

NADIA KABIR BARB

From Bangla Beat To Afro Beat

I have to admit that I am not an aficionado of Bangladeshi music but I am definitely capable of appreciating good music when I hear it. Last week I was at a concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, a prestigious venue for any musician to perform in and it gave me great satisfaction to think that it was a Bangladeshi concert. The name of the event was "From Bangla Beat to Afro Beat". I had heard about it from one of the organisers and a whole group of us decided to attend the concert and show some support for an event that was trying to introduce our music into the mainstream world music arena. It promised to be an interesting night as the music ranged from traditional Baul inspired songs, to a modern urban approach to our traditional music and ultimately to what I would call Jazz fusion combining our Bangladeshi music with a strong Cuban and African influence.

When we arrived at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, it was actually like a reunion of old friends and acquaintances. It was rather nice to briefly catch up with people that you had not had a chance to meet up with recently. To a casual observer, it might have seemed like a congregation for young Bangladeshi professionals but on inspection there were actually many non Bangladeshis as well. The foyer was packed with people, which in itself was a good thing. At least the attendance was excellent. Of course, this obviously is not the first Bangladeshi Concert to be held in London but what was interesting was that the audience was diverse in its ethnicity. It was not just comprised of Bangladeshis and what better way to introduce our rich musical heritage to the world music arena than to have a multicultural audience.

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As we settled into our seats I was quite curious to find out what was in store for us and surprisingly enough the concert actually started more or less on time! Punctuality is not something we Bangladeshis are renowned for. First to sing were Shahjahan Munshi, a respected folk singer and song writer, and Rob Fakir, well known for his Baul songs performed in its purist form. It was a truly spectacular performance. I found myself unconsciously tapping my foot to the music and was amused to see that most of the people around me were doing exactly the same thing. I was looking at the singers and the other musicians dressed in traditional Baul outfits and I was thinking to myself that we need look no further than our very own Bauls to see where the hippie look may have originated from with their beads and long hair.

Rob Fakir managed to get everyone in the audience to clap along in accompaniment to his songs. Not that we needed much encouragement as his energy was contagious. He exuded charisma and had true rock star qualities! Even the dholok player was superb. I had no idea that in November 2005, UNESCO had declared Baul culture to be a National Treasure. It is about time we started taking a little pride in our cultural heritage.

All we could think was that Ektaar All Stars who were next on stage would have a hard act to follow. But we need not have been worried. Shayan Choudhury (Ornob) blew us away