

ENTERTAINMENT



## Taking the New World Beat to the Old World

Fresh off a whirlwind month-long tour of India, Dal Dil Vog, the bhangra rock group everyone loves to love, is heading back to India.

"We thought there were going to be tons of bhangra bands in India," says lead singer Dal. "What we discovered when we went out there is we are the only bhangra rock band in the world. There is nobody else doing what we're doing."

The response to their music was so positive that the group is poised to achieve critical distinction if they act fast. Marketing the group in India also makes a lot of economic sense. Canadians buy only four per cent of

all the compact discs sold in the world. On the other hand, India, with a population approaching one billion and a middle class that's 250 million strong, is ripe for the commercial picking.

But going back to India isn't about the money, say the members of Dal Dil Vog.

"The Indian audience is hungry for entertainment," says Jas Singh, who plays bass guitar. "When we went there we were a little bit hesitant but by the time we left, they had moved us from guest appearance slots to headlining the shows."

Although Dal Dil Vog has done quite nicely for itself in Canada (independently, the band has sold 10,000 copies of *The New World*, their first album, and played more than 500 shows in the last two years), India may prove to be their promised land.

Their high-energy music, which is a combination of Western rock and bhangra rhythms, was embraced by Indian audiences at their shows in Madras, Delhi and Bombay. The response reinforced what they've discovered since they first began making music: a lot of people like their particular sound.

The six-member band, which will release its second album, *Elephant Head*, this year, has experienced some changes in the past few years. First off, Dal Dil Vog, which was formed four years ago, is now a full-time band. All of the band's current members quit their day jobs last year while Av Singh, who played *dhhol*, left a year ago to pursue other interests.

"Usually in a band's history, year four is when it falls apart," says band manager Umeeda Swido. "This band is not going to fall apart but has become much stronger as a result of the stress and heartache that it's been through."

Things are certainly looking up as evidenced by the recent Indian tour, which was funded by a music company in India, a grant from Heritage Canada and band members. One outdoor show in Delhi for 14,000 spectators proved to be especially eventful. The band's Indian sponsor spared no expense when it came to putting on a spectacle: there were ramps going out into the audience, a light show and some surprises.

"When we started playing, all of a sudden all these fireworks started going off and I thought, 'Oh no, somebody is shooting at us,'" Dal recalls with a laugh. "It was like Canada Day."

With the exceptions of drummer

Craig Burdes and keyboard player Dave Mills — the two non-Indian members of the band — everyone in the group had been to the subcontinent before. Indians, particularly youngsters, were intrigued by the group's fashion sensibilities and their hair styles — or lack thereof in Craig's case.

"Every kid thinks that you're a movie star or somebody famous," says Mills. "Some of the smaller kids who came up to us didn't want anything other than just to be near us. Those kids were fantastic. They put a smile on your face. I remember one kid said, 'Don't lie to me please. Are you a movie star?'"

Adds Dal: "Jas was [mistaken for everyone] from Michael Jackson to a WWF wrestler to Gene Simmons to a *dakku*."

As thrilling as it was to see their names on 60-foot billboards in the heart of the city, group members remained true to their motto: peace and respect. While in Delhi, they put on a charity show for 1,000 orphans.

"It's one of the things we decided we'd do when we go into a new place," says Dal. "We want to make sure people who are perhaps not as fortunate as we can

come out and see our show. We want to make sure some of the people who may never get to see a concert in their life see at least one."

Says guitarist Ranj Singh: "When we went to India with our traditional instruments and brought rock and roll with it, it was a whole new sound they never heard before. I think they went from wanting to hear cover tunes to thinking our music sounds pretty cool."

The tour was not without its problems, however. Each band member suffered stomach sickness and a few of the lads found that their asthma was aggravated by the urban pollution. "You open your hotel window and you can see the smog come into your room," says Jas. "It's really bad."

When Jas, Ranj, Mills and Burdes went to the Singhs' family village in Punjab, their hired car was sideswiped by a bus.

"On the surface, you think India is completely crazy and nothing works," says Burdes, "but after you've been there a while, you see it does work but it's a different sort of system."

Which kind of describes Dal Dil Vog as well. □

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