

# Now Age Sounds

Photography by Angel Ceballos

Taraka and Nimai Larson — sisters, bandmates, and Hare Krishna devotees — are anything but typical. Incorporating Eastern-Indian melodies, chanting, primitive drumming, and fantastical getups, their brainchild and two-part band, **Prince Rama**, is out of this world. **By Elspeth Dehnert**

**R**aised in a Hare Krishna commune in Florida, sisters Taraka and Nimai Larson were not destined to lead a conventional lifestyle, no matter how hard they tried. They went to a normal school, ate normal food (minus the meat), had normal friends, and they even started a normal punk-rock group in high school. But despite all of their attempts at normality, their deeply-engrained background could not be shook. Eventually realizing this, the sisters, still in high school, decided to manifest their unique lifestyle and upbringing into a palpable embrace of their identities: a band, which they named Prince Rama of Ayodhya, after a hero in an ancient Indian tale they were familiar with as children. “Our music will always be steeped in Krishna consciousness; this is how Taraka and I were raised: the first music we heard, the first books we read, the first stories we learned,” explains Nimai. Now shortened to Prince Rama, the duo is in the midst of catching the attention of both the American and international psychedelic music scenes.

After winning the Battle of the Bands music competition in high school, Taraka and Nimai garnered enough confidence to play small gigs around their hometown of Gainesville, Florida. When the time to go to college came around, the sisters each went their separate way. However, their passion for music failed to leave their system, convincing the duo to carve out enough time from their academic schedules to go on national and European tours. Experiencing the audience's positive reaction, the sisters decided to pursue their music, their band, full-time. Upon graduating from college, Taraka and Nimai began touring the US, successfully infiltrating the underground music circuit along the way.

But Taraka and Nimai craved something more — an inspirational location to call home. In no time, the sisters packed up their bags and moved to the heart of cutting-edge art and music in the US: New York City — the artist-drenched borough of Brooklyn to be exact. “When we moved to New York, we were broke as a joke and living in this fairy-artist warehouse. Taraka and I were singing Fleetwood Mac covers in the subway for money,” recalls Nimai.



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They quickly staked out local music venues brave enough to allow the unfamiliar band to occupy the stage. It didn't take long before talk of a Hare Krishna-sister act spread around town, solidifying a musically-captious, artiscally-sophisticated fan base.

In addition to the sisters' intriguing background, Prince Rama's exciting live performance and entirely one-of-a-kind sound sets it apart from other bands, putting the audience into a kind of trance, as if they are in another dimension – a time and place that is unrecognizeably strange but beautiful. “I've been telling people lately that we sound like ‘tribal Bollywood,’ super dance-y and dark,” explains Nimai. With the use of Eastern-Indian melodies, *kirtan* (chanting), dark synthesizer undertones, ethereal guitar riffs, Taraka's haunting falsetto voice, Nimai's primitive drumming, prayer bells, and a clever manipulation of electronic currents, Prince Rama captivates even the casual listener. Complementing their music is the use of live performance, which is laden with spectacular outfits, glitter face-paint, trippy video projections, free-spirited dancing, audience-participatory chanting, and cult-like trust exercises – one of which, called “trust fall,” involves Taraka plummeting backwards from the

stage onto unsuspecting onlookers, who then pass around her limp, confident body. “The most important elements we incorporate into our live sets are that of trust and danger,” says Taraka. “If you can't trust each other, how can you claim to love one another?” Content with their ever-growing fan base, the sisters never imagined what would happen next.

While playing a show at the 2010 Austin, Texas-based South by Southwest music festival, the duo's unique musical performance impressed the founding member of prominent psychedelic band Animal Collective. “We hopped on the bill last minute, played a really fun set, and had a great time. It just so happened that Avey Tare was in the audience,” explains Nimai. “He came to a couple more of our shows throughout the festival and then asked us if we'd like to release music with his record label, Paw Tracks, to which we said ‘duh!’” Wasting no time, the duo recorded their fourth, yet first official full-length LP, *Shadow Temple*, under Paw Tracks, in a 135-year-old church with the help of Tare and his bandmate Josh Deakin. The album, receiving critical acclaim, catapulted Prince Rama into the public eye. “Getting signed by Paw Tracks definitely broadened our scope in terms of making fans,” says Nimai.

For the duo, the past two years have been a whirlwind of national and international tours, sold-out shows, immense press attention, as well as musical and philosophical growth. In addition to releasing a second successful album under Paw Tracks, *Trust Now*, in 2011, Taraka recently released a manifesto, *The Now Age*, for which she has received attention from prominent theorists and new age thinkers. “The core concept of the Now Age is ‘ghost modernism.’ I'm interested in the creation of a new relationship to time, where it's not being recapitulated, but instead looking into the present moment and seeking out music, materials, structures, people, fashion, and whatever is within the lens of the present,” explains Taraka.

Taking a break from touring, Prince Rama is planning to record their third official album, which many participate to further break the boundaries of what we define as “music.” In the meantime, Taraka and Nimai will continue to fully embrace the present realm – the now – inspiring even the briefest onlooker with their unorthodox and organic approach to life. As Taraka puts it, “It's when you get to that place, which is no place at all, truly existing in space, truly being. That is utopia.” ■