

Ashram Interview

1. How did you come together as a band?

In 1998, we founded the rock band Fur Balloon in Austria. In 2004, Boris Seidl traveled to India to explore a new culture and expand his spiritual horizon. In Kovalam, he met Ajaya Kumar, and their first songs emerged from this encounter. In 2006, we recorded our first album as a band in Trivandrum. Hari Krishnamorthy was invited as a session musician for tabla recordings. His musical skill impressed us so deeply that he became a permanent member of the band.

2. Where does the name "Ashram" come from – and what does it mean to you?

An Ashram is a spiritual place of retreat, transformation, and exchange. For us, the name symbolizes the fusion of two musical worlds.

3. How has your music evolved since the beginning?

We've always searched for an international sound, guided by emotion rather than genre. Early on, we focused heavily on fine-tuning our productions. But with our latest work, we consciously returned to a raw, authentic rock sound. Many tracks were recorded in just one or two takes, leaving in the intentional "dirt" between the layers. You can even hear guitars crackling or the metronome in some recordings. Our aim was to recapture an honest rock energy.

4. What sets you apart from other bands?

Many bands today release only singles. We wanted to move away from the "one-hit-wonder" model and return to the roots of rock'n'roll. That's why we spent years crafting a concept album inspired by Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha. This book mirrors our life journey and perfectly reflects the themes in our music – helping us focus on what truly matters.

5. How does your cross-border collaboration work?

We develop ideas, chat constantly, record together, travel, laugh, and work hard. Our collaboration only works because it's built on two decades of deep friendship and a shared love for music. We're living proof that music can unite continents.

6. How would you describe your musical style?

Fusion, Oriental Rock, Psychedelic World Rock – or simply the Ashram sound. In the end, we don't care what it's called, as long as it rocks and feels good.

7. Who or what are your biggest musical influences?

In Europe, definitely bands like The Doors, Pink Floyd, and Led Zeppelin. In India, each of us has our own musical and spiritual gurus. Naturally, classical Indian music is a huge influence. One thing we've learned: music is the universal language – it's understood everywhere.

8. Which instruments do you use that are unusual in rock music?

Sarangi, Mridangam, Tabla, Ganjira, and Sitar – the full Indian instrumental spectrum. We also use Mellotron and vintage guitar amps.

9. Does improvisation play a role in your music?

Definitely. Nothing alive comes strictly from a script. Every song transforms live – we leave space for spontaneous moments.

10. What is the concept behind your new album *Eternal Thirst*?

Eternal Thirst is a concept album inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*. It reflects the eternal search for wisdom, the interplay of light and shadow, the waiting – and ultimately, the awakening. The ferryman and the element of water play key symbolic roles.

11. What does the title refer to?

It's the thirst that can never be fully quenched. The yearning for depth that never lets go. The cover shows the ferryman gliding across water – symbolizing both life and death.

12. How deeply did *Siddhartha* inspire the album?

Each song represents a stage in *Siddhartha*'s journey – and our own. The book served as a mirror in which we saw ourselves. An interesting side note: Hesse's parents were Christian missionaries in Kerala, the home of our Indian bandmates. His grandfather wrote the first dictionary for Malayalam – their native language.

13. How did the song "Charon" come to be – musically and thematically?

The riff for "Charon" had been around for a while. Its rhythm is unusual – not your standard 4/4 beat. Our tabla player, Hari Krishnamorthy, loves exploring new rhythms and plays a central role here. In a way, he becomes our live "Charon", carrying us across musical waves.

14. Why did you decide to sing in Sanskrit?

India is home to many languages. Our last album was in Malayalam and English, which limited its reach. Sanskrit, on the other hand, is more widely understood in India and has fascinating connections to Germanic languages – which we found intriguing.

15. What was the process of working with the Sanskrit translator like?

Sumanagale Srinivas is an extraordinary translator. She understands the deeper layers of language and didn't just translate our lyrics – she felt their essence.

16. Were there any particular challenges during the recording process?

Absolutely. Initially, we produced across two continents. Once we had 18 demos, Boris traveled to India for two months to finalize the recordings. We underestimated the technical challenge of working in 96 kHz – we ran out of hard drive space quickly. Two of our recording computers failed, and we had to recover lost data. Sometimes we miss the days of analog tape. Our first album (with Fur Balloon in 1998) was done in 10 days – now it can take years.

17. What can audiences expect from your live shows?

A musical journey. A one-of-a-kind experience. Anything can happen – and everything happens live. It's going to be a great event!

18. What does it mean to you to perform the new album live?

Every concert is special – especially since some members travel long distances to be there. Once we're on stage, we become one.

19. What is the lineup for your upcoming show at Spinnerei?

We're thrilled to perform with our original lineup again. Adrian Müller will join us on bass – traveling all the way from Münster. Christian Cermak, our keyboardist, is also back, along with Hari Krishnamorthy on tabla and German Schwarz on drums. New additions include

sitarist Joseph Paulson, a seasoned session musician from Kochi, and Aravind – a rising talent from India who recently won Star Singer Season 9 in November 2024. We're confident: this will be a stellar lineup!

20. What was it like performing in prisons – and how did it influence your music?

Playing in prisons is incredibly intense. Just entering those spaces is a powerful experience. We realized how isolated many inmates are and how flawed the rehabilitation system often is. These experiences deeply influenced our second album, *Prison Without Walls* – making our music darker and more reflective.