



*Laya Project Live! and Nostalgia represent two of the biggest undertakings for this year's Perth International Arts Festival, which begins tomorrow, Friday, February 13. BOB GORDON reports.*

## LAYA PROJECT LIVE! Welcome To Countries

**Laya Project Live! opens the Perth International Arts Festival this Friday, February 13, at Supreme Court Gardens.**

**Much like the tragic bushfires earlier this week in Victoria, the Asian Tsunami on Boxing Day, 2004, stopped the world in its tracks.**

Yet while hearts pour out globally at the time of tragedy we do not see the struggle of those who have survived, their resilience in getting life back together and starting again. The Laya Project, an endeavour that has embodied a film and CD release, as well as live performance, is testimony to the human spirit and what spurs those on who have what would appear to be nothing.

Formed just prior to the tsunami EarthSync is a production house in Chennai, India, that took on the task of documenting the surviving culture of the affected areas, travelling for two years through Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar and India.

Producer, Sonya Mazumdar, has overseen the project from the get-go and while EarthSync goes from strength-to-strength, The Laya Project gives itself ongoing life as well as hope to others.

For full details about this huge musical and cultural performance, which encompasses the traditional Welcome To Country, head to [www.perthfestival.com.au](http://www.perthfestival.com.au) (.)

**I read an interview you did last year and you mentioned that "all my projects are my babies but Laya is my firstborn child". How has it grown with you... and you with it?**

*(Laughs)* Yes, Laya Project is really my first baby, my firstborn in terms of the work. Incidentally I have two grown up sons, so this is leaving the humans out of it to talk about the project. We started as a record label and a studio and within months the tsunami happened and we took a position to embark on this project in a very naive and passionate. We wanted to document the tsunami as a reference point and we wanted to document the folk traditions of these countries and communities.

It was really the very first project that we took on and it was a very, very difficult project... as all firstborns are. Starting from the logistics, to the lack of knowledge, to 'what next?' As we embarked on the production it just grew and grew. We were just trying to deal with it in terms of living up to it, in a way. It took two-and-a-half years to produce, a lot of blood sweat and tears, if you may. It was very personal... you Chennai was affected by the tsunami too. It touched a very personal chord.

**So you weren't quite prepared for the magnitude, it evolved as it went along?**

Yes and no. I think you're right... as I say when we embarked on the project I don't think we really expected it to become so big. It was our lack of experience, perhaps. But there

was no question of compromising on quality because that is something we are obsessive about. Whether that's quality in terms of content or production. We realised very quickly, a few months into the project, that this was going to be a big one because there was no way we could cut corners. Cutting corners would just make it less than what we wanted it to be.

**It must have seemed a change for your working life that because a change for your life in general. You'd started up as a production**

**house not long prior, but this wasn't just some contract you were working on and completing. It sounds as though it's at the very heart of your organisation and yourselves. Has it changed your work ethic?**

No really, because Laya Project is, really, who we are. Laya Project is Laya Project because it is basically who we are. All the work we do as a production house has that kind of texture to it. It's definitely our driving force. What we want to do is be commercially viable, we want to do projects we love doing – there's no compromise on that. Every EarthSync project is driven by a passion for our offspring. That's why I said what I said, that Laya Project is our first baby. Subsequently we've had quite a few babies and they're all siblings (*laughs*) so they all have the same kind of character in terms of production and content quality.

But it has changed things for me, the fact that there were moments – and just moments – during the production that we were doing something so special, 'who will listen to it? Who will buy it? Where is it going to go?' You must remember that then we didn't have any marketing in place or distribution deals, it was just all about this amazing project which was mind, body and soul. At this end it has been successful. People love it, people want it. There are product sales. It's changed my perspective and built a certain confidence in markets and in audiences. To do something passionate and really believe in it and not make any compromises and it's successful, for me that's really changed how I've looked at all my projects.

**In terms of audiences, something I find interesting is that you wanted to move beyond financial aid and assistance. The aid that came in did not address their culture, so it was in effect cultural aid. The great thing being is that now that Laya Project travels to new markets it's actually cultural aid to the rest of the world...**

Well the rest of the world is harder to deal with. I don't have any answers for that except to say that we as the human race, our verve and our resource is our culture and if we lose that or we stop giving value to the cultural side of our lives then I really don't know where the human race is going. How long can a human really survive without culture?



**Yet through culture those who suffer  
make those who haven't feel better about  
themselves...**

But the fact is that in such countries with traditional communities – especially in third world countries – and those who are in minorities, is that sadly how it goes is that most of them are economically weaker and have less access to the kinds of resources others have. It's sad, but otherwise it's a reality. On top of that there is natural disaster that falls upon them. I have to say there's much to learn from them because you

really see the resilience of the human spirit at every turn and every step when you go to these communities. They don't have anything, they've lost so much. You arrive with a microphone and a camera and say you're interested in music and the whole community comes out to share and to give. It's amazing. It changes your perspective. I have a nice house and a nice computer but do I have this ability to share, to smile and welcome people even though I don't have much in my house or my kitchen? It's beautiful. It restores a faith in humankind.

