Harmonising with the Quartet

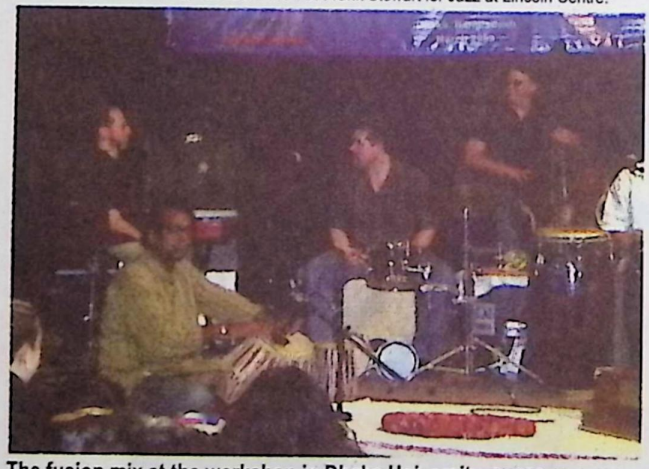
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As the band played on the *cahon*, stroking the wooden chimes to add effect, the audience, thanks to the piano melodies floating in time and again in between the percussions, realises that Duende was playing a Latin jazz version of the famous song 'Mrs. Robinson' by Simon and Garfunkel (with just a hint of Led Zeppelin). Moving on to a more soothing tune, the rhythm gets all the more complex and 'funki' as they play Duke Ellington's 'African Flower.'

Last week, music lovers got to listen to Latin Jazz - a combination of rhythms and beats from African and Latin American countries with jazz and classical harmonies from Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and the United States. The US embassy very recently hosted a free open-air concert at the GSO Field near the US Embassy, where the Duende Quartet presented a bunch of tunes from famous jazz musicians in the west and also thrilled the crowd with their 'jazzed-up' versions of popular rock ballads and soft rock numbers.



The Duende Quartet. PHOTO: Frank Stewart for Jazz at Lincoln Centre.



The fusion mix at the workshop in Dhaka University. PHOTO: Nasirul Islam.

The band is named after the mythological creature - Duende - a fairy- or goblin-like creature in Spanish and Latin American mythology. The quartet includes Harry Appelman on piano and keyboards; Josh Schwartzman on the bass; Sam Turner and Mark Merella on various hand percussions. Many listeners, especially the ones belonging to Asia, have asked the band why they do not have a vocalist. To that Duende replies that the quartet is made up of percussions and musical rhythms hailing from African and Latin countries. This kind of music emphasises much more on the harmonies that can be played with acoustic measures created with the help of natural sounds and elements, rather than the melody of a vocal. "However, there are Latin jazz bands out there, which do have vocalists," explains Sam Turner. "In our case, it's Harry who plays all the melody!" referring to Harry Appleman on piano and keyboards.

A workshop was held in Dhaka University, in association with the Department of Theatre and Music, where the Duende Quartet demonstrated various kinds of Latin jazz tunes and rhythms. Two major categories of Latin Jazz are Brazilian and Cuban. While Brazilian Latin Jazz includes *bossa nova*, the Cuban jazz includes a variety of fusions between Cuban music and American jazz, such as Cubop.

The students seemed particularly interested in the *cahon*, a box-like structure, literally referring to a box in Spanish, producing the sounds of a drum, resembling much more the *baya* of a the traditional *tabla* set. Mark Merella, the *cahon* player, sits on the 'box' and plays the raw sounds and rhythms. The story goes that during the eras of slavery, the slaves would get together during lunch breaks and beat rhythms on boxes and crates and sing songs. According to Mark and Sam, that is where the *cahon* originated.

The workshop ended with musicians from the department fusing the Bangla *dhol, tabla* and *dotara* with the Duende Quartet's Latin jazz compositions, bringing out a mix of the eastern classical melodies and the African - Cuban beats. The quartet had also played at the American School following a grand outdoor performance at the GSO Field. The Duende Quartet's Latin jazz performance was a new experience for many in Dhaka. The quartet successfully introduced new forms of harmonies and melodies amongst music lovers. ■