

SONGLINES

TOP OF THE WORLD

JULY 2009



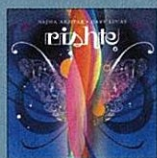
Najma Akhtar & Gary Lucas **Rishte**

World Village 450008

Full Price (54 mins)

★★★★★

Blues-rock meets Indian modes



Although I didn't realise it at the time, the first world music album I ever bought was a record by John Mayer and Joe Harriott's Indo-Jazz Fusions more than 40 years ago. In the years since, John McLaughlin and others have continued to fuse jazz and Indian music in highly imaginative fashion, but there have been far fewer attempts to explore the common link between Indian music and that other great musical product of black America, the blues. Step forward the British-Asian singer Najma Akhtar and the American guitarist, Gary Lucas, formerly of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band. On his album *The Edge Of Heaven*, Lucas reinterpreted classic Chinese pop tunes with a bluesy edge and Akhtar has famously worked with Page and Plant, so both are used to pushing the boundaries of their default styles – which may begin to explain why their collaboration here works brilliantly. The concept is at its most obvious on Skip James' 'Special Rider Blues', a magical journey from Memphis to Mumbai and back again.

Yet in many ways the rest of the material, jointly composed by Akhtar and Lucas, is even more interesting. Their guitar-vocal duets are accompanied only by *tabla* and, occasionally, violin. Some of it has a very 1960s hippy, free-festival feel: 'Naya Dhin' even reminded me improbably of early acoustic Tyrannosaurus Rex. 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.

**TOP
OF THE
WORLD
ALBUM**



Nigel Williamson