

Civil war refugee holds concert to benefit his native Sri Lanka

By Dan Abendschein, Staff Writer
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Musician Rajeev Nandakumaran came to Pasadena as a young child from war-torn Sri Lanka. Now he is holding a concert here in his home town, to benefit refugees in his home country.

Nandakumaran, a hip-hop artist who goes by the name G-Vo, is holding a charity event at the Ambassador Auditorium tonight, when he'll also celebrate the release of his second album. He hopes to raise \$25,000 for the International Medical Health Organization, to be used to aid refugees from Sri Lanka's civil war.

The war, which first broke out in 1983, pitted a separatist group of minority ethnic group called the Tamils against the majority Sinhalese.

The war had personal impacts for Nandakumaran, a Tamil, whose family fled in 1984.

"They came to our house and burned it down and we fled," said Nandakumaran.

His family moved to Northwest Pasadena, where he grew up. He later attended UCLA and now lives in Duarte.

Nandakumaran said he sees himself as somewhat in the center of the conflict in his homeland: He wants peace and does not support the separatists, but he also wants to see Tamils treated equally.

He describes his music as coming from a "third-world perspective."

His music influences cover a diverse set of sounds - Michael Jackson, Boyz II Men, Jay-Z, Kanye West, A Tribe Called Quest, Coldplay, John Legend, and Lupe Fiasco.

Tonight's concert at the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena is sold out. More than 1,300 people are expected, said Nandakumaran. Representatives from Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office will be there, and Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard's office will be making a presentation.

The refugee situation in Sri Lanka has become grim, with nearly 300,000 people living in camps. Recent heavy rains have triggered flooding. Some international aid groups have estimated that 1,400 people a week are dying from the poor conditions inside the refugee camps.

Nandakumaran has visited Sri Lanka twice and is looking forward to going back and performing there. But he knows he'll be walking a political tightrope.

"My music is very apolitical," said Nandakumaran. "I've gotten a lot of flak for not representing the militant perspective."

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