

fROOTS

JUNE 2009

NAJMA AKHTAR & GARY LUCAS

Rishte World Village 450008

Regular *fR* readers will be familiar with the work of London-based *ghazal* singer Najma Akhtar and New York guitar magician Gary Lucas, both being virtuosos in their chosen fields. Believing Akhtar's voice could work in an Indian/blues fusion, Gary Nesbitt (an American music lover) sought out Lucas and made the introduction. Najma and Lucas hit it off and immediately set about collaborating. There is an easy, flowing quality to the 11 numbers recorded here that suggests the two musicians quickly found common ground (Lucas's 2001 album *The Edge Of Heaven* found him having lots of fun with 1930s Chinese pop). Nothing sounds forced or the result of studio trickery, instead with tabla and violin (on two tracks), a music epic in scope and intensity develops.

Ten of the songs are original while a take on Skip James' *Special Rider Blues* finds Najma singing in English as Lucas bleeds washes of electricity around her. The performance is emboldened by an eerie intensity, both artists channelling the weird beauty that always shadows James' compositions. Here the duo sound uncannily like Led Zepelin at their most inspired.

Najma's voice remains extremely graceful, an instrument that conveys innocence and sorrow. Lucas creates remarkable patterns of sound. Fans of his work with Beefheart-Buckley won't be disappointed by the spatial dynamics he creates although some of the Asian community may find Lucas's reverb-heavy guitar a more aggressive accompaniment than what normally accompanies their favourite *ghazal* singer.

Rishte is dynamic and challenging, a 21st century Indo-American blues fusion that suggests the West and East can communicate with much greater ease than many of our politicians would allow us to believe.

www.worldvillagemusic.com, via Harmonia Mundi: www.harmoniamundi.com

Garth Cartwright