

## **Fayetteville band writes, records soundtrack for international film**

BY SARAH K. TERRY Northwest Arkansas Times

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Could four young Fayetteville musicians become the next Beatles?

If New York film director Mickey Nivelli has anything to say about it, the answer is yes. The Beatles rose from the relatively unknown Liverpool, England, to take the world by storm, he reasons, so Arkansas quartet Rhythm Mandir could very well do the same. "My question is, why not? Never worry about failure, just about aiming too low," said Nivelli, an India native who has worked on such films as "If Looks Could Kill," " Sarafina! "and" Yesterday, "the first-ever Oscar nominee from South Africa.

The band is currently collaborating with Nivelli on his forthcoming project " Rainbow Raani, "a genderbending comedy that will begin filming in April in Guyana, Africa. The titular character is a backup singer for The Rainbows, a Guyana band looking to make it big in America — a goal not unlike that of the Fayetteville group, which will possibly change their name to The Rainbows at Nivelli's request.

In fact, for the film, the band is recording under the new moniker.

" This is a very big opportunity for us, not something a 24-year-old sees every day, "said Arnab Banerjee, keyboardist and vocalist for the group." It's unimaginable. "

Adding mightily to the project's prestige is the presence of vocalist Slinger Francisco of Trinidad, known to legions of calypso fans as The Mighty Sparrow. During his 50-year career, which was jump-started with his 1956 single " Jean and Dinah, "the singer has packed stadiums across the globe.

The film is history in the making, Nivelli said, as The Mighty Sparrow has never sung others' songs for a film before. It will also feature vocals from the singer's daughter, Karen Francisco.

Nivelli worked with The Mighty Sparrow on an earlier film, " The Caribbean Fox, "and had always wanted to repeat the experience, he said. He tried for about six months to get in touch with the singer — " It's easier to contact President Bush, "he said — to no avail.

He had given up when a dream about his beloved pet parakeet playing with a sparrow prompted him to try once more.

" A divine force guided me to try to contact him one more time... and everything gelled, "Nivelli said.

After hearing some of the music, The Mighty Sparrow was moved to join the project.

" I don't have a monopoly on talent, "he said." I got to listen to it, and I thought this is nice. These guys have sweet voices. Can you improve perfection? ... I see this as a smash hit. "

" I hear him say stuff like that, and I still think I'm dreaming, "Banerjee said.

The adventure began for the local band with an e-mail Banerjee received several months ago announcing that Nivelli was in search of music for his new film. They sent in some songs, Nivelli liked what he heard, and they were on a plane to New York the next day, Banerjee said.

After meeting with Nivelli to study the script and discuss how the music should sound, the band returned to Fayetteville and spent the next few months composing. They were on a tight schedule because Nivelli wanted to begin recording in December, Banerjee said.

They have completed seven songs with vocals, the last of which was recorded Friday at local studio The Listen Laboratory. The band will also compose the film's background score.

In addition to Banerjee, the group includes keyboardist-percussionist Abin Thomas, guitarist Andrew Blume and bassist Michael Allen. They have played together for about five years and are hoping to use the film as a stepping stone toward a music career, Banerjee said.

It will be some time before Fayettevillians can catch the band live, though.

" We're focusing all our energies on completing this project, "he said." The message, I guess, is for other bands in Arkansas to keep trying, and something will come along. "

The Mighty Sparrow agreed, noting that he has something in common with the up-and-coming musicians.

" On their first venture out, they hit the jackpot, "he said." Just like me. "

Nivelli said he does not know when " Rainbow Raani " will be released, but it will be Guyana's official entrant for the Oscars.

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Contact: [webmaster@nwanews.com](mailto:webmaster@nwanews.com)