

Michael Franti: For the Love

THE SPEARHEAD FRONTMAN REFLECTS ON ACCEPTANCE, YOGA, AND HIS DAILY PRAYER.

MICHAEL FRANTI'S MUSIC is inseparable from his work as an activist, humanitarian, and spiritual being. For the past two decades, the energetic six-foot, six-inch performer has used his platform as singer-songwriter for the hip-hop/funk/rock band Spearhead to spread positivity, raise environmental and political awareness, and alleviate human suffering through charities like Soles4Souls and his own recently established foundation, Do It For The Love.

Franti, who has famously gone shoeless since 2000, brings a high level of consciousness to his life as a touring musician, maintaining a vegan diet and a steady yoga regimen as he travels the country in a biodiesel-fueled bus.

Born to an Irish-German-French mother and an African American/Native American father, Franti was raised by a Finnish American couple after his biological mother placed him for adoption, fearing that her parents would disapprove of his ethnicity. Not coincidentally, he is now a prominent crusader for tolerance and equality. On Spearhead's latest album, *All People*, he celebrates the multiculturalism that is written into his very DNA.

What are some of the things that your travels around the world have taught you?

I think the main thing is that there are lots of ways of looking at the world. There's not one way that's the right way to do it. My mom used to tell me when I was a kid, "It's not enough just to have tolerance for other groups of people. Empathy and compassion are great, but when you have acceptance of other people, it becomes a part of who you are." So when you accept another way of being, that enters into your life and the way that you start to live your life. That benefits you and makes your life richer, more fulfilling, and happier.

Especially through music—you see all different styles of music, ways

of playing it, ways of communing through music. It's amazing that this tiny little vibration that you can't see will tickle our eardrums and inspire us to connect with other people, inspire us to laugh and smile, cry, and open up that window to our soul.

What's the spiritual significance of the tattoos on your arms?

There's one on my left arm that says, "Today I pray for . . ." and then it has a line. I fill in that blank with a Sharpie every day: "Today I'm praying for my mom," or "I'm praying for a friend," or "I'm praying for rain," or whatever it is. Sometimes I let fans write into it. People will write in somebody that they're praying for: a friend or family member.

Spearhead's style of music is about being openhearted. It's about positivity. There's a lot of people who come to our shows who aren't feeling positive or openhearted, and they want to get that experience from the music that night that we're playing in their town. I think [having them fill in the tattoo] is another way to help someone feel positive about whatever situation they're in.

As for the tattoos of birds turning into fish on my forearms, a friend of mine in New Zealand who has done most of my tattoos told me a story that he had heard when he was in Tahiti: Fishermen watch the birds leave the trees in the morning, and they see where the birds are flying into the water, which angle they're flying in from, and how long the birds stay underwater. From that, they're able to learn where to cast their nets to catch



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fish. They can see how deep the fish are, and they can see which direction they should approach the fish. So it's kind of like a prayer of abundance: if you pay attention to what's happening in your life, watch the signs, and connect with nature, you'll get what you need from life.

Tell me about the hatha yoga that you do while you're on the road.

When I'm on tour, I'm constantly going in and out of the tour bus, venues, and wherever we're off to during the day to do promo. Then I'm constantly running around, jumping, and dancing in our two-hour show. So there's a

physical toll on my body, but also, just meeting fans, meeting the promoter, interfacing with my band about what songs we're going to do tonight and also what's happening in the world that I might want to talk about—it's just a lot for my mind. My body gets tired, and my mind gets taxed. When I get on my mat, it's kind of my window to my soul. My soul says, "Hey, body. Hey, mind. I know you're feeling run down, but you can go deeper. Let's just take this time to quiet all of it and feel what's happening in my body, so that I can get back to the three things working really closely together."

What experience do you hope to impart to your audiences?

The main thing is that I want people to feel like, when they leave a show, they're standing just a little bit taller: their head is held a little higher, there's less weight on their shoulders, there's a smile on their face, and they feel like they can face whatever's happening to them. My life partner, Sara, and I recently started the Do It For The Love foundation, which brings people with advanced stages of life-threatening illness, kids with severe challenges, and wounded veterans to live concerts. We see it happen every night at our shows: people come who are really sick or have really severe challenges, and we see music change them. We see people cry, open up, and be with the people that they love the most. That's really why we do this.

—DAMON ORION