




**FINDING THEIR BLISS**

*Wab! and her audience connect at Omega Institute's "Ecstatic Chant" weekend last summer.*



*Devotional chanting, a centuries-old practice in India, is newly in vogue in the West. It even has its very own...*

# Yoga ROCK STARS

*A Special Report by ANNA DUBROVSKY*

There's a rave-like atmosphere in the ballroom of a Florida hotel and a group of musicians onstage, but this gathering of hundreds isn't a party or performance. It's a spiritual practice. The yoga conference participants singing and dancing late into the night are engaged in *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of joyful devotion to God.

Bhakti yoga isn't a recent import. Many Westerners got their first taste in the 1960s, when shaven-headed Hare Krishna devotees took a bhakti practice called *kirtan* to the streets. Kirtan is the chanting of God's names and attributes, often in call-and-response fashion. In 1969, Beatles guitarist George Harrison produced a recording of the Hare Krishna mantra, and bhakti debuted on Britain's *Top of the Pops*. Around the same time, former Harvard psychology professor Richard Alpert returned from India with a new name—Ram Dass—and the message that psychedelics were poor substitutes for divine love. He taught ancient Hindu chants to hippies.

Recent years have seen another surge of Western interest in bhakti yoga and particularly devotional chanting. Longtime “kirtan wallahs” such as Jai Uttal and Krishna Das (Americans both) have graduated from living rooms to concert venues that seat many hundreds, achieving the status of rock stars in the yoga community. These days, it's rare to find a yoga conference without communal chanting on the program. The Omega Institute's annual “Ecstatic Chant” weekend grew so popular that this year the retreat center scheduled two chant-a-thons. There are kirtan camps for those seeking in-depth study and kirtan ringtones for cell phones. The Canadian music company that manages Avril Lavigne and Sarah McLachlan recently signed half a dozen chant artists to its label. “It's a bull market,” quips Shyamdas, who has led kirtan for a quarter of a century. >>

Why are a growing number of Westerners investing in bhakti? For one, it's accessible. Anyone can sing to the Divine Being. The practice doesn't require formal training. It doesn't require physical flexibility. Unlike avenues such as asana and silent meditation, which call for persistence, chanting "can be immediately successful with just a little bit of good intention," says Shyamdas, who points out that bhakti is by far the most popular branch of yoga in India.

"Success" is an experience that even longtime chanters find hard to verbalize. It's heart-opening, they say. It's elation and more. "I haven't found a good way to explain it without people thinking I'm weird," says Sharon Smith, a Connecticut yoga teacher and retired project manager. "You need to feel it a little bit. I don't think you can talk someone into appreciating kirtan. It's visceral."

The yoga studio boom also has much to do with bhakti's new fan base. More and more people are giving yoga a go and discovering the music that's played in many classes. They buy chant albums and tickets to sacred sing-alongs. Miten, a British rocker turned devotional singer, says people often tell him: "I've started to get into yoga, and I heard your music, and I can't stop playing it. I play it in my car. I play it to my kids. It just resonates. I don't know why."

It's not only yoga practitioners who are tuning in. After NPR reviewed David Newman's *Lotus Feet: A Kirtan Revolution*, the chant maestro heard from music lovers who'd never stepped inside a yoga studio. "They were just digging the music," says Newman, whose spiritual name is Durga Das. "We'll go to a yoga center to chant and the owner will say, 'God, we've never seen these people.' They are drawn to the music, and through the music they're exposed to the vibration." Krishna Das was greeted by 700 fans in Buenos Aires after one of his songs, "Jaya Bhagavan," was used in an Argentine film.

Though rooted in India, the music of yoga's new rock stars has an unmistakably Western imprint. The ranks of chant artists are filled with lovers of rock and jazz, bluegrass and reggae, folk and world fusion. "We were brought up with the Beatles or the blues or whatever, so that enters into our styles," Shyamdas says. They may slip an English song into an otherwise Sanskrit set. They may swap tabla drums for bass guitar. They may even insert a sax solo. It's not the stuff of Indian temples, but that doesn't mean it's any less spiritual.

*Anna Dubrovsky is a contributing editor of Yoga+. Last year, after returning from seven months of yoga study in Chennai, India, she settled in Pittsburgh, where she also teaches yoga.*

*"I just realized I had to sing with people."*

## Krishna Das

BHAKTI WITH A DASH OF BLUES

**KRISHNA DAS** makes no apologies for the way he pronounces "Ram," the Hindu deity who epitomizes virtue. He doesn't pronounce the "r" the way someone proficient in Sanskrit would. That caused an Indian woman to leave one of his kirtans. She just got up and walked out.

"I understand there are people who feel that what happens in the West with chanting is ridiculous—what do we know about chanting?" says Krishna Das, the white guy from Long Island whose name is synonymous with Indian mantric music in America. "That's really dumb. It's like saying Westerners don't have God in their hearts, because that's what chanting is about. God knows what the heart wants and responds to the call of the heart. It's not about music or pronunciation."

"Dumb" is the milder of the four-letter words that dot his defense of American-style kirtan. Krishna Das—born Jeffrey Kagel—discovered devotional chanting in India in the early '70s. He practiced it there at the feet of his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, also known as Maharajji. But the music he makes today borrows from rock and roll and country blues as much as it does from the temples of India. "As the mantras changed me, as they got deeper into me, they began to come out of me in a way that's more natural to this incarnation. The chants took on different shapes—much more Western shapes. I didn't do that on purpose. It was a natural evolution." *All One*, his 2005 release, explores the Hare Krishna mantra from four diverse musical perspectives, including rock and South African township jive.

**This weaving together** of ancient mantras with modern melodies and instrumentation may offend purists, but it's part of the reason why communal chanting is gaining popularity in cultures that prize individuality and secularism. "It's only reasonable that people here would be attracted by the Western sounds because it's who they are," he says. The pressures of modern life also account for the expanding kirtan "market." "It's growing and will continue to grow because things are getting harder and harder in the world. I think it just reflects people's desire to find some happiness, some rest, a sense of joy in life."

Krishna Das spent the better part of his 61 years searching for happiness. He struggled with depression and drugs. He worked odd jobs and dabbled in music. In his 20s he met Ram Dass, the Harvard professor turned spiritual teacher whose 1971 best seller *Be Here Now* introduced legions of Westerners to Maharajji and yoga. Krishna Das traveled to the foothills of the Himalayas to find Maharajji. He spent almost three years there, basking in his guru's unconditional love. Then, in 1973, Maharajji died.

"I was really destroyed by that," Krishna Das says. "Being with him was the only thing that made me happy. It was the most extraordinary,



powerful experience I've ever had, on the physical plane anyway. When he died, I figured my only chance to be happy was gone. I went through a long, long, long period of very unconscious self-destructive behavior."

**It wasn't until 1994 that a solution** presented itself. "I was standing in my living room in New York, and I just realized I had to sing with people. It was the only way I could clean up the dark places in my heart." He walked into a Jivamukti Yoga Center in Manhattan, where founders Sharon Gannon and David Life offered him a Monday slot.

His audience then was several yoga students. Today he packs houses all over the world, singing with hundreds and sometimes thousands. The man who jokes about being "Jewish on my parents' side" occasionally bursts into a gospel classic—"Amazing Grace" or "Jesus on the Mainline"—as if to remind people that it matters not how you call out to God. It matters that you do.

**He has found the faith he lost** when his guru died. "By leaving his body, he forced me to find that love inside of me—or to begin to at least look for that love inside of me. That's really the point: it's not outside of us. Things outside of us can push a button for us and open us up temporarily. But ultimately we have to find that place ourselves. When we unravel our psychological issues and untie the knots in our hearts, and begin to let go of fear and judging ourselves and treating ourselves so harshly, then we start to move deeper within ourselves to where that love is."

**Tour dates at [www.krishnadas.com](http://www.krishnadas.com)**

## { THE YOGA+ PLAYLIST by Shannon Sexton }

**"Ganapati" by Ragani,**  
from **BEST OF BOTH WORLDS**

"Ganapati" is my first pick because it invokes Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. In India, it's traditional to sing a Ganesha song at the beginning of kirtan. Ragani, an American woman, studied Indian classical music with Swami Rama and other masters. The arrangement incorporates Indian and Western instruments, the traditional call-and-response format, and non-traditional techniques like harmony. Her velvet voice is spellbinding.

**"Angels' Waltz" by Sada Sat Kaur,**  
from **ANGELS' WALTZ**

Sung in the centuries-old language of Gurumukhi, this "Govinda Hare" chant is a perfect driving song—especially for an energy boost. Kaur's commanding vocals may inspire you to belt out your own.

**"Hari Krishna" by Sheetal,**  
from **LOVE OF AGES**

A heart-searing song that opens with Sheetal's haunting improvisational vocals and morphs into a longing lament. The steely quality of her voice is typical of Indian classical singers (though Sheetal is first-generation American). This slow tune is arranged in an eerie minor key.

**"Govinda Jaya Jaya" by Donna De Lory,**  
from **THE LOVER & THE BELOVED**

Donna De Lory was one of Madonna's backup singers. I like her breathless vocals and artful electronica arrangement. It's a modern take on an ancient chant. One medley weaves English lines about love into the chant until it becomes a melodic tapestry.

**"Aja Utama" by Dave Stringer with Karnamrita,**  
from **DIVAS & DEVAS**

This is a fun duet. Dasi Karnamrita's classical Indian vocals are complemented by Stringer's soulful, bluesy American voice. They play off each other really well. It's an uplifting *bhajan* (devotional hymn).

**"Aad Guray Nameh" by Snatam Kaur,**  
from **CELEBRATE PEACE**

There's a peacefulness and purity to this song—almost like a hymn. Kaur starts off by herself, and then a chorus joins her. The chorus becomes bigger and bigger, and the harmonies become richer and more layered until, suddenly, I feel like I've been transported to a heavenly, ethereal church.

**"Govinda Hare" by Krishna Das,**  
from **PILGRIM HEART**

Some chants are imbued with a natural sweetness, and this is one of them. Das says that one of the words in this Krishna chant, "Prabhu," is a very sweet, intimate way of saying "Lord." He writes: "In this song, we sing to the great Friend, to the feeling of love that we have for our best friend." It's a song filled with longing.

**"Amba Parameshwari" by Shantala,**  
from **THE LOVE WINDOW**

To me, this soothing song to the Divine Mother feels like a spiritual lullaby—very calming and comforting. Heather Wertheimer's angelic vocals enhance the mood.

**"Namah Shivaya" by Pandit Rajmani Tigunait,**  
from **PULSATION**

Drawing from the oral tradition of the Himalayan sages, Pandit Tigunait preserves the meter of this Shiva mantra, so it's one of the most classical kirtan songs on our list. The chorus sticks to the main mantra, *Namah Shivaya*, while Tigunait varies his call with Sanskrit names of the Divine. It's a booming, energetic chant.

**"Hari Om Shiva Om" by Deva Premal,**  
from **EMBRACE**

This chant honors Shiva and Vishnu, Premal explains in the liner notes, and "is a celebration of the masculine principle." Her rich, sensual voice brings it to life, and the atmospheric, Eastern "cool jazz" arrangement, layered with gentle percussion, bansuri flutes, and textured harmonies, casts a spell on me every time.

*Listen to these songs online. Go to [YogaPlus.org](http://YogaPlus.org) and click on "The Yoga+ Playlist." To hear our top picks from the other artists profiled in this article, click on "Yoga+ Playlist: Bonus Tracks."*

## Deva Premal & Miten AT HOME IN THE WORLD



*“We swim in our music, 24/7.”*

Ask **DEVA PREMAL AND MITEN** where home is, and you won't get a short answer. The couple tours so tirelessly that the closest thing to home base is the apartment in Germany where Deva was born and her mother still lives. They keep clothes and other belongings there and return for a few weeks each year. “We actually consider the whole planet our home,” says Miten.

The two have been traveling the world since 1992, when they left their guru's ashram in Pune, India. They are the Johnny and June Carter Cash of sacred music, with more than a dozen albums and a fan base that includes both Cher and the Dalai Lama. “We swim in it, 24/7,” Miten says of their music. “It's not to be famous. It's not to make money. It's not to sit in front of an audience. It's to connect with our guru, and the way we do that is through our music.”

Their guru is the Indian spiritual teacher who came to be known as Osho. Deva was just 10 when her mother returned from a trip to India and introduced her to Osho's “active meditations”—techniques that include dancing, Sufi whirling, and humming. She became a preteen devotee, donning mala prayer beads and robes in the shades of a sunrise. Years would pass before she slipped into a pair of blue jeans. In her late teens, she left Germany and moved to the ashram in Pune. It was there, in 1990, that she met Miten.

She was 20. He was 43.

Miten, whose Osho-given name means “friend,” came to Pune by way of England and a rock-and-roll lifestyle. In the '70s, the singer-songwriter toured with Fleetwood Mac, Lou Reed, and Ry Cooder, closing many sets with a plaintive song called “Show Me a Home.” The business of music sapped his passion for music. After reading a book of Osho's discourses, he sold his guitars and moved to a commune of devotees in England. “The pain I was carrying around with music suddenly evaporated as soon as I sold my guitars and stopped identifying myself as a musician,” he told *Yoga+*. “That was one of Osho's great teachings. He helped many people drop the idea of who they were so they could actually locate something of who they really are. Suddenly I wasn't a musician anymore. That was a great relief.”

**Miten soon discovered** that “the orange people,” as Osho's robed followers were called, saw joyous singing as a spiritual practice. Their song-filled meditations reawakened his passion for music—and for life. It wasn't long before he was leading the music sessions, first in England and later at the ashram in India.

Though Deva had studied violin, piano, and voice as a child, she wasn't a singer when she and Miten met. She was studying bodywork at the ashram and,

one day, recruited Miten for a practice shiatsu session. That sparked their romantic partnership. Their musical partnership took root later, when Deva asked Miten to listen to her sing. He put her in the band.

**Deva shunned the spotlight** until 1997, when she recorded a mantra album in her mother's apartment. *The Essence*, which features the ancient *Gayatri* mantra, rose to the top of New Age charts. Unlike their earlier albums, it found fans outside the Osho community—in yoga centers. “We put *The Essence* out thinking that it would support our friends in their massage practices,” Miten says. “Suddenly it was like the world started pouring through our window. We began receiving all these invitations to come play in yoga studios in America. We've gone from yoga studios to playing to 1,500 people in Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. Amazing.”

Deva and Miten's music is an amalgam of sacred mantras and English songs written by Miten or musician friends. Their concerts are sing-alongs rather than call-and-response affairs. “The people who come to sing with us, they're part of the band. They're the choir,” says Deva. “That changes every night. It's going to sound different and have a different flavor every night.”

**Tour dates at [www.devapremalmiten.com](http://www.devapremalmiten.com)**

## Wah! "IF IT'S PLAYFUL, I'M THERE."

**WAH!** is sitting on a lawn at the Omega Institute campus in Rhinebeck, New York. It's the end of a four-day chanting festival, during which she took the stage half a dozen times. A stranger approaches and drops to his knees. He is a middle-aged man who spent much of the festival dancing ecstatically, smiling broadly, hands flapping like prayer flags. He takes one of her hands in both of his and touches his forehead to it. He's in a good place, this one.

"We all need to get to a good place," Wah! says when the man is gone. "Some people who have come to the concert are already in a good place, and other people are not. Let's balance out those vibrations so everybody can feel the wideness of their own heart."

Devotional chanting, stripped of musical and spiritual jargon, is just this: getting to a good place. No one leaves a Wah! concert with a heavy heart, shoulders hunched, or feet shuffling. Most people get what they came for, whether it's solace, insight, inspiration, or a sweaty good time. "The mantras are designed to lead you into infinite space," she says. But unlike many spiritual practices, chanting needn't be approached with solemnity. "The music has emo-

*Her music is sensual enough to accompany candlelight and playful enough to make you shimmy.*

tional content. If it's serious and drab and educational, I'm just so not there. And if it's got a groove, and if it's playful, I'm there." Her music is sensual enough to accompany candlelight and playful enough to make a grown man shimmy. She lays down a groove that makes for a head-bopping drive home.

Wah! is her legal name, exclamation point and all. It was given to her by a yoga teacher. "Wah! is something you might say when you can't say anything else, when it's so incredible, so juicy, so indescribable, so beyond what you expected—that's the expression: 'Wah!'" Her discography, which includes ancient Sanskrit chants and ethereal English songs, tells the story of her spiritual transformation, which began not in India but in Africa.

**Wah! was in her teens** when she traveled to Ghana and Nigeria as part of an American dance company. She was a musician, singer, dancer, and conservatory student at Oberlin College. She stayed in Ghana when her stint with the ensemble ended and lived in a shamanic shrine in the hills. "I

had an experience in Africa," she recalls. "People gather during sunrise, and they drum, and they dance—a swirling whirling dervish kind of dance—and then as the sun rises, if there are any complaints within the community, they're brought before the elders. Once the problems are solved, you start the day. People go to the fields or make baskets.

"I just loved getting up before the sun and hearing the drums, getting together and starting the day with community," she says. "It triggered something in me, some memory in me of what spiritual life should be. I didn't know what I was looking for, but once I went to Africa, I went 'Oh yeah, that's right!'"

**A government coup cut short her stay in Ghana.** She returned to the States, finished her performing arts degree, and moved to New York City, where she danced and choreographed, composed and performed music, and tried to cultivate the sense of community she'd found in Africa. "I moved into a meditation and yoga center. It was ten to twelve hippies living together." Wah! had learned the rudiments of classical Indian music at Oberlin and played for her housemates. They sat and listened to the complex

melodies but didn't participate. "My experience of wanting people to be involved kind of forced the simplification of the meditation music," Wah! says. She switched to simple mantras and

call-and-response. It worked. The audience became involved.

Today, Wah!'s music is a staple at yoga studios, and she performs in front of audiences that already know the words. She plays violin and electric bass, among other instruments, and her band bears a closer resemblance to R.E.M. than a Ravi Shankar ensemble. The only instrumental link to Indian music is the harmonium (introduced to India by the British in the colonial era). "I've been trying to weave together elements of pop within the chanting because pop is the heartbeat—the pulse—of American culture. Bhajans and chanting are the pulse of Indian culture, before Westernization. There's been a lot of pop exploration and instrumentation exploration until I really found what I wanted. And I have found it."

**Tour dates at**  
[www.wahmusic.com](http://www.wahmusic.com)





## Jai Uttal

### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MINSTRELS

Walking through Jai Uttal's northern California home, I pass more than 20 instruments. He introduces each one—the one-stringed ektar and the five-string fretless banjo, the droning tamboura and the wailing soprano 12-string guitar. “Each instrument has a different song, a different world that emanates from it,” he tells me.

Like his instrument collection, Jai's musical repertoire is vast, spanning everything from rock to the *Ramayana*, an ancient epic Indian poem that he set to music and performed with the Chicago

*“Whether kirtan is sung, screamed, or cried, it's all praise.”*

Children's Choir. His CD *Mondo Rama* (one of dozens he's produced) contains Brazilian influences, Hebrew prayers, Appalachian blues, Beatles psychedelia, along with Indian music and chants. Jai tours with his band, Pagan Love Orchestra, drawing audiences well beyond the New Age or yoga crowd.

He's lived in India among the Bauls, the wandering street musicians of Bengal. He's led kirtan in countries as diverse as Israel and Fiji. He has sung with great singers and those with no musical ability at all. To Jai, this is the epitome of kirtan. “Sometimes kirtan is gorgeous and sometimes it's super rustic. It's all kirtan. The heart of kirtan is the prayer—the repetition of the mantra, of God's names, and the intention—being sung. But that singing can be two screechy notes or a gorgeous classical raga. Whether it's sung, screamed, or cried, it's all praise.”

Jai, who grew up in Manhattan, began studying classical piano at the age of seven and went on to learn old-time banjo, harmonica, and guitar. He was a musical

experimenter from the beginning. At 18, he moved to California to become a student of India's “National Living Treasure,” Ali Akbar Khan, from whom he received traditional voice training. You can detect this influence in Jai's trademark vocals which, the first time I heard them, sounded to me like the yearning of my own soul. Says Jai: “I honestly feel that, since I was a teenager, all my music has been directed—even if not totally consciously—toward inner healing, finding a place of wholeness.”

At 19, Jai traveled to India. As with many of his generation, the journey was transformational. He met his guru, Neem Karoli Baba. (Jai Uttal's Sanskrit name,

Jai Gopal, was given to him by a yoga teacher before he met his guru. “I guess that's why I'm not a ‘Das,’” he jokes, referring to the fact that Krishna Das, Bhagavan Das, and Ram Dass were also devotees of the Maharajji.)

Jai also steeped himself in the spiritually ecstatic music of the Bauls, an experience

that has shaped his life. “Before I ever went to India, among the albums of Indian classical music I had was one called *The Street Singers of Bengal*,” he says. “This record was so moving, I had to meet the Bauls.”

The origin of the name Baul is debated, but one interpretation is that it comes from the Sanskrit word *batul*, meaning “divinely inspired insanity.” Jai tells the story of going to Shantiniketan, a town in West Bengal, where he heard they were living: “After several days of asking around and not getting anywhere, I was in a *chai* shop when this old man, wearing a patchwork dhoti and bells around his ankles and carrying a one-stringed instrument in one hand and a little drum in the other, came in. He played and asked if anyone had any money. Afterwards I followed him. We came to a little *mela* (a gathering): Onstage was this big family, all sitting down except the lead singer, who was dancing. On the floor were all the grandmas and grandpas, the little babies, all generations, playing cymbals and singing with him. It was just great. And the guy gets off the stage and it turns out he's Lakshman Das Baul, one of the two well-known Bauls on the cover of one of Bob Dylan's albums!”

Jai met him and then others. “We really connected with one guy, Baidyanath Das Baul, who started coming to our house and then gave us lessons four times a week. We knew no Bengali and he knew no English, but we began to have this amazing relationship over music, singing, *chai*, a little food, all kinds of instruments.”

Jai became friends with other Bauls, too, and traveled around with them. “I had written some Baul-style songs with English words, and I would play some of them. What a rich and beautiful time it was.” It was also inspiring musically. “The music of the Bauls is simple but full of passion,” says Jai. “The words are very metaphorical. The imagery is rural, rustic. But their tone is one of busting out, breaking through the rooftops of heaven.”

—Maggie Jacobus

Tour dates at [www.jaiuttal.com](http://www.jaiuttal.com)

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## Wallahs to Watch



### SEÁN JOHNSON

When Seán Johnson evacuated New Orleans in August 2005, he took a few changes of clothes, his harmonium, and a box of music and mystical poetry. Hurricane Katrina hit the next day. Unable to go home, Johnson embarked on a kirtan tour to raise money for hurricane relief—and to collect himself. “The kirtan was very therapeutic,” he says. His music is as much a product of his New Orleans roots as it is of formal study. “There’s music in the water, in the air, in the heat and the humidity here, and in the way people walk and talk,” says Johnson, who grew up listening to jazz, hip hop, and rock, and sang in the city’s children’s choir. In college he studied the singing style of his Irish ancestors and got hooked on Middle Eastern music. Later he apprenticed with South Indian musician and author Russill Paul. “When I lead kirtan now, it’s a really rich brew of all these traditions.”

**Home Base:** New Orleans, Louisiana

**Website:** [www.seanjohnsonkirtan.com](http://www.seanjohnsonkirtan.com)

**Can’t Miss:** When he’s not touring, Johnson teaches yoga and leads Monday evening kirtans at Wild Lotus Yoga, the New Orleans studio he founded in 2002. His 200-hour teacher-training program, Soul School, blends bhakti and hatha yoga. [www.wildlotusyoga.com](http://www.wildlotusyoga.com)

**Coming Soon:** Johnson is helping raise funds to convert a 55,000-square-foot warehouse in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans into a healing center, which will include a second Wild Lotus location as well as a food co-op, an organic café, and performance and gallery spaces.

### SNATAM KAUR

Snatam Kaur’s day begins at a time when many musicians are heading to bed. At 4 a.m., she and her husband begin morning *sadhana*, two-and-a-half hours of Kundalini Yoga and chanting and prayer in the Sikh tradition. When she’s on tour, they’re joined by bandmates and crew. “As an artist, a lot of my inspiration comes at that time, a lot of the tunes and ideas for future albums,” says Snatam, who has churned out six solo albums since 2002. “It’s my well that I draw from.” Snatam’s parents turned to Sikhism shortly after she was born. She learned kirtan from her mother and musical improvisation from her father, a former manager for the Grateful Dead. Her kirtans include Gurmukhi chants drawn from Sikh scriptures and English aphorisms composed by her spiritual teacher, Yogi Bhajan, who brought Kundalini Yoga to the West in the 1960s.



Between chants, she teaches yoga and meditation. “I look at each concert as a full experience of healing. The words that we share are considered to be a technology of transformation—almost like opening up a medicine cabinet.”

**Home Base:** Espanola, New Mexico

**Website:** [www.snatamkaur.com](http://www.snatamkaur.com)

**Can’t Miss:** Snatam will be among the musicians performing from the world’s most mystical sites as part of Project Peace on Earth, a globally telecast event scheduled for September 2009. [www.projectpeaceonearth.org](http://www.projectpeaceonearth.org)

**Coming Soon:** She will release a children’s album that includes “Feeling Good,” a song Snatam wrote at 15 and rediscovered while flipping through old journals. An accompanying DVD will feature an interactive yoga class for children.

### WADE IMRE MORISSETTE

Wade Morissette had just started college when his roommate handed him a copy of *The Mystic Path to Cosmic Powers*. He dropped out; cosmic powers intrigued him more than environmental law. Over the next decade, the Ottawa native traveled to India four times, studying with yoga masters and spiritual teachers, including K. Pattabhi Jois, T.K.V. Desikachar, and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. At the Osho meditation resort in Pune, he was given the Sanskrit name Atmo Sargam, or “innermost scales of music.” Morissette had grown up in a musical household, studying piano, guitar, and a West African hand drum called *djembe*. His twin sister, Alanis, had risen to stardom singing about heartbreak and revenge scenarios. “Getting that Sanskrit name lit a fire under me,” he says. He resolved to seek God in song. “At the end of the day, it is a practice. At the end of the day, I’m really not trying to sell records.”



**Home Base:** Vancouver, British Columbia

**Website:** [www.wademorissette.com](http://www.wademorissette.com)

**Can’t Miss:** He will teach yoga and lead kirtan in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vancouver as part of the Yoga Health Festival, a 10-city tour, September–October 2008. [www.yogamonth.org](http://www.yogamonth.org)

**Coming Soon:** Morissette’s first book, *Transformative Yoga: 5 Keys to Unlocking Your Inner Bliss*, will be published in 2009.

### DAVID NEWMAN

#### AKA DURGA DAS

Less than two months after taking the bar exam in 1992, David Newman opened a yoga center in Philadelphia. He’d give it a year, he figured, and fall back on his law degree if Yoga on Main failed. “I never had to go back to practicing law,” he says.



Krishna Das and Bhagavan Das came to sing at the studio, reawakening Newman's passion for music. Their guru, Neem Karoli Baba, "installed himself in my heart," says Newman, and chanting became the keystone of his yoga practice. "The kirtan represents my inner world, and my musical presentation represents my present incarnation as someone who's crazy about guitars and loves the singer-songwriter idiom," says Newman, who fronted bands in high school and studied music in college. His non-traditional presentation has found fans in kirtan's birthplace. Recently he signed a deal with a New Delhi-based record company to distribute his music in India.

**Home Base:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
**Website:** www.davidnewmanmusic.com

**Can't Miss:** Newman and his wife, percussionist/singer Mira, will host Kirtan College, an intensive training program at Kashi Ashram in Sebastian, Florida, Feb. 14-22, 2009. www.kashi.org

**Coming Soon:** Newman's fifth album, his first for Vancouver-based Nettwerk Music Group, will be released this September.

#### SHYAMDAS

In 1972, a teenage Stephen Schaffer traveled to India seeking Neem Karoli Baba, aka Maharajji. He returned eight years later as Shyamdas, "servant of God." In



the intervening years he'd found not only Maharajji, but also a master of devotional yoga named Goswami

Prathameshji. "He was the best kirtan singer I ever met," says Shyamdas, who lived in Prathameshji's home and sang in his temple. Shyamdas spends more than half of each year in India, studying the languages, literature, philosophy, and music. He has written or translated more than 20 books about the devotional path,

which are published by an Indian press. He's a scholar who downplays the virtues of scholarliness. "Kirtan isn't about how much you know, that's for sure. Kirtan is about how much you feel."

**Home Base:** Upstate New York and the Vrindavan area of India

**Website:** www.shyamdas.com

**Can't Miss:** Shyamdas will host a "bhakti immersion" and kirtan weekend at Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York, Sept. 26-28, 2008. www.anandaashram.org

**Coming Soon:** He plans to release an audio book about "the life of the intoxicated kirtan singer."

#### DAVE STRINGER



Dave Stringer didn't go to India in 1990 to find a guru. He went because he was broke and couldn't refuse a job shooting films for the first Siddha Yoga ashram. "All the images of people sitting in meditation 'blissed out' were actually a turnoff for me rather than an enticement," he says. At the ashram in Ganeshpuri, the skeptic became an enthusiast in short order. "The experience of chanting, which was at first total nonsense to me, was strangely compelling, not only musically but in terms of how I felt—completely ecstatic," says Stringer, a trained jazz musician. About a decade after returning to Los Angeles, he traded his career in film editing for one in kirtan. "I don't ask people who come to my kirtans to believe in it. I ask them to suspend their disbelief for a long enough time to give it a go and see what happens."

**Home Base:** Los Angeles, California

**Website:** www.davestringer.com

**Can't Miss:** Stringer will lead chanting at the Big Island Retreat with Ram Dass and friends in Pahoehoe, Hawaii, Nov. 5-10, 2008. www.ramdass.org

**Coming Soon:** His fifth album is scheduled for release in September. Stringer's spring 2009 tour will be recorded for a live album to be released the following fall.

#### BENJY AND HEATHER WERTHEIMER

##### AKA SHANTALA

They met 10 years ago at a songwriting workshop in Portland, Oregon. (He recites the exact date



without the slightest pause.) She was a part-time folk singer as well as a therapist and yoga teacher. He'd opened for Carlos Santana, scored music for the internationally syndicated soap opera *Santa Barbara*, and studied classical Indian music with masters Zakir Hussain and Ali Akbar Khan. In 2000, the year they wed, Benjy was invited to play an Indian stringed instrument called *esraj* during the *shavasana* portion of a workshop by Anusara Yoga founder John Friend. Live accompaniment to yoga practice became a specialty of the Wertheimers, who record and tour as Shantala. The couple has released two chant albums and tours for about nine months of the year. "One of the great joys is coming back to the same locations year after year and seeing how the community is growing," says Benjy.

**Home Base:** Portland, Oregon

**Website:** www.shantalamusic.com

**Can't Miss:** They will accompany Anusara Yoga classes and lead kirtan at the Yoga Journal Conference in Estes Park, Colorado, Sept. 21-28, 2008. www.yogajournal.com

**Coming Soon:** Shantala will release *LIVE in love*, which was recorded in the summer of 2006 in a Buddhist meditation center in Portland.



*Ready to try communal chanting? Contact yoga centers in your area to find opportunities. Regular kirtan gatherings can be found in these and many other cities:*

#### **Chicago, IL**

Monthly kirtan with Devi 2000 at the Moksha Yoga Center  
www.devi2000.com

#### **Columbus, OH**

Kirtan with Mike Cohen and Friends on the first Friday of every month  
www.mikecohenkirtan.com

#### **Milwaukee, WI**

Kirtan with Ragani on the first Friday of every month (except Nov. and Feb.)  
www.raganiworld.com

#### **New York, NY**

Kirtan with various musicians every Wednesday at Jivamukti Yoga's downtown studio  
www.jivamuktivyoga.com

Kirtan with various musicians every Friday at the Integral Yoga Institute  
www.iyiny.org

#### **San Francisco, CA**

Regular and recurring gatherings throughout the Bay Area  
www.boloma.com

*Delve deeper at a workshop or retreat. You can rub shoulders with chanting royalty at holistic centers such as these:*

#### **Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health**

Stockbridge, MA  
www.kripalu.org

Sept. 5-7

**The Ecstasy of Chant: Getting High on Mantra** with Russill Paul, author of *The Yoga of Sound: Healing and Enlightenment Through the Sacred Practice of Mantra*

Oct. 17-19

**Passion and Grace: The Art of Devotional Singing** with Jai Uttal and Daniel Paul

Dec. 28-31

**Saptah**, Kripalu's end-of-year ritual, features continuous chanting of the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* for two days and culminates with kirtan.

#### **Omega Institute for Holistic Studies**

Rhinebeck, NY  
www.omega.org

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

**Ecstatic Chant: The Yoga of Voice** with Krishna Das, Robert Gass, Miten, Deva Premal, Shyamdas, Jai Uttal, Wah!, and others

Sept. 1-2

**Labor Day Ecstatic Chant** with many of the same musicians

Oct. 3-5

**Holding Bliss: A Yoga & Chanting Weekend** with Wah!

#### **Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat**

Paradise Island, Bahamas  
www.sivanandabahamas.org

Oct. 11-13

**Weekend Kirtan Special** with senior staff of the ashram

Oct. 29-Nov. 2

**Practical Bhakti: The Yoga of Devotion** with senior staff

Nov. 24-Dec. 1

**Thanksgiving Retreat** with David Newman

#### **Yogaville Satchidananda Ashram**

Buckingham, VA  
www.yogaville.org

Oct. 10-13

**Bliss of Chant Kirtan Festival** with Jai Uttal and Daniel Paul, David Newman and Mira, and Wah! +