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Someone as unique as **Priya Ragu** only comes around once in a generation. The Tamil-Swiss artist approaches her music with an extraordinary life experience, a globally focused creative vision and a way of translating music that’s genuinely incomparable.

While she could be described, widely-speaking, as R&B, Priya’s music isn’t like any R&B you’ve heard before. It’s both vaguely familiar yet completely unrecognisable. Imagine ***Kehlani***, ***Summer Walker*** or ***Snoh*** ***Aalegra*** suffused with **South Indian** instrumentation and you’re in the ballpark of the wonder, the profound magic of Priya’s brilliantly beguiling music. Produced by her brother, **Japhna Gold**, and written entirely by Priya and her brother, the musicis bathed in the sounds of their heritage, from stunning Kollywood samples (similar to Bollywood, but originating from Tamil Nadu in South India) and Krishna mantras to traditional tabla and the Tamil language itself. Her music is an essential snapshot of Sri Lankan and South Indian sounds; from the street dances of Kuthu to religious chants typically heard at temple, to the influence of musicians such as ***Ilyaraja****,* ***Deva*** and ***A.R. Rahman***, yet all the while itmanages to be firmly, solidly of the moment.

Her songs are all about confounding expectations, says Priya, and it’s a perfectly apt choice*. “I wanted to challenge the stereotypes of Sri Lankan people essentially being limited to cooks, cleaners or shop workers. People who are looked down upon. People who are rarely envied or desired. I’m proud of who I am and my music celebrates that.”*

Priya was born and raised in Switzerland following her parents escape from the Sri Lankan civil war in the early eighties. They initially arrived in Germany before later settling in St.Gallen, Switzerland, where Priya and her elder brother were raised. Her father worked for the post office and her mother was a pharmacist's assistant. Their upbringing was peaceful and traditional, interspersed with weekly family gatherings at which relatives would gather to eat fried spicy chicken and informally perform music on everything from *“a plastic laundry basket to spoons and forks.”* A young Priya would dance along, noticing when the adults were out of tune, unconsciously registering it for later life.

Priya has an extraordinary voice. It is inherently warm and melodious yet shot through with an effortless emotion as able to express joy as it is desire. She discovered she could sing when, at the age of 10, her father persuaded her to join a band that he had formed to raise money for back home. Her father played tabla, her brother was on keys and Priya was the reluctant lead singer. Though the vocals of the spiritual, traditional Eelam music were too high for Priya, something was awakened. She heard her own voice and she liked how it sounded.

As she grew older, the Swiss and Sri Lankan cultures began to clash. Priya’s parents were strict, particularly with her; she wasn’t encouraged to listen to Western music or hang out at the mall after school. Often, she was one of two brown kids at school. *“It increasingly became a struggle for me to connect with my culture. At that point, being Sri Lankan meant speaking a funny language, curry, corner stores, people who didn’t dress fashionably… It wasn’t cool to be Sri Lankan then.”*

Her musical ambitions began to take root, but there was little inspiration for a young brown girl who wanted to perform. Priya couldn’t sing as high as the playback singers in the Kollywood films and when she looked at the Western pop charts there was no-one that looked like her. Hearing the Fugees felt like a revelation. *Killing Me Softly* rooted her to the spot. Aware her parents would disapprove of her listening to Western music, Priya would sing along quietly in her bedroom for hours each day, entranced by the seemingly effortless melodies that infused the vocals of Lauryn Hill and Brandy. Later, her tastes extended to **James Taylor**, **Nina Simone**, **India.Arie**, **Musiq** **Soulchild**, **Donny** **Hathaway**, **Aretha** **Franklin**, **Stevie** **Wonder** and **The Beatles**. Throughout it all though, and despite her growing cultural conflicts, the sound of Kollywood fascinated both Priya and Japhna. Mostly it was the films of Tamil superstar **Rajinikanth**, including ***Padayappa*** (1999), whose soundtrack was produced by **A. R. Rahman**. The Chennai composer and producer’s contributions to films such as 1995’s ***Bombay*** and ***Kadhal Desam*** (1996) were also highly influential on the pair.

At 16, she shyly performed Alicia Keys’ *Fallin’* to her brother. He insisted she perform at a show he was doing with his rap group later that week. Priya’s live debut was cut short when her father discovered her plans after reading her diary and forbade Priya from attending. *“It was the worst day of my life, I was devastated,”* she recalls. *“It made me feel so unheard, so silenced.”* Though it didn’t stop Priya singing, it made her ambitions more covert and she decided unless she achieved true success, she wouldn't tell her parents about the music she made.

After finishing school, she set her sights on working at an airport, a place she had thought so glamorous as a kid. Throughout this time, she would sneak out to jam sessions and open mic nights, singing backup for local Swiss artists. It was, she thought, enough. She at least got to perform. But internally she was fighting with herself, struggling to push away an increasingly desperate desire to write and sing and perform her own music. Her parents were keen for Priya to get married and she wrestled with her own insecurities and the wishes of her mother and father. Eventually, three years ago, something snapped and she decided she had to try, she had to see what would happen if she put everything into music.

Priya decided to quit her job to head to America for six months to focus on songwriting. Needing somewhere to stay, her friend, the rapper **Oddisee** offered Priya his Brooklyn studio and she left for the US in 2017. Sending song ideas back and forth via Whatsapp and Skype to Japhna, the pair created a number of tracks over the six months she was in New York, and the work continued when she returned to Zurich, where Priya now resides.

*“In some ways it feels like the universe was just waiting for me to be ready. I’m not sure I could have made the music I’m making at any other time. It’s only made more special by the fact I get to do this with my brother. It’s so magical,”* says Priya.

As quickly and easily as the decision to move to New York had arrived, everything else followed similarly fortuitously. She started writing songs about breaking out of the boundaries of expectation, and the reactions were instantaneous, popping up on blogs and sites across the globe and helping Priya to begin to build a small but highly engaged following.

A subsequent deal with Warner Records commenced in October 2020 with the release of her official debut single, the incredibly charismatic **‘Good Love 2.0’**. A gorgeously optimistic song, Priya projects her idea of perfect, first love with the lyrics: *“Beyond religion, beyond cast, beyond colour. It’s the feeling nothing can tear you apart because it’s so strong.”* The vibrant, intimate video, which was shot in Goa, was cast by Priya herself after combing through Instagram and finding a director in Mumbai, and both a stylist and a lead in Delhi.

Priya’s underground following suddenly exploded as ‘Good Love 2.0’ earned a wave of international attention. Eclectic radio play spanning Radio 1, 1Xtra, 6 Music and the BBC Asian Network underlined her limitless potential, and established her as an artist who has everything it takes. That was reflected at the start of 2021, when Vogue, i-D, NME, The Line Of Best Fit, gal-dem, The Forty-Five and Notion all tipped her as One To Watch for the year ahead.

Her second single, **‘Chicken Lemon Rice’**, amplified the energy that Priya captured with ‘Good Love 2.0’. This time resulting in Priya being named as Jack Saunders’ Next Wave artist on Radio 1. *“‘Chicken Lemon Rice’ is a celebration of unity and diversity,”* she explains. *“It’s here to commemorate all the beautiful cultures of the world. The world is not black and white, it’s colourful. We can come together and still be ourselves whilst celebrating different heritages and learning from each other*.”

The track sets the tone for a big year ahead for Priya. She’s preparing to drop her eagerly anticipated third single, **‘Forgot About’**, plus she features on ‘Goodbye My Love’, a track from **Jungle’s** upcoming third album ‘Loving In Stereo’, which will be released in August. Jungle are just one of an array of influential artists who want to work with Priya, after Honey Dijon, Little Dragon and Hot Chip’s Joe Goddard all remixed ‘Good Love 2.0’.

While live shows have been impossible since Priya first broke through, she has been able to demonstrate her captivating ability as a performer with select video content. Her musicality stood out during her Live From The Archive performance, in which she was backed by a seven-piece live band that included Japhna, as well as a stirring string quartet.

Priya’s next high profile live performance came at this year’s virtual **Great Escape** before she embarks upon a European headline tour in November. Currently consisting of nine shows across six countries, the tour includes her debut London show at the Jazz Café on November 23rd and culminates in Zurich a week later.

Whether she’s on tour on in the studio, Priya’s music focuses on spirituality and possibility, yearning and heartbreak. She mostly sings in English, although occasionally Tamil seeps through to a level far beyond most contemporary music. Similarly, Priya’s fashion blurs the edges; she will top off a sari with sneakers and a turtleneck sweater, for example, or pop a blazer on top of a Salwar Kameez. For someone who has navigated multiple worlds since birth, it’s natural that the music, the clothes, the food and the language that emerges from Priya’s creative well represents the sum of her parts. *“It would be impossible for me to not include my culture in all aspects of my life.”*

Priya’s success has also opened up her relationship with her parents, who are now incredibly supportive of their daughter's musical career, in particular her ability at merging the two worlds so brilliantly and beautifully. *“My parents didn’t have the luxury of ambition. It was about surviving and providing for the kids. We owe them a lot. They’ve been through a lot,”* reflects Priya. They speak more freely about their past, with her father recently admitting he had previously been a singer in Jaffna; he occasionally played to a big crowd of people. *“I’m so proud of my heritage, my parents, my people,” says Priya. “I want to create amazing music. I want to leave behind meaningful songs and a real cultural impact. I want to make South Asian people proud.”*

For **Priya Ragu** music isn’t about making money or courting fame. It’s a necessity, a need, an overwhelming desire. *“It’s only now, finally, that I feel truly at peace with myself. I am, for the first time in my life perhaps, fully at ease.”*

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