



Trance Guru

Veteran deejay and musician Goa Gil still upholds the spirituality of the trance-dance experience, busted raves and druggie teenagers notwithstanding, reports **Kenneth Lobo**



If anyone's observed the progression of the trance scene from its embryonic days on the shores of Goa to the consumeristic hedonism of present-day raves, you can bet your house on Goa Gil. Credited with instituting the sub-genre of Goa Trance, the 65-year-old musician and deejay flew into India as a disillusioned teenager, booking a one-way ticket from San Francisco to Delhi via Amsterdam, and headed straight for the hills. So, before Goa Gil, there was Baba Mangalanand. "In the summer of 1970, I took guru dakshina in Kashmir, I would spend time in the jungles of Rishikesh where beautiful songs would come to me, like the Vedas came to the Rishis of yore," says the hardened hippie.

The lure of celebrating Christmas with friends brought Gil down to Goa. "The top of my head would open up and these songs would come through. The Rainbow Gypsies made a booklet then with poetry, drawings and my lyrics were in there with Goa Gil on it. The name stuck," he says. For the longest time, the deejay oversaw a gathering place called the Music House, a creative hotspot for Indian and foreign musicians.

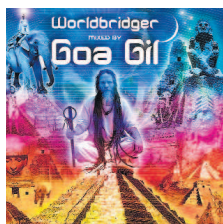
Gil doesn't play in Goa any more, an ironic indictment of the scene that gave him a name in the first place. "When people think of Goa Trance now, it's the stuff I don't play. Most of the producers of this music live in Ibiza and never even visit Goa. In the last few years, a few of them came visiting, but that's it. A lot of promoters carved out a formula and stuck to it for over 10-20 years. I believe in pushing the envelope," he says. Gil traces the deterioration of Goa to early 2000, with the explosion of chai shops and plastic in all its avatars. His contribution to awareness is on a more abstract level,

like a pastor or shaman, "feeding cosmic energy into youth across the world, making them more aware of themselves and their surroundings." Yet, for three months a year, when he isn't travelling, Goa is home. "Where I live, we have African drums by the sunset and friends coming over. I still live in the '70s in that sense," he says.

Though his visits to Mumbai have been few and far between, he remembers performing at Rang Bhavan in '84 and Pune in '78, where recently dozens of youth were arrested and charged for drug use at a rave. For Gil, the difference between a trance party and a rave lies as much in intent as organisation. "Raves are organised with multiple deejays and bands. The quality doesn't matter; the focus is money. The 'real' parties are about one or two people spinning, each deejay interpreting the other's music," he says. What about cops raiding the party on Holi, when Indians publicly consume more cannabis than perhaps any other country in the world?

Gil feels that the problem is not unique to India, that around the world few have to suffer for the benefit of the majority. "It's a problem with change and the generation gap. Take the prohibition era of the '70s. Only tourists with permits cards would be allowed liquor in five-star hotels," he says. The veteran is guarded when quizzed about his stand on the drug debate. "There are plenty of drugs in pharmacies as well. You need to be specific about what drugs you talk about. I believe in the ancient Indian tradition where you would work all day, head to the temple and smoke a chillum. Today, alcohol is a bigger evil," he says.

(Goa Gil will perform tonight as part of Smirnoff's Bar 21 Nights at Squeeze in Bandra)



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