

BY SUZANNE ZALOKAR  
STAFF WRITER

**B**ibi McGill began playing guitar at the age of 12. Her parents noticed her playing air guitar on a pool cue and asked her if she wanted to take lessons. She did.

McGill went on to study music academically and earn a degree in music scoring and arranging, after which she promptly made the move to Los Angeles, where she worked hard and faced as much rejection as anyone. But she did not give up.

In 2001, she cracked the nut of the L.A. music scene; she got her first break – touring with Pink. The tour was short lived, but she was noticed. “Who is that woman with the tattoos and the Afro who is ripping it up on the guitar?”

One day she was playing in bars and her living room in her Hollywood apartment and the next week she was playing some of the biggest shows: MTV, Saturday Night Live, Dick Clark’s Rocking New Year’s Eve and Jay Leno.

She went on to tour with big Latin artists: Paulina Rubio, the “Mexican Madonna,” and then La Ley, a Grammy Award and two-time Latin Grammy Award-winning Chilean rock band.

From 2006 to 2014, McGill served as lead guitarist and, for many of those years, as musical director in Beyoncé’s all-female band, The Sugar Mamas.

Ask and McGill will tell you that the fame and glory of touring has it upside – and its downside.

Today, the guitar diva, who has been called the female Jimi Hendrix, is on the same journey of personal enlightenment that she has always been on – even through her fame. The journey is her focus.

McGill has her own line of raw, vegan kale chips and teaches yoga in a couple of studios in Portland. She DJs conscious music and spiritual gatherings. She leads yoga retreats and is a guest speaker at events around the globe. Her latest addition to her arsenal of self-discovery is hosting tea ceremonies through her platform, Black Light Honey Dragon Tea.

**Suzanne Zalokar:** Tell me about the significance of the tea ceremonies you have been holding.

**Bibi McGill:** No one in my family drank coffee growing up, so I didn’t have that. Being more drawn to nature and plants, I wanted to drink tea.

Recently, I realized that I have been on this path for much longer than I thought. It just began to flourish and blossom in me at the encouragement of one of my tea teachers.

He is what is called a Tea Monk. Pretty much all he does is serve tea. He drinks tea. He studies tea. He meditates. He does Qigong. He is very much more of a recluse, a hermit. He sources different information



PHOTO BY ERIKA EVE PLUMMER

Bibi McGill hosts tea ceremonies and teaches yoga in a couple of Portland studios.

## Bibi McGill’s path of self-discovery

*The Portland guitarist, who was musical director in Beyoncé’s all-female band, shares love and healing through music, tea and yoga*

about Chinese art and things that relate to tea: teapots that are from the 1800s, for example.

Long story short, for me, being on this path for two decades, if not more, seeing him and being drawn to what he is doing, being able to sit with him and drink tea with him in ceremony with other people and then starting to study with him and having him tell me that I should (pour tea for others publicly), I was like, wait. You meditate all day, you’ve been doing this for many years. I’m a musician. I don’t know.

I didn’t think I had enough information. He encouraged me. In less than a month I started to serve tea to other people in more of an open, public kind of space.

Tea is a plant with medicinal properties that can not only heal different aspects of your biological or your physical body – your digestion, certain organs, your blood – but

also energetically.

There are different energy channels in the body can be opened up. Clarity can be brought into your being. That is the experience that I want to bring to people. The invitation is, yes, “Come sit with me and drink tea,” but come drink tea *and listen*.

I pour tea in an environment where the first hour or hour and a half is silent.

It’s so wonderful to connect with something that is so simple. You feel something, but it’s not a psychoactive, psychedelic drug like ayahuasca (Amazonian plant mixture that is capable of inducing altered states) – a lot of people are into that. But it takes people out of their bodies.

This brings you into your body and causes you to be more aware.

**S.Z.:** You grew up in Denver. How did you end up in Portland?

**B.M.:** I have been practicing yoga since 1996. And it was 2005, I think, and I just didn’t understand people in the music industry – I couldn’t understand them. It was all about the ego and power and putting other people down and feeling superior.

That’s not how I was brought up, and it is certainly not what yoga had been teaching me since 1996. It completely changed my life. I got to the place where I was tired of dealing with these people in the music industry. I was like, I’m going to teach yoga. I love music, but I don’t like the industry. I’m done. I’m putting down my guitar. I’m going to continue to teach and practice yoga and season my yoga practice. If it had been up to me, I would have left everything and gone and lived in a cave in India and just meditated. That was a dream of mine too. But I couldn’t do that. It wasn’t realistic.

Then there was Northridge earthquake in California that hit in the early ’90s (its magnitude was 6.7), and I had just recently moved to California. It was my first earthquake, and it killed a lot of people and freeways were collapsed. The city was dark. It felt like a deserted planet. It shook me up a lot. I wanted to figure out a way to get out of there. I was traumatized.

I read a paragraph about Portland, Ore., and I was like, “That’s where I want to live.” It talked about outdoor beauty. It talked about laid-back people. It talked about being conscious and healthy and peaceful. It talked about good food. But it also had a really nice music scene. I don’t need a big, huge music scene. I want something that is more laid back.

I love it more and more every day.

**S.Z.:** What musical projects are you cultivating on your own?

**B.M.:** For many years, the last four to five years, I have been playing with different Kirtan artists. Kirtan is the word for devotional music.

I’m into sharing music in a way that is a little bit different now. It doesn’t mean that I will never go back to mainstream music; it just means that this is where I’m at now. Music has to support my intention and my path right now.

It’s not traveling with an entourage of 100 people, only me having to rely on myself.

If I get (an interesting, enticing) call ... I have many that have been booked over the last couple of months and many that are in process. I’m going to speak at the wildlife festival in Borneo and a Balinese women’s conference.

If I play music, it is going to have to support the other ways in which I share love and knowledge and education and experience and life and healing and all of the things that are important to me.

It is just as healing to me as it is when I share it with other people.