

PRESS RELEASE

Zoe & Idris Rahman

Where Rivers Meet

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'Increasingly drawn to her Bengali heritage and inspired by her old man's tape collection, she's been listening to Bengali folk, film and popular music from the 1950s and arranging songs of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The results are hugely atmospheric, lyrical pieces that have a simple haunting beauty.' **Time Out.**

Pianist **Zoe Rahman** is one of the UK's brightest talents. A powerful pianist and noted composer, she has worked with the likes of Jerry Dammers' Spatial AKA, Reem Kelani and drummer Clark Tracey. Her previous album, *Melting Pot*, was nominated for the **Nationwide Mercury Music Prize**, and although solidly in the jazz tradition, it offered up one intriguing pointer to this new album in its closing track 'Mucche Jaoa Dinguli', a beguiling arrangement of a popular Bengali song by Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee.

Where Rivers Meet finds Rahman collaborating with her brother, clarinettist, **Idris Rahman**, with whom she has also worked in his band *Soothsayers*. Idris who has also worked with the likes of Arun Ghosh, Mad Professor, Osibissa and Dodgy is also a noted engineer, working with Julia Biel, Basquiat Strings and of course Zoe Rahman. Together they have conjured some unique, jazz-inspired interpretations of Bengali music, including the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, Abbasuddin and Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee amongst others. Neither strictly speaking jazz nor world-music, the Rahmans' original take on Bengali popular music offers up a unique new form of Anglo-Asian music: beautiful improvised music that is utterly compelling in its brilliant meeting of musical worlds.

The idea for this project first came to Rahman when she transferred some of her father's old worn-out cassettes onto CD when he was in hospital and needed something to listen to. Intrigued by the music, (that she only ever heard him humming in the kitchen before), Rahman realised that there was a whole world that she hadn't explored that was part of her heritage.

"We wanted to learn about our family heritage by delving into this rich musical source and hope that in the process the songs will be seen in a new light by those who already know them. Perhaps they will take others on a journey of discovery similar to the one we have experienced through making this album"

Much acclaimed for her formidable technical ability and exuberant performance, pianist Rahman is joined on the album by her brother and regular trio partners, drummer Gene Calderazzo and bassist Oli Hayhurst. Appearing alongside them is an exciting array of guest artists that includes Bengali vocal star Arnob, vibrant percussionist and tabla player Kuljit Bhamra and the stunningly talented violinist Samy Bishai.

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ABOUT WHERE RIVERS MEET

The idea for **Where Rivers Meet** came when I transferred some of my Dad's old worn-out cassettes onto CD about five years ago when he was in hospital and needed something to listen to. It was the first time I'd really heard the Bengali music he'd been listening to in private for as long as I could remember (before that we'd only hear snippets of him singing it in the kitchen or on the way to school). I didn't understand the lyrics but the music itself and the way the lyrics were delivered made a deep connection with me.

I realised that there was a whole world that I hadn't explored that was part of me and my heritage. Being born and brought up in England (with an English mother and Bengali father) I'm very English culturally, so I felt that I needed to spend some time catching up on Bengali culture, music and language before it was too late and my Dad couldn't share it with me.

I played one track, 'Mucche Jaoa Dinguli' at the London Jazz Festival later that year - with Idris on clarinet and Adriano Itauna on percussion (Dad said afterwards, with tears in his eyes, 'now I know you can play'.... we'd only been playing for about thirty years before that!!). I recorded that track on my album 'Melting Pot', but I knew that I wanted to explore further. The opportunity came when I was asked by Kishon Khan, another London-based pianist with Bengali roots, to take part in the 'Bangla-beat' festival at the Southbank in 2006. My brother and I used it as an opportunity to work on some more Bengali material. We met more Bengalis that night than we'd ever met in the UK. There were some fantastic musicians involved in that event, such as the singer Armeen Musa, who we discovered later was the great-grand-daughter of a very famous Bengali singer, Abbasuddin (who our Dad remembers hearing sing in his village when he was a boy). She taught us a folk song that he made famous - 'Amay bhashaili re', which became the sixth track on our album. We also met the singer Arnob, who we ended up working with on two separate trips to Bangladesh, one in 2006 when we went over to do some initial recording for the album (during which I got ill with double pneumonia and ended up in a Dhaka Hospital...very nice) and again in 2007 on a British Council Tour.

The tracks that we've chosen here are mostly songs that our father loves and that we've discovered through him. A lot of the music was originally film music, we've subsequently discovered. Dad's favourite singer, Hemant Kumar (Mukherjee) sang the originals of many of the tracks on this album - weirdly, Kuljit Bhamra, the percussionist on the album, actually played with Hemant many years ago, which connects him to our journey. However, some tracks were introduced to us by other people. I first went to Bangladesh (Dhaka) in 1986 and was taught the song 'Abar elo je sondya' (track 10) by some of my cousins (by the way, I've got about 300 close relatives over there).

I recorded my auntie Ayesha (a specialist in Tagore's music) playing harmonium and singing 'Tumi amay' (the second track on the CD) during a visit to Dhaka in 2000, so we learnt it from this and another badly-recorded version of her singing it on TV. Ayesha's son, Polash, who's also a great singer (and who performed with us in Dhaka in 2007), did some recording for us during our 2006 trip but unfortunately we weren't able to use it on this album...hopefully for the next one...

Then there is the last track 'Purano sei', which although it sounds a bit like Auld Lang Syne, is a very famous Tagore song. Idris and I played it on our last trip to Dhaka and the entire audience sang along, as they did with many of the other tracks.

All of the music on the CD was recorded in London, apart from Arnob's vocals - he put them on afterwards from his studio in Dhaka. Our dad makes an appearance on track eight, reciting the lyrics of one of his favourite songs 'Koto din dekhini tomai', and the street sounds on 'Purano Sei' were recorded from the balcony of our auntie Aleya's house in Dhaka - the streets of Dhaka are filled with the sounds and colours of cycle rickshaws, so we wanted to reflect this in the album and the artwork. Our designer saw a Bengali rickshaw for sale on the internet, so we bought it for the photo-shoot.

We asked William Radice to translate the lyrics for us as he's always been someone that our Dad has had a huge respect for as a translator and poet. He also wrote a 'teach yourself Bengali' book which I've been trying to learn from for about sixteen years-it's where I found the name for my record label! **Zoe Rahman, May 2008**