

Music of the Soul: The Lover and The Beloved
An Interview with Donna De Lory

Donna De Lory is known for her pop music and beautiful backup vocals for artists like Jewel and Enrique Iglesias. She is probably most well-known for touring with Madonna as one of her two singing/dancing stage companions for over a decade. Last year she made her foray into the spiritual music scene with the release of her CD, "The Lover and The Beloved" —a blending of celestial music, her ethereal voice and Sanskrit mantras. Donna discusses the evolution of her music and her life on tour with Madonna.

Integral Yoga Magazine: When did you become interested in Yoga?

Donna De Lory: Ever since I was a little girl I have been drawn to things from India—the music, the Sanskrit words. When I was 17, I started to do some Yoga. I remember watching Joseph Campbell on television years ago. He was so inspired by Sanskrit. He said, "Satchidananda" and how it was a huge word. I remember saying, "Wow, what is that word? Truth-knowledge-bliss." I have read some of Swami Satchidananda's books and now I want to go deeper into his teachings and see where they lead me.

IYM: How did you go from Madonna and pop music to "The Lover and the Beloved"?

DDL: It was a gradual evolution. I was singing in churches and Yoga centers about six years ago and I was saying: "Ganapati Om" and other mantras. I was also playing pop music and dance music and then someone said I should play harmonium with my band. I had no idea what a harmonium was and then a friend gave me one to borrow. For a year I had it. Things just started happening like that. I started writing my songs on it and it started influencing me more. Without going to India or knowing how to play it, but by just sitting down and learning it, that became my meditation. It was incredible and I decided to immerse myself in this.

One day I was rehearsing with a band and I started singing mantras over the music and no one knew what I was doing but it all came together. I feel that the mantras are these sacred words for all of us and now I'm getting deeper and deeper into them. They've helped me realize what music is to me—it is my spirit. What do I have to do to be in my bliss? Just sing. I don't have to be a star, be beautiful, be loved, be like Madonna. Wow! Thank God I found this, I found my soul. I just need to sing. I am just opening myself up to what I am going to sing, what my voice is going to translate.

IYM: Speaking of Madonna, what is it like touring with her?

DDL: In the beginning, it was fun touring the world with her and trying to be a star and hanging with celebrities. It was a blast to travel and dance and see the world from that perspective. But after doing it two or three times, been there done that and she also got to that place. She is older than me and she has been a great influence and a mirror. Now, I'm watching her go into being a family person and having to juggle career and family. I was seeing her do it and wondering if I could do it, now that I have a daughter.

So I asked her if striving for that level of success is worth all the hard work that she has put in. She said, as she usually does, “You need to ask yourself that. I’m just a mirror. You have to ask your own soul. Is this the life I want?”

IYM: What about her spiritual practices? Have you learned about Kabbalah?

DDL: She has a very serious Yoga practice and at first, I just didn’t commit myself to taking that time every day to practice. I didn’t have that type of discipline and didn’t realize it was so important. On our last tour, she had a Kabbalah teacher come out and they had Kabbalah classes at night after rehearsal. When my boyfriend was there it was beautiful to go to the classes together and to learn the principles that you can immediately apply to your life. Learning to accept pain in life is one principle. When you are hurting, you say yes to life. And that is the ultimate hard one! But, the alternative is to be a victim. So you have to say yes. It’s the same principle in Buddhism and Hinduism.

I appreciated Madonna’s efforts to have that for everyone and to enable us to apply it to each other as a group. I think it helped remind us of what we were there for. We had prayers before the shows and that was beautiful. She was completely centering everyone. It was incredible. When you know someone who is surrounded by all that fame and wealth—it’s good work.

IYM: Do you think it’s a harder struggle for those who have that fame to stay centered?

DDL: I think it is harder. It can be more of a diversion if you feel you need material things or success to fill you up. I try and be really conscious of that. The huge thing is not getting attached. This lifetime I was born into this and I am grateful for this experience and I don’t want to judge others—this is the life I needed to learn from and to find spiritual life in this.

IYM: Is it harder to find the spiritual when singing at a rock concert or a club?

DDL: You can have a spiritual experience in a club. It’s just that it’s distracting; people are distracted. You can feel the spirit of alcohol. Last time I played in New York, I played a club Friday night and at Jivamukti Yoga center Saturday night. The club had a great sound system and it was a great experience. Some people came up to me and said: “I just feel great after your music.” So it happens; but I feel less connected in that setting because of the alcohol. In a Yoga center everyone is so present. It’s nice when people are quiet and listening when you play and that they are appreciating and being moved and inspired.

IYM: Would you talk more about the balance between the spiritual and material?

DDL: I love material things—good food, to live in a beautiful place—and I really like the balance of the two and to find that in everything. I wanted so much to be a part of the spiritual community and share my gift in this community without having to join ashrams or temples. That was too extreme for me with my life. But to be able to tap in and connect with people and find truth, this is my path. I was looking at a photo of

Swami Satchidananda with the car and I loved that he appreciated and enjoyed things that are part of life. Like Mother Teresa said, “Say yes to life” and say yes to all of it.

IYM: What is it like to include mantras in your music?

DDL: When I used to write songs, they referred to parts of my life—relationships I had and getting caught in love. It’s different than mantras—OM, Amen, Hallelujah—which reach out so far. When I was singing the mantras, I was getting completely lost into something more transcendent. With pop music you are usually singing about a breakup or hurt or someone leaving—you are dealing with your mind and ego. With mantras, it’s not just about me satisfying myself or about how people will love me. This is more about doing God’s work and using my gift.

IYM: Would you like to do more recordings using mantras?

DDL: I feel more inspired to sing mantras right now, whether it’s Sanskrit or a Hebrew prayer—it’s all truth. Truth is one, God has so many names. I’ve been trying to let this flow through me since I was young and now I feel in a place to do it. It’s exhilarating and it feels good—like eating a salad out of your garden. Why is that different than when you go to a restaurant? It’s a different energy. I want to stay really pure, letting it come through me instead of worrying about whether it will sell or not. I want to keep the energy and strength to stick with it.

I’m just trying to stay in my bliss—to get out of the ego and mind. I try not to think, “This is what’s going to sell,” but rather, “Is this my heart, is this is what I want to do?” I was listening to the “Lokaa Samasta” *sloka* and I’d like to compose a song with this and its translation. It’s a feeling, it’s so big! I feel like I found this vibration that is for the good and I finally found a way to use my gift and I hope to keep letting this flow through me.

*For more information on Donna De Lory’s recordings and tour schedule, please visit:
www.donnadelory.com*