

issue 2

ISSN 1749-6144

serendipity

Aspirational. Inspirational. Sri Lankan.

M.I.A

Missing in America

**50 hottest
things to do
in Colombo**

Arrack

Sexy cocktails

Quails in Seeni Sambol

New wave Sri Lankan cuisine!

PLUS

Tsunami - One Year On
Sunil - Gypsy King



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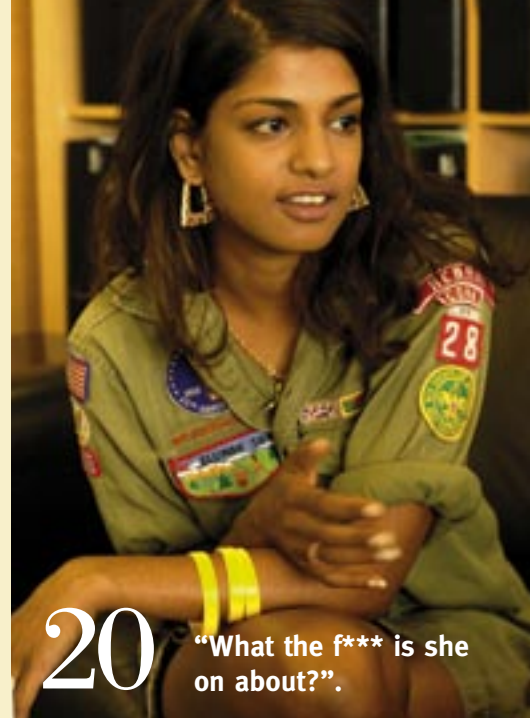
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Wow...

What a whirlwind couple of months. The reception we got from you guys has been fantastic! We've received so many emails from people all around the world - it seems like we've hit a nerve out there. We're glad you like what we're doing - keep sending us your feedback.

Music is in the blood of all Sri Lankans - so in this issue we profile two very different artistes who have made their mark. Our cover story is M.I.A the controversial female rapper who's generating acres of press coverage; while equally memorable in his own way is Sunil, the lead singer of the Gypsies. You've seen him cavorting on stage singing about space midgets; now hear him sound off about the things that get him good and mad.

For those of us who were irrevocably moved by the events that shook Sri Lanka on Boxing Day 2004, our special retrospective on the Tsunami is a meditation on that fateful day - and the aftermath one year on.

But at Serendipity, our goal is also to celebrate and inspire: that's why we firmly believe that it is everyone's duty to take their friends and neighbours back to Sri Lanka, start spending money there and get the economy kick-started again.

That's why we've put together a fantastic 8 page insiders guide on to how to party in Colombo (and also how to recover on the morning after when you've 'overdone it' on the dance floor).

And if you're looking for imaginative ideas on food and drink this Christmas, you might want to check our new sections on 'Modern Lankan Cuisine' (quails stuffed with seeni sambol anyone?) and our special section on 'Arrack Cocktails' - some new twists on old favourites.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue, as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

From our family to yours, much love,

Afdhel & the Serendipity Team

feedback@serendipitymag.net

serendipity

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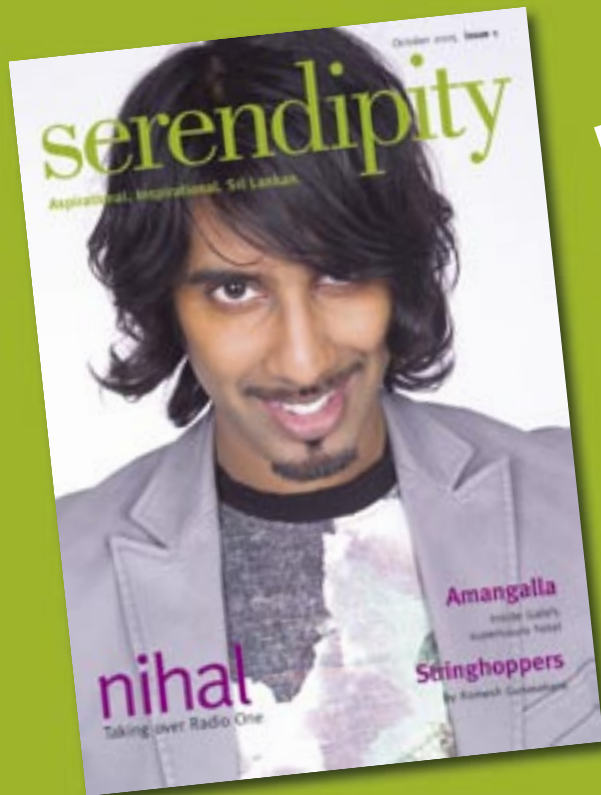
serendipity

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kothu

What's cooking this month...

ASIAN AVENUE

We've been bobbing our heads to some fine beats and rhymes from promising young rapper Krishan. His album 'Asian Avenue' comprises Tamil hip-hop in its purest form covering themes like the ethnic conflict, youth, love and drugs. A wide range of professional music producers, lyricists and vocalists make this one a pleasure to listen to. Look out for a full interview with him in our next issue but for now you can find out more at: www.krishanlive.com

WAKE MAGAZINE

WAKE is a collection of short stories, novel extracts and poems by authors as distinguished as Sir Arthur C Clarke and Romesh Gunasekera. Some pieces have taken on new significances since the Boxing Day tsunami, others are indirect responses on relevant themes, still more are just good pieces of writing. Along with the fiction, WAKE contains comment, opinion and diary articles, illustrations and photographs. 100% of money raised from selling the anthology will go to Habitat for Humanity; production costs are covered through charitable sponsorship. To purchase a copy go to: www.wakemagazine.org

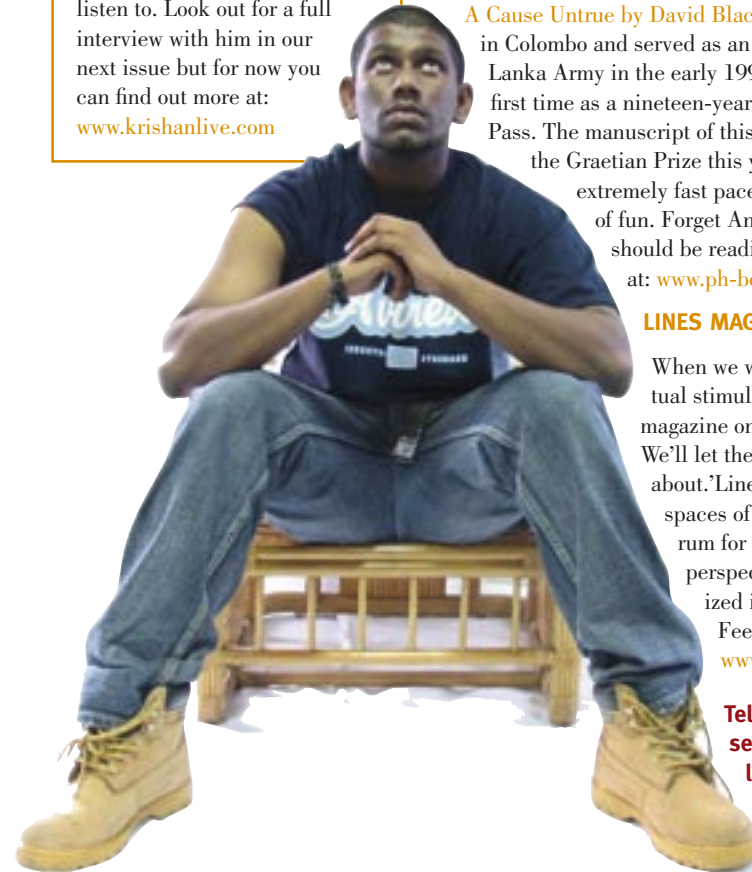
NEW FICTION

A Cause Untrue by David Blacker. David Blacker was born in Colombo and served as an enlisted soldier in the Sri Lanka Army in the early 1990s, seeing combat for the first time as a nineteen-year-old rifleman at Elephant Pass. The manuscript of this book was short listed for the Graetian Prize this year. It's a thriller that is extremely fast paced, action-filled and loads of fun. Forget Andy McNab, this is what you should be reading pool-side. Find out more at: www.ph-books.com

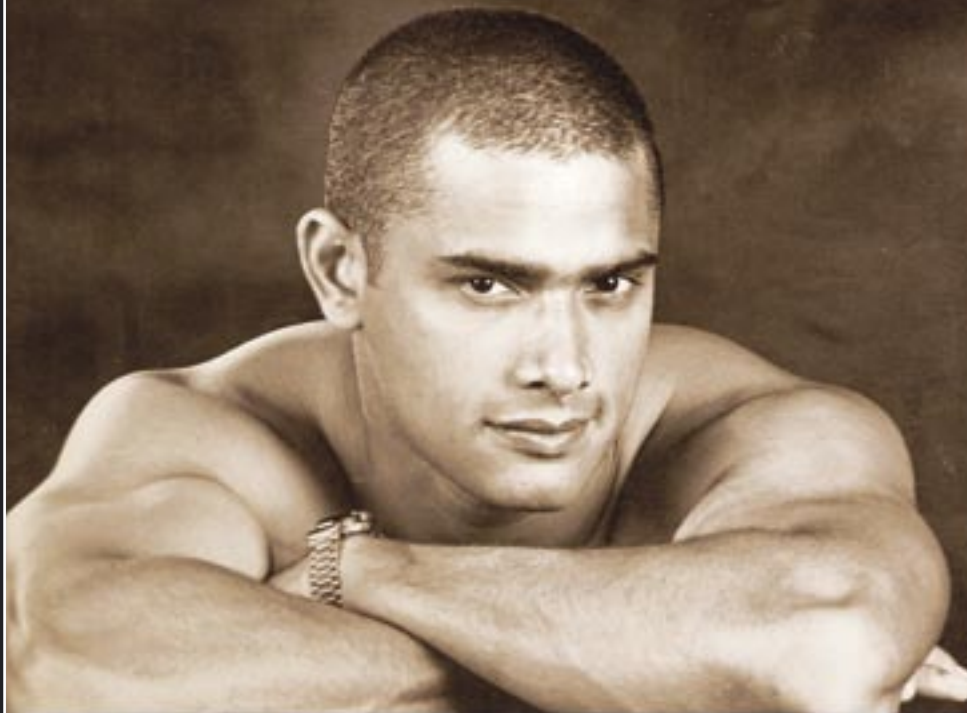
LINES MAGAZINE

When we want some intellectual stimulation, we check out Lines magazine online, coming out New York. We'll let them tell you what they're all about. 'Lines engages with the political spaces of Sri Lanka. We provide a forum for voices of dissent, including perspectives and issues marginalized in mainstream debates.' Feed your brain at: www.lines-magazine.org

Tell us what's making your senses tingle, email us at: letters@serendipitymag.net



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letters

Hi,

Thnx for a brilliant, mature magazine. I was kind of getting fed up reading mags and papers printed here in London by Sri Lankans relating to Sri Lankan issues. The only thing available to read in these is politics and mud slinging hence this is a novel change from the norm thnx again keep up the good work

**Fatima Hamsadeen,
London**

Glad you liked it Fatima. We were kind of tired of them too – which is why we started the magazine. We'll leave the mud-slinging to others.

Hey guys,

Kudos on Serendipity. Its about f***ing time. Hope it will be kept up. I look forward to contributing my meanderings on the flipside Down Under as well, if it be considered. Location- Brisbane. 19 years, dude. Student to be. In the midst of settling down and starting a

new.alien experience, survived already for 7 months and counting.

Keep it going guys, just a shout out to say Well f***ing done.

Ciao for the nonce,

**Neraj
Queensland, Aussieland**

F***ing strewth mate, thanks for the words of encouragement. Have a f***ing bonzer day and crack a tinny for us.

Hi there,

My name is Andrew and I am writing to enquire as to how I can 'get involved'. Are you looking for people to help out in any particular areas at all?

I've taken a look at the website for the magazine and it's looking good! The simplicity of the site makes it very easy to view and it definitely has a contemporary look. I was a little shocked to see myself and a few mates in a photo in "the audience" section!

Kind regards,

Andrew Logathanan, London

Hey Andrew...thanks for the

offer of help. Just keep your eyes and ears peeled for interesting Sri Lankans doing interesting things and let us know of anything cool you think we should be covering. Its your magazine!

Haera Rai, Serendipity,
Haere rai,

Welcome, welcome and well done.

May you titillate, fecundate, tabulate wonder, evoke sighs of longing and sharp gasps of delight, may your funk be feisty and draw people in Picasso pleasure.

Nicky Black, Raglan, New Zealand

Titillate, fecundate and tabulate. That's as good a definition of our editorial mission as was ever written. We'll try our very best :)

Hi there,

Congrats to you and your team! excellent work with the mag!

**M. Hilal Suhaib
Ontario, Canada**



Pics: Lee Bazalgette

01. Dr. Katherine Giles, Ms. Nicky Giles, Mr. Dion Paragas and Ms. Leah Marikkar **02.** Mr. Nihal Arthanayake and Mr. Afdhel Aziz **03.** Winner of the Best Velvet Jacket Award **04.** Ms. Annabell Seevaratnam and Ms. Michele Brainerd **05.** Ms. Sura Al-Naimi and Mr. Eroshan Meewella **06.** Rapper Krishan (second from left) and his crew **07.** Ms. Elsie Peel, Mr. Brenton Smith and Ms. Leah Marikkar **08.** Ms. Mihiri Bonney, Ms. Dinalie Gomez, Mr. Nuwan Kalpage, Ms. Radhika Mendis and Ms. Deborah Peters **09.** Ms. Leah Marikkar and Ms. Soharni Tennakoon **10.** Ms. Nikki Dowson, Mr. Romesh Virasinghe, Ms. Jo Parker, Mr. Khaliq Ismail **11.** Ms Sashi Wettasinghe and Mr Sherhan Wicky

Serendipity: The Launch! (kind of...)

So everything's on course for our swanky launch party, goody bags all wrapped, DJ warming up nicely, Ceylon Pride arrack shots being poured – when the venue decides to cancel the event (for reasons too long and obtuse to get into – see our website for all the sordid details).

As you can imagine, not the best news in the world to get when you have hundreds of people standing outside waiting to get into your global launch party.

Serendipitously however, the Medicine Bar on Great Eastern Street around the corner was happy

to take us in at short notice – and imagine our surprise when over 150 of you amazing people decided to turn up and party with us regardless!

Our sincere apologies to everyone who couldn't make it to the new venue - and our thanks to everyone who braved the cold and the queue outside to come in and celebrate with us - we love you for it !

See you at the next party, in Colombo, Dec 23rd at Tantra,

The Serendipity Team

the 50 hottest things to do in Colombo

Heading to Colombo for the holidays? Love your extended family but just can't handle another endless round of lunches and dinner?

Our Associate Editor and '21st Century Holly Golightly' Leah Marikkar, tells you how to get under the skin of Colombo in the Christmas Season. Here's our pick of the 50 Hottest Things to do in Colombo.

Get ready to party...

Pics: Dominic Sansoni
Deshan Tennekoon
Gehan De Silva Wijeyaratne



Barefoot Garden Café



Number 18



1 Drinking Chilean wine in the **Barefoot Garden Café** listening to jazz on a sunny day after taking a buzzed walk through the gallery.

2 **Number 18** – Great cocktails, superb fusion cuisine from chef Russell Gronow, and impeccable service make this currently the hottest restaurant in Colombo.

3 Eating masala koththu with iced Milo while sitting in your front car seat half drunk at **Pilawoos** at 5am in the morning. The Mecca for late night revellers looking to refuel after a hard night's hedonism. The one in **Kollupitiya** is still open; however we recommend driving past the old **Bamba Pillas** and holding a moment's silence. They say they'll re-open in a new location soon, but who knows. God bless 'em.

4 An evening beer/coffee (for the alarming few who don't want beer...erm.) on the **Mount Lavinia Hotel** terrace to watch the sunset

5 Extremely hung-over on a Saturday afternoon having a massive meal at **168 Seafood Palace** catching up on the antics of the night before

6 On a semi date having an iced cold Lion Lager or arrack cocktail sitting by the ocean on the brand spanking new pool terrace at the **Galle Face Hotel** – enjoying the ocean spray and secretly trying to keep your hair in place

7 **Jazz Sundays at CR& FC** – Sitting on a mat in the rugby field at dusk listening to some of the best spontaneous jazz this side of the Indian Ocean. Only on the first Sunday of the month.

8 Ordering a large arrack and ginger beer in the air-conditioned bar chatting to waiters and eating cheese toast at the **Singhalese Sports Club** on a Friday night. (Note: You need a member to get in. A member of the club that is. Not a penis).

9 **H2O** – dancing till 5am at Colombo's latest club with all the beautiful people you'll most definitely see again.

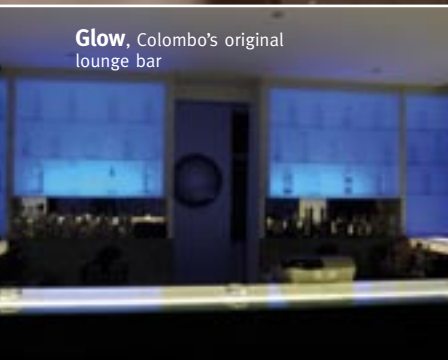
10 Screaming "We Are the Champions" with 4 people trying to control the mike at **Lava KARAOKE Bar**, especially when everyone you know in Colombo is squished into the lounge.

11 **Rhythm and Blues** – getting there for just after midnight when all the musicians gather for a post gig jam session – no under 21's (a rule which applies to most bars in the country- remember to carry your fake ID!) ! And indulge in the awesome local cocktails. (Or delicious fried Singapore mixed noodles).

12 Thursday nights salsa dancing at **Bistro Latino** sipping on Peach Margaritas and getting the eye from sleazy old men. >>



Glow, Colombo's original lounge bar



13 The Sanctuary Spa – Get the all-over aromatherapy massage to wash away your jet lag. Our editor loved it so much he once went four times in seven days. It's on his speed dial.

14 Sitting by the glass topped bar at **Glow**, the first bona fide lounge bar that started the trend in Colombo, sipping on a very strong cosmopolitan and glaring back at the teenage girls who eye you up from their crowded hyperactive corner. Sadly its closing in January and moving to new premises, but they wanted to say to all of their patrons, thanks for the memories.

15 Inn on the Green – missing a bit of England? Sitting in a crowded pub booth having a steak and ale pie with a variety of beers off the tap, plus a pretty diverse list of canned and bottled brews.

16 Jumping into several **trishaws** with your friends at 3am and then racing each other to the next bar/club – screaming and skidding down **Galle Road**.

17 Sakura (Japanese Restaurant) – while munching on sashimi on the tatami mats, then being told by the waitress in classic Lankan accent “sorry sir we are cloused.”

18 Indulging in a mocha pot or crème brulee in the afternoon at **The Gallery Restaurant at Paradise Road**, then later on a mojito-fuelled, candlelit date but knowing half the restaurant is watching you.

19 Pettah Market on a Saturday morning. Busting crowds, great bargains and endless photo opportunities.

20 The beef samosas at **Imperial Pakistani Restaurant** opposite **House of Fashion** – they are absolutely divine.

21 Branded socks at 30p a pair at **House of Fashion**. So you can mack out in style.

22 The only **McDonald's** in the world (yes it is true) where the staff takes your order and serve you straight to you in your car and not at a drive in counter. Except in the rain.

23 The ridiculously cheap Rs.45/- shot of arrack and hot butter fried cuttlefish at the **White Horse**.

24 If you can find a member then the best cheese toast you can find in Colombo is at your fingertips at **The Golf Club** and if you want to bear it go to the old school men's bar for a real classic experience.

25 Eating nasi goreng or chicken koththu at 4am at the **Hilton Coffeshop** after shoving a couple salt and pepper shakers into your friends' handbag when she isn't looking.

26 Waiting about an hour for the most delicious grilled lobster dish at **Golden Mile**, during which you manage to get enough sand into your shoes to create a mini beach in your back garden.

27 Catching up with old school friends at the **Commons Café** eating a chilli chicken melt followed with a slice of mud cake and the gasp “No! He's gay?!”

28 On an occasional Friday night, taking a bottle of arrack and heading down to **Mt. Lavinia Beach** with a few buddies and a lot of stories.

29 Getting stopped and checked by the cops at 3am blind drunk yet still trying to convince them you really didn't see the roundabout you “slightly grazed”. Then slipping him five hundred bucks to look the other way.

30 Running for what you think is the best table by the pool at the **Colombo Swimming Club** and then spending the next half hour to catch the waiters attention to order the next round. So you order 3 more.

31 Binge eating an unlimited number of milk hoppers and the best of Jaffna cooking at **The Peninsula**.

32 Walking into **Frankfurt Lavinia** for a prize-winning steak on a Poya day...why Poya? Just ask for the teacups.

33 Watching matches at the **Cricket Club Cafe** shouting abuse at the >>



Tantra, new look, new menu, retro vibe and great views.



opposition team followers and eating burgers named after cricketer's body parts.

34 Cricket matches!!!! Bajau bands, shouting till you're hoarse and drinking continuously so being unable to follow what the score is or who's playing.

35 Partying at **Tantra**. Recently refurbished with a new menu and desserts, more casual seating with sofas & humptys, updated cocktails and drinks menu, (incl some new world wines) and more of a retro music vibe. If you want a taste of Pangea or Umbaba in Sri Lanka, this is the closest you'll get – but minus the attitude and plus a fantastic view of the Colombo Skyline.

36 Any play at the **Punchi Theatre**, which looks like a giant space mutant anthill from the outside but a great space for theatre according to those in the know.

37 Eating isso vade at **Galle Face Green** with kids with kites and wondering whether you should buy an inflatable penguin and Spiderman doll from the street vendors.

38 Do an awesome takeaway of **Shanti Vihars'** ulunduu wadeys and paper dhosais with parippu whether its for having friends over or on your own.

39 Finding amazing high street brand winter wear in the middle of the clothing rack when you think you're done shopping, at **Arena**

40 Getting your hair cut at **Kess** and having an absolute blast chatting to Vasantha as he tells you your shoes "so" don't go with your bag.

41 Casinos in Colombo and though they explicitly say they only allow foreigners, sitting there at the black jack table screaming when you win – drinking your free scotch and coke. And they bring you free smokes too.

42 Odel – The Selfridges of Colombo. Everything you need under one roof. Nuff said.

43 Clancy's on a Tuesday night dancing crazy to Wildfire playing "Summer of '69"...again.

44 Beach Wadiya - This venerable seafood restaurant has been around for donkey's years, has been patronised by royalty and rock stars alike and still manages to retain its shabby chic appeal.

45 Galle Face Hotel New Years Eve Party – The granddaddy of 31st Night parties. A great New Years Eve party consisting of awesome music from DJ Tareeq and Dr J and a host of funky individuals living it up till 10am. Believe it.

46 24 hour beer home delivery (like something out of a Homer Simpson fantasy.... mmmmm) Call 2.489.489

47 Buying cheap pirate DVDs – We wont tell you the places we go to because they'll get raided; suffice it to say that we don't leave Colombo without a suitcase filled with the latest Scoresese, Spielberg and Spike Lee masterpieces.

48 Barista – As Derek Zoolander would say, the place to get orange mocha Frappuccinos! Though you may have to settle for a straight skinny decaf.

49 Paradise Road – The most tasteful ethnic modernist chic for your home.

50 – Pick up a copy of the Leisure Times magazine (238 5970), Colombo's most complete and up to date listings guide to entertainment and leisure. Unless you want to be having yet another lunch with your third cousin quite removed, on the basis that you once played together in a sandpit when you were three, the LT gives you an insight to this little vibrant hub of a city, its got the inside skinny on the latest places, including all the contact information and latest events. We highly recommend it!

For more information on contacts for each location check out www.theleisuretimes.com for telephone, address and a brief explanation of what to expect!

Colombo Rocks!

Rocking Colombo for the past three years with their outrageous, sexy parties is the Colombo Nightlife crew.

Anyone who's attended one of their parties – whether its been the wild foam parties at MKOP or the Fiesta parties, dancing under the moonlight on the Mt Lavinia beach – will never forget the hot music, the beautiful crowd, the cool vibe, all just right.

As they say themselves ‘. Our goal is simply to fan that fire, add a little spring to that two-step, and give that cocktail an extra twist. Since December 2002, we have hosted loads of parties, each with unique themes, distinct flavors and the promise of unparalleled fun. ‘

And this year, they are pulling out all the stops with an even more ambitious calendar of events, culminating in the daddy of them all – the biggest, coolest, New Years Eve bash the city has ever seen.

Serendipity gives you a sneak peak at the best parties that they are throwing this season. Just pray that you'll be able to get a ticket. See you at the bar.



Party 31 - New Years Eve party at Mt Lavinia Hotel

New Years Eve in Colombo is the night when everyone – and we mean everyone – parties until dawn. Unless you're dead from the waist down or too old to party (never!), it's the one night when everyone puts on their finest and heads out to hang out with their friends, flirt, get drunk and generally misbehave.

The main 5 star hotels and their poolsides have hitherto been the main stomping grounds. But this year there is a new kid on the block who's getting all the attention. Party 31 at the Mt Lavinia Hotel promises to be THE party that everyone will be going to.

Over 1200 guests are expected on Paradise Beach, adjacent to the Mt Lavinia Hotel. The whole beach will be boarded over and guests will be under one of two over sized marquees on the beach – one with a glitter and diamonds thing (for the bling blingers amongst you) and the other with a floral/jungle theme (for those who really want a taste of the wild life!).

Dj's on the night will be DJ 00 from Canada, Glow Residents Anzar and TJK (experts in rocking the crowd) with a special midnight appearance by LA Rapper Delon and a special concierge service will allow you to text the bar with your drinks orders. What more could you want!

Tickets are 4000 and include the lavish Mt Lavinia Hotel Buffet served at dawn.



Fiesta Serendipity first stumbled across the Fiesta party on Mt Lavinia Beach one beautiful tropical night. Wandering across the beach towards the thump of some phat hip hop, we walked into a scene straight out of a Jay Z video.

Mount Lavinia beach was transformed into a spectacle - think palm trees, sea breeze and buckets of ice-cold champagne. Think pure white sands, lights flashing over the ocean and a bumping dance floor bathed in moonlight. The next Fiesta is on the 29th of december. The new exotic location is the recently opened BuBar in Mount Lavinia. Its a beautiful new venue right on the beach. The theme is Glitter so make sure you throw on the sparkles! Tickets are 1000 rupees.

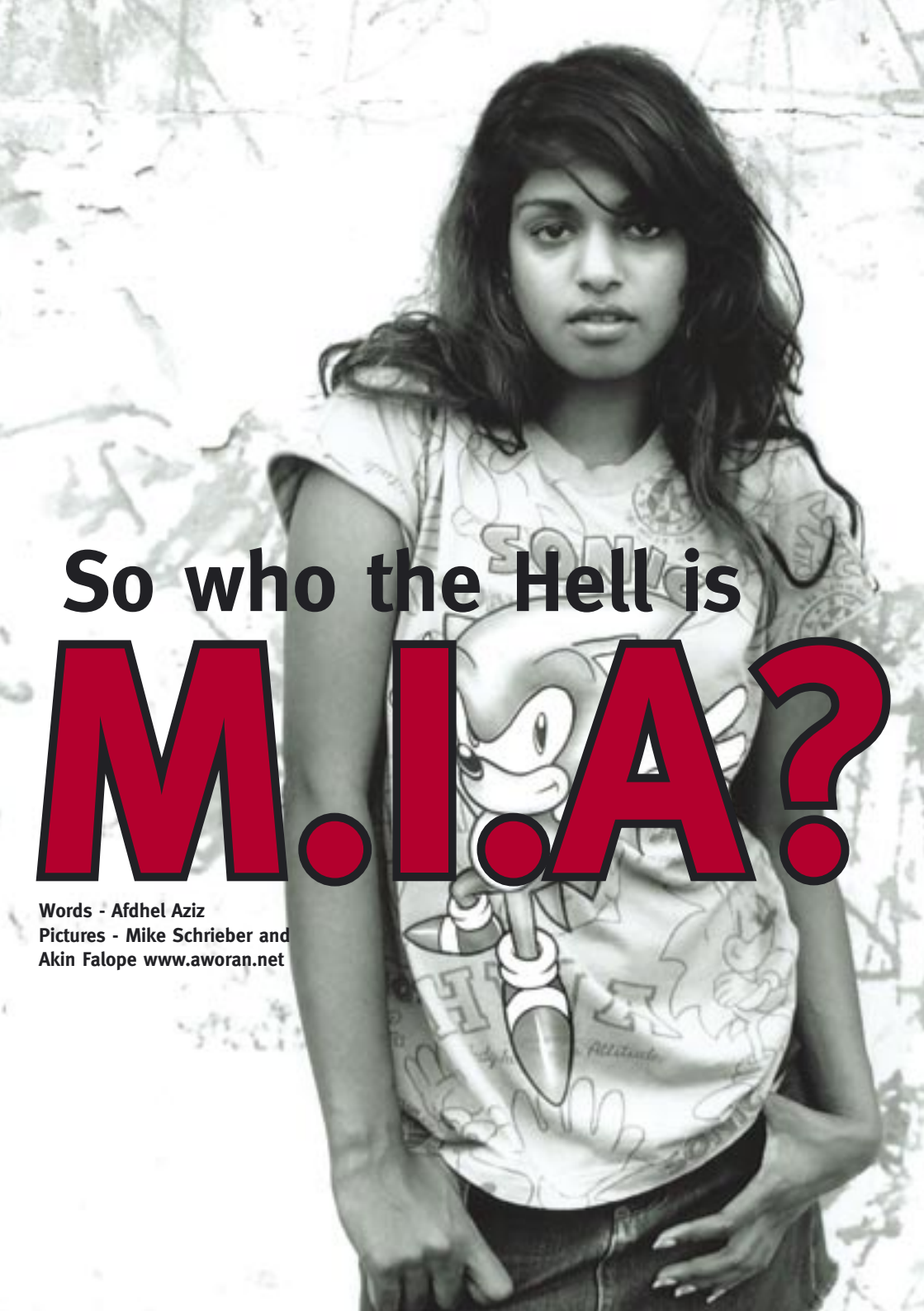


Mint is on the 22nd of december. The venue is MKOP. MINT represents the return of CNL foam parties in colombo after the much talked about "ICE"! Get ready to get soaked and have a great time! Tickets are 1000 rupees.

For all the details visit:

www.colombonewyear.net

www.colombonightlife.net



So who the Hell is

M.I.A.?

Words - Afdhel Aziz

Pictures - Mike Schrieber and
Akin Falope www.aworan.net

Its 4:37 a.m. and I'm in room 1034 of the Hudson Hotel in New York and I can't sleep. Outside, sirens wail in the canyons of Manhattan. On the other side of America is the woman I'm trying to track down. M.I.A.

And somewhat ironically for this journalist trying to secure an interview, she really is Missing In America.

I'm looking at her website. It's brightly coloured, garish, almost childish. According to it, she's playing dates in Washington, Detroit, Anaheim... it sounds like a plan to conquer America.

One concert, one in-store appearance, one radio interview at time.

Frustrating to be so close and yet so far.

Despite innumerable calls to press officers and label bodies, our requests have so far met with a deafening silence. Trent Reznor from Nine Inch Nails wants to work with her and Timbaland is rumoured to be producing her next album. She's doing 'Rolling Stone' and 'Spin'; what chance does our tin-pot rag have right?

So f*** it. I'm just going to have to do it all myself.

Shoreditch, London: A sweaty, dark club filled with fashionistas, oversized sunglasses and ironic haircuts. All of a sudden, horns blare out and someone starts chanting about 'London Quieten Down I need to make a sound'. Horns blare out and M.I.A.'s 'Bucky Done Gun' starts its jerky bionic rhythm. The crowd whoops and starts to go wild.
Strike One.

Rotterdam, Holland: An urban snowboarding event on the banks of the Maas River. Boarders hit the ramp and flip into the sky, catching some big air as the crowd roars their appreciation. The DJ on the bus is playing

old school hip-hop into which he seamlessly drops in M.I.A.'s 'Pull up the People', electro-dancehall that has the crowd unconsciously rocking. **Strike two.**

Sao Paulo, Brazil: An earnest Paulista seated at the table next to me at the Jam sushi bar finds out I'm Sri Lankan. 'You know M.I.A?' he says, dragging on his cigarette. 'She came to play here and she didn't stay at the hotel, she stayed at her friends house. Very cool. Her music is like favela (Brazilian slums) music, you know. For the people.'

Strike three. >>

THE WRITINGS OF CHAIRMAN MIA

If I represent anything, it's what it's like to be a civilian caught up in a war.

My mum brought me up going, "Ah Gandhi, he's such a nonviolent man. You turn the other cheek, huh." And then now it seems like what President Bush is teaching us is if somebody steps to you, you just kill him. Don't even ask any questions. Just take him out. He's the biggest bloody 50 Cent he is.

I really felt like I needed to know what I wanted to tell my kids—if being good was striking twice as hard.

Fighting terrorism is affecting the world more than terrorism. If this is being good, we better stock up on weapons.

I use political references or words to reflect everything—whether you're poor, whether you're from the street, whether

you can't pay the bills, whether you're just the underdog all the time.

Education is so important. I think especially if you are the other, then it's always good for you to know what people think about you.

My mum is a saint, and my dad is insane. That's exactly what I am—I'm a split personality between my mum and dad. I look at them both, and they hate each other.

"I was a refugee because of war and now I have a voice in a time when war is the most invested thing on the planet. What I thought I should do with this record is make every refugee kid that came over after me have something to feel good about. Take everybody's bad bits and say, "Actually, they're good bits. Now whatcha gonna do?""

M.I.A IS HOT. White hot at the moment. Slowly but surely, she's winning the hearts and minds of music fans around the world with her blend of ragged electro-dancehall beats, her breathless rhyming, and her unrestrained, refreshing attitude. Her third world urchin good looks get her on the cover of magazines; her beats and production gets her played at all the right parties. But unless you're a music or style junkie, M.I.A is the biggest Sri Lankan artist in the world you've never heard of. So who is this woman? Where did she come from?

The story starts with 11-year-old Mathangi 'Maya' Arulpragasam leaving Sri Lanka with her mother and two siblings arriving in the UK in the early Eighties, living on a West London estate in Hounslow. Malnourished, she was the smallest kid in her school. Her growing up follows the pattern of many immigrants in the West; racism, junk food, hanging out, the usual crimes and misdemeanors that life throws at you. She's openly boasted about shoplifting Versace from Harvey Nichol's department store; a consummate street politician, an original hustler. Then she moved to LA, West Coast, Compton to be exact, where she supposedly lived the life of a gangsta princess, followed by a four-month trip to the Caribbean island of St Vincent. She ends up at the Central St Martins College of Art where her acid-pink graffiti stencils attract the attention of Justine Frischmann, from Brit-pop band Elastica, who asks her to design album covers for her. She moves in with Justine, staying on her Notting Hill couch, before she meets electro-clash star Peaches. This final zig in her zig-zag life was what caused her to pick up a Casio keyboard and starting to put together the lyrics and melodies she had written during her stint on St Vincent. While working the night shift at a call centre, selling software to people in Ohio. And promptly gets picked up by XL recordings, home to Basement Jaxx and the White Stripes. Where she becomes the style and music media darling it seemed almost inevitable that she'd become.

If Eminem and Fifty Cent get their own life stories made into movies, then I think M.I.A has

a damn good chance too. You couldn't make this shit up. And it gets better.

Her father, Arul Pragasam a.k.a Arular, joined the Tigers from the more conciliatory EROS group. She remembers soldiers bouncing her on their knees and trying to get her to open up about his whereabouts. He has never lived with her, had scant contact with her and hasn't seen her since 1995. Yet he looms large in her own personal mythology—hence the title of her debut album, the Mercury Music Prize nominated 'Arular'.

This unspoken, unarticulated connection to the LTTE is probably one of the things that makes it difficult to separate M.I.A the artist from M.I.A the expert propagandist. Her stage show features her and her backing dancers decked out in military uniforms, marching and saluting, a tactic not seen since Chuck D and Public Enemy (she does her homework). Her videos, albums and website blaze with military imagery, tanks and bombs and aircraft tricked out in garish pastels pinks and blues and greens, liberally emblazoned with Arabic calligraphy. It somehow manages to borrow the imagery and rhetoric of terrorism without ever endorsing it, defusing it with her playfulness and nonsense rhymes. A dangerous tactic and one that has caused her some friction in the past: MTV refused to play the video for her debut single 'Sunshowers' without running a disclaimer. In an era when the 'War on Terror' imprints itself on our consciousness every night on the news, it's a tactic that could easily backfire, could easily be seen as tasteless and inappropriate. But M.I.A is someone who is making a name for herself as someone who cleverly exploits the inherent contradictions of politics, the complexities of being a global citizen, always skirting on the edge of the abyss but never quite falling in. She never commits herself to a clear political stance and it's probably not in her game plan to do so.

That's why M.I.A sticks in my consciousness, a thorn in my side. On one side, I admire her and what she's achieved on the global stage, representing Sri Lankan talent to the world; >>

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

The Guardian

Shrapnel-sharp dance music that demands to be heard

Village Voice

Not for a moment does the violence seem vindictive, sadistic, or pleasurable. It's a fact of life to be triumphed over, with beats and tunelets stolen or remembered or willed into existence.

Rolling Stone

Weird, playful, unclassifiable, sexy, brilliantly addictive.

Uncut

M.I.A.'s vivid debut already sounds like a booty-shaking milestone to rank alongside The Streets and Dizzee Rascal.

Stylus Magazine

It's a swaggering, spitting, utterly contemporary album of politically dissident, sexually forthright Anglo-Sri Lankan dubstep bhangra hip-pop IDM in which M.I.A. stars as protagonist, antagonist, chanteuse, MC, exotic schoolgirl tease, graphic artist, chastiser of the immoral, and fun-loving London-living party girl. And all in under 40 minutes, too. It's special. We've not heard it's like before.



on the other, I can't help but be deeply suspicious of someone who so cleverly manipulates her image and her message with the dexterity of a Labour spin doctor and uses terrorism as a brand essence. It's at the heart of what makes her such an infuriatingly difficult subject to write an article about it. It's because it makes you have to articulate your own thoughts and position on a deeply unsettling and troubling topic.

As a Sri Lankan who lived in Sri Lanka during the Eighties and Nineties at the height of the violence, all of this makes me very, very uncomfortable. I lived in the heavily-Tamil Colombo suburb of Wellawatte and I remember the riots of July 1983 when Sinhalese gangs rampaged through my neighbourhood, in an orgy of senseless violence. I also remember the outrage when the LTTE blew up the Central Bank or a commuter train or one of their many other targets, causing hundreds of civilian casualties. Like many Sri Lankans I know, I'm past trying to figure out which side or cause is right or wrong. Terrible atrocities have been committed by both sides. It's been going on for decades. We just want it all to stop so we can get our beautiful country back.

And that's why I can't just sit back and applaud M.I.A. for her achievements. It's kind of like being a New Yorker but one who disapproves of the gangsta rap posturings of Jay-Z: one half of you appreciates the braggadocio and the confidence; the other is appalled by the tasteless materialism and the violence espoused in the lyrics. But then again how do you distinguish between someone like Michael Ondaatje who uses the conflicts in Sri Lanka in his book 'Anil's Ghost' (in particular,

the Marxist JVP insurgency and its aftermath in the South) and M.I.A. who gleefully shouts incendiary lyrics 'Like PLO/I don't surrender'? Why is one considered literary fiction, high art that gets put forward for highbrow literary prizes and the other rabble-rousing low culture that cheapens a deeply divisive conflict that has claimed thousands of lives? Maybe it's because no-one can really understand what the hell she's talking about. Sample lyrics:

**I BONGO
WITH MY LINGO
AND BEAT IT LIKE A WING YO
TO CONGO
TO COLOMBO
CAN'T STEREOTYPE MY THING YO
- 'SUNSHOWERS'**

What the f*** is she on about? I have no idea. And after all, great pop music has always had a deep vein of gibberish. From 'Obladi-oblada (The Beatles)' to 'Every sha-la-la-la, every wo-wo-wo' (The Carpenters), the list is long and illustrious. But I digress.

I guess the point is until I fight my way past the ever growing retinue of minders and handlers, press officers and agents, and get to ask her the questions myself, we're never really going to figure out what she's all about.

**So how about it Mathangi?
Ready to face your peers?**

Going Home

By Janaka Jayasingha

If you grew up away from Sri Lanka and your only memory of it is visiting relatives and being bored senseless; then you really need to come back and do it on your own. It's a rite of passage that you'll never forget.

Day 1: Escape

... And what a day. Passport, tickets, oversized backpack that has been packed, re-packed, and re-packed again. Having a Sri Lankan nurse as a mother I have enough medicine to set up a small clinic in Uganda. I have 5 million Lonely Planets. I've got "Eastenders" updates being emailed to me from one excellent friend, the Charlton Athletic results emailed to me from another. I bid everyone goodbye in an excellent evening from which I can't remember one iota. So I guess there's nothing else to do other than jump on the plane.

Got to Colombo safely and feeling great.. haven't really slept in 30-odd hours but suddenly awake and buzzing. Yum, jet-lag, welcome to the joys of long-haul. The reason for my complaining is important. It doesn't matter how stressed or tired you are, when you look out of the window and you see the beautiful landscape, you feel welcomed. The country's gorgeous huge rolling verdant countryside make you forget your worries and about time.

There is something truly magical about this tiny island. From the moment the plane dips and turns at the Palk straits, you look out of your window and everything looks perfect, from the fine white sand beaches into the dense rainforest, even the roads, lined with palm trees. Maybe it's because it's my motherland, but an enormous sense of belonging hugs you on arrival.

It doesn't matter how arduous the journey was, how stressed you were at work in your nine-to-five, or what little problems you had back in 'the other world'. You're in another time and place now. The heat hits you, then it's the laid back nature of the people. Smile, chill, take another fresh Mango shake.. and relax. Welcome to the 'Resplendent Isle'.

Welcome Back 'Home'.

Day 4: Family, eating, and Uncle Nihal.

I'm eating like I'm going into hibernation. I'm fast getting elephantitis of the belly. I'm staying at my aunt's in the heart of Colombo and am almost tied to a chair and force-fed. It's like the Gluttony scene from 'Se7en'.... but in a good way. The colossal whalesque belly is being worked on tomorrow as I go surfing in Hikkaduwa. What a life.

Soon I'm looking to get out of Colombo, see what other places in the country have to offer. It's so hard to travel this island as an expat. Primarily because you are obliged to visit (and to eat with) 150,000 relatives during your stay.

"Of course you know uncle Nihal, he's your aunty's brother's cousin's sister's mother's father's uncle's friend's wet nurse's cousin's sister's father... Plus he saw you once in 1979 when you were 3." >>

Oh, that uncle Nihal, I guess I didn't realise we were that close.

There's a huge wealth of culture, history, sounds, smells, and nature that this culture boasts. These are the real gems encrusting the emerald isle, and I'm going to actually see them. I can't wait. My obligations will be on hold. Uncle Nihal always understands, we were that close.

cockroaches.

"So you take half now, wait half an hour, then pop the other half."

This is Ad. He's a cool Israeli Swami-type hardcore backpacker who looks scarily like Ali G. He like (many other backpackers) stumbles into Sri Lanka during a solid tour of India's meditation, tantric healing, and Goan drugs. He was offering me 'paha borlay' (meaning 5 rupee balls), a cheap 'ayurvedic medicine' that is taken by poor workers and school kids. It's meant to give you a cheap buzz, but taking it often drives people crazy. We later learnt that whilst completely legal, it contains some herbs, ganga, and opium to give that said buzz.

"Eh?" I dopily asked. In the short time I've known him I found out he hates this. He abhors people losing concentration during conversations as it shows a lack of respect. I couldn't help myself. I was staring out into the sea. The sunset gifting a gorgeous orange-red glow to a near perfect serene beach. In an hour or so I knew the tide would rise and I was looking forward to the waves lapping at my feet. I drifted off and started thinking about my last two weeks.

This was Unawatuna. A beautiful tiny beach, slowly spoiling as package holidays swamp the place more and more. Germans marking their territory with towels on the sun lounges. But if you squint your eyes, on quiet days you can feel like you're the only person there and the clean golden sands and the emerald green ocean are your island paradise, and then your beer tastes so much better.

Three days. Three days is all I spent in Colombo.

Three days in when I last wrote. Three days was great, spending time with my lovely extended family. Then the lure of the coast, with my trusty Lonely Planet book, spurred me on. This is my first time backpacking alone. You have to understand that before this trip I wouldn't and couldn't go to a cinema on my own. This day I was riding public transport and making my way to the coast. My advice to the independent traveller backpacking in Sri Lanka is to get the hell out of Colombo as soon as you can. Each day you spend in the city is a day not spent seeing some amazing beaches, outstanding countryside, spellbinding, haunting architecture.

So I got this bus to a town called Hikkaduwa. It's a Jekyll and Hyde beach with rich hotels with fat bermuda shorted tourists snapping away at anything and ordering burgers, and young budget backpacker surfers at another end smoking dope and 'catching some barrels', or whatever.

I left the place and headed for Unawatuna.

Unawatuna is so much more beautiful. While I was there I saw the delights of a turtle sanctuary, met Ad, and snorkelled.

The turtle sanctuary was spellbinding. Because of certain tourists these amazing creatures are shelled and curried, or turned into paperweights or some other ghastly tacky souvenir. This was a project that tried to rear them to an age they were old enough to go alone, and then set them loose into the ocean. I held some newborn babies in my hands.. a truly amazing experience and one I recommend you do. You pay a small donation and you can set them free onto the beach and watch them lovingly as they clumsily make their way out into the ocean.

The snorkelling is amazing here, the seas are so green and clear which brings the best out of these amazingly colourful fish.

I was lured back to Hikkaduwa for the prospect of a big night out. It was the opening night of a club and I went crazy. Pop music here is shit. Sri Lanka seems to be stuck in some bizarre commercial 'Event Horizon': a point of singular-

ity where bad music is inexplicably absorbed. This Room 101 of mindless pop drivel drives one to believe that there is no musical vibe on this island.

But this band that played was amazing, a kind of BadMarsh Shri thing going on. Sri Lanka has a rich beautiful history of South Asian music, this band embraced it but made it 'danceable' (trust me). I danced on my own (a very big step for me) and didn't care, I was having the time of my life. You escape from Colombo's obvious "Blue Elephants" and "Chapter Ones" and you can really discover some tucked away gems.

I found a place at a surfers rest for an amazingly measly Rs250 per night (£1.80 Sterling) including bathroom, mozzie net, and fan. There I met a lovely cool surfing couple:

"No we don't mix it with tobacco because then that would be bad for your body!"

I tried my hand at surfing last year. I remember thinking I was OK for a beginner. One hour out there. Looking like an idiot. My brief affair with surfing was over. Less so an affair and more a quick snog behind the bikesheds and maybe a half-grope.

The Rs250 room couldn't flush the toilet. Had stains everywhere and a dodgy lock. Every night I feared someone would come in, steal my TCs (Traveller's Cheques), and slit my throat. I woke in the morning to a cockroach on my face. Beware of budget backpacker hostels, wherever you are. I'm moving on.

That's when I left. I found an amazing room in Unawatuna and spent my time swimming, snorkelling, sat on beaches playing chess, with a tippie of shandy. This is where I met Ad.

"Eh?" I ask guiltily, snapping back into reality.

"So, I was saying you take half now and then half later, do you want some?"

Day 11: Pineapples, Serendip, and Powercuts
Is a pineapple a vegetable or a fruit?

..was one of the incredibly hot topics of conversation that can only be discussed by someone truly relaxed. Welcome to Sri Lanka's pace of life.

Serendip was the name the English author, Horace Walpole, gave this country. He thought he truly found paradise when he set foot here. You could believe it when you're lying in beach resorts, when you're snorkelling amongst magnificently coloured fish, you can believe it when you're having the most glorious feast for around 2 English pounds.

Serendip seems a strange name for a place where main streets are flanked by policemen with huge machineguns and every now and then army checkpoints bring your vehicle to a stop for a 'quite standard' inspection.

I spend afternoons on the veranda after several huge plates of curry with a book and a big bowl of tropical fruit. Lazy days. A pineapple is really a vegetable isn't it? Where are the seeds?

I like to think I'm convalescent on all aspects of butt cleaning utilities. But even I was flummoxed when encountering my auntie's "butt gun". It is considered disgusting in Sri Lankan customs to wipe one's arse with bits of paper. Not only do you incur bad hygiene principles, but from an aesthetic viewpoint, one also falls prey to the infamous 'skid mark'. Water guns (or butt guns if you will) shoot high power jets of water banishing those vile winnits (or Klingons if you will) to the Colombo municipal sewerage system. The experience also wakes one up in the morning not altogether unpleasantly.

It looks exactly like one of those soft drink guns in bars. I hope you have pleasant memories of me when you next have Coke squirted into your next high-ball glass.

Day 18: Leaving Sri Lanka, wanky scenery, and public transport.

I've spent the last few days in the 'Hill Country'. This is far inland and, not surprisingly, hilly. This gives it a cool fresh weather much like an ideal British Spring / early Summer (much akin to some Enid Blyton or PG Wodehouse novels), >>

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providing a stark contrast to the searing tropical climes of the lowland coastal cities.

I resolved myself to continue in this backpacker spirit and public transport it. The Sri Lankan transport infrastructure is abysmal, though amazingly cheap. I took a train 80km, this was supposed to take a shocking 3,5 hours slowly meandering around the Hills - ended up taking 5 and a bit hours. But still the experience is fantastic and I recommend you do this. Everything is shot into epic scale and you feel like you're in 'Passage to India' or, more aptly, a Michael Ondaatje novel. The rickety tracks, the perturbingly constant creaks and strains of the carriage, the distinct odour of shit and piss emanating from the WC four hours into the voyage. Yum.

A few rickety tracks, tea estates and hawkers later we were on the windy tracks of 'Hill Country'. Only a few months previously a train came off the tracks in a horrific accident killing and injuring many. Horrifyingly the train carriages are still here, overturned, on the side of the tracks. It reminded me of the car crash scene in 'Wild At Heart'.

There is something earthy about all of this which I love: The glorious views, the "Vadai" man dragging his basket of fried homemade typhoid sold cheap for your delectation, they're all here..

Buses are strange. In England people use a vehicle till it's on its last legs, and then scrap it. In Sri Lanka, this is the time it is prime for public transport. The bus is at 45 degrees to the ground as the suspension is shot to shit and the rust is the only thing holding this thing together.

A strange (for us) custom on the roads: When commuters pass large pagodas they all get out and put donations as blessings for a safe journey. The buses just stop in the middle of the road and all the commuters hand the conductor loads of change and he jumps off, donates, prays, and jumps on. The traffic just waits. Mind you, the way they drive and what they drive here, only omnipotent beings can really help if you are a public transport passenger.

Bus, train, bus eventually takes us to Adam's Peak, or Sri Pada (meaning 'sacred footprint'). The peak is 2226m above sea level. Every religion on the island lays claim to this stunning Mecca. The top of the mountain has a large footprint imprint that goes down 27 feet. Buddhists believe this is Buddha's first footprint on the island. Christians believe that this is Adam's first step onto Earth. The Muslims and Hindus also have their own interpretations.

Whatever you believe there's no mistaking the majestic splendour of it all. It's interesting to see Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims walking together, helping each other and sharing teas. The English author John Stills describes the peak as 'one of the vastest and most revered cathedrals of the human race'.

The dawn hails a magnificent sunrise, epic because of the altitude and imperial view. Just at the very beginning of sunrise, you see the sun on the horizon, in the Indian Ocean. Due to the rise and fall of the high waves, it almost looks like a bright orange globe is bouncing up and down. Soon after, as it rises, on the other side, an amazing spectacle awaited us. Attributed to the sheer height and shape, a shadow so vast is cast in a perfect pyramid stretched out to the horizon pointing out to the West. As the sun rises higher this shadow races into the foot of the mountain.

It really is breathtaking.

This country is amazing. My heart weighs heavy as I wave goodbye. My personal quest has drawn me closer to the country I can now call a home. I was amazed at the wealth of variety the emerald isle holds. Get out of Colombo, avoid the tourist traps and visit the real country. I guarantee you'll be beguiled by the charms of the land, its people, and their cultures. It's a land I never knew existed.

Modern Lankan Cuisine

By Leigh Walters-James

Warning: This is not a recipe page. This is a call to arms.

Leigh Walters-James is a lawyer by profession, but a chef at heart. He's worked at the Michelin 2-star Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons restaurant in Oxford amongst other places, and has spent so much time in Sri Lanka that he's considered an honorary Lankan. Even though he's actually Welsh. But we don't hold that against him. Except when it comes to the rugby.

How many times have you sat in a restaurant with your friends and yearned for the tastes of home; the rich chicken curry, fiery sweet seeni sambol and mellow parippu... the words mouth-watering, explosive and flavourful are what spring to my mind when it comes to Sri Lankan cuisine.

If you agree, then you are in good company. I am not Sri Lankan, but am blessed with a love of the peculiarities of the richest of island races.

And my passion for food of all kinds has driven me to enthuse like a native for Sunday lunch at my Auntie Lila's place in Colombo as much as

the chef's table at Ramsay's in Claridges.

So it occurred to me when ploughing through yet another Franco-Thai fusion extravaganza that we were all missing a trick.

Why not use the evocative flavours of Sri Lanka in a modern European setting and combine tastes and textures that please the palate, with the ability to visually delight the eye?

We can have our cake and eat it.

I present Modern Lankan Cuisine: Quails stuffed with seeni sambol with a saffron, coconut and



Quails stuffed with seeni sambol with a saffron, coconut and Arrack sauce, served with parippu (lentil) cakes and spiced mango



Simple aubergines garnished with coriander and cinnamon



French beans sautéed with chilli

arrack sauce, parippu cakes and spiced mango, French beans sautéed with chilli and simple aubergines garnished with coriander and cinnamon.

Is your mouth watering yet? These dishes are a showcase of a few of the many flavours and textures that Sri Lanka has to offer but with some novel twists designed to take them to another level.

If you have the basics of Sri Lankan spices, these dishes can be created from a short trip to the supermarket and your friendly butcher.

Sri Lankan cuisine has its place as much on the

Great accompaniments:
These will taste great with:
White wines - white wines with a bit of guts to them, so a Gewurtstraminer or Chenin Blanc grape or possibly a Viognier or an Australian Riesling;
Red Wines - something light and fruity such as a Pinot or Gamay grape found in Burgundy and Beaujolais respectively.

crisp linen covered tables of restaurant and dinner party as it does in the humble roadside guest houses and simple family get-togethers.

Its time Sri Lankan food came of age in the West. Thai, Chinese and Indian restaurants are winning plaudits and Michelin stars; why can't Sri Lankan food do the same?

Go forth and unleash your creative side; take your grandmothers favourite, tried and trusted recipes, let your imagination run wild and put Nobu to shame.

Looking forward to trying what you come up with!



My First Time

By Zoe Green

Picture: Shehani Fernando

My First Time won the Harpers and Queen Orange Prize in 2004 and first appeared in Harpers and Queen

Today the lady from UNICEF gives me a flowery dress to wear but I tell her that I don't want it. The flowers don't look like any flowers that I recognise; they must be English flowers: small and weak with pointy petals. Sri Lankan flowers are big and colourful and have strong scents. I don't imagine these English flowers have any scent at all.

The lady from UNICEF is about forty and has grey wiry hair like a dog.

"Why don't you want it?" she asks, looking disappointed. "It's very pretty," she adds, hopefully.

I tell her that I think it's silly and then I ask if I

can have my trousers back. She sighs and goes into one of the tattered tents that crouch around the camp like roosting bats, reappearing shortly with my regulation combat fatigues. She sighs again (this lady will die of sighing) as she hands them to me, neatly folded but with the creases slightly out. I don't say anything but run my fingers down them critically.

"Other children wear dresses, you know," she says her face sad and droopy like the stray that sits outside her tent, waiting for the scraps of food that she feeds it after every meal. On the first day that I was here I threw stones at it to help make it go away but she told me off for doing that. >>

I thought fine then, you keep the silly dog, ungrateful lady, it'll only keep you awake at night.

"A dress is no good in the jungle," I tell her. "It falls to pieces. These trousers, though – they're really tough: feel."

I show her the material, stretching it flat and scratching my nail across it, and she pretends to examine it but I can tell that she isn't very interested.

"You don't like to play with the other children either," she says, her eyes averted as if it is of little concern to her. Her Tamil is funny because her tongue doesn't make the right movements in her mouth. I could teach her the proper pronunciation but I don't think she'd want to learn from me.

"Don't you have any friends?" she asks. She sounds exasperated.

"They're different since I came back."

"Not from the village; from the Tigers."

"I don't know. No," I pause, thinking that it was more like a family, then add: "I had my gun." I pause again, this time for effect. I'll tell her like it is. I want to see how tough she is, this charity lady who wants so very much to interfere in our affairs.

"Your gun is your best friend," I explain, smiling brightly – teacher to student. I bend towards her: "It is everything to you. It is like your parents too and your children. You look after your gun: you clean it every day, you take it to bed with you and hold it close. You are never without it. Colonel Valluvan taught us that, Miss."

I know she's a Miss and not a Mrs because of the way she looks. She clears her throat:

"And did you ever use your gun, Kalai?" she asks, her voice level as if she is asking a question about the weather.

I nod.

"Often? On people?" she persists.

I nod again: "Yes, Miss," I say reasonably, "of course."

"And do you miss it?"

"Yes," I say simply, because I do.

She nods as if she knew that already and, for a moment, we sit in silence and it's almost companionable but then the lady interrupts it. She looks me straight in the eyes and I feel like she's looking right inside me. I don't feel very comfortable and I stretch my neck backwards and look up at the trees, looking for a way out.

"When was the first time you killed someone, Kalai?"

I am sad that she has broken the silence.

"One year ago. A month after recruitment," I tell her quietly.

To tell you the truth, I don't really remember. Time is different in the jungle. I could tell her what the day was like: that it was early morning, that the smell of the awakening earth permeated the nostrils, that the hiss of the jungle was slowly intensifying like meat frying and that, high in the trees above me, I could hear the sound of a coaha bird calling to its mate.

"What happened?" she asks.

So I tell her about the boy who ran away. He ran away to tell the army about us but we managed to catch him before he got to the checkpoint. The boy was older than me, maybe thirteen, fourteen.

"How old are you?" the dog-haired interrupts.

"I don't know exactly. Younger."

I tell her how we marched him into camp with his hands tied and his mouth taped. It was night time so we were lucky that we managed to catch him. But that's why they like having young people,

I told her, because we hear better than the older ones. We had to use G.P.S. though to find our way back; she asked what G.P.S. was so I explained but I don't think she really understood so I carried on with the story and how we had marched him in as the sun was rising. Far away, in Batticaloa, you could hear the sound of the imam in the mosque making the call to prayer and, as the sun opened its yellow eye, steam began to rise from the ground.

We took the boy to Colonel Valluvan's hut and Colonel Valluvan came out to see him. He didn't say anything: just looked at him. We all were looking at him. The boy looked frightened and he was trying to say something but the duct tape stopped him.

The lady interrupts me again; I wish she wouldn't.

"Did you know this boy?" she asks.

I tell her yes: not very well, but a little. You know everyone a little. Then I hurry on, describing how Colonel Valluvan walked round and round the boy with a thin smile on his face like a snake. Then he made us all walk round the boy in a circle until we got dizzy and then Sarala, who is a bit younger than me, began to laugh. The boy was quiet now but his eyes were looking everywhere like an animal in a trap. Once Sarala began laughing everyone else began laughing and so did Colonel Valluvan. Colonel Valluvan's laugh sounded like the waves pounding the beach at Trincomalee. My auntie took me to Trinco once before I was recruited. We had ice-creams.

I saw into the boy's eyes. He looked at us laughing, then he also began to laugh. It was a funny yelping sort of laugh, like it was an effort, like he was nervous but wanted to join in. When he began that noise, Colonel Valluvan switched off his own laughter, walked up to the boy and hit him across the face with his gun. I saw that blood then came out of the boy's nose and he had

stopped laughing. He shut his eyes and looked like he was trying to concentrate on breathing with the duct tape across his mouth and the blood coming out of his nose. After hitting him, Colonel Valluvan had walked away but now he came back very fast and hit him again, this time in the groin. "Eyes front!" The boy was trying to look up but he was bent over like a tree yakkha and tears were coming out of his eyes.

"Take the tape off," Valluvan ordered. "He can't breathe." He himself was breathing heavily and the paunch on his stomach was ululating as he spoke.

He pointed at me, so I went up and ripped it off fast: it's less painful if you do it fast, like when amma used to take plasters off. I had to stand on tip-toe to do it. Some skin came off the boy's lips and I saw spots of blood welling from them that would soon be mixed with the blood from his nose. It looked as if his nose was broken.

Colonel Valluvan asked me if I knew the boy; I said no, only to walk past. Colonel Valluvan thought that was very funny and patted me on the shoulder.

"How long have you been with us?" he asked me.

"Maybe a month," I say.

One of the others say that no, it's two months since they recruited me.

"Time passes quickly when you're enjoying yourself, no?" He has a very friendly voice.

I nod.

"Good girl. What have you learnt since you came to us?"

I tell him everything we have done. He stops me when I tell him about target practice and looking after my gun.

"Let me see your gun," he says. Hesitantly, I hand it over. Already it seems strange to be >>

parted from it, even by Colonel Valluvan.

He sees my hesitation and tells me not to worry: that he'll give it back.

He gives it a thorough examination and I can see that he's checking that the barrel is clean and that I have been caring for it properly.

Eventually, he hands it back, smiling.

"Very good," he says, "very clean. Very conscientious soldier, we have here. You," and he swivels round to point at the rest of the corps, "could learn something from this one." He turns back to me. "Now, what is your dream? Your goal in this earthly life?"

I know the answer to this, so I tell him, smiling: "I want to make the ultimate sacrifice for Tamil Eelam."

"Good girl," he says and claps me round the soldiers, squeezing my body into his.

I look at the boy, whose eyes are closed again.

"And are you a good shot?" he asks.

"Yes," I tell him. "Bull's eye. Always." I'm proud, but I try to keep it out of my voice.

"That's good for you," he says. "Maybe there will be no need for you to martyr if you can shoot. You will be useful to us. Shot anyone yet?"

"No, sir."

"Keen to get started?"

I look at the ground. I haven't really thought about it.

"No need to answer: I know you are. Well, no time like the present, eh?"

I'm still looking at the ground and everyone seems to be very still.

"Eh?" he says again, louder, jerking my chin up-right with his index finger. His voice is suddenly harsh. His breath smells of curds and I flinch.

"Yes, sir; I mean, no sir!" I say quickly, tumbling over my words.

"Good," he croons, walking away. With his back to me, he stands looking at the boy whose left eye he holds open with the butt of his pistol, and speaks to me.

"This bugger was going to go off and try to get us killed. This bugger wants us all dead. I don't want to die? Do you?" He doesn't wait for a reply, but continues. I see that the boy is trying to blink, but Colonel Valluvan is pressing the gun into his eye socket.

"I don't want to die. This bugger is a viper. He will bite you on the heel when you aren't looking. Best just to kill viper and be done. Don't you think?" He turns to me. I give him a miniscule nod because I cannot disagree or he will kill me too.

"So we kill the viper. Quick blow to the head with a stone."

Now that Valluvan has released the boy's eyelid, the latter blinks very quickly several times in succession, eyelashes quivering like a lizard's tongue.

"But we cannot do that to... what's his name?" he asks impatiently as if it is of little consequence.

"Thevan," someone says.

"Ah, Thevan. Your parents owe me money, you know. You've got any brothers? Or a sister? No matter. Sisters or maybe jewellery; the house, if it comes down to it. Not that I want to cause them any trouble... but..." He turned back to address the rest of us and spread his hands wide in a gesture of supplication: "As I was saying: we cannot kill Thevan with a stone. It takes a long time to kill a man with a stone. They do that in the Middle East but we are more civilized. We will waste a precious bullet on you. I prefer it when we use our bullets on Government soldiers, but we mustn't let you bite us when we sleep. Come here," he says to me. "Tell him to kneel."

I walk over to Thevan. I look at him but he won't look back at me. I would look me in the eyes, so I think he's a coward.

"Kneel," I say, trying to make my voice like Teacher's at school. School, though, is a distant memory.

Thevan does nothing.

"Kneel," I say again, this time more sharply.

Still, nothing.

I kick him in the shins.

"Kneel, dog."

Clumsily, with his arms still tied, he kneels. His eyes are shut again, as if he's already dead.

In silence, Colonel Valluvan comes behind me and walks me round behind Thevan.

"How do you hold your gun? Show me," he instructs.

I take the safety off and cock it, putting my hands in the correct position on the cool metal. He puts his hands over mine and brings the gun down until it's pointing at the nape of Thevan's neck. He takes his right index off the gun and points at the small indent in Thevan's skull.

"This is where," he says, his voice low so that only Thevan and I can hear it.

I nod. Thevan's shoulders tense almost imperceptibly.

"OK?" he says.

"OK," I murmur.

Legs apart, weight even, I keep my arms steady. I take a deep breath. Steady. Another deep breath. I feel eyes upon me, watching, waiting. I feel Thevan's eyes upon me although he can't possibly see me. Watching. Waiting. Breathe. Steady. Breathe. I begin to pull back the trigger. It moves very slowly. If you pull quickly, you shoot wide. So, slowly, I pull the trigger back and, just when I think it can't go any further, there is a crack that sends a jolt through my body and sends Thevan's jumping forward so that his head hits the ground in front of his knees.

I lower the gun and stand back.

Colonel Valluvan pats me on the back.

"Good girl," he says, and smiles.

That was my first time, I tell the lady from UNICEF. Do you think I'll be able to join again when I'm old enough? And I finger the hollow between my collar-bones where the phial used to hang.

Educated at Oxford, Zoe Green lived in Sri Lanka between 2000 and 2002. In 2004 she won the Harpers and Queen Orange Prize and she has just completed her MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. She is working on her first novel. She says what she missed about Sri Lanka is "hoppers and sambol! The smells and sounds of the early morning. The possibilities and adventures."

“...We have all the laws, but they are not implemented because leaders themselves - when they are in a situation - they break the law. ...”

Words: Jehan Mendis
Pics: Timothy Seneviratne

GYPSY KING

sunil perera on politics, midgets and bathroom brawls

Sunil Perera is the leader of the Gypsies. For the past three decades, the country has sung Gypsies songs on trips, danced to them at parties and watched their music videos on television. Regular foreign tours, several hit albums and sell-out concerts have made the Gypsies Sri Lanka's biggest musical franchise.

Timothy and I met Sunil at the Torana recording studio in Nugegoda. While waiting for him to arrive, we considered the merits of taking photographs of a serious, almost regal-looking Sunil in keeping with his new socio-political subject matter. This plan was short-lived, because Sunil turned up in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt that read 'Trainee Gynaecologist'.

Before the interview, Timothy and I shared cigarettes and a bottle of ginger beer. I looked for a place to stub my cigarette out and spotted an incense stick holder below a mural of Saraswati - the Hindu Goddess of Music. I dismissed the thought of ashing in it as mildly sacrilegious, and went in to the next room to find a dustbin. When I came back, Sunil was casually ashing in the incense stick holder. That was the first of many times during the afternoon with Sunil Perera that I thought to myself, "I am not in control of this situation". >>

TRAINEE
GYNAECOLOGIS

“...if you ask me
“What would you
like to change about
yourself?” I’d say
“God should have
given me at least
bloody two inches
more than this”.

Jehan Mendis: Your early music has very basic subject matter. Tell us about that

Sunil Perera: Our forte was humour, because to tell you frankly: love songs also I tried, but the thing is - look at me – frankly, I don’t have a good voice. I don’t have good looks. I don’t have enough height -if you ask me “What would you like to change about yourself?” I’d say “God should have given me at least bloody two inches more than this”.

Sunil wears a hat in most publicity photographs he’s in, so I had the impression he was much taller. Still, I thought he was being far too hard on himself. Maybe I should have said something reassuring.

JM: You are talking specifically about your height?

SP: [Sunil laughs his deep booming barrel-drum laugh] I wish I was at least two inches taller than this. Then at least I would have been more presentable. A woman looking at me would be impressed ... but still, I managed to get my message across because I had a lot of humour in the songs, not because people like me for my looks, or my voice ... but I still have some material which is very very catchy, which is very very humorous, and also [people] think that it is part of their life as well.

When you write something about your life, that relates to a lot of people. And that is one of the reasons that, I guess, people took a liking to the material that we wrote. People like humour. People are fed up with all this serious stuff.

The Gypsies’ are holding a series of concerts this year promoting their new album “Ai? I Don’t Know Why”. I had been informed that the concerts contain skits featuring several Sri Lankan political figures, George Bush, Tony Blair, Prince Charles, Camilla Parker-Bowles and Michael Jackson. The highlight at a recent gig was a midget dressed in red referred to as ‘Sahodaraya’ (comrade), holds on to the end of the saree of the actor playing President Chandrika Kumaratunga and refuses to let go.

Sunil says that they write about social issues partly because the country is in decline and they are disgusted by the situation. “Totally pissed off”, he says, “That is one of the reasons why we are compelled to write. Not that we think about writing seriously about any particular issue. Certain things just come out without your knowledge.”

JM: So how did you come to write it?

SP: I was having a discussion with a friend. We were going on, and trying to argue. Some try to defend the system... When you’re in a situation like that you get into... I like to... when I’m having a drink I always want to talk...

JM: Debate?

SP: [animatedly] Ah. Debate. I want to argue. All the time. And, what I hate most is when I’m in a conversation with somebody - even at a party or something like that - somebody - here we’re having a nice conversation - of course some may agree, some may not - but still, we’re having a nice discussion, ah? Trying to, sort of, reason out why this is like this, why is it like this. From nowhere comes somebody and says “Why don’t you sing a song?”

That kills it. That kills the whole scene. By the time I get back, the whole thing is dead. You can’t start the whole conversation all over again. You can start it, but you can’t get back to the point where you were.

Something that I really enjoy is having a drink and sometimes you get into tough situations also where you try to argue with people and you know they say “No - why do you say that?” and they don’t want to discuss. This is why I say this country will never come right.

JM: Never come right?

SP: Never come right, because most leaders think of the vote in whatever they do - not about the country. In the back of their mind, they want only one thing ... If they are going to lose with regard to elections, even if it’s a good move, they don’t want to go for it. >>

Next Issue:

From LA to NY to London
to Colombo...

The hottest Sri Lankan musicians in Serendipity: The Music Issue



JM: What is the biggest problem that this country faces?

S: Law and order. Number one: law and order. We have all the laws, but they are not implemented because leaders themselves - when they are in a situation - they break the law. So when the top people do that you can't expect the podi'uns to follow [the laws].

JM: What do you think about the recent copyright enforcement that has taken place?

SP: That will never materialise here because before introducing the copyright thing, the basic structure with regard to law and order should be done. That should be implemented. Otherwise it will not come right. How can you have law and order only in one particular area? No. The whole system is totally mismanaged and it is so dirty. Eka vennay na. [It won't happen].

JM: Have you thought about going into politics yourself?

SP: No. To me, politics is like a toilet. Lets put it this way: when you want to answer the call of nature, you got to go to the toilet. You got to go. When you've got to go, you've got to go, but we don't like to live in there: the toilet. I might have to use the loo to do my job and get out, but you don't like the environment in there. To me, the political situation in Sri Lanka is like a toilet. I don't like to live in there. Get your job done; get out. Nobody likes to live in there. It's in such a pathetic situation.

While I was digesting this Timothy, unable to restrain himself in the face of Sunil's manic energy jumped in to ask if Sunil had ever been approached by political parties. Sunil said that they had, but that they do not want to align themselves to any party.

SP: You've got to be independent. A lot of artists, singers, film actors - they have gone into politics. But eventually what happens is, you lose a certain percentage by doing that ... If you are an artist, you should be catering to everybody. When you put your views across saying that this

is the party who is right, there may be so many fans who support the other side also. So they may not like it.

Timothy: Have you had problems with regard to your songs or lyrics? Have there been any clashes?

SP: The only thing is songs have been banned by the state media. That is the only thing. That's okay. I mean, any party coming into power will do that ... What we do, we do it for the cause of entertainment. Nothing but entertainment. Not to sling mud at anybody ... Might get the wrong message to the top people. Last week there was an interview of mine. All of a sudden they... [makes slicing motion with his hand]

JM: They censored it?

SP: They censored it. I mean it was a very abrupt ending. Even I was wondering what the hell was wrong. It wasn't a live thing. It was a recorded thing. Then, I called the producer and asked, "What happened? Why did they chop it abruptly like that?" He said that while the thing was on there was a call from one of the top fellows to stop them.

The Sunday Observer had reported recently that "the UNP had tried to use two of the latest songs of Sunil and the Gypsies with a sound-alike voice of Sunil and words to suit the UNP's propaganda". Sunil says that the words of the songs were changed to defame the president, and that he had no idea about this until a friend asked him about it.

S: He thought it was me. So I had to tell the media [that I had nothing to do with it], because even the President might get the wrong impression. Today we are having a dinner with Mahinda Rajapakse - this evening - I'm going to tell him. I'm going to invite him for the show because he's also one of the characters that come in the show.

J: How do you think he'll take it?

S: The thing is some of these people they are very very open to a lot of these things, but all the podiuns -oya innay gamay yakku [these little >>

people

village devils] - they give them the wrong messages ... and the sad situation is sometimes they tend to believe it.

I asked Sunil Perera about his much-publicised skirmish with Mahen Ratwatte, son of former Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte at the Colombo Hilton. Sunil says that he had never met him before that night.

S: I was getting some dinner when he grabbed my hand hard like this, and said, “I want to talk to you” ... he took me to the toilet and one kanay ekak [slap across the ear]. The second one, I didn’t sit still because I knew he was out to hit me. And he was going on ... “F*****g LTTE bastard... blah blah”. And I didn’t know what was happening. I mean, you got to sort of know why you’re being assaulted, no?

S: I thought the music wasn’t right or, but still, if the music wasn’t right the organisers would have come and said, “I don’t like the type of music that you play” or “The session wasn’t right” or something like that. But you won’t hit, no? ... When I came out [of the toilet], I said “Rattewatte gahuwa. Mokada dannay na” [Rattewatte hit me, I don’t know why].

It was later that Sunil says he realised that what would have probably upset Ratwatte was the line “helicopterayen usavi yang oi” [“let’s go to court in a helicopter”] from the song Ratay Minissu.

S: Then the UNP was in power. What the UNP did was - ara kenda kanda karanava vagay [like making a mountain out of a mole hill] - they blew it out of proportion. Why? Ratwatte was in the opposing party. The newspaper headlines said “Sunil Perera Brutally Assaulted”. Brutally assaulted? He just gave me [a slap]. That was because the UNP was in power they carried the propaganda to put the Ratwattes down.

The May Day thing - the UNP altered the lyrics of the songs and slammed Madam... no permission, nothing. So when I told the media that I feel really bad about this, the government immediately gets the state media to communicate “SUNIL IS REALLY MAD WITH UNP”.

[Sunil laughs]

You can’t help that. Both parties they do that. Both parties have done it.

Sunil seems less upset at politicians throwing punches and misrepresenting him than at the rest of society.

S: The country is screwed up totally. You know in Sinhala films they won’t let you ever hit a cop. Suppose you have story board where you have a cop taking a bribe? No way. They censor it. You can’t show a cop taking bribe. In India you can do that. The buggers show them hitting the cops and putting the cops in the shed. In this country you can’t do that. Why? Because we’re hypocrites. Everyone knows that cops take bribes. So why can’t you show it?

Sunil Perera is the face of the Gypsies. His personality has shaped both the band’s music and their image. The subject matter of their songs can be as light as midgets from space (Kuru Mitto) and meeting a Veddah chief’s hot daughter in the jungle (Ojaye!). So it is not surprising that Sunil Perera is not viewed as an agent of socio-political change. That is, until now.

We already knew the man was a great entertainer. After hearing what he has to say, you might even call him incendiary.

Many thanks to Leisure Times, Colombo’s ‘Time Out’, where this article first appeared (www.leisuretimes.lk)



a refreshing
approach altogether!

An Ode to Arrack

By Ruwani Hettiarachchi

You to me are the sweetness of this wood,
You bathe me in the hot perfume your eyes.
You are the soft timbre of chinking glasses.
Your arms envelope me in their ochre glint
The hot secrets of your fingers coarse through me.

Draw your smoothness over me, and let me
swallow it whole.
And let me say the words 'if tonight I die,
I die in the duskiness of your love, a thousand
times wiser'
Your hot medallion of fire on my tongue; your
gilded brand.
Let me make testaments to you;
No strange and waxen potions shall I make
No fleeting glamour shall I seek, your sweetness
keeps me whole.

Yet you are no sweet ambrosia, no elixir of life.
Sometimes you are potent, garrulous
In defiance of your own fragility.
But to me, you will always bring songs
Sweeter than the midnight note of the fever-bird
Laughter more resonant, our voices are full. Our
hearts no longer empty.

Nymph. Wretch. Recount me your tale;
Cast no more spells on me. At least for tonight.
Because tonight I feel the coarseness of grass
underfoot,
I hear the crackling of dry coconut fronds, their
fullness only a lush, hidden memory.
Tonight I listen to the voluble plotting of crickets,
Tonight I glimpse the ghostliness of the moon,
and I am frightened.

Lull me to sleep as you do, tracing your fingers
over rivulets of sweat
But let me sleep tonight for a thousand years.
I want to forget your love, so I may love you
afresh tomorrow.
In the morning, you are no more to me than a
leaden milestone,
But tonight you are my very lifeblood.
Eyes reddened I will seek you out in dark places,
And I will let you swirl your fearsome fire
over my mouth
And let the inferno inside silence me.



Cocktails

Bored of Arrack and Coke? Try these sophisticated new twists on old favourites...



The Slave Island Ice Tea

Substitute dark rum for light
Cut out gin and tequila, use two shots of Old Reserve instead
Dash of kasippu (Noilly Prat works just as well, chances are kasippu isn't widely available in London) instead of Cointreau/triple sec
Fill with coke as usual, squeeze of lime

Serve in a Collins glass, garnish with slice of lime.



The Dawa (A survivor's drink)

A whole lime cut into eighths
1 tbsp golden syrup
one shot of Old Reserve
lots of ice

Pour the shot into an old fashioned cut glass, place honey, cover with lime and ice. Works really well if everyone has their own little pestle to crush lime and ice, turns into a gorgeous long drink. Practically medicinal.



Our new Cocktail Editor, Ruwani Hettiarachchi is an economics graduate and says 'I am presumptuous enough to call myself An Economist, particularly after a few glasses of Old Reserve.'

'I don't like to play favourites with my arrack since each one has such individual character. But I'm partial to Ayebrook and Mason's Old Reserve (more popularly dubbed 'Old Reverse') and DCSL Double Distilled (devarak perana lada), which is a terrifically underrated drink. I've yet to come across a spirit with more complexity and formidable character. I always feel like borrowing the words of Seth: 'fearsome shimsham firewater' when I taste it.'

Send us your favourite cocktails: feedback@serendipitymag.net
Oh, and cheers!

The day the sea turned black.

Words & Pictures; Shehani Fernando

One year on and the Tsunami has slipped from the news agenda, overtaken by other environmental disasters in New Orleans and Kashmir. A week after the waves struck Sri Lanka's shores, Shehani Fernando travelled to Ampara to witness the devastation and hear from some of the survivors. Serendipity publishes an article she wrote shortly afterwards as a reminder of the many thousands of displaced people still in need of help.

Walking down the main road is like entering a ghost town. Saris hang from branches swaying in the wind silently; video tapes are scattered on the sand; trees lie horizontally across the landscape with roots clawing at the air. A photo album lies open, the pictures distorted by salt water. A lone shoe has found its way to the top of a cupboard in an abandoned house. Pictures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary still hang on the walls of houses in this predominantly Catholic, Tamil area.

Once, the people here lived by the rhythm of the ocean, its familiar ebb and flow. Forty nine year old Fouzan Delima is one of them, now a survivor from the small fishing village of Sinnamuhattuvaram in Ampara. All that remains of his house is a wooden post with a small piece of corrugated iron attached to it. On the morning of the 26th, while brushing his teeth, he noticed that the sea level was rising and began to hear the panic-stricken voices of his neighbours. "The sea is coming, the sea is coming". For him, like tens of thousands of others who live along Sri Lanka's coast, the impact of the tsunami has touched

all aspects of their lives – destroying families, homes, businesses and ultimately a way of life by the sea. He started running with his wife and young child as the waves approached. "There was a lot of white foam but the sea was very black and dark in colour. It smelt something like gun powder. We were running towards the river, and some of us got in. The water was chasing us, and that's when I lost my wife. I saw her in the water, and I knew that she was dead".

Fouzan managed to hang onto his son, and despite being carried some distance by the current, they eventually climbed onto the roof of a house to escape the waves. From where he sat he could see people being swept into the nearby lagoon where many of them eventually died. After being rescued by the Special Task Force they were taken to a makeshift refugee camp. Surveying the wreckage of his home he says, "Now I am back here and I have no house or belongings. I am scared that the sea may come back at any time. I am confused as to what to do. I don't know if I want to live here". >>

Fouzan de Lima and his son.

"There was a white foam but the sea was very black and dark in colour. The water smelt like gun powder. The water was chasing us, and that's when I lost my wife. I saw her in the water, and I knew that she was dead".

"Now I am back here and I have no house or belongings. I am scared that the sea may come back at any time. I am confused as to what to do. I don't know if I want to live here".



Jayakala and Sumathi

Jayakala and Sumathi sit in silence. Both have lost children. Jayakala says “I wanted to survive because I thought that my husband and the children would make it. If I had known that I would lose all my children, I would have given up”.



Chandra sits on the foundations of her house. Nothing else remains. The group of survivors have different responses to the idea of re-building their lives here’.

In Ampara alone, more than 10,000 have died with 184,000 people being displaced. All have similar stories about that fateful day. Many still think of the tsunami as an act of God: they thought it was the end of the world. A few kilometres away from Sinnamuhattuvaram, 438 families have been temporarily housed in the Sri Rama Krishna College in Akkaraipattu, making use of every inch of space. The Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation has a strong presence here and appears to be coordinating aid. But this is a short-term solution. The school term starts in February and it is unclear as to where the refugees will be re-housed. Some are keen to rebuild their lives in exactly the same place while others cannot face going back.

Chandra is a thirty year old housewife. She lost two children, 8 year old Thanusha and 12 year old Kirthana. Her house has been obliterated, reduced to its concrete foundations. She shows me where she was carried to, and the trace of a water mark on a nearby wall suggests the size of

the wave – more than twice her height. Her first warning that something was wrong was the sound of people screaming outside. By the time she had started running with her children, the water had engulfed them completely. “My two children were swept away towards the river. I was underwater and I couldn’t breathe – I thought I was going to die. I was shouting ‘help me, help me’ and then another wave came and dragged me towards the lagoon... The sea is so powerful and can destroy everything in its path. In my mind I thought I was going to die, and that my children were going to die. God took my two children and spared us”. Chandra has trouble sleeping and eating now. She doesn’t understand why she and her husband survived. “I am living at refugee camp and it makes me feel sad because it’s not like home. It’s difficult to come back here - because we are all scared. How can we come back and live here? There are so many memories of my children here, and I will never forget what happened here until I die”. >>

Vishvalingam

Vishvalingam is a fisherman by trade. He lost three children. “We are now alone. We do want to come back to this village. This is where we were born. I only know how to fish – that’s all I know. So I want to come here – that’s the most important thing for us right now”.



Seeing these people re-visit their homes is extraordinary. They are numb with grief. They stare blankly at the wreckage, excavating the detritus. It is the fishermen that I feel for the most, those like Vishvalingam who has spent his life depending on the sea. He was out fishing that morning and came back to the house to sleep. When the water level began to rise, a neighbour pointed out his boat which was balancing precariously on an extraordinarily high wave. He and his wife Jayakala grabbed their three children and started running. “That’s when the wave went over my head. My wife and one of my children were swept away. I was holding onto the other two. But my sarong got caught on some barbed wire and that’s when I lost the two I was carrying”. He starts to break down, sobbing incessantly while his wife looks into the distance. “They were waving at me and it looked as if they were saying goodbye and I couldn’t bear it”.

None of the children made it. “I thought I was the only one who had survived. I was crying and wailing that I had lost everything. Then someone came and told me that my wife was still alive. He told me where she was, so I went and looked for her. She was alone”. After being swept into the

nearby lagoon, Jayakala had been rescued and sent to another camp. She doesn’t speak much during the interview but says simply, “I wanted to survive because I thought that my husband and the children would make it. If I had known that I would lose all my children, I would have given up”.

This is just a tiny snapshot of a tiny village in a tiny island whose grief has shaken the World. I return to London a few days later, unsettled and bewildered. I am amazed at the impact the tragedy has had on friends, colleagues and strangers. But my mind keeps wandering back to that horrific landscape and to the people I met there. Where will they all end up? Fishermen like Vishvalingam can’t imagine living anywhere else but Sinnamuhattuvaram. He hopes to return despite everything. “We are now alone. We do want to come back to this village. This is where we were born. I only know how to fish – that’s all I know. So I want to come here – that’s the most important thing for us right now”.

Shehani Fernando is a journalist, currently working for BBC London

...one year on



Our Editor-at-Large, Nihal Arthanayake, took a special trip out to Sri Lanka with Radio One. Here's his impressions of what it's like one year on.

It has been just over a year since the Tsunami struck and a terrible new word was added to the Sri Lankan vocabulary. On the 25th December 2004 I doubt many people even knew what a Tsunami was. I only recognised the word because it had been a song by the Welsh rock band the Manic Street Preachers, and not a very good song at that. It seemed like such a beautiful word, that of a demure Japanese maiden or an ergonomically perfect MP3 player. By lunchtime on the 26th December 2004 the word Tsunami carried with it a grim litany of death and destruction on an unprecedented scale.

As the news networks scrambled to get their A List reporters out to the region, shocked tourists recounted their ordeals via mobile phone, and the death toll rose I like the midday sun that bore down on the embattled survivors. In the following

days and weeks pictures of the missing faded as hopes of ever seeing them again did. In the UK the British public dug deep, and the Disasters Emergency Committee declared that they didn't need any more money after less than six months of campaigning for donations. The news networks obviously felt that the story had been covered and moved onto David Blunkett's and David Beckham's extracurricular activities.

In Sri Lanka the immediate problems were being addressed by private individuals and organisations while the government tried to impose its authority by stopping fishermen from rebuilding houses near their boats. Consultation, compromise, and some would say corruption, flourished while the people wanted comfort care and construction. I have just returned from Sri Lanka. BBC Radio 1 wanted me to visit the country of my heritage to make a radio documentary charting the progress that had been made and look at how the money was being spent. I travel to Sri Lanka at least twice a year so by the time I landed this time I had already heard the disgruntled voices, though almost a year on these voices were threatening to become a cacophony of rage.

Those who have witnessed the reconstruction effort rarely speak highly of the government. After 12 months there are still far too many living in

camps while some NGOs live in Colombo's finest hotels. In 12 months the Red Cross has built under 200 houses with a budget of \$280,000,000. To their credit they do have 3000 houses under construction. After four days of relentless travelling and over a 1000 km covered I came away with a clearer vision, yet one tinged with sadness. It is easy to heckle from the sidelines believing that the money we gave should have been instantly converted into a two room domicile with clean running water and electricity.

The reality of rebuilding an entire coastline was broken down to me by Al Panico, the head of the Red Cross in Sri Lanka, yes he does have the word 'panic' in his surname. Think about the amount of houses that were destroyed, the land ownership issues, and the lack of basic amenities that would have to be built from scratch. The need to use local workers and materials so as to re-inject money into the economy, while not paying over inflated prices also added to the problems those tasked with reconstructing Sri Lanka faced. In Trincomalee the government agent expressed the party line with bureaucratic eloquence claiming that they were 'satisfied' with the progress that had been made. While near Unawatuna an English photographer, engaged in art therapy classes for children, railed against the

inefficiency and insensitivity of the government and NGOs who were trying to build European style housing estates for people who had never lived that way

Sri Lanka is still a very bureaucratic country which hardly aids the pace of progress. If this pearl in the Indian ocean is to be rebuilt in a way that makes it stronger, and gives those who survived and their children more opportunities, then the wait will have been worth it. While that is of little comfort to those who hear the monsoon rains battering down on their tin roofs, the reality is that the task is a monumental one. If those who are in charge of the physical and psychological reconstruction do the people of Sri Lanka a disservice then they should be held accountable and punished. Politicians and NGOs alike, one year on, the world is watching.

For more information on Nihal's club night at the Notting Hill Arts Centre, which has been collecting money for tsunami rehabilitation all of 2005, check out

www.bombay-bronx.com

To listen to his show check out www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/urban/bobbyandnihal

For Orlantha

By Marissa Johnpillai

i hope that you saw
a perfectly nuclear family of elephants
a peacock showing off his tail
the black backs of water buffalo like islands in the lake
flamingo as pink as rose water sherbet
origami herons on an overhanging branch

start to

fly

across the

water

like blank pages of a book

i hope that you
behaved yourself
filled your memory card with photographs
didn't show too much cleavage too often,
by accident or on purpose
(i never knew which)

i pray that you
savoured your complimentary cocktail
revelled in the hotel beach towels and bath robes
were not facing the wave as it hit

i pray that you
were sharing a smile with your mother as you both
lost
consciousness
that your life didn't flash before your eyes
and only violins played in your final dreams

i pray that you died like a swan

for orlantha
yala safari park, sri lanka
boxing day, 2004



About the author
Marissa Johnpillai is 22 years old, and currently oscillating between New Zealand (where she works and studies) and Sri Lanka (where her family lives). She's currently working on collections of poetry, short-short stories, and cryptic crosswords. Her favourite Sri Lankan phrase is the rather lame pun "mang kiyane / gas uda").



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