

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



MIDIVAL PUNDITZ

Hello Hello

This past decade has been marked by the rise of the Indian electronica scene and no single band has had more influence on its growth than the **Midival Punditz**. Comprised of New Delhi based producers **Gaurav Raina** and **Tapan Raj**, the Punditz have been repeatedly heralded as pioneers of a scene that has ushered in some of the freshest global music out of India.

On their third studio album *Hello Hello*, the duo has successfully documented their own personal journey as artists and brought their sound into the present. As India's influence on the world through music, film and fashion hits a new peak as evidenced by the worldwide popularity of the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, the Punditz have kept their hands on the wheel and helped steer this ship into a new century of sound and culture.

Hello Hello encompasses all the varied worlds in which this producer/DJ team exists – tying them together through a sound that brings International Electronica, Global Pop, Folk, and Indian Classical with modern day song writing. The result is a sound that is uniquely Midival Punditz. For this album, the duo get support from longtime friend and collaborator **Karsh Kale**, working as co-producer, vocalist, multi-instrumentalist and songwriter.

The album's opener, "**Electric Universe**," follows in the old tradition of "tonight's-the-night" style dance hits. The majestic bansuri flute sets up the vocoder lyrics – "this is the night/to turn on the lights/to the universe" – over a sturdy, western dance groove. But at the end of the record, an acoustic version of the same song, with "real" vocals and acoustic guitar by Karsh Kale, turns it into a nocturne – as if to prove that despite all the bells and whistles, in the end it's all about the song. **Led Zeppelin's "Four Sticks"** gets an authentically South Asian treatment that builds on the faux-Indian sounds of the original. They collaborate on this one, with Israeli electro jazz band, **J.Viewz**. A few minutes later we're taken into the 19th century with a setting of the Indian poet **Mirza Ghalib's** beautiful "**Har Ek Baat**" over a decidedly 21st century beat.

Raina and Raj realized that Western dance music wasn't connecting with them on the same emotional level as India's own classical and folk music – so they decided to do something about it. In 1997, after several years of work setting up their own studio in New Delhi, the two producers launched the Punditz. Gigs with **Tabla Beat Science**, the Indo-electronica act founded by producer **Bill Laswell** and tabla maestro **Zakir Hussain**, put the duo on the map. They honed their vision with a series of events called **Cyber Mehfil** – a modern update on an ancient north Indian tradition of artistic gatherings. The original mehfil could include music, poetry, and/or dance.

The Cyber Mehfil brought the sounds of modern electronica to the traditional music of the subcontinent, while adding visuals and incense to entice the other senses as well. In a span of eight years since the first Cyber Mehfil, the Midival Punditz have become the most in-demand producers and remixers in India, with remix credits for some of the biggest Bollywood soundtracks such as the 2008 blockbusters *Don* and *Chake De*. They have shattered attendance records of some of India's most venerable clubs such as Mumbai's Blue Frog and have become the foremost ambassadors of India's rapidly growing alternative and electronic music scene around the world.

Since releasing their first Six Degrees record in 2002, the Punditz have created a Bollywood film score, given tracks for a Hollywood film (*Closer*), collaborated with some of the greatest classical musicians of India, and contributed to several Six Degrees compilations. Their version of Zeppelin's "Four Sticks," in fact, was originally done for the Six Degrees 10th anniversary record, and revealed Raina and Raj's abiding love for classic rock. That affection colors much of Hello Hello. The song "**Atomizer**," for example, is a rollicking, stomping tune that looks back to 80s rock and also features an electronic "vocal" track. And on "**Drifting**," one of the album's two instrumentals, **Pandit Ajay Prasanna's** bansuri flute weaves its way over a layer of guitars that suggest U2's, the Edge.

Because young Indians grow up with a strong classical music influence and an even stronger pop music one (namely, the string of hit songs coming out of the Bollywood film industry), the Punditz's blend of Western and Indian music is completely organic; there's no sense of anything being forced. In fact, in songs like "**Tonic**," it's hard to tell where one tradition leaves off and the next begins. Is that a clubby groove?, a South Indian folk rhythm? Maybe it's both... As if to blur borders even further, the vocals consist of a bilingual rap, by actor/performance artist **Ajay Naidu**. The voice itself has a quiet, restrained sound, but there's no restraint in the words. This is one you probably won't be playing for your mom. Another seamless fusion is "**Desolate**," where a moody, 6-beat rhythm leads to a surge of voices, by Bollywood star vocalist **Shankar Mahadevan** & New York based singer/songwriter **Shahid**. It's a distinctly Indian sound propelled by grinding electric guitars.

Like any good producer team, Raina and Raj know that you have to vary the mood and the tempo, and two of the highlights on *Hello Hello* are slower, more atmospheric songs. "**Naina Laagey**," written collaboratively with Assamese singer/producer **Papon**, has a lovely melody that comes straight from the tradition of Indian Classical love songs; this one, though, is sung over tolling piano and Brian Eno-esque electronics. And "**Sun Mere Sanam**," sung in Urdu, has some of the most complex singing on the album by New York based modern ghazal artist **Vishal Vaid**, floating over a downtempo groove and a bed of synthesized and programmed sounds.

Of course, this all plays well in the clubs of Mumbai and New Delhi. But Midival Punditz have also become a genuinely international band, attracting critical acclaim in Europe and the States while performing their high-energy live show at festivals such as **Glastonbury** and selling out venues from New York to San Francisco. Collaborations with rising star **Anoushka Shankar**, "it" Bollywood composers **Salim & Sulaiman**, **Sting**, **Norah Jones**, and countless others in India and abroad have cemented their reputation as both talented producers and musical visionaries. They are part of a remarkable infusion of Indian culture around the world. India's film industry has begun appealing to the global mainstream, and cross-cultural movies like **Slumdog Millionaire** have become worldwide success stories. The stage is set: it's a world on Shuffle, and Midival Punditz are on the playlist.

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