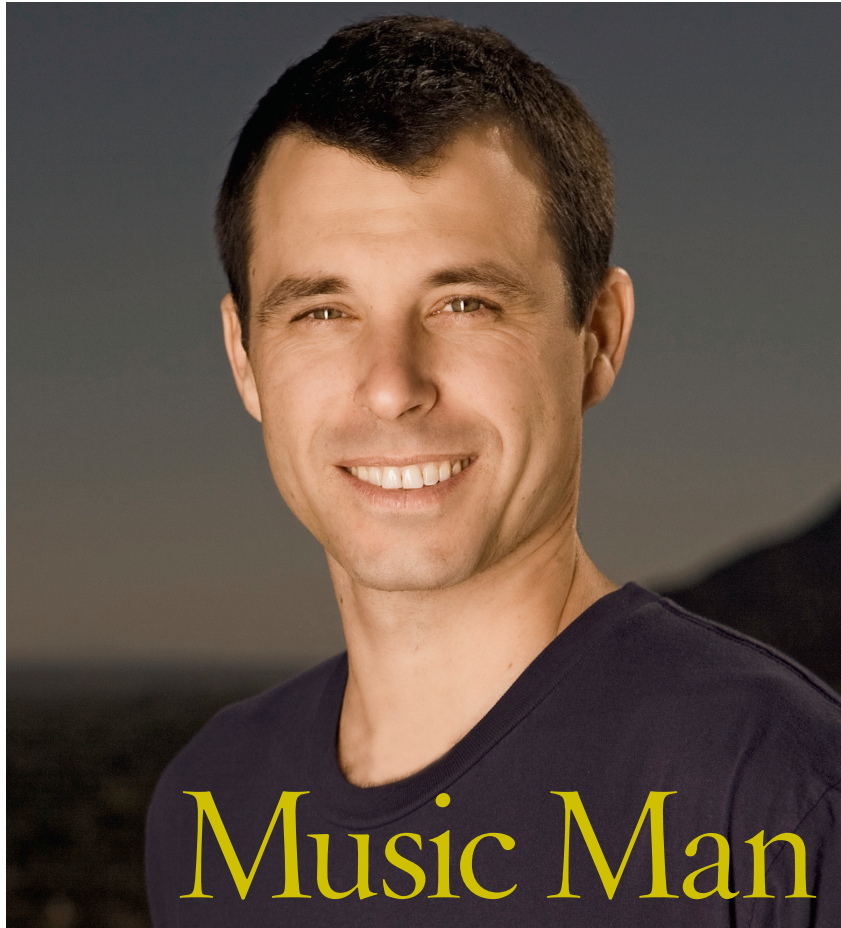


## the yj interview

by Diane Anderson



**Hip-hop yogi**  
**Ian Lopatin talks**  
**about Bikram,**  
**the beat, and**  
**making yoga**  
**more American.**

**WHEN HE WAS KID** Ian Lopatin watched his mom host neighborhood yoga gatherings. As an adult he worked as an entertainment lawyer in Los Angeles, had a life-changing encounter with Bikram Choudhury, and opened At One Yoga Studios, in both Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona. He now teaches his hip-hop-influenced yoga around the country and is launching an oxymoronic line of yoga lifestyle togs called Spiritual Gangster.

**So, you were exposed to yoga at a young age?** When I was four or five, our massage therapist would come to teach yoga classes, and the whole block would show up for yoga. I thought my mom was crazy. I didn't have a regular yoga practice growing up. After finishing law school in California, I was stressed and running a lot. I went to Yoga Works, and Sean Corne got me addicted. My mom gave me a book on yoga. And, strangely enough, Bikram Choudhury sat next to me on a plane. He changed my life. I practiced with him daily in Westwood, California. One thing led to another.

**How would you describe the At One style?** It's a fun, athletic experience with music, and we blow up people's misconceptions about what yoga is. A big aspect of our success is the community-based element of everything we do—we host *kirtans*, events with food, and discussions about environmental issues.

**How important is music?** Yoga and music are portals that help people experience breakthroughs. I use music to get everyone on the same energetic page. People start moving like a school of fish. Steve Ross taught me how to make music integral and how to sequence asana to it. It's fun and helps people move more deeply into their own experience. We tap into this energy and get yoga out to the masses. There's this amazing information in the yoga system that needs to be packaged so that it's relevant to high-stress Americans. I use a lot of hip-hop. For standing sequences, it has a primal beat that everyone can catch: It's a simple one-two. Think of old Michael Jackson songs or what Justin Timberlake is doing these days. Even the stiffest white person in the room can move to it.

**Aren't some of the lyrics unyogic?** In the beginning I picked high-vibration lyrics. But, truthfully, most people don't listen to the lyrics. I used to worry about the words, but now I realize if it has a great beat, it works. People who are offended probably need to get jolted out of their comfort zone.

**What's Spiritual Gangster?** I'm working with my girlfriend, Vanessa Lee, to create a line of high-vibration lifestyle clothing called Spiritual Gangster. Yogis generally care about the environment and come together for causes we believe in. The name means we're a gang of spiritual people who want to make a difference. Our T-shirts have messages like "Grateful," "Meditate," and "Love Your Mother," and a lot of the shirts are organic or recycled. We donate 10 percent of profits to sustainability projects, like planting trees, and to social causes, like the Cambodian Children's Fund and Sean Corne's foundation, Off the Mat, Into the World. ■

PHOTO: KING LAWRENCE