

Genre Bending Indian Blues

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Contributed by: PatriciaHerlevi



Najma Akhtar & Gary Lucas

[Rishte](#) (World Village, 2009)

It's not every day I get to listen to an American blues-Indian Classical music fusion recording. I have heard my share of jazz Indian fusion recordings, but "[Rishte](#)" by classical Indian vocalist Najma Akhtar and American guitarist Gary Lucas (Captain Beefheart, Jeff Buckley) happens to be a first for my ears. And it has taken a few listens before the music actually sunk in.

First I would like to say that I was impressed with Najma Akhtar's short biographical notes found in the CD booklet. *"In October of 2005, while visiting relatives in India and Pakistan, Najma was caught in the South Asian earthquake. Thankfully, she and her family were safe, but she was surrounded by devastation. Instead of returning home to London, Najma became a caring humanitarian, a role similar to one she took years before in Bosnia..."*

Besides her humanitarian efforts, Akhtar also possesses an incredible vocal talent that thankfully does not get overshadowed by Lucas' guitar on this CD. Although when Lucas brings out the electric guitar on a few tracks, it can be overpowering especially when he plays the high end of his guitar. I prefer the acoustic and slide guitars myself, the old timey blues that appears on a few tracks such as Skip James' "Special Rider Blues," probably the best fusion track on the recording. I will admit I never enjoyed the high end of electric guitars especially when the guitarist unleashes a flurry of notes—I feel dizzy.

The titular feels upbeat with tabla beats laced throughout with acoustic guitar framing Akhtar's stellar vocals. On Aksar her vocals glide and I am reminded of the Canadian Ghazal singer Kiran Ahluwalia. Alicia Svigals loans her violin talent to "Naya Dhin" and "Parda" and Nitin Mitta and Narendra Budhakar perform on the tablas heard throughout the recording. "Daaya" highlights slide guitar and old time blues make its home on this Ghazal. "Parda" bounces along like a true pop gem and "Pensif Khayal" closes out the album with a bang.

"[Rishte](#)," despite being a pioneering fusion project, will likely attract mass appeal in the world music circuit. Both Lucas and Akhtar have already made names for themselves working with prestigious and or fringe art musicians (Captain Beefheart). Both blues and Indian Classical music have worldwide audiences and it's a matter of blues or Indian Classical purists accepting this genre-bender recording.

Buy the CD:

- In North America: [Rishte](#)
- In Europe: [Rishte](#)

Patricia Herlevi hosts the healing music blog, [The Whole Music Experience](#) and has contributed to World Music Central since 2003.

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