

Nikki Hill isn't a blues veteran — well, not yet! But, she's slowly getting there, combining blues, R&B and gospel rhythms to create a sound that is spectacularly unique. And, that's before you hear her stellar voice! She plays a heady roots music set with her band (The Pirate Crew) and there's a definite hint of Deep South soul to her music. She also performs with her husband, Matt Hill, and with a debut album in her kitty and several performances to look back on, she's here to take the city by storm at the Mahindra Blues Festival, which will take place on February 14 and 15 this year.

- **Did you always want to be a musician?**  
When I was young, I wanted to be and do everything, like most children. I thought about being a poet, a painter, a chef, a doctor... One thing that remains constant was the desire to do something that made people feel good or better, even if it was only for a moment. I've always been interested in science and the human body, so I became more interested in healthcare. I went to college and received a degree in exercise and sport science and before I became a musician, that was my career!
- **Is this your first trip to India? What are you looking forward to?**  
Yes, this is my first trip and I still can't believe I'm here! I'm looking forward to meeting people, playing music for a new audience, hearing the other artists in the line-up and eating some good food.
- **What are you most excited about at the Mahindra Blues Festival this year?**  
I'm excited about checking out performances by other musicians. I've never seen any of these artists perform live, except for Buddy Guy!
- **What do you have in store for audiences?**  
We have a great roots show, with lots of energy. It's great to listen to, watch and dance along to, if you feel like it!
- **What's the one song that you love to perform?**  
That's a tough one. I don't perform songs that I don't like. So, I have to say that I enjoy performing all my songs!
- **Where do you derive inspiration from?**  
Most of it comes from me being in love or being hurt or unhappy in the past. Sometimes specific experiences inspire me, and sometimes it's other artists and bands who I listen to and admire.
- **Who are some of your favourite artists?**  
That is the toughest question ever! Some of my favourite artists include The Staple Singers, Little Richard, Otis Redding, Lightnin' Hopkins, The Rolling Stones, Ike & Tina Turner, AC/DC, Howling Wolf, Joan Jett, The Faces, The Meters, Sam Cooke, Barbara Lynn, Toots & the Maytals, Otis Rush, Big Maybelle, The Black Crowes, Eddie Hinton and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers... the list goes on!
- **Have you heard Indian music in any form?**  
When I was a teenager, I used to watch a TV channel that played retro Bollywood films all day on Sunday. So, I think I'm most familiar with the voice more than anything else!
- **What do you think the most challenging part of a performance is?**  
Choosing the encore!
- **Your live shows are amazing — but they must leave you pretty exhausted! How do you unwind?**  
My shows are like medicine for me at this point. They're like a fun workout — so, I actually love the physical part of a live



>> Nikki Hill will be performing at the Mahindra Blues Festival

# GETTING BACK TO HER ROOTS

The Mahindra Blues fest is back! With titbits about her upcoming performance at the festival as well as about herself, roots star **Nikki Hill** talks to **Rhea Dhanbhora & Yamini Walia** before the event



show. A big hug from my husband and some quiet time is usually all I need to relax, since I'm not too wound up as it is.

- **What has your biggest achievement been to date?**  
The biggest achievement for me is that I'm making a living with my music. I'm still shocked that we pay our bills by being creative and making people happy. It's tough for artists — it always has been — so, being able to do this is an incredible achievement. Between that and some of the amazing festivals and crowds that we have had a chance to play for, I'm a happy woman.
- **Did you face any hardships as a woman in the industry?**  
Thankfully, several women have paved the way for me and other



women in the industry. There can be annoying hardships to face, but I can't imagine how much harder it used to be. Sometimes, I encounter promoters (male and female) who will only address my band mates; sometimes when I perform at festivals or at club gigs, people think I'm the girl on the guest list, and sometimes, people get too close for comfort and seem to think that they can get away with it. And then you have the pressure of maintaining your image as well (which is an issue in itself) and I think, unfortunately, it can cause people in the industry to treat women (and men) in a certain way, based on their looks or attitude. A lot of my experiences also come from me being new to the industry. There are so many different things to face that sometimes it's hard to determine if it's because of gender, race,

- experience or personality, but I think that you just have to keep yourself controlled and be nice and personable, while staying assertive, hungry and humble. And, if you're the bandleader or the one handling the business, proving that you truly are and getting the work done, says a lot, especially if you don't let people take advantage of you or ignore you. I was raised by women, so I have a hard time letting sexism get in my way, because I was taught never to let that stop me. I think that this (along with my stubbornness) helps me out — I don't even think about it, and just let my talent speak for itself.
- **What's in store for the future?**  
I will be releasing a new record in 2015, performing and practising. I want to keep doing what I'm doing.
- **Do you have any messages for your Indian fans?**  
I can't wait to see you!