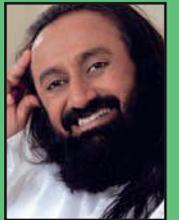


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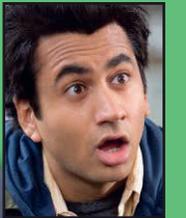


SRI SRI RAVI
SHANKAR'S
SPIRITUAL
MESSAGE



THE SAJA SAGA
Q&A WITH
VISH MISHRA
INDIAN BEDTIME
STORIES

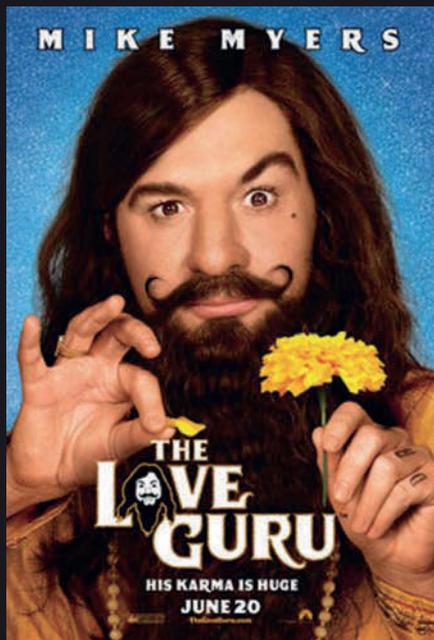
KAL PENN'S
HOLLYWOOD
DREAM



a Star
is Born
MANUNARAYAN'S BIG BREAK



coverstory



MANU NARAYAN

astarⁱs born

Manu Narayan has a second lead in this summer's likely blockbuster, Mike Myers' "The Love Guru." **GEETA BHATNAGAR-NOVOTNY** profiles the young actor of "Bombay Dreams" who may well be on his way to stardom



BIG BREAK: Manu Narayan in the film "The Love Guru."

THE STANLEY CUP is at stake. But the star player of the Toronto Maple Leafs is on a downward spiral – his love life has gone awry, you see. With the stakes so high, something needs to be done – and soon.

Enter, the Love Guru. The American-born holy man from India brings the message of love and spiritual healing to the troubled sports star and attempts to make things right for the struggling team.

That, in a nutshell, is the storyline of the controversial Mike Myers film "The Love Guru." Starring Myers in the lead role of Guru Pitka, the Love Guru, the film is slated for a June release. As only in Mike Myers movie fashion, colorful characters are brought to life, moral issues are wittily challenged and parody and laughter abound ... and someone gets the girl!?

While audiences may associate biting satire, hilarious comedy and even gross antics with Myers' films, "The Love Guru" has landed itself in a bit of trouble because of its perceived denigration of Hinduism. What started

as a protest by one man from Nevada has steamrolled into a veritable movement with a loose coalition of groups alleging the film is "debasing Hindu practices" with its spoof on Hindu religious and spiritual teachers. Paramount Pictures, the film's distributors, has said it will host a special screening for Hindu leaders ahead of the film's release to allay their fears.

In the meanwhile, the film is being promoted on screen and online, where it has generated considerable buzz. In addition to the film's official Web site (www.loveguru.com), there is a Web site for Guru Pitka (www.thegurupitka.com), a technology savvy spiritual teacher who also has pages on Facebook, YouTube and MySpace.

But this story is not about the controversy, real or imagined. It's not even about the guru. It's actually about the shishya (disciple).

In keeping with tradition, where there's a guru, there has to be a shishya. In Myers' film, the role of the shishya is played by Manu Narayan, star of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Bombay Dreams." He plays Rajneesh, "an

innocent guy who really believes in the goodness and teachings of Guru Pitka." Being in this mega-budget Hollywood studio film and likely summer blockbuster is indeed a big break for the young actor.

But even more significant is that he plays the second lead in the film that could well make way for big name recognition among mainstream audiences all over the world and could pave the way for a successful career in show business.

The guru-shishya experience isn't new for Narayan. In real life, he spent time in India under the tutelage of Kadri Gopalnath, the pioneer of Carnatic style music for the saxophone. Indeed, Narayan is an accomplished saxophone player and has a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh with a double major in saxophone and vocal performance.

"In the United States, you learn a craft by being taught maybe a couple of hours a week; but in India you go and live with your teacher and go through different stages of apprenticeship over the span of years," he says ▶

◊ reverently. During these stages of apprenticeship one may go from being an assistant of sorts to observing every aspect of the teacher to ultimately moving to play and collaborate with the teacher.

"I would carry Sri Gopalnath's sax on the train and was able to take being scolded and lauded as a student does," he recalls.

That experience, and an Indian accent, helped Narayan immensely in developing Rajneesh's character. "Rajneesh is Guru Pitka's moral compass," he says.

"Rajneesh and Pitka go through the stages of Rajneesh being a Guy Friday to sort of an assistant then to being his protégé."

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Penn., Narayan is the only child of Vatsala and J.B. Narayan. His father is an engineer and his mother a manager of the Sri Venkateshwara Temple in Pittsburgh.

Like any other Indian parents, they had high hopes for their son and were quite taken aback when he wanted to pursue a career in the arts.

ARTISTIC POTENTIAL

Robert Page, Paul Mellon university professor of music and director of choral and opera studies at Carnegie Mellon University, recalls reassuring the Narayans their son's career choice was not a calamity. "Manu had something special.

Narayan's parents didn't know what to do with him," Page says. "It took a lot of convincing. I can still see them in my living room today. They wanted him to go into business."

In the end, his parents conceded to keep nurturing his artistic talents. "My parents were always proud of me and if it wasn't for their dedication to me in the arts, I wouldn't be anywhere," Narayan says.

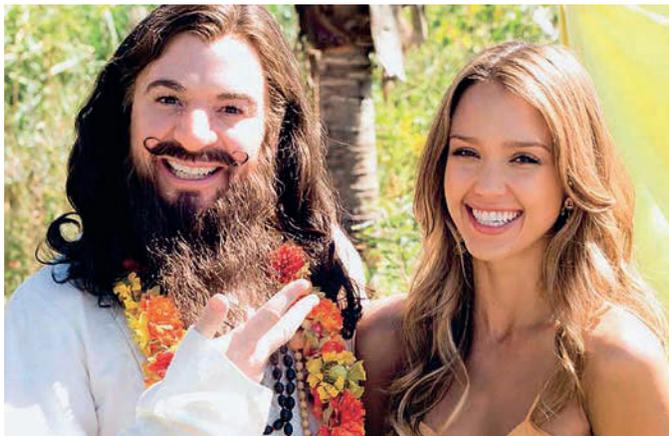
His career was launched a semester before he even graduated from Carnegie Mellon, when we got the major role of Thuy in the national tour of the Broadway musical, "Miss Saigon."

From then on, his numerous stage credits have ranged from Shakespearean plays to playing Akaash, the lead in the Broadway musical, "Bombay Dreams."

His other vocal accomplishments range

COURTING CONTROVERSY

Fearing ridicule of their religion, some Hindu groups have decided to make pre-emptive charges against "The Love Guru"



THE FAKE GURU

Mike Myers and Jessica Alba in the film. It's just a good-natured comedy, is what the filmmakers say in their defense.

The Austin Powers star plays an American raised in an ashram in India who returns to the U.S. seeking fame and fortune out of his faith.



PRIESTLY PROTEST

Rajan Zed, a Nevada-based Hindu chaplain and leader, is spearheading the protest against the film.

New age guru Deepak Chopra, who appears in the film, has given a clean chit to the movie, even as some Hindu groups are demanding an advance screening of the film.

from singing with Cyndi Lauper and The Band's Garth Hudson to performing for dignitaries that include Queen Elizabeth II, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and President George W. Bush. Narayan can be heard on the album "A Night in the Old Marketplace," songs by The Klezmatiks' Frank London, released in 2007 by Soundbrush Records. He has co-written and recorded the single "Help Me to Find" for the film "Hiding Divya," star-

ring Madhur Jaffrey, Pooja Kumar and Deep Katdare. Along with bandmate Radovan Jovicevic, he has recorded the single "Have Me" for the upcoming film "And Then Came Love" starring Vanessa Williams.

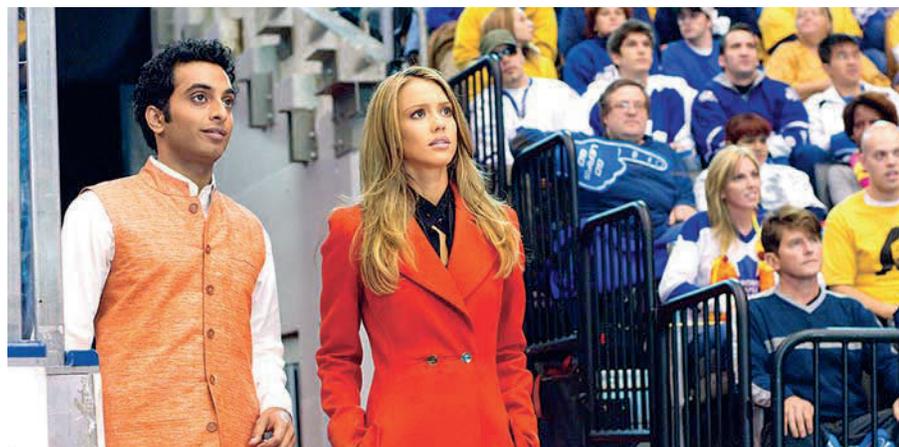
He has done numerous shows on stage and is now branching out into film and television. Narayan most recently guest starred on TV in the "Cashmere Mafia" pilot, the "Lipstick Jungle" pilot and the "M.O.N.Y." pilot. However, he is still best-known for his role in the Andrew Lloyd Webber-A.R. Rahman collaboration, "Bombay Dreams."

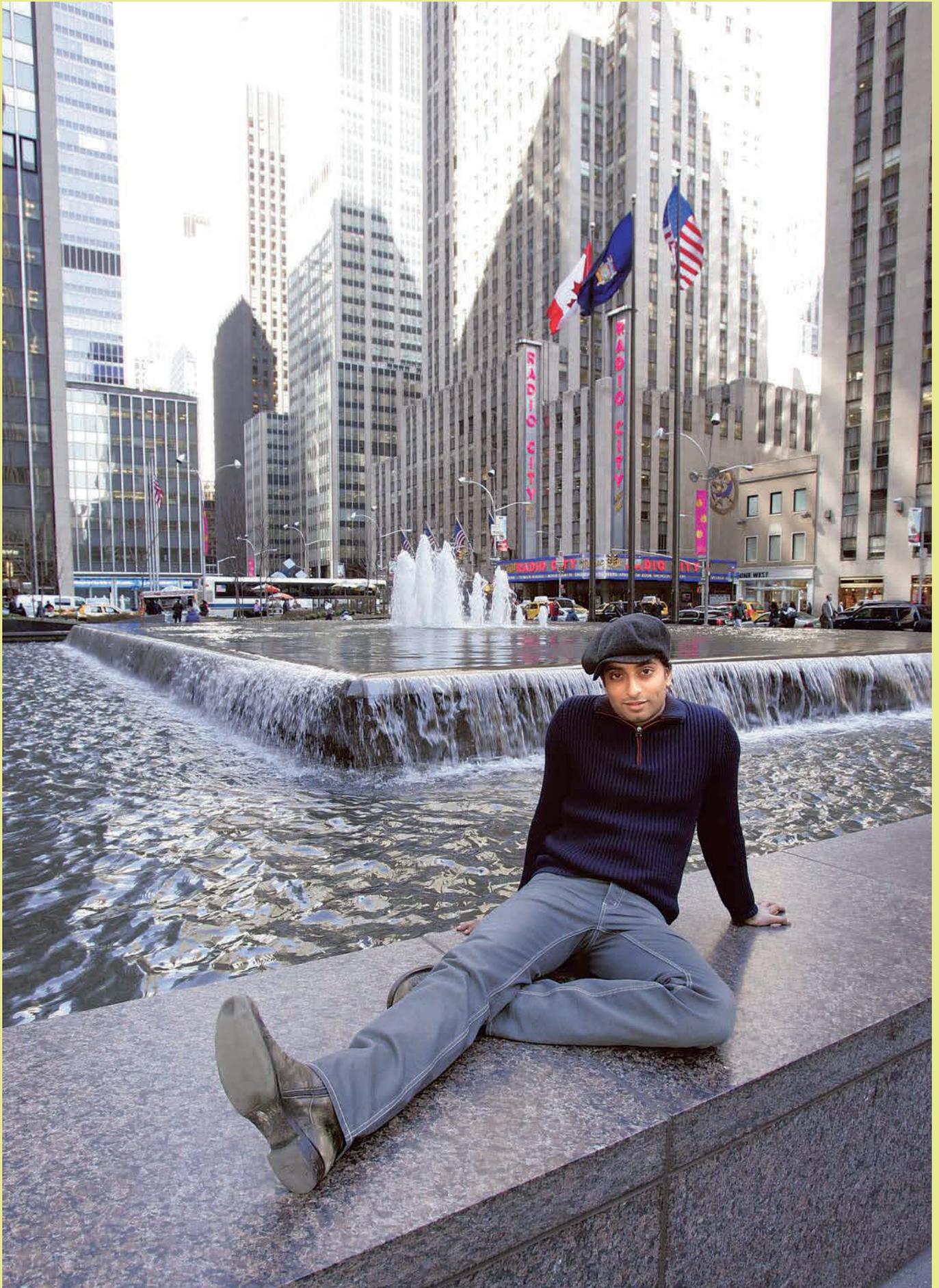
Jaffrey, the legendary actress and cookbook author who played Narayan's grandmother, Shanti, in the musical, recalls it was a pleasure working with the young actor.

"Manu is such a hard worker and a great actor, great singer and very good looking. I love Manu, he is such a good person and a good human being," she says.

The two had a number of emotional scenes. "I think when you are working together with actors, it is a relief to work with people who are likeable and lovable, and Manu is that," Jaffrey says.

Even though he has a sizable resume ◊





MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPS INDIA

◆ and a Broadway production under his belt, Narayan was very excited when he landed the role in the Myers film. “When I got to Broadway, I knew what that was all about and that was really exciting,” he says. “But there is always this cautious optimism when you book a film. You don’t know at the end of the day if your character will test well or if you will end up being edited out.”

He has always been a huge Mike Myers fan. Every word and phrase of a Myers’ script is a brilliant use of double entendres and innuendo and the films themselves are witty and intelligent. About “The Love Guru,” Narayan has this to say: “It is done in the kooky comic fashion of Mike Myers. It is a rip-roaring funny movie!”

The film was shot last year in Toronto, and Narayan was there from August to December. He got to interact with the cast – including Sir Ben Kingsley, Jessica Alba and Justin Timberlake – and even met with Mike De Luca, former president of production at New Line Cinema and Dreamworks and lead producer on “The Love Guru.”

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Working on the film was “one of the two best experiences in my life,” Narayan says. “Being a leading role on Broadway and being a lead in a major studio big-budget film were major dreams of mine and I was able to have them, fortunately.”

And the icing on the cake was working with Myers. “It was like a dream come true,” the young actor says. “Mike Myers is the hardest worker. He has a true cause and effect to all of his work. His art is a science.”

Yet, not everyone admires Myers or thinks the film is appropriate. A number of groups have alleged the film denigrates Hindu values. They express similar concerns: They all want to respect the right of free speech, but they believe it is important for filmmakers to be sensitive to members of minority races and religious communities. They feel this film mocks Hinduism and makes light of its beliefs and practices.

The protest started when Rajan Zed, a Hindu chaplain in Reno, Nev., spoke out against film. Zed delivered the first Hindu

WHOLESALE CAREER

Narayan is a typical young man who loves rollerblading and a typical New Yorker who enjoys Broadway, on and off stage



MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPSHOTS INDIA

STEADY RISE

Narayan has acted on stage, TV and film. Even before he graduated, he was offered a role – playing Thuy in the national tour of the Broadway musical, “Miss Saigon;” he has since acted in numerous plays and made appearances in TV series such as “Law & Order: SVU” and “The Sopranos,” among others.

SIMPLE PLEASURES

Narayan loves being in New York and though he likes his hectic life, he also cherishes his downtime and is looking forward to rollerblading, catching up with friends and traveling. He also loves to hunker down with a good book and his favorite authors are Joseph Campbell and Vikram Seth.

opening prayer in the United States Senate last year. The prayer received media coverage, more so because a group of protesters interrupted the ceremony, shouting out against allowing a Hindu prayer in the house.

“From the information available about the movie, it appears to be lampooning Hinduism and Hindus and using Hindu terms frivolously,” Zed has been quoted as saying in news reports.

Various Hindu and non-Hindu organizations, in the U.S. and in India, as well as religious leaders – including the Rev. William Bartlett, a well-known Buddhist priest and interfaith chaplain; Lonnie L. Feemster, civil rights activist and religious affairs chairperson of the Reno-Sparks chapter of the NAACP; Paradheya Das of Sri Krishna Vedic Cultural Association in Sacramento, Calif. – have issued statements in support of Zed.

“Guru is never to be ridiculed under any circumstance. Respect for the giver of knowledge is a foundational and essential element found within Vedic culture,” Das has been quoted as saying.

While Narayan is aware of the controversy, he feels it is completely unwarranted. “I can assure you from being on set with Mike that he has a great love of Eastern things. But these movies are what Mike does as a comedian,” he says.

“It is silly that people may try to make a name for themselves by creating controversy. I hate when people talk for me. I am a Hindu and this controversy does not represent the opinions of me or most of my peers.”

How does he think people will react to ◆



MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPSHOTS INDIA

◆ his role? How will the film affect his career? "I have gotten a few offers. I have tried to take the advice of the people who represent me," Narayan says.

"I just shot a guest-star role in a TV pilot with actresses Geena Davis and Rosie Perez. I am really just sifting through offers and making music with my band Darunam and deciding the next step."

Narayan is the lead singer for Darunam. "We are mastering a new project of the well-known clarinetist Milan Milosevic," he says, referring to his bandmate, Jovicevic, and himself. "It is sort of a Buddha Bar album which should be released in September."

Janina Gavankar, an actress and musician of mixed Indian and Dutch descent, played one of the lead roles in Darunam's music video for their single "All That's Beautiful Must Die." Gavankar is best known for her role of Papi, a lesbian in the Showtime Network hit "The L Word."

A MILLION PIES

"Manu and I are like a Venn diagram, there's a lot of overlap, so it was only a matter of time until we connected," she says. "I'm pleased that our first meeting was documented for all time in the form of a music video. Manu is the only person I'd stay in a latex skirt for, for two full-length shoot days. Manu is one of those guys who has his fingers in a million pies, all of which you're excited to taste."

As Narayan traverses his career, he never forgets where it all started. He recently returned to his alma mater as guest speaker for a career day.

Page, his mentor at Carnegie Mellon University, said Narayan was "able to, in such a charming, hospitable way, share some of his

MUSIC MAN

Acting is OK, but Narayan is a musician first. He trained in Western classical music at a prestigious school



MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPS INDIA

ALMA MATER

Music is the mainstay of Narayan's life. He graduated in 1995 with a bachelor's in fine arts from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh as a double major in saxophone and vocal performance. He recently returned to his alma mater as a speaker for career day and offered his insights on being an actor and a musician.

ONLY CHILD

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Penn., Narayan is the only child of Vatsala and J.B. Narayan. His father is an engineer and his mother a manager of the most prominent Hindu temple in Pittsburgh. They were quite perturbed when he wanted to pursue a career in the arts. It took considerable persuasion before they relented to let him follow his passion.

Wanted: A Sense of Humor

GURU PITKA, THE protagonist of "The Love Guru," is Mike Myers' first original character since Austin Powers.

And is equally, if not more, outrageous.

Upon researching this film, I discovered Myers is taking his character to the nth degree. Not only is there an official Web site promoting the film, there is also a Web site for Guru Pitka, where you can view video messages of sutras and the laws of Pitka.

You can also peruse picture galleries of Pitka with almost every A-list celebrity – from the Beatles to Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes.

You can also read and

explore Pitka's mantras and teachings.

There is a show on the Sundance Channel called "Iconoclasts." This documentary-style hour-long show features two notable people interviewing each other and sharing their passions and the impetus for their drive in their chosen careers. One episode features Myers and new age guru Deepak Chopra sharing their philosophies on life and mutual admiration. In fact, the accent Myers dons for Pitka sounds suspiciously close to Chopra's cadence. As they say, imitation is the highest form of flattery.

But there is no doubt Myers has written an educated script

for "The Love Guru" as Chopra himself remarks on the filmmaker's impressive knowledge and study of Eastern philosophies. On the other hand, Myers has been quoted as saying how much he enjoys Chopra's sense of humor.

I choose to view the film as another opportunity and step forward for our culture to assimilate into the mainstream. Even if Hinduism is slightly satirized in this film, it at least creates some awareness about the religion. We must not have much faith in American society if we think a comedy such as "The Love Guru" will serve as the primary source of education for people about the Hindu

faith. And no matter how you slice it, satire will always have its place in the entertainment world.

South Asians should be pleased we are becoming so visible in the American mainstream. Our culture is being incorporated in all aspects of American life and we can still hold onto our traditions and beliefs.

One can even go so far as to say South Asians are all the rage, we are becoming trendy and our culture benefits from the visibility as long as there is a nonviolent aspect to that portrayal, which "The Love Guru" reflects.

I have observed TV commer-

DREAMS COME TRUE

In acting and music Narayan is living out his dreams just as he did as his character in "Bombay Dreams"

BROADWAY

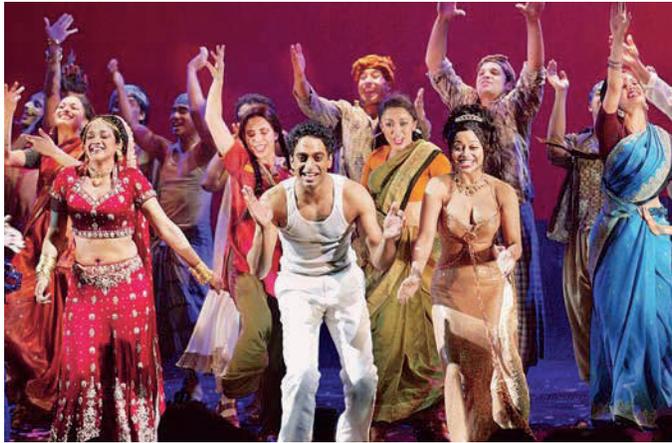
Narayan's Broadway debut was in "Bombay Dreams" as the lead, Akaash, a young slum dweller who dreams of becoming a huge movie star. Narayan is seen here with his co-stars, from left, Sriram Ganesan, Ayesha Dharker and Anisha Nagarajan at the opening night after-party in April 2004 in New York City.



MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPS INDIA

OFF BROADWAY

Narayan is an award-winning classical saxophonist in the Western and Carnatic styles. Together with guitarist and composer Radovan Jovicevic, Narayan is founder of the band Darunam. The duo has released an EP titled "All That's Beautiful Must Die." The music video for the title single was directed by Nusrat Durrani of MTV World.



MOHAMMED JAFFER / SNAPS INDIA

◆ concerns about being in the arts in the real world. He made it plain that it is not a bed of roses. You must be prepared; being in the right place at the right time means being in the right place ready to go."

"Manu talked about the rigors of doing 'Bombay Dreams,' and how much weight he lost during the run, saying he had never worked so hard physically in his life, bringing the point home that even though you may look ethnic, talent and proficiency is far superior than an ethnic look," Page says.

The professor, who has known Narayan for more than 20 years, praised the actor's generosity with his time, saying: "Manu has never forgotten where he came from. He has such a big heart. It doesn't surprise me one bit – his accomplishments. And he will keep growing from here. He never once complained about paying his dues."

THE NEW YORKER

So, where does he go next – what are his aspirations? "Good music and being in New York City. When you are feeling that there is nothing going on, there is always something going on in the city," Narayan says, adding another one: "Just waking up every day and being able to do good work."

When he has some downtime, Narayan likes to rollerblade, especially now that the weather is nicer. He likes to meet with friends and to travel as much as he can. He loves to read, his favorites being Joseph Campbell and Vikram Seth; he is currently reading the Mohsin Hamid novel "Moth Smoke." His favorite show on TV was "The West Wing" and he currently enjoys watching the HBO series "In Treatment."

And, of course, his favorite movie is "The Love Guru."

Geeta Bhatnagar-Novotny



cialists have become a medium to spark the introduction of a minority culture into the mainstream society. I see South Asians in TV commercials, many times playing Americans without accents. And I see more South Asians in lead roles on major network shows.

I feel very excited for the future of South Asians when I see how their cultural integration is evolving in the entertainment business.

In almost any minority culture, the first step toward acceptance by the majority in the entertainment industry is through humor and parody and, sometimes, the caricature of a stereotype. Because South

Asian culture has been prominent in the U.K. for much longer than in the States, South Asians have their own mainstream shows there. Honestly, their comedies make fun of themselves by lampooning their own cultural idiosyncrasies.

Perfect evolutionary examples in the entertainment business are: from "I Love Lucy" and "Leave it to Beaver" to "The L-Word" and "Sex and the City;" from Mr. Miyagi in "The Karate Kid" to Lloyd in "Entourage;" from Cheech and Chong to George Lopez; from "Good Times" to "The Cosby Show" ... and the list goes on. These were all entertaining mediums and so are their comparative coun-

terparts. These days, religion has turned into big business. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Buy your way into heaven"? And on every other show, Oprah endorses a new self-help book or religion/philosophy.

Myers, Paramount Pictures and Spyglass Entertainment have done a brilliant job of marketing Pitka as an actual person. It is fascinating to see Pitka's mini sutras on his Web site, as well as on YouTube, Facebook and MySpace.

The catch phrase for Pitka and the film is "His Karma is Huge." The innuendo is clear, given that the title of the movie is "The LOVE Guru."

Pitka has trademarked his

original proverbs. So this film actually seems to be more of a spoof on opportunism and capitalism in the self-help industry more than anything else.

For all of those caught up in the controversy, Pitka makes this statement, "I am also a spiritual teacher, affiliated with no one faith and I have combined many disparate disciplines into a unified movement of human potentiality and equipoise."

Check out the film for yourself and if you are not laughing hysterically at even one point in the movie ... get a sense of humor.