

## Mp3 Amit Chaudhuri - This Is Not Fusion



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Critically acclaimed worldwide as a landmark, this project brings together the Indian raga with rock, jazz, and the blues, and also includes songs with great lyrics about our globalized world; remarkable for its playfulness. 10 MP3 Songs WORLD: World Fusion, BLUES: Blues-Rock Details: A Note for the listener

This Is Not Fusion is a project in experimental music bringing together genres in 20th-century Western popular music (jazz, blues, rock) and the Indian raga. Its first performance took place in Calcutta on 15th January 2005. At that time, this is what I said about the basis for the experiment: 'Its my concern, in this project, to think beyond a physical meeting-point between musicians of Western and Indian traditions (which is what fusion, in the ordinary sense, usually is), towards a musical and conceptual meeting-point, a space in which not only musicians encounter each other, but in which musical lineages intersect, and renovate themselves and become altered by this contact. These musical intersections already exist, in structural similarities between ragas and rock melodies, for instance, or between Western folk melodies and Indian ones, mainly in the form of the pentatonic scale found in the blues and also in Indian music in ragas such Malkauns and Jog; the aim is not only to take advantage of these musical intersections between the two traditions, but to attempt to create a language of music and performance out of them. One is really seeking a point of entry into one musical tradition or system through another one. That point of entry might be a phrase from a raga, through which one might access, afresh, a jazz classic, or a handful of notes from a blues or rock composition, through which one might enter a raga. This is the starting-point of this exploration, and it widens into a range of references to the world we live in. In a sense, all the compositions are what Marcel Duchamp called found objects: that is, they already exist in one form or another, and have been given, hopefully, another dimension and lease of life through art.' As I said at the time, the cheeky title, and, more importantly, the music itself aimed to arrive at a language

of performance that had a conceptual basis other than the one of bringing two or more cultural spheres mainly, the Western and Eastern together. That conceptual basis was provided by the memory that survived from my guitar-playing days in the late Seventies: that the mainly pentatonic blues scale, also used in jazz and rock, was also remarkably akin to some of the ragas I had begun to learn then. Its obvious that this scale, and variants of it, had travelled, probably from Africa, to different parts of the world at different points in history, and become incorporated into, or come to embody, quite distinct musical traditions and world-views. Many of these pieces, too, contain in them this metaphor and narrative of travel, from one musical system to another. (It should be pointed out that I've been a vocalist and performer in Hindustani music for two decades alongside being a novelist but that my early encounters with music involved listening to Western blues, rock, and jazz. As a teenager in the Seventies, I performed with a guitar. My turn to Indian classical music was so absolute that I stopped listening or having anything to do with Western music from the early Eighties onward, and returned to it slowly only in the last seven or eight years. This project and the conceptual cross-fertilization it represents would have been impossible without this double legacy or lineage.) As this experiment crystallized, a phrase from a raga, in the way I've already described, was used as a point of entry into a jazz or rock standard, and vice-versa. That is how pieces like The Layla Riff to Todi and Summertime were arrived at or recontextualised. In the last year, the experiment has been pursued further, the repertoire widened, new compositions added. A greater number of songs have emerged; the new pieces continue to respond to what's in the air, what's to be found in the ether of the contemporary, to my travels in the globalized world, as well as the persistence, in it, of older sensibilities, tunes, and memories. One thing becomes clearer than before: that, for many urban Indians, the Western and Eastern are not part of two different worlds, but a common inheritance, and have been inlaid into different parts of a single self, a single memory. It's this memory, where what's foreign and what native is constantly realigned, redefined, that this music wishes to explore.

Amit Chaudhuri, Calcutta At the British Museum

It's comforting to discover someone who shares your rage against a cultural trend the world thinks is wonderful. This happened to me the other day I was leafing through the London Review of Books, and came across a list of events taking place at the British Museum. Among them was a concert given by a mixed bunch of Indian and Western musicians - the kind of mish-mash that normally makes me pass by in a hurry. But what really struck me was the title: 'This is Not a Fusion'. Aha, I thought; there's someone out there who feels the way I do

about fusion. Being against musical fusion is a bit like being against globalisation. You appear faintly ridiculous, a kind of Canute holding up an impotent hand against the tidal wave of musical crossovers. And let's face it, it is a tidal wave. Forty years ago when someone brought a sitar into pop music, or used gamelan scales in a piano concerto, it was noteworthy. Now a mingling of global flavours has become practically the norm. Why should this worry us? Haven't cultures always mingled and fused together since mankind has been on the planet? And isn't a plea for the alternative - a purity of musical cultures - a rather suspect and even slightly fascist idea? Indeed it is, but the idea of musical purity is an Aunt Sally, erected by the fans of fusion so they can feel morally superior by knocking it down. No one in their right mind would want to argue for the superiority of 'pure' musical cultures, for the very good reason there aren't any, and never have been. But there's all the difference in the world between a genuine cultural fusion and a shotgun wedding - which is what today's musical fusions generally are. The two essential factors in a real cultural fusion are time and emotional ambivalence. Take the example of the gradual ingestion of the Arab lute, or 'ud into Western music. There must have been fascination at the first encounter, certainly. But there must have been a certain disgust, too, because the tuning of an Arab 'ud is wrong by Western standards. This 'wrongness' was bound up with the fact that these sounds weren't just sounds, they were the musical signature of the infidel, the threatening Other. Think what a slow coming-to-terms that must have entailed, before the 'ud could re-emerge in Europe as the lute! These days there is no coming to terms, because the music industry, and the ideologues of multiculturalism, are in too much of a hurry. They want results now, so emotional ambiguity, and the time needed for real understanding, must be banished. Instead the elements in the 'fusion' have to be reduced to a quickly digestible parade of flavours: the mystical-erotic sitar, the melancholy Irish pipes, the innocently twee Chinese lute. These flavours are embedded in a basically Western harmonic framework which accentuates their picture-postcard prettiness. On the face of it the British Museum concert doesn't seem so different, with its mix of Indian vocals and tabla with guitar and piano. But it was conceived and led by someone who is bound to be against fusion - the writer Amit Chaudhuri. He's known in Britain as a fine novelist and literary critic, but it turns out he's also a very accomplished singer in the classical Hindustani tradition. His novels deal with the difficulties of the cross-cultural lives lived by an increasing number of the world's peoples; not just the millions of refugees and emigrants, but the equally large numbers of people like himself who've been educated abroad. Returning home, they find their sensibilities have

changed, and with that change there comes a confusion. For a creative person like Chaudhuri, that confusion is a spur to understanding. Chaudhuri found himself asking: which is really 'me', musically speaking the rock music I grew up with on the radio, or the old Indian ragas? The music he writes and performs with his ensemble gives a provisional answer. He and the millions like him are both Western and Indian, but not in the sense of some easy 'fusion'. It's more a dialogue, highlighting strange similarities between the stray things rattling about in the unconscious. To give one particularly striking example, there's an interesting formal resemblance between Eric Clapton's 'Layla' and the raga Todi, which Chaudhuri explores with his group. At its best, Chaudhuri's 'non-fusion' music creates a striking metaphor for the urban sensibility, which today is increasingly the condition of everybody, even those who stay at home. From an article by Ivan Hewett which appeared in the Daily Telegraph, London, on 30th November, 2006. Ivan Hewett is one of Britain's foremost music critics, and author of *Bridging the Rift*, a study of developments in Western music. He lectures at the Royal College of Music, London. \* And in Calcutta When did Indo-Western fusion really begin? On the coattails of the first colonial encounter after Bengali fisherfolk heard the odd ditties of British traders who landed along with Charnock? Or when ustads at the Mughal durbar overheard the occasional English ambassador who may have tucked his favourite instrument into his baggage to while away the time in arduous, exotic India? Or in even remoter memory, if Indian melodies travelled westwards on camel caravans through the Middle East via the Arabs into North Africa and Spain, influencing Europeans during the Moorish occupation? These questions may occur to listeners as they hear this CD of Amit Chaudhuri and band. Understandably, Amit is leery of associating with the fusion bandwagon, because the word came to mean pejoratively, in popular quarters, an anything-goes approach in which the musical rigour of both traditions got watered down into self-indulgent freedom of expression. To tell the truth, all music is fusion. No musical form remains untouched by acculturation, though classical pandits still turn up their noses at the perjury committed by colleagues who jam with jazzmen. To pin those purists down on hybridization, just ask them how their Ragas Kafi or Miyan ki Malhar got those names, or how the violin found such a hallowed place in south India. Listen to Carla Bley's A.I.R. (1971), a brooding, more melancholy interpretation than Amit's of All India Radio's raga-based theme tune. Just like you cannot dam the waters of a river from flowing into the sea, just like no one could prevent people from migrating to distant lands since time immemorial, so also you cannot squeeze music into watertight compartments and label them. Music always overflows outward

like the rhythms of life; it always crosses boundaries. Amits flow into these channels took an interesting course. In 2001, I had directed an evening of poetry and jazz with readers like Dhritiman Chatterji and Nandita Das delivering Amits works against a score by Indo-jazz composer Arthur Gracias. I had even goaded him into singing Hindustani classical alongside Arthurs sensitive guitar. In 2004 he called me, enthused about his latest project for which he had written new compositions, such as Spanish Bhairav. I remember asking him whether it consciously echoed the famed experiment of Jyotirindranath Tagore (Rabindranaths eldest brother) with Italian Jhinjhoti for Desdemonas Willow Song in his play Asrumati (1880). Thats the earliest historical instance of Indo-Western fusion I know. But Amit and gang went further when the concert, titled This Is Not Fusion, materialized in January 2005. It was a sparkling yet thoughtful gig, melding Indian classical with rock. Possibly for the first time ever, a Hindustani vocalist used the blues as bandish, on the Gershwin classic Summertime. The result was divine. Derek and The Dominos Layla riff was another stunner that set me off on a different chain of thought: could Eric Clapton, inspired for this song by George Harrisons wife Patti, have heard his best friend George playing the bhaktiful Raga Todi some time either on sitar or a record by Georges guru Ravi Shankar and the tune stayed on his mind? Stranger things have happened. Amits original concert, after much fine-tuning and many travels worldwide including trips on the Berlin underground, the automated but pulsating sounds of which inspired one of his newer songs has finally made it to disc: relish it. Ananda Lal (Ananda Lal is Professor of English at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, where he teaches, among other things, popular music. He has been a theatre, jazz and rock critic for nearly 30 years, his articles on music published in many books and periodicals. He directs university theatre, conceptualizes concerts of poetry with jazz, and has compiled and introduced Tagores own recordings on the CD, The Voice of Rabindranath Tagore.) Some responses from eminent musicians and critics, and background details about Amit Chaudhuri and the music: "Chaudhuri's 'non-fusion' music creates a striking metaphor for the urban sensibility." Ivan Hewett, Daily Telegraph, London "Sublime music..." Wall Street Journal, Asia "Chaudhuri is a wonderful singer-- without any qualification such as 'considering his distinction as a writer.' There is a sense of calm, a simplicity, an inwardness to his singing which deeply appeals to me." Vikram Seth, author I think Chaudhuris CD (and I have listened to it several times by now) is a landmark project in the inter-musical landscape between Western and Indian music. It stems from a very personal between-the-worlds and is attractive because the necessary negotiations within the musical sphere reach

out to so many other levels of understanding music: social, biographical, technological. But most of all it is a kind of music that has clearly defined roots: not in one tradition or the other but in a very personal terrain of the globalized soul. Very often, music critics demand "authenticity" and "honesty" from music - a demand bound to produce a phoney parochial "authenticity": for no musician today lives unaware of all the other musical possibilities around them. Chaudhuri's music is "authentic" in another, more important sense: it does not construct an ideal place, but shows us where it came from and what is lost - but also what can be gained in admitting strangeness into your own tradition. Sandeep Bhagwati, well-known Indo-German composer of Western art music, and professor at the Dept of Music, Concordia University, Canada "Universally appealing... both the melodies and the lyrics are slyly parodic." Naresh Fernandes, Time Out Bombay I've been waiting for this music for 37 years These songs are brilliant. Usha Uthup, the best-known singer of the Western popular song in India Sparkling yet thoughtful melding Indian classical with rock. Possibly for the first time ever, a Hindustani vocalist uses the blues as bandish, on the Gershwin classic Summertime. The result is divine. Ananda Lal, Professor of English, Jadavpur University, jazz, popular music, and theatre critic The work has intellect but is not intended to be clever. That means it references many ideas and streams of thought all at the same time, and I like this layering of ideas. And these ideas arise in some sort of organic way, as in first Chaudhuri's own organism and its memory. The fact is that Chaudhuri is exploring emotional ranges within the tunes, and that requires control: as in what to throw out or what to focus in on. And I never once got the sense that Chaudhuri is trying to be clever or that it's about navel gazing: there is a fun element to it which is a sufficient deterrent to either trying too hard to connect the dots between two traditions or taking oneself too seriously. Madhav Chari, India's leading jazz pianist I'm very struck by the sheer range of Chaudhuri's musical affinities and internalizations. The kind of melding that is at work here cannot happen arbitrarily. There's a logic to it, a very elusive and beautiful intersection of different musical traditions. Chaudhuri has made me listen to Summertime in an altogether different register, and in his marvellously precise, yet quirky, lyrics, I found myself remembering Simon and Garfunkel and all those wonderful musicians that were part of my growing up in Calcutta Listening to Chaudhuri's particular blend of different musics, which is non-fusion, I was alerted to the enormously creative possibilities of one music catalyzing the creative possibilities of another. How beautiful that his voice should be able to cross so many intimate territories, and with such fine performative poise. Rustom Bharucha, one of India's leading cultural commentators That a singer with

a soothing, classical voice has remained hidden in this writer of acclaimed novels is this album's first surprise. Amit Chaudhuri, a trained classical musician besides being a fabulous novelist has succeeded in marrying the East and the West with aplomb Go for it. The Hindu, Bangalore Amit Chaudhuri, one of India's foremost writers, proves, with this album, that he is one of its best fusion singers This is music that touches the soul. A must-try. Incredible India magazine I have been taking great pleasure in listening again and again to the writer Amit Chaudhuri's collaborative album This Is Not Fusion. There's conceptual seriousness here and also play; a fine mix of experimentation and wit. The sounds and phrases stay in the mind long after you have finished listening to the song. I recognize different parts of myself in this music. The writer/ critic Amitava Kumar on [amitavakumar.blogsome.com](http://amitavakumar.blogsome.com) This Is Not Fusion is a project in experimental music conceptualised by Amit Chaudhuri, bringing together the raga with jazz, rock, and the blues. Besides open, experimental structures, it also has an increasing number of songs composed by Chaudhuri in its repertoire. After its huge and acclaimed opening at the Gyan Manch, Calcutta on 15 January 2005, when both the audience and critics applauded its conceptual and musical originality, it travelled to Delhi for the 'Building Bridges: 60 Years of the UN' concerts. Then, to great acclaim, it went to Berlin, the theatreschauspiele at Frankfurt, the Lille 3000 Festival in France, the School of Music, Norwich, the British Museum, London, and to the Palais de Bozar in Brussels. Ivan Hewett, one of Britain's foremost music critics, said in the Daily Telegraph, London, 'Chaudhuri's 'non-fusion' music creates a striking metaphor for the urban sensibility, which today is increasingly the condition of everybody, even those who stay at home.' The CD, This Is Not Fusion, was recently released in India by Times Music. In the first ever Indian workshop on experimental music organised by the singer Shubha Mudgal at Ahmedabad, this project was described as a landmark involving the creation of a new genre by other esteemed musicians, composers, and musicologists from all over India and other parts of the world. Amit Chaudhuri is one of India's leading writers and novelists. He has won major awards in Britain, the US, and India for his fiction, including the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the Betty Trask award, the Encore Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction, and the Sahitya Akademi Award. His work is translated into several languages. He's been Creative Arts Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, Leverhulme Fellow at Cambridge, Visiting Professor at Columbia University, Samuel Fischer Guest Professor at Freie University, Berlin, and now spends part of the year at the University of East Anglia as Professor of Contemporary Literature. He is also an acclaimed vocalist in the Hindustani classical

tradition who has performed all over the world, with two HMV recordings to his credit, one of which has just been released on CD by HMV.

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