

Tendinitis can't slow Harry Manx

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Musician Harry Manx will perform shows at L'Astral on Friday and Saturday to support his new album, *Bread and Buddha*.

Photograph by: Dave Sidaway, Montreal Gazette

Harry Manx laughed with gusto when recounting his doctor's initial, possibly tongue-in-cheek, suggestion after Manx sought help for a "pretty serious" problem with tendonitis.

"He said: 'You just stop playing, it'll be good,'" Manx said.

That prescription is, of course, not an option. The musician and songwriter's increasingly busy tour schedule continues to keep him on the road in Canada and the United States longer every year. Accordingly, the time spent dazzling audiences with his fretwork on various stringed instruments – including slide guitar and the 20-string mohan veena, an Indian relation – only increases.

Offstage, however, ice and a brace are often called upon to keep the condition under control. And less time is spent practicing. "The body will be the one thing that will slow me down at some point," Manx said.

But as Manx's ninth album, *Bread and Buddha*, makes clear, there's no aural evidence of any slackening of pace just yet. On the disc, as always, stinging, Eastern-sounding guitar phrases colour blues and American roots music to blend into one of the most original styles out there.

The special mixture is reflected in the disc's title, suggested by Manx's former publicist Anya Wilson. "It fits with my other titles, which lean toward indicating some polar opposites: heaven and Earth, (a contrast) that has been the gist of my music – like blues and Indian music," Manx said.

The album's hushed closing track, *The Unspoken Quest*, is a perfect example of the Eastern discipline he learned in India while studying the mohan veena with his mentor, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, during the 1990s.

"That song is pointing at silence," Manx said. "There are people who'd like me to do a whole album like that – of that kind of meditation music. But I'm still very much a lover of the blues and very earthy sounds, with a dash of rock 'n' roll in there."

Without prompting, Manx raises the question of whether he has earned the right to play blues. The issue has never concerned him, he said. "I know people who struggle with that, but I never had that problem," he said. "I just thought: 'The music is there. I'm here. Let's do it.' I think what qualifies you to play is to be able to feel the music and not try to be greater than the music."

That doesn't mean the artist can't put his own stamp on the much-

explored genre, Manx conceded. Blues legend Charley Patton's *Moon Goin' Down*, covered on *Bread and Buddha*, for example, has been given a 12-bar structure and new chords absent from the original. Manx said that might be because he has heard the original Patton recording only once.

"If you can play it, you can own it," he said. "It's that simple."

Manx, who lives on Salt Spring

Island, B.C., with his wife, Majma, and 7-year-old son, Hector, spent a good part of the past year on the road proving his ownership of the music. "I'm not necessarily proud of (spending so much time on tour)," he said. "I take my family obligations seriously. Without that, the road is pretty empty."

Manx has recently shared the stage with Richie Havens, another man well known for his highly individualistic approach to music. The '60s folk-blues veteran, after hearing a few of Manx's discs, invited him to play on an album and then hooked him up with The Roots Agency, a booking organization that now includes both performers in its roster. "Richie and I are pretty good with each other," Manx said. "I think our music carries some of the same message. His people are definitely my people. I notice that every night."

The two are preparing to play both Carnegie Hall and a Woodstock memorial, Manx said. He tried to attend the original Woodstock festival – he was 14 or 15, he said – but couldn't get across the Canada-U.S. border. "Now I get my revenge," he said, laughing.

The title of a standout track on the new album, *True to Yourself*, might suggest a personal musical manifesto, but it also speaks of a spiritual quest, something Manx said is ongoing. "I've been a meditator for a long time. I'm still asleep, but I know I'm asleep. Maybe that's the difference," he said, laughing heartily.

"I was into that during my years in India," he said. "I was playing for meditators. Our job description as

musicians in the ashram was to deepen their silence. You can't distract and disturb them. And some of that element is still in my music."

Asked what the biggest revelation has been during the years since he released his debut album, *Dog My Cat*, in 2001, Manx hesitated only a second. "That all those strange musical ideas I had in the privacy of my own imagination actually mean something to people and do have an impact." he said.

Bread and Buddha is in stores now. Harry Manx performs a solo show Friday and Saturday at 8 at L'Astral. Tickets cost \$26.50. Phone 514-790-1111 or go to www.ticketpro.ca)

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