

October 4, 2006 issue

Community News



**Achievers:** *The Pranav Ashram Heritage Class held its 4th Annual Graduation on September 23, 2006 at the Humberwood Community Centre with its over seventy children in attendance. The program featured a musical segment of various ragas, singing and tabla recitals by the students under the tutelage of Dave, Nisha and Vishal Samraj.*

*Toronto's lawyer Mr. Dhaman Kissoon of the legal firm, Kissoon & Associates, encouraged the students to aspire for high goals and take hold of the opportunities presented in this society. He pledged an annual donation of \$1000 over the next ten years to the two most outstanding students in the music class and presented the first two certificates for the year 2006/2007 to Natalie Persaud and Jessica Ramlakhan.*

*Mr. Jay Brijpaul, well known Toronto Real Estate magnate, lauded the efforts of Swami Bhajanananda in keeping the children of the Ashram within their culture and religion. The Swami conducts weekly classes in Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, Hindu Philosophy and Hindi. Mr. Brijpaul followed up with the commitment of a generous financial reward to the best all round student in his/her school and in the Ashram Heritage class.*

*Swami Bhajanananda outlined his vision of the heritage class which is to imbibe in the children high ideals and moral values to achieve successful careers and become themselves worthy ambassadors of society.*

*In picture above, the students of the Ashram's Heritage Class after receiving their certificates and accolades. Pix by Ramesh Ramkalawan*

## **Nivelli's 'Rainbow Raani' unfetters Colours of Humanity**



***Rainbow Raani in Toronto: From left - Pradeep Samtani, Producer; Mickey Nivelli (Harbance Kumar), director and screenplay writer; Supriya Singh, actress and Dr. The Honourable Slinger Francisco (the Mighty Sparrow) who performs on two cuts of Rainbow Raani (Love Beyond the Physical), a new movie just released in Toronto following successful screenings in Guyana and South Africa. (Photo by William Doyle-Marshall)***

***By William Doyle-Marshall***

Mickey Nivelli has been living in Trinidad for 42 years with his Trinidad-born wife. He began his filmmaking career with "The Right and The Wrong", filmed in Trinidad and Tobago. Since then he has produced a variety of films set in different Caribbean locations as well as South Africa.

His most recent project Rainbow Raani screened in Toronto last week was motivated by human harmony. When Nivelli, formerly known as Harbance Kumar looked at the rainbow a couple of years ago, he felt God wanted to give human beings a message. He analyzed the rainbow as God's appreciation for all colours and not just one.

"God likes not one colour. God likes a variety of colours in his grand design. Those people who think of only white colour or brown colour or yellow colour just have to look at the rainbow and they would know that God's message is different".

The director felt he wanted to share that message with the world. But realized he could not do that in the form of a lecture. He decided it would be necessary to weave it into a love story. So just like the Beatles of Liverpool, Nivelli said he created a story of a band called the Rainbows. It comprised four lead players – an African, an Indian, a European and a Chinese.

The cast of performers include Stephanie Bentley, Ryan Boda, Aldous Davidson, Sinee Daniels, Manvi Dhoopar, Kirk Jardine, Roshan Khan, Stephen Hiscock, former British High Commissioner to Guyana, Jenna Harris, Olive Gopaul (Miss Guyana), Sabrina Perry, Kristia Ramlagan, Pascale Piquion, Laura Smith, Max Massiah, Prashant Kumar and Rondell Leo Matthews.

It is their story, their love conflict interwoven with the message of human harmony that Nivelli aimed for. Based on public responses in Guyana and South Africa where Rainbow Raani was screened, the director thinks he has very successfully transmitted the message from his mind to the screen. He is convinced that people love very lofty messages, which are sort of intertwined with entertainment, music and comedy. "You laugh. The subliminal message will hit the target stronger than if I had blatantly talked that this should be and this should not be," he noted.

Rainbow Raani has created history of sorts for Dr. the Honourable Slinger Francisco O.C. (the Mighty Sparrow). He sings the title cut as well as another, titled "It Breaks My Heart" on the sound track. The opportunity to do a different kind of music and especially to put it up on the screen, Dr. Francisco could not pass up.

"This is what I have been looking for, for a long time. I wouldn't say all my life because all my life I never knew what would happen," the champion calypsonian said. But for the greater part of his professional career, Sparrow always wanted to do something special. He considered this as one of the opportunities that he embraced. "I thought based on the reviews and the appreciation shown by the people, who have seen it and heard it, we did a fine job," the Birdie, as he is called fondly smiled.

Nivelli describes Sparrow's involvement with the project as a divine intervention. He reports the death of his bird, which he had loved like his son. In a dream the bird, a parakeet, was playing on his carpet with a sparrow. The next morning he phoned Sparrow and was shocked when the calypsonian agreed to the performance.

Nivelli has been an admirer of the Mighty Sparrow for four decades. Pausing to make the link with the world famous calypsonian he remarked "I am from India and I have been married to a Trinidadian girl 42 years and we have been having a lovely 42 years. So I am the son-in-law of Trinidad for 42 years. If you are a son-in-law or son of Trinidad and you don't know the Mighty Sparrow or don't admire the Mighty Sparrow or don't take inspiration from the Mighty Sparrow, that's wrong."

He boldly admits being inspired by the calypsonian. "I have been taking inspiration from Sparrow all the time, giving us subliminal messages through little naughtiness and through everything and those people who focus on his naughtiness, focus on his naughtiness. But those people who see everything in their right perspective they will get the message of what a powerful message he delivers at the right time to the right people."

Following the movie's recent screening in South Africa, Nivelli was asked whether Julio Iglesias was the artist who sang "It breaks My Heart". A lady asked if it was. "When I told her it was Sparrow, the Calypso King of the World, she was surprised that he could sing like that. I said "you do not know his versatility. That's how lucky we are to get the Mighty Sparrow into Rainbow Raani," Nivelli concluded.

Rainbow Raani presented by Guyana Entertainment Inc. is showing at the Rainbow cinema at Fairview Mall, Don Mills & Sheppard.

## **Charu Shankar - a voice pleading for the welfare of the needy**



***Charu Shankar - intrinsic passion for musical expression***

Charu Shankar, a classically trained singer in the Carnatic style of Indian music, performed live at the Burnhamthorpe Library in Mississauga on September 30. Her efforts are directed to her charitable foundation Pankaja.

Charu's aim is to raise Can. \$80,000 to build facilities in the village of Ayikudy, close to the therapeutic Kutralam waterfalls in Tamil Nadu, South India, a night's train ride from the coastal city of Chennai. In a visit to this area in 2004, Charu was struck by the lack

of medical facilities to help those in need. Her own father was a victim of this unfortunate situation as he lost a limb to diabetes.

Charu worked as an educator for UNESCO and saw the sufferings of her countrymen, especially children, as she travelled from place to place. She decided to pour her life's savings of Can. \$10,000 and to connect her "intrinsic passion for musical expression with helping children in a tangible way." This resulted in Pankaja and the liaison with Handi-care Int., a Canadian-based charitable organization. Charu hopes to provide wheel chairs, first aid supplies and other medical necessities to the community of Ayikudy.

In her presentation, this charming young lady who turned heads at the recently concluded Masala! Masti! Mehndi! shows, focussed on songs written by Shri Swathi Thirunal Rame Varma, a South Indian King and a gifted musician in the State of Travancore who lived in the 19th century. She did not just sing her pieces but went a bit further, to educate her audience about Carnatic music in Malyalam and Telugu, in addition to English. "My music is lively and peaceful. At the same time, it is artistic, vibrant and uplifting," Charu said. The first half featured pure classical pieces like the ragas Kalyani and Mayamalav Gowla.

The second half of the show was less classical in nature with the inclusion of a Meerebai bhajans, one set in raag Brindavani Saarang and another in raag Paharee, adding a scintillating thillana in Hameer Kalyani. Charu hoped that at the end of the show, more people would leave with more inner peace than when they first arrived at the theatre. (MM)

## Hundreds join Dhaman at 50



***Dhaman Kissoon and his family at his 50th birthday celebration at the Devi Mandir last Saturday. From left, son Navin, Dhaman, wife Sultana and daughter Mala.***

*By Manshad Mohamed*

Last Saturday at the Devi Mandir in Pickering, Mr. Dhaman Kissoon was indeed the 'man-of-the-moment.' With a host of friends, families, co-workers, a community of well-wishers and several religious heavy-weights in attendance, the well known Toronto attorney celebrated his 50th birthday in grand style in an entirely religious setting. Kissoon's 50th birthday, auspiciously, fell during the week that Hindus observe the occasion of Navraatra, the worship of Durga Maa.

Kissoon is no stranger to the Devi Mandir and its vast membership as he has been actively supporting that organization with, among other initiatives, his Annual Golf Tournament. At Saturday's function Vishnu Sookar, a spokesperson for the Mandir, publicly acknowledged that Kissoon's efforts at fundraising for the Mandir have yielded over \$100,000 so far.

But the charitable nature of this legal luminary expresses itself in multifarious ways through different avenues. For example, he teams up annually with the Police in 23

Division to bring Christmas cheer at the end of each year to the disadvantaged in the City's west end. This act of philanthropy is repeated at the time of Thanksgiving. He is also responsible for organizing Leadership Workshops for youths in his community. Just one week prior to his birthday he committed to an award of \$1000 annually over the next 10 years to be given to a deserving student graduating from the Pranav Ashram Heritage Class.

The Kissoons, a family-name synonymous with the legal profession, are a very closely knitted unit, and in Dhaman's philanthropic endeavours, he is assisted by his wife Sultana, his mother Mrs Latchmin Kissoon and other family members.

At last weekend's celebrations, a special service was performed in Dhaman's honour by Pt Munelal Maharaj and Pt. Damodar Sharma while Swami Bhajanananda of the Pranav Ashram and Mr Dwarka Persaud, President of the Radhakrishna Hindu Mandir of Cambridge paid fitting tributes. Popular music instructor of the Saaz-O-Awaaz School of Music, Shri Dev Bansraj Ramkissoon and his wonderful tabla playing son Dev Jr. delighted the crowd with bhajans. Dinner was also served.

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