



RANIDU

@Dhasa4Photography / sas - Fotolia.com

When you meet Ranidu Lankage in the flesh, this laid-back, affable man doesn't seem like the powerhouse of Sri Lankan pop culture that he is. Words by Afdel Aziz.

But beneath his relaxed friendliness beats an ambition that has driven him to become one of the most dynamic players in the burgeoning Sinhala pop world. Log on to his Facebook page and he has thousands of fans around the world; on the occasion of his birthday, there are hundreds of messages from dozens of countries. His impact is undeniable; the first Sinhalese artist to be played on BBC Radio1 and the creator of the first Sinhala-language single to be played on MTV, Channel V, and Z Music India. We sat down with him to discuss his new album, his fans and his dream collaborations.

Tell us your feelings about Sri Lanka now that the war is over?

I think if I summarise in one word, what I feel is hope. I hope that the country will prosper and that we can all get together and build a new Sri Lanka for

the 21st century. I am also hopeful that we will always remember and honour the heroes who sacrificed life and limb to bring us this peace.

What was the reaction to your song 'Sebalanani'?

I did this song for charity – as a tribute to the soldiers who laid down their lives in the war. My father served in the military for 32 years and I have had so many people that I was close to die in this war. The song fulfilled a promise I made to my dad to honour the sacrifices of the soldiers through my music. I also tied up with SLT Mobitel and launched the 'Sebalanani' project. I am pleased to say that we have raised over 1.5 million rupees so far for the project and a tribute album with my songs is on the way. I am extremely pleased with the overwhelming response and thankful to all my fans that supported the cause.

Tell us a bit about your next album coming out in March? What is it called and whom are you featuring on it? What kind of musical direction is it?

It will be named after my hit 'Hinahenne mung' (I smile because of you). I took a very different musical direction on this album from the last one which was hip hop-based. I wanted this album to reflect where I am as a person currently as well as my current musical taste.

I do music purely for my fans. our letters, texts, calls and emails keep me striving harder to make new and better music.

The album is a pop R&B-based album with a tinge of hip hop flavour. I consciously minimised the rap element

in my tracks and sang more as I wanted the Sri Lankan audience to fully comprehend the messages I tried to convey. The tracks being slow didn't permit much rap either. One of the key themes of the album is my love and appreciation for my family. Over the past couple of years I have begun to realise how important family is in my life. I also think a lot of people fail to tell the people they love (i.e. their family) that they love them only to kick themselves after it's too late. This is why I decided to do songs for my whole family in this album. 'Mage nangi' and 'Amme mathakai nam' have both been released in 2009 and received an amazing response from fans. A special song for my dad is in the works! I am also planning on doing a song about the importance of education and of course 'Sebalanani' a song for our heroes will be included in the album as well.

Also part of the album is 'Athamita Kasi' (the fake friends song) which was a record-breaking track for Sinhala music. 'Athamita' was the first Sinhala hip hop track to be featured on the BBC Asian network Top 20 chart and the BBC World Service. It was also picked to represent Sri Lanka in 'Around the world in 60 records' hosted by well-known Radio1 DJ Rob da Bank. A glitch-hop remix to 'Athamita kasi' was done by former Bandish Project member Nucleya and received great reviews and major airplay in the UK. There are a few more surprises in the album as well. I will leave those for the album coming soon!

Tell us a bit about your label – what is it called? What kind of artists are you signing?

The label is called CMB records. It's a pop/hip hop/R&B label that focuses on bringing the latest in international pop and hip hop to Sri Lanka and putting our own twist to it. My vision is to build a sound and movement that is distinctly CMB. Currently I have five artists on my label collaborating with me on various projects. Pasan is a talented young producer that I am currently grooming and Nishantha (singer) and Killer B (rapper) are my Sri Lankan artists. Jakes Bejoy is a talented and popular Malayalee singer/composer who is working with me on Tamil and Malayalam projects. Ronnie Tisdale a.k.a. R-Tiz is my R&B artist who I am producing for the American market. Over the past year I have released several tracks featuring all my artists and more are on the way.



How do you think the Internet has changed music in Sri Lanka?

The Internet has on one hand posed immense challenges to the music industry in Sri Lanka and on the other hand has been a boon to up-and-coming artists looking for an outlet. Blogs that allow free downloads of music have propped up in the hundreds, and within minutes of releasing a song, even for streaming only, these websites figure out how to post it for download. Therefore, monetising online sales has become impossible. What this has done though is promote the music widely throughout the Internet and get it to people that my online team would not be able to reach.

What would you like to say to all your fans out there?

I do music purely for my fans. It is you that keep me going everyday. Your letters, texts, calls and emails keep me striving harder to make new and better music. I love all of you and hope you will keep supporting our movement – CMB!

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