

[Bhava of Bernhardt; Algerian Makes Mantra Music](#)

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Weaving mantras into the synthesized celestial aspirations of New Age music is no novelty. The mantra Aum Namasivaya has been enshrined, both elegantly and crudely, in raga-based ethno-music to righteous rock.

No record exists of when the first European tried out a Hindu mantra. Could have been a Greek soldier from Alexander the Great's army 2,300 years ago, or a wandering pilgrim of the occult long before. Today, Patrick Bernhardt is wandering far into the fields of mantra and music. His harvest is an album, *Atlantis Angelis*: the most popular New Age recording in Canada last year. An initiate of Sridhara Deva Goswami - disciple of the late Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura of the Sri Chaitanya lineage - Bernhardt reflects to *HINDUISM TODAY*, "I consider my body as an instrument. The voice, the fingers, the energies of the heart and mind are dovetailed in the service of the Source. The body is the temple of the Supreme Soul: the temple is the best instrument." He dresses close to Hindu style, kurtha shirt (or tunic) and shawl, with beads around his neck and an initiation necklace. The language he is most comfortable in is French. He was born in Algeria in 1952. But his English is improving in preparation for an upcoming US tour. He just spent a few days in northern California, tending to business and celebrations with Backroads distribution company. There is excitement over a newly recorded album and the tour, but Bernhardt purposely exits the hubbub to attend the Green Gulch Zen Center in Mill Valley, the closest Asian spiritual oasis to Backroads.

Bernhardt is now back home in Montreal, in a state of near-seclusion, rehearsing for what essentially is a one-man performance: acoustic guitars, tamboura and synthesizers that replicate Peruvian flutes to Tibetan bells to grand pianos. And then there is his voice, pellucid as a mountain brook, singularly singing mantras. No other words or messages. The Chaitanya tradition of continual holy name chanting is a personal sadhana for Bernhardt that naturally flowed to his music.

Referencing what he calls a Vedanta aphorism, Bernhardt explains, "...the spiritual sound is the best means of attaining total freedom and global harmony. This is the science of mantra yoga. As a mantra yogi, it was natural for me to try to expand my spiritual practice in my professional life - from an artistic angle of vision."

The new album - Solaris Universalis with a Sri Chakra yantra on the cover - is just being released. But Atlantis Angelis is what ferried Bernhardt and his collection of Hindu, American Indian and European mantras to the Canadian public. Most of the distribution and promotion was focused on Canada, but wherever it has been heard the response has been enthusiastic. Frank Forrest, the producer of Musical Starstreams, currently heard on 60 stations, discovered it at the 2nd Annual International New Age Music Conference in Los Angeles. He proclaimed, "This is absolutely the best album of 1990." He reports there was more positive listener response (phone and mail) to it than any other music he's played in the show's 6-year history. Stephen Hill, producer of Hearts of Space said it "is probably the best produced truly New Age album of the last ten years." New Age magazine reviews share the euphoria.

Bernhardt, working solo - with help from a keyboardist and women singers - wove the complex musical textures of Angelis at Studio 1913 in Montreal. It soars from tamboura-based raga-like renditions to baroque Mass arrangements. The title track includes over a dozen mantras selected for their healing properties. Among the Hindu mantras are Om Namō Narayanaya, Jaya Radha Madhava, Om Namō Bhagavate Vasudevaga.

Bernhardt was 12 when he started music theory and classical guitar under Cecil Hebert in France. As a boy and teen, he was fascinated by the mythological stories of ancient cultures, triggering a search for universal truths. He became a conscientious objector to the French military and a social activist protesting the use of nuclear energy. By the time he was 21, he had toured Europe and North Africa with several bands while studying music and absorbing the culture of each country. In Spain, he became a vegetarian. He settled in Quebec, Canada. Eventually, his awareness and growing understanding that music could still the modifications of the mind and improve health led him to the use of Eastern mantras and the study of Hindu scriptures. "That sound influences people is a scientific fact. Knowingly or unknowingly, people benefit from their auspicious effects," he offers.

After intensive study and spiritual initiation in India - he has been to India 3 times - he was no longer fulfilled by his pop music band. The creation of the Atlantis album naturally evolved from his experiences in India and his practice of japa for the past 15 years.

Until recently Bernhardt lived outside Montreal, in a country house that was his sanctuary for Hindu living. A shrine for Krishna was the centerpiece. Pictures and artifacts from India sparingly decorated the walls. He collects Indian instruments, and has just developed a new guitar - called Orpheus. It was hand crafted, following harmonic geometry, by violin-maker Raymond Morin and is equipped with drone strings. He has written a well-received book, "The Secret Music of the Soul."

HT: Define spiritual music.

PB: Spiritual music is the music able to link your soul with the Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. If the music, or when the music, is able to do that, it is actually spiritual music. All other music can be good for different purposes, but is completely useless for spiritual advancement.

HT: What is your guru's impact on your life?

PB: I feel a direct connection with the Param Brahman through the parampara, or disciple succession.

HT: What is the difference between Chaitanya mantras and other mantras?

PB: A Chaitanya mantra influences the inner consciousness of a living being. The only goal in chanting such a spiritual mantra is to attain God consciousness. Other mantras have material purposes: to get money, or a good wife, etc. They cannot give you liberation.

HT: How are you influenced by Hindu culture?

PB: By regularly reading and studying Vedic literature. I analyse the different events of my life according to the laws of karma and reincarnation. Hindu culture shows clearly that the karmic circumstances and the travel of the soul through different bodies are not a question of belief; this is a science.

HT: About Indian instruments created from inner sounds heard in meditation?

PB: The sages of India made special instruments - like the vina, given by Siva - in order to imitate as far as possible the shabda brahma, or the inaudible sounds. It is possible to detect those sounds only in deep meditation. Modern electric instruments used in the West are really different. The modern musicians, often, have no idea about the incredible beauty of the immortal shabda brahma.

HT: About your book.

PB: My book is a synthesis of modern science - including research about the influences of sounds on the body and the mind, and spiritual traditions. It shows the power of all kinds of sound vibrations, including spiritual ones, on the body, and on consciousness.

HT: How does sound influence healing and mind?

PB: When we are sick, the sickness doesn't come from outside. It comes from inside. This means that in the body there is a lack of harmony. This disharmony comes from the mind (not in the brain); therefore, health is manifested when we can experience a complete "clean up" of the mirror of the mind. For thousands of years, mantras have been used to clean up the mind from all kinds of negative sensations and limited thoughts.

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