

## Rapping With MC Yogi

Contributed by Steven Rosen

"MC Yogi Brings Joy And Gladness To The Heart." -- Krishna Das

MC Yogi is a phenomenon. The next big thing in sacred chant, he's a rap artist with profound social awareness (check out his songs about Obama and Gandhi) and has a penchant for Hip Hop Hinduism (ala Ganesh, Hanuman, Rama, Krishna and others).

Born Nicholas Giacomini in California's Bay Area, MC is a musical navigator who takes his listeners to the Bronx by way of Bengal. Though his style is steeped in rap and the urban grooves of East Coast hip-hop, his message comes from India's sages of old — his is the Vedic paradigm with a little bit of big city rhyme.

Giacomini's incarnation as MC Yogi sets the world alight with his passion for truth. Not preachy truth, mind you. Just down home, simple, "the way it is," irresistible and irrepressible logic. The divinities in his songs are neither vouched for nor denied. They are not presented as literal aspects of reality or as mere metaphors. In a sense, he presents them as both — and as neither. His point: learn what you can from them, because they're here to stay.

Steven Rosen: Let's get into your musical influences. Where does that begin?

MC Yogi: I must have been about seven years old when I got my first two hip-hop albums by The Beastie Boys and Run-DMC., which revolutionized my consciousness. Before that, I was a quiet kid into comic books and Star Wars action figures. But that hip-hop stuff opened me up. That's when I got into graffiti and break-dancing and stuff like that.

SR: What was it about those records?

MC: Well, this was the late '80s, when MTV was really popular and hip-hop was having a hard time breaking into the mainstream. There were these two records produced by Rick Rubin, and the albums had wide appeal on a number of levels. They were like crossover albums. So it was able to get me, and so many others like me, into hip-hop, to appreciate it as an art form.

SR: How did you go from hip-hop to Eastern spirituality?

MC: Oddly enough, the first time I heard the word "namaste," which is a standard Indian greeting of respect, as you know, it was on a Beastie Boys album called Check Your Head. Remember, I was into East Coast hip-hop which is very different from West Coast hip-hop, and they often had Muslim MCs. This was a foreign, exotic faith, at least for me, so this turned me on to new ideas about religion and spirituality. That's how it started.

Also, I do have to say that Sgt. Pepper was a special record in my own spiritual journey, even though I got it long after the fact, many years after its initial release. My dad also got me Bob Marley's album Legend. Both of those records changed my life in a big way. Sgt. Pepper was the first time I heard Indian instruments, and that really struck a chord. It resonated deeply...

SR: And this led to an interest in Eastern mysticism and yoga practice?

MC: Well, when I was about 18, my dad got me into yoga, Ashtanga yoga. He was doing it with some friends and it seemed like the logical next step for me. He was doing Mysore style, without a teacher — he and his friends knew the sequence and they practiced on their own. It was a vigorous method, without doubt. And his meditation practice flowed from the Siddha yoga tradition, Gurumayi, and her approach to meditative techniques. So, initially that was the lineage I was introduced to.

SR: And how did the interest in yoga and hip-hop coalesce?

MC: Initially, when I got into yoga, I suppressed the hip-hop side. I let it drop for a while. I stopped listening to rap, and I got into a one-pointed pursuit of the spirit; excellent yoga practice was all I wanted. That was my focus. But gradually, all of the things I loved before getting into yoga started to seep back in, and that's natural, I think. You set them aside, for awhile. But your natural interests and inclinations come out again in due course. They start to blend.

SR: That's a natural occurrence, yes, and quite common in the lives of spiritual practitioners with artistic interests. You assimilate. You make your spiritual path your own, and then you incorporate the things that are close to your heart. It's quite natural.

MC: So my love for rap and my love for yoga naturally came together.

SR: But I want to know how you learned the Vedic literature, and why you seem to have a certain expertise when it comes to Vedic deities. When you rap, you tell the stories so well! You are clearly not a Sanskrit scholar, and I don't think you've poured over the traditional literature...

MC: Well, I went to India and got into the comic books...

SR: You mean like Amra Chitra Katha?

MC: That's them. Of course, I'd get the basic ideas from there and then check back with the sacred texts, just to make sure that I was getting the stories right. Also, I guess I just really absorbed them along the way, hearing different parts of the stories from various teachers, in yoga classes, and so on. These myths — some people call them myths, which is a loaded word, I know — are just embedded in my consciousness. I think they go beyond the Hindu connotations and their surface associations — they speak to something fundamental and raw within each of us.

And there's the hip-hop beats, too, which are very hypnotic. They're like a drum loop. And when you get into that zone, they bring out all these inner feelings and thoughts and realizations. So whatever I had learned from the Indian comics, and teachers, and so on, it all becomes enhanced when I try to express it through hip-hop. When I rap, I go into a kind of trance, and I'll free-style, I'll start reciting spontaneous poetry. That's when it all comes out. So I write it down and then repeat it over and over, and then newer stuff comes out. That's how it works.

SR: Well, you're certainly unique. It seems odd, in a sense, a white guy doing rap, though I know that many white guys are in fact rapping these days...

MC: Some people compare me to Eminem, since he's a white rapper. But I focus on yoga deities. That's the difference. In that sense, I'm an un-rapper! I'm the antithesis of the usual rapper. Like the first album focuses a bit on Ganesh, who has an elephant head. He's the lord of overcoming obstacles. I like to make this joke when people compare me to Eminem. Since I am rapping about a divine elephant, they can think of me like this: I'm M&M with peanuts.

Find out more about MC Yogi and check out his free downloads of spiritually charged rap including "Vote for Hope" and the "Vote for Hope" video at: [mcyogi.com](http://mcyogi.com) or [whiteswanmusic.com](http://whiteswanmusic.com).

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