



MUSIC TO MOTIVATE

Toronto-based electronic trio LAL has been using music to inspire political and creative change BY LISA LAGACE

When Rosina Kazi and Nicholas Murray decided to start making music together back in 1998, they had no idea of the critical praise to come. They were just looking for an outlet to pursue a mutual passion.

From the beginning of their collaboration with bassist Ian de Souza, the Toronto-based trio has emphasized a Do-It-Yourself mentality. "Our first recording was DIY, all at home, no support for anything, and we've maintained a similar working style on each record, even though we have been able to get artist grants for our last three recordings," says Kazi. LAL's sound is an eclectic blend of soulful hip hop, dub loops, jazz sounds, beat sampling and thick bass lines, all brought to life through Kazi's rhythmic vocals. "We have always created and produced our own material with the support of our community. From

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shameless

PHOTO: MATT MAASKANT

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the artwork, to the videos, to the concept, we've always worked with local artists."

Unlike many musicians, they believe in creating their own opportunities and choose not to work with promoters. When they put on a show, they are involved in every aspect, from planning to booking and promoting. "We've never even hired PR in Canada. It has all been our friends helping us figure it out," Kazi continues. "We also support a lot of artists in Toronto, either helping them record their first project, looking them up with grants, or providing information. Helping to create a scene rather than just moving up on our own. It's not DIY but rather DIWF, do-it-with-friends."

LAL has also received financial support from the Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council and FACTOR, and uses the money to pay artists they collaborate with. "Making music takes time and hiring the people you want takes money. These organizations allow us to do this," says Murray. "With or without a grant we'd do our thing, but the grants have allowed us to maintain our integrity and basically do what we want to do as artists. Ironically, we are a political band and you'd think governments would not want to sup-

port us, but it goes to show what kind of arts culture we have, and are in danger of losing with the new wave of conservatism that has hit us federally and in the City of Toronto," Kazi says.

Speaking of those politics, for Kazi it's a personal thing. "I come from Bangladesh and it's definitely a place where art and politics go hand in hand. Seeing the poverty in Bangladesh as a child planted the seeds for me to speak up against what I felt in my body was unjust."

Their third record, *Deportation*, received critical praise nationally and abroad for its ability to combine soulful tunes with forthright political themes. "That recording was inspired by my experience as a Muslim Canadian and also the fact that some of our friends have been deported. It is looking at how cities are changing — who is seen, not seen and how culture is being sold," she says.

The band's latest record is due out in the winter, and features a similarly political theme. The concept album explores a fictional city where arts activism is illegal, permits are required to make art, and the poor are forced to live on the outskirts of the city where pollution is in abundance, water is a limited resource, and power outages are a regular occurrence.

"It's kind of already happening in a lot of cities," she says. "With this bleak reality comes the ability of artists and communities to survive, flourish, be creative and work together." ■

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playlist

TOP 5: MUSIC

The members of LAL listen to a wide variety of genres that range from techno to jazz, international music to the more avant-garde. "I'm not so much into what is trendy or hot, just what I come across through my friends," Kazi says.

These artists are in regular rotation for Kazi lately:

- 1. Yamantaka Sonic Titan:** "They have an amazing and inspiring prog-rockish vibe. Trans and queer women rep hard in this band."
- 2. Secret Trial Five:** "This is a queer punk band from Toronto that represents people of colour."
- 3. Sarah Linhares:** "She's an amazing singer and dancer from Montreal, rocking sweet soul vocals over electronic beats."
- 4. Tribe Called Red:** "These guys are sick DJs from Ottawa who mix reggae, electronic and Native vibes. They truly rock a dance floor and are pushing the boundaries of music."
- 5. Mandeep Sethi:** "Mandeep is a politically active emcee who's not afraid of anything. He is doing some great stuff in India and the Bay Area around hip-hop culture."