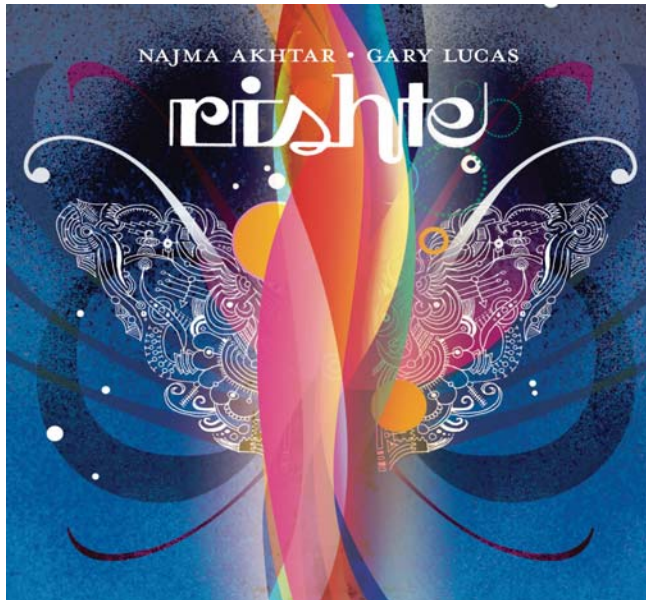


# Najma Akhtar and Gary Lucas :: *Rishte*

A unique partnership between India and the blues  
Available July 14 on World Village



## The Origins of *Rishte*:

Blues promoter Gary Nesbitt first came across the 'beautiful, angelic' voice of **Najma Akhtar** in 1989 while touring a review of legendary blues performers from San Francisco, so it might be said that the blues were in on this project right from the beginning. When Nesbitt finally met Najma in 2006, they discussed his idea for a project linking Indian music and the blues, and after Najma's return to the UK he began to cast around for a suitable collaborator. He'd been listening to **Gary Lucas's** work with **Jeff Buckley** and in particular their album *Songs to No One*. "I listened again to Gary's and Jeff Buckley's...very hip interpretation of Edith Piaf's *Hymne à l'Amour*. The track features Gary's amazing guitar wizardry...It was at that moment I heard Najma's voice with Gary's guitar coming together."

Najma was familiar with and loved Gary Lucas's work with Buckley. Lucas turned out to be a big fan of

Najma's and expressed a keen interest in working with her. About two months after the initial hookup, in the spring of 2006, Lucas invited Najma to a gig in London at the Luminaire Club, where she joined him on stage for an impromptu jam. A few months later she went to New York and they recorded a four song demo together. Everything clicked; the tracks were amazing. It was then that everyone involved knew something very magical was happening. The project absolutely had to continue, and over the next several months Najma returned twice to the States to record the remaining seven songs of what would become ***Rishte* (World Village 450008)**.

## The Music of *Rishte*:

When Najma met Gary there was no plan. Gary produced the music (including some songs originally written for Jeff Buckley) and Najma contributed the words (mostly in Urdu) and the melodies, and in the process a beautiful and curious transformation has occurred. There is blues in the mix - in particular the eerie revival of the Skip James classic "Special Rider Blues" - and there's Indian music too, as expected (both "Daaya" and "Parda" are based on Ghazal styles). Out of this chrysalis of expectation has burst a butterfly whose wings drip psychedelic jewels; a dark and heady funk and fey folk evocations jostle in the powerful title track and a powerful pop sensibility underpins everything. It would be easy to apply simplistic marketing jargon to the music of *Rishte*: Indo-Blues fusion, east-meets-west and the like. But this is to misunderstand the alchemy that occurred when Najma met Gary - a rare confluence of interests, talents and cosmic synchronicities that have produced an album which is truly more than the sum of its parts: a unique and pungent symbiosis.

**WORLD VILLAGE**

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## Gary Lucas:

A world class guitar hero, a Grammy-nominated songwriter and composer, an international recording artist with over 20 acclaimed solo albums to date, and a soundtrack composer for film and television, **Gary Lucas** is an artist always on the move. Gary has been dubbed “*The thinking man’s guitar hero*” by The New Yorker, “*The world’s most popular avant-rock guitarist*” by The Independent and a “*Legendary leftfield guitarist*” by The Guardian. He was hailed “*Guitarist of 1000 ideas*” by The New York Times and “*a true axe God*” by Melody Maker. FROOTS described him as “*without question, the most innovative and challenging guitarist playing today*”; Rolling Stone’s David Fricke wrote: “*Gary Lucas is one of the best and most original guitarists in America*” in a review of Gary’s avant-rock album **Coming Clean**, which received 4 star reviews internationally. Gary was also selected by the editors of DownBeat magazine as one of their “Hot 66 6-Stringers”, alongside John McLaughlin, Richard Thompson, B.B King, and other guitar legends.



Gary Lucas tours the world relentlessly both solo and with several different ensembles, including his long-time band **Gods and Monsters**, with Billy Ficca (Television) and Ernie Brooks (Modern Lovers) and whose ranks once included the late great singer **Jeff Buckley**. Gary co- wrote two of Jeff Buckley’s most famous hits, “**Grace**” and “**Mojo Pin**”, the former of which later became the title track and the opening track on Jeff’s double platinum Sony album **Grace** – which MOJO magazine recently named the #1 Modern Classic Rock Album. Gary and Jeff’s early collaborations can also be heard on the recent Jeff Buckley and Gary Lucas album **Songs to No One**, which charted internationally with worldwide sales approaching 100,000. Other notable Lucas releases include **The Edge of Heaven**, an album of Gary Lucas’ lush arrangements of classic Chinese pop songs from the 1930s, and **Operators are Standing By**, Gary’s compilation of the best of his early band and solo work which garnered a 4-star MOJO review: “*This album confirms Gary Lucas as THE psychedelic guitarist for the post-modern set.*”

In addition to Gods and Monsters, Gary is also involved in an electronica project known as **Wild Rumpus** with the UK-based **DJ Cosmo** (Colleen Murphy), and continues to co-lead **Fast ‘N’ Bulbous**, a seven-piece ensemble devoted to the music of Gary’s original music mentor, avant-rock visionary **Captain Beefheart**, with whom Lucas played and toured with as a featured soloist for five years – and which first put Gary Lucas on the musical map as a force to be reckoned with. His recent duo album with Swiss guitarist **Gerald Zbinden** earned four stars in Uncut: “*the two mesh and meld to immense effect...this is some of Lucas’s most beautiful work in years.*” Gary also recently joined forces with renowned Spanish author and spoken-word artist **Bruno Galindo** to produce a unique fusion of psychedelic guitar, electronics and intense and intimate spoken word poetry, both live and in the studio. Yet another project is **Gary Lucas Vs The Dark Poets**, whose **Beyond the Pale** album was released in 2008 on Some Bizzare Records.

For more info about Gary, please visit: <http://www.garylucas.com>

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## Najma Akhtar:

**Najma Akhtar's** father worked as an Indian film distributor and Najma grew up listening to Indian film music. Her parents bought her a harmonium when she was young and she began to imitate her favorite film songs. While visiting family in Najibabad, India, near the Nepalese border, she learned the Urdu language, a variant of Hindi that is written with Arabic characters, as well as the Indian vocal tradition of singing literary texts. In particular, Najma learned to sing Ghazals, which are Urdu love poems dating from seventh-century Persia that contain elements of Sufi mysticism. These songs were traditionally sung by men when courting women. However, in contemporary India, Ghazals are often used in

filmi, soundtrack music for the Bombay film industry that combines both traditional and contemporary music.

Najma enlisted the help of Indian vocal teacher Ustad Naaem Solaria to teach her classical Indian singing. With Solaria's help, Najma mastered a large vocabulary of inflections, including slides, quavers, and microtonal pitch blends. Najma's music career began in 1984 when she won the UK's Asian Song Contest. The prize was a trip to India. She returned home and recorded **Qareeb**, her international debut, released in 1986. Recorded in England, this album featured a selection of Ghazals put to melodies written by Akhtar and accompanied by a combination of traditional Asian and modern western musicians, including saxophonist Ray Carless. **Qareeb** was widely acclaimed and introduced western listeners to Akhtar's pure, soaring voice. Songs from the album were used for an international fashion show and in the film *Sammy And Rosie Get Laid*. Over the next two years Akhtar sang throughout the world, including performances as part of the WOMAD 1989 tour, and released **Atish** (meaning "fire"), which drew on a broader range of influences (everything from Indian film music to C&W), and featured percussionist **Talvin Singh**. 1992's **Pukar - Calling You** was notable for the reggae-influenced "Mousum Sahana" and a track based around her vocal improvisations. Throughout her musical career Akhtar's voice has also been used to add passion and colour to albums by a variety of artists, including **Andy Summers**, **Jah Wobble**, **Steve Coleman** and with **Robert Plant/Jimmy Page** on their **No Quarter** album. **Forbidden Kiss** (1996) was a modern adaptation of the film music of Indian composer Sachin Dev Burman, followed by albums **Vivid** (2002) and **Reincarnation** (2007). Her most recent album **Fariyaad** was released on the Connecting Cultures label in January 2009.

Najma has also pursued a stage and television career. Her debut performance as actress and vocalist was in the play *Haroon and the Sea of Stories* at the National Theatre, London in 1998. In 1999 she sang and acted with the Tara Arts Theatre company, and played the lead role in the UK television production **Aprie Begane**. She worked with the Theatre Melange Company in 2000 and was a part-time lecturer for the degree course in music, University of Westminster in 2000-01. Najma wrote, composed, and recorded 13 songs for the film **Bollywood Queen** in 2001 and performed in London's West End musical **The Far Pavilions** in 2002.

For more info about Najma, please visit: <http://www.najmaakhtar.net/>

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## **Rishte – World Village 450008**

### Track Listing

- 1 = RIShte
- 2 = FRAGRANCE
- 3 = AKSAR
- 4 = BEHAAL
- 5 = WOH DHIN
- 6 = SPECIAL RIDER BLUES
- 7 = NAYA DHIN
- 8 = DAAYA
- 9 = PARDA
- 10 = SOUL TAKER
- 11 = PENSIF KHAYAL

“Rishte is dynamic and challenging, a 21st-century Indo-American blues fusion” – **fRoots**

“[Lucas’s] ragtime vamps provide elaborate drones for traditional ghazals...while Skip James' 'Special Rider Blues' gets a eastern-tinged reading on the National Steel.”  
– **Uncut**

“Weaving her lyrics around Luca's instrumental templates, Akhtar shapes the sweetest of melodies...far from being some polite fusion project, Rishte is vital and red blooded...” - **Mojo**

“their collaboration here works brilliantly...As for Akhtar, her voice is a heaven-sent gift. If she had made this album with that other noted blues aficionado, Robert Plant, it would surely sell a million and win a Grammy.” – **Songlines, Top of the World**

### **RIShte ON MYSPACE:**

<http://www.myspace.com/worldvillagerishte>

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