

MOJO

JULY 2009

Najma Akhtar & Gary Lucas



Rishte

WORLD VILLAGE/HARMONIA MUNDI

Outstanding hybrid music from British-born Indian singer and US guitarist.

Gary Lucas has said that he hears the voice of God in a bent note, so one can only guess what he experienced while complementing Najma Akhtar's ecstatic vocal melismas with his own mesmeric, acoustic fingerpicking and slide. Akhtar had intended to move her sinuous, ghazal-based style closer to the blues – literally on a version of Skip James' Special Rider Blues – but crucially the duo, backed by tabla and occasional violin, are exploring new ground. Weaving her lyrics (largely in Urdu) around Lucas's instrumental templates, Akhtar shapes the sweetest of melodies on *Nay Dhin*. As she navigates the fast syllables on *Behaal*, Lucas leaps in with a psychedelic solo, while *Parda* is a stunning baroque-folk raga. Indeed, far from being some polite fusion project, *Rishte* is vital and red-blooded, nodding back to Davy Graham's East-West musical explorations, and standing comparison with his best work.

Mike Barnes