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Katayoun Goudarzi and Shujaat Husain Khan – *Spring* (2013)

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That the poetry of Persian poet Rumi still matters today goes without saying. The Sufi saint's words have inspired generations of musicians, writers, vocalists, and even philosophers the world over.

His works are still performed devotedly in Iran and by the Persian community, with care given to the extensive interpretations possible in every single one of Rumi's words.

So here is *Spring*, a spiritually centered recording from vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi and sitar player Shujaat Husain Khan. The album takes the dynamic force of movement into account, melding Goudarzi's tones with Shujaat Khan's lyrical control to probe the connotations of Rumi's poetry.

Tabla player Abhiman Kaushal and flutist Ajay Prasanna provide shade and stability, but the thrust of *Spring* lies in the collaboration between Goudarzi and Shujaat Khan. Theirs is a working relationship built on harmony of vision.

The process is distinctive, too, with the vocalist recounting and revealing a poem and Shujaat Khan building melody. Goudarzi's expressive sense returns her to a single line in particular, which is reiterated as a refrain.

"*Spring* was an incredibly joyful project for me and excitingly different from what I had done in the past to some degree," the sitar player says. "It evolved so beautifully that Katayoun and I decided not to edit out any pieces that was recorded."

In that sense, the record is liberation. Using Rumi's poems about love as underpinning, Goudarzi and Shujaat Khan push through flexible pieces that run the range of love and existence.

From the initial strings of "Paradise," the album has a truly exuberant feel. Shujaat Khan's playing is warm and even adventurous in its exploration of altering paces, but his vocal is pensive. Goudarzi arrives with a full-throated spoken word portion. The lovely "Dast-zanân" is a marvellous piece, with the vocalist's breathy tone bordering on the sensual and Kaushal's tabla throbbing the track forward. Prasanna's flute runs like water in a creek, surging so naturally that it's hard to believe it's coming from anywhere but deep within. The divine unity of the players is exquisite.

Each piece on *Spring* is led by Shujaat Khan to an extent, but that doesn't stop the music from curving where it must. Sometimes, that allows Goudarzi to enter some limitless spaces, as with the ethereal "My Insane Heart," and sometimes that amounts to what could be termed a showcase of his faultless skill ("Madness").

A celebration of freedom and poetry, Goudarzi and Shujaat Khan's *Spring* is a delectable album of world music. It elevates life and love without turning a blind eye to the darkness on the other side of the coin, rejoicing in the whole of Rumi's words and the ever-altering, ever-challenging nature of humankind.