

Crosscurrents: Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland warp time and space at Emory's Schwartz Center in Atlanta GA.

By Ralph A. Miriello / November 4, 2017

Louiz Banks, Shankar Mahadevan, Sanjay Divecha, Gino Banks, Chris Potter, Dave Holland & Zakir Hussain at the Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, Emory, Atlanta

What happens when you assemble one of the world's preeminent masters of the ancient art of the tabla with an eclectic jazz master of the upright double bass? You warp time and space.

If you were fortunate enough to have been at Emory's Schwartz Center this past Thursday evening (November 2, 2017), then you would have experienced a fascinating amalgam of Indian/Jazz influenced World Music at its finest.

The program, aptly titled *Crosscurrents*, is a touring group that includes the phenomenal Indian tabla artist Zakir Hussain Quereshi, NEA jazz master bassist Dave Holland, world class saxophonist Chris Potter, pianist and "the Godfather of Indian jazz" Louiz Banks, guitarist Sanjay Divecha, drummer Gino Banks and one of India's greatest voices and Bollywood superstar vocalist Shakar Mahadevan. With such an esteemed and accomplished group of musicians there was no doubt that the music would be both adventurous and moving.

The sixty-six-year-old Mr. Hussain is the son of the great tabla master Alla Rakha Quereshi, whose legendary performances with the sitarist Ravi Shakar, introduced India raga to a receptive western audience back in the late sixties. Rakha was also instrumental in bringing together the southern Indian Carnatic music tradition with the classical Indian Hindustani tradition of the northern India, and his son Zakir has carried on that practice in his own music taking it a step further. By working extensively with western musicians, Hussain has elevated the status of the more than four-thousand-year-old instrument, bringing its sounds to a worldwide audience. Hussain's tabla work can be heard accompanying western jazz artists like Joe Henderson, Pharoah Sanders, John McLaughlin, George Brooks, crossover artists like Bela Fleck and Edgar Meyer and rock artists like George Harrison and the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart. His work on the break-through World music albums *Planet Drum* from 1992 and *Global Drum Project* from 2009 both garnered him Grammy awards. His handwork is so quick, so nuanced and so poly-rhythmic that when you see him play your eyes and ears seem to be deceiving you.

The seventy-one-year-old jazz multiple Grammy winning bassist Dave Holland originally hailed from England but has been living in the United States for over forty years. His playing has been sometimes classified as avant-garde/fusion because of his early work with Miles Davis, Sam

Rivers, John Abercrombie and Anthony Braxton but the breadth of his musical interests goes far beyond any narrow categorization. He has studied flamenco, written and arranged for his big band and trios, and explored eastern musical traditions. He has superb intonation, a rapid pizzicato technique and can bow the cello or the double bass with refined proficiency.

Emory's Schwartz Center is a gem of a performance space; comfortable with great sight lines and marvelous acoustics. With acoustic music of the nuanced variety that Mr. Hussain and Mr. Holland were presenting on this evening, the theater's acoustics became an indispensable asset and the performance was well broadcast.

Mr. Hussain was seated on an elevated platform with his tablas and an array of other Indian percussive instruments within easy striking distance. Mr. Holland was stationed to his immediate right. The drummer Gino Banks was perched at a higher level at center stage. Louiz Banks was seated behind a grand piano and a Korg electronic keyboard to the far left, while Mr. Mahadevan and Mr. Potter shared center stage.

I find myself at a loss for words to describe the music and its transcendent effect on me or anyone who takes the time to experience it played "live" with both an open heart and an open mind. It defies description. You are immediately aware that this music is not just for momentary enjoyment but a vehicle into mindfulness, a conduit that can bring you to a higher place if you let it.

The compositions that I could identify included Chris Potter's "Shadow," a song titled "The Dove Flies," some ancient traditional Indian classical music and Mr. Menhaden's wildly popular "Breathless," which ended the set. The songs, though defined by breaks, for the most part streamed like one continuous current throughout the approximately ninety-minute show. The music's time became elusive, a relative warping of your own personal space. Where in western music there is usually a manufactured beat (no matter how complex) that you can hold onto, there was instead an organic heartbeat. Time changed as the music demanded; from reasonably paced, to arrhythmic to bursting with tachycardia and back to normal all within the structure of a single song. And amazingly no one missed a beat!

Virtuosity was the order of the evening; each artist showing physical facility as well an intuitive connection to the music. Mr. Hussain and Mr. Holland are perfectly matched. The tabla goes amazingly well with the double bass when played by two like-minded spirits. Mr. Potter was most effective when he played his soprano saxophone emoting an airy, more exotic sound to the proceedings. Louiz Banks was a sensitive accompanist on the piano and at one point on an electronic keyboard and his son, drummer Gino Banks was mind-linked with Hussain's poly-rhythmic playing. The surprise of the evening was the amazing vocalist Shankar Mahadevan who stunned the audience with his vocal gymnastics, his subtlety and his range. I had never

seen him before and his control was astounding and a real treat to behold in person. His voice can match musical lines in precision with any accomplished instrumentalist, and his ability to modulate incrementally gives him a micro-tonal range. His breath control, especially on his tune aptly named "Breathless," is just short of astonishing.

At one point in the show, the group broke off into a more traditional jazz trio with Potter on tenor along with Holland and Hussain. The group played off a Potter inspired riff and you could see these three really tuning into each other in what appeared to be a free, spontaneous improvisational segment.

Hussain is a true marvel whose rhythmic sense is without boundaries. Holland, who claims to have never formally studied Indian music, adapted flawlessly to the ebbs and flows of the classical Indian music with amazing aplomb. At times he created drone effects, usually provided by a sitar or tambura, by continuously bowing a note or pair of notes on his bass. It is no wonder he is one of the most in demand bassist in all of jazz.

The group is by all definitions a super group and not to be missed. This leg of the limited North American tour started in late October. They have three remaining performances one on November 4 in Orlando, FL and one in Newark, NJ on Nov 5 and the final performance for this year in London at Barbican Hall on November 11,2017. The group will reunite in the new year, touring again starts in Los Angeles and ends in Washington DC from April 27,2018 through May 6, 2018. In speaking to Holland after the show he indicated that they will be recording both this group and the Holland/Potter/Hussain trio before they disband. For those who appreciate extraordinary world music then catch *Crosscurrents* live before their gone and if that's not in the cards, you can buy the records when they come out.

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/crosscurrents-zakir-hussain-and-dave-holland-warp-us_59fe2a84e4b0d467d4c22596