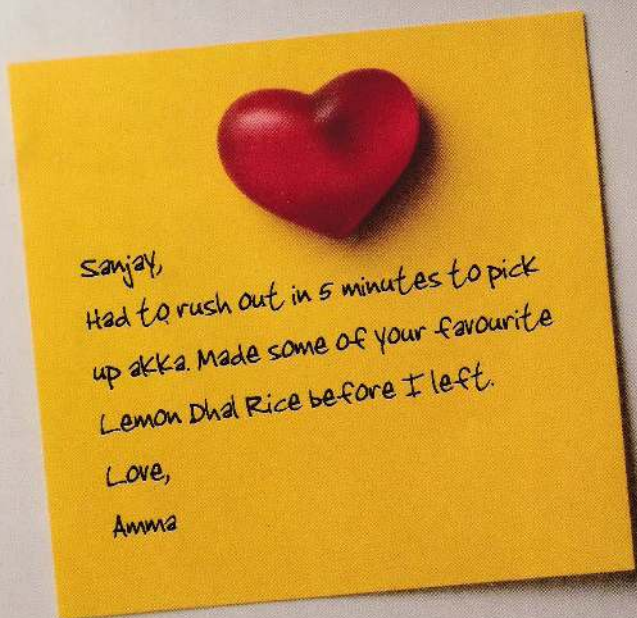
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
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