We Got The Beat!!!

Posted on



Elephant Foot silhouetted in the setting sun

Dara-rat-ta-da-dum… the beats of the drums rose and fell enfolding the Hikkaduwa Beach in its enchanting cadence. Foot tapping to the rhythm, I revelled in the gripping pulse of the drums as Elephant Foot set on an enrapturing musical journey.

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Indika De Silva

The Band…

Hailing from the vibrant coastal town of Hikkaduwa, Elephant Foot is a percussion band that fuses an eclectic set of drum beats with their own style of drumming to bring a unique set of rhythms. Comprised of six members – Lal Priyanka (Leader), Dasun Fernando, Saman Priyantha, Premasiri Lamahewa, Chandana Gunasingha

and Nishan Priyanjana – each is well versed in playing several different instruments, making way for a diverse set of sounds.

Though the members have been involved in creating percussion music for more than a decade, it was in 2002 that they formerly formed a band to perform and produce music. “When choosing a name for the band one of my close friends from Australia was very keen on the name Elephant Foot,” said Lal reflecting on the inspiration behind the name. Therefore, armed with the name Elephant Foot, for the past 12 years they have been able to build a loyal fan base throughout Sri Lanka.

The trend of percussion music in Sri Lanka first began in Hikkaduwa and Elephant Foot became the first band to make a music video for this type of music

Elephant Foot draws inspiration from Mother Nature to create a distinctive set of percussion rhythms that showcase their versatile yet singular flair in drumming. Focusing on freestyle music, the mood and the feelings of the drummer influences the sound, which can vary from mellow to soul shaking. “What really matters when playing drums are the feelings. Therefore, though the basic track is the same, it is hard to play it in the same way the next day,”
revealed Lal.

The trend of percussion music in Sri Lanka first began in Hikkaduwa and Elephant Foot became the first band to make a music video – for their single Rain Forest – portraying the pulsating rhythms of the drums. The instruments incorporated in creating the sounds of Elephant Foot have mainly originated from the South American and African continents and Lal asserted that, “we are playing our own rhythms with international instruments.” True to his words the vibrating tattoos of their drums convey a quaint set of rhythms that holds all captive in their lilting cadence.

The group has so far released two albums, Dalu and Rain Forest featuring a diverse set of sounds derived from a variety of drums. Now they are gearing to release the third album by the name of Ali Adiyaa (Elephant Foot). Furthermore, Lal also owns a shop named Elephant Foot Drum Shop that carries a varied set of instruments showcasing his devotion for percussion music. “We haven’t changed our rhythm. People, our fans, are the ones who have changed and has extended a hand towards recognising this art,” said Lal about the flourishing percussion music industry in Sri Lanka. “I have the freedom to follow the path, the beat, I want to and that is how we create our music. Furthermore, the music will be here even when we are not.”

The Music

Shading my eyes against the glare of the afternoon sun, I watched as countless people scuttled about or just laid down on the beach enjoying the soothing breeze that swirled around. Some children and adults enjoyed the warm rays of the sun while playing to their hearts content in the shallow yet cool waters of the ocean near the shore.

Slicing through all this candid motions, the catchy tune of an ensemble of percussion instruments drifted towards us calling all, towards its irresistible sounds.Captured in the enchanting beats, I slowly made my way to the place where Elephant Foot continued their performance pouring their hearts and souls to the emitting melodies. Listening to them I remembered Lal describing their music as, “it’s original, it’s groovy and Elephant Foot is about the feeling of sound.” I realised the accuracy of these words as the beats entranced all nearby while even the surrounding air seemed to resonate with the invigourating beats.

The sun set low silhouetting the members of the band as the continuous rhythm flowed through, winning many hearts and making new fans of those who were listening to the ripple of beats that reached out and grasped them in its trance. This was indeed the unbreakable rhythm of Elephant Foot that conveyed the ‘feelings of percussion’.

Elephant Foot Drum Shop

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Members and Instruments

Lal Priyanka (Leader): Bongo, Darabuka, Djembe

Dasun Fernando: Djembe

Saman Priyantha: Djun Djun

Premasiri Lamahewa: Djembe

Chandana Gunasingha: Street Conga, Djembe

Nishan Priyanjana: Shekere, Samba Shaker, Seed Maracas

INSTRUMENTS

Bongo

Originating from eastern Cuba, the Bongo is an Afro-Cuban drum consisting of two drums of different sizes. The sound is produced by hitting with fingers and hands. Played by holding behind your knees or keeping them on a stand, the Bongo can create a diverse set of sounds with quick rhythms and staccato beats.

Darabuka

The Darabuka is used far and wide in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe. Slightly varying in form from one area to the other, the drum is mostly played by either holding under the arm or resting on the leg. The sounds played can vary and include complex beats and techniques that ranges from simple single strokes to more elongated rhythms.

Djun Djun (Dunun)

Also hailing from West Africa, the drum is cylindrical in shape with two sides and a stick. Played either by wearing a shoulder strap or on a stand, the drumming pattern can range from simple to complex.

Street Conga

Mostly popular in Latin music and dance, the instrument is also widely used in Afro-Caribbean rhythms. It is struck using the palms and the fingers.

Shekere

Shekere, samba shaker and seed maracas are used throughout the world. These instruments are shaken and struck by hands to produce sounds and is mostly used as accompaniments.

Djembe

Believing to have originated from West Africa, the Djembe is considered as one of the most versatile percussion instruments. Consisting of a loud beat, the drum could be easily heard over an ensemble. Djembe includes a variety of techniques and rhythms and is played utilising the fingers and palms.

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