

SHUJAAT HUSAIN KHAN, KEVIN HAYS, KATAYOUN GOUDARZI, TIM RIES, DIBYARKA CHATTERJEE-WILL YOU?

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Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries and Dibyarka Chatterjee started working together in 2009, and four years later the multitalented quintet released their debut album *Dawning* in 2013. It was released to widespread critical acclaim, with critics hailing the album as a “beautiful,” “tonally lush,” and a “hypnotic” cross cultural collaboration. *Dawning* epitomised everything that was good about world music and was on the top forty CMJ charts for more than seven weeks. That was no surprise given the musical background of the personnel involved in the band play live as Saffron Ensemble.

The five members of the band may be from very different cultural backgrounds, but the close friends and have one thing in common...music. They enjoyed playing together and recording their debut album *Dawning*. It was a true cross cultural collaboration with musicians from three countries playing their part in its success.

Master sitarist and vocalist Shujaat Husain Khan was born in Calcutta, India and is from a family of musicians. He released his debut album *Sitar* in 1979, and since then, the son of the famous sitar maestro Aftab-e-Sitar has been nominated for a Grammy Award. Joining Shujaat Husain Khan was a young up-and-coming Indian musician.

This was tabla player Dibyarka Chatterjee, who is the son of sitar master Pandit Samir Chatterjee. Just like Shujaat Husain Khan, music was in Dibyarka Chatterjee's blood and he followed in his father's footsteps. He made his debut as a child, and moved to New York with his family when he was ten. Since then, he has been playing alongside Indian and Western musicians.

Among them, are American saxophonist, flautist and composer, Tim Ries. He was born in New York, and nowadays, is based in New Jersey, where he divides his time between a solo career and playing alongside the great and good of music. This includes jazz musicians Donald Byrd and Jack DeJohnette to rock royalty like Donald Fagen, Rod Stewart and the Rolling Stones. With over a hundred credits to his name, Tim Ries is a vastly experienced musician.

So is American jazz pianist Kevin Hays, who also combines a solo career with working as a sideman. He's previously been part of Al Foster, Benny Golson, Eddie Henderson, Ron McClure, Seamus Blake and Chris Potter's bands and been a member of the Sanga Quartet and The Blue Note All-Stars. Kevin Hays has also collaborated with a number of artists, including with Benin-based guitarist Lionel Loueke. They released their first collaboration *Hope*, earlier in 2017. *Hope* wasn't the only collaboration Kevin Hays was working on.

He was working with vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi, who was born in Tehran, in Iran. She began writing poetry when she was seven, and since then, has become known for her distinctive and melodic style of recitals. Katayoun Goudarzi combines an emotive rendition of her poetry with painstaking attention to the linguistic

and lyrical integrity of the piece. This had paid off, and her work has featured in books and albums including *Dawning* in 2011, and four years later, the long-awaited and much-anticipated followup *Will You?*

After a four-year wait, Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee return on the '22nd' of September 2017 with *Will You?* It will be released on Tames Records and marks the welcome return of this multitalented quintet and their very special sophomore album *Will You?*

It found the five musical friends returned to the recording studio record their second cross cultural collaboration. The ensemble featured the two Americans, two Indians and Iranian vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi. To outsiders, they were an unlikely ensemble, with three traditional musicians working side-by-side with Kevin Hays and Tim Ries who had spent much of their careers playing jazz and rock. However, as Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries and Dibyarka Chatterjee all sat in the same studio, they were trying to find new arrangements for Rumi's centuries-old teachings. He was a 13th Century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian and Sufi mystic. However, the ensemble had made progress since the project began.

Initially, all they ensemble had were a few snippets of tunes sung over Whatsapp. They had been inspired by phrases translated from Rumi's teachings. This was a starting point for what eventually became *Will You?*

Soon, they had made progress. Shujaat Husain Khan remembers that time well. "I come up with the skeleton of the tunes, but that's really just what we build out from...We converse to make this music. It's never the same interpretation, the same sound, the same song twice."

Meanwhile, Katayoun Goudarzi cautions: "the music is not classical Persian music. It's Persian classical poetry sung in Indian idioms, but with a touch of jazz. In that respect, it's perhaps different than things that have been done in the past." If anyone was going to spot these differences it would be Katayoun Goudarzi.

Musically, she prides herself on being a perfectionist, who pays attention to the finest details. Katayoun Goudarzi is also someone who is not afraid to experiment musically. There's a reason for this though, as she wants to honour the spirit and sense of the poetry that she loves and holds dear. It inspired much of the music on *Will You?*

This includes *Don't*, which is a plea to save a beloved from arrest and torment. It required a very different vocal technique from Katayoun Goudarzi. Fortunately, she's a versatile vocalist who has broadened her musical horizons over the years.

Katayoun Goudarzi's career began reciting Persian poetry. This requires a very specific technique that is best described as a sweeping spoken approach. However, for *Will You?* Katayoun Goudarzi changed tack and decided to return to singing. She switches between several styles during *Will You?* as Katayoun Goudarzi attempts and succeeds to heighten the intensity. During a series of powerful, poignant and emotive performances, the rest of the ensemble accompany Katayoun Goudarzi. Playing an important part is Shujaat Husain Khan's fluid, graceful, reactive playing style. Sometimes it's understated and subtle, and is yin to Katayoun Goudarzi's yang, on what is a very personal album for her.

Her reason for singing on the album was the poem *Don't*. Vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi explains: "that poem was the reason I sang on this album. The lyrics are saying, he's my life, don't beat him up, don't take him away. I had to portray that pain. I had to sing those lyrics with all the passion it required. If I couldn't do it right, I wouldn't touch them. That was one of the inspiring songs that made me think of singing a lot of the album."

Katayoun Goudarzi also explains a little about Rumi's work: "With Rumi you can find all different kinds of poems, chronicling all different kinds of human experience. Some are wildly romantic. Some are edgier like 'Don't.' Most of the verses we use on the album are love poems. The way I present the lyrics this time, on the title track, is to use three different poems to make sure I'm completing the story." This is what one would expect of a perfectionist like Katayoun Goudarzi. She's willing to use three separate poems to tell a story effectively.

The rest of the ensemble play their part in the storytelling process on *Will You?* They expand the narrative of stories and complete the story. Kevin Hays added to Sweet Caroline, while the rest of the ensemble use their instruments to augment Katayoun Goudarzi's vocal. They become part of the musical tapestry on the ten tracks that became *Will You?* Sometimes, it's a case of the rest of the ensemble reacting or responding to Katayoun Goudarzi's vocal.

An example is *Void*, where Shujaat Husain Khan hums as he dawns the part of Rumi, adding to this evocative and moving song. Other times, the rest of the ensemble frame Katayoun Goudarzi's vocal, or create a backdrop for the vocal. They range from dramatic to haunting and chilling to atmospheric and ruminative. One of the best examples is *Don't*, where Tim Ries' lone saxophone sets the scene for Katayoun Goudarzi's vocal. It provides a thoughtful and moving backdrop before the baton passes to the tabla, sitar and piano. Only then does Katayoun Goudarzi deliver an emotive, heartfelt vocal. This adds to what is a powerful, poignant and moving album. So do the pregnant pauses when the band stop playing and allow Katayoun Goudarzi's vocal to take centre-stage on several songs. One of the most successful example is on *Will You?*, which adds to what's already a powerful and poignant song. It's part of the much-anticipated album from Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee, *Will You?*

It is no ordinary album. Instead, it's a powerful, poignant, moving and thought-provoking album. *Will You?* is to some extent best described as an outpouring of grief and fear, that features paeans plus songs about hurt and heartache. All this was inspired by Rumi's poems, which nearly 800 years later, continues to endure and resonate emotionally, across cultures and people of all ages. This includes Katayoun Goudarzi and the rest of the ensemble. Their hope is that the lyrics and music on *Will You?* will result in an emotional awakening. It should provoke a variety of emotions that are shared by people the world over. Katayoun Goudarzi explains: "happiness and sadness. Love and hatred. These are universal feelings, no matter what language we speak, the colour of our skin. No matter how you express it, the feelings are the same. We wanted to bring those emotions to the surface." This the ensemble do successfully from opening bars of *Will You?* to the closing notes of *Disarray*.

Four years after the release of their debut album *Dawning*, Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee make a welcome return with *Will You?* It will be released by Tames Records on the '22nd' of September 2017. This is the second successful cross cultural collaboration from Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee.

Despite coming from three different counties, speaking different languages and practising different religions, the ensemble are close friends, who were brought together by their shared love of music.

Since then, the friendship has extended beyond music and the five friends realise that they've more in common than they maybe first thought. Even in these worrying times where political tension and uncertainty cast a shadow across the world. Despite that, the five members of the ensemble have grown closer during the last eight years. They've also created two very special albums, their debut album *Dawning* in 2013, and the eagerly awaited and much-anticipated followup *Will You?*

Katayoun Goudarzi reflecting on the different background of the ensemble reflects: "Isn't it something? A diverse group can create things a homogenous group can't. Each of us interpreted these emotional musical phrases through all our experiences, all different, yet it all gels. Perhaps because at the end of the day, we're all human. It's important to remember that."

In doing so, the five members of the ensemble have created a power and poignant followup to *Dawning*, *Will You?* It finds Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee fusing elements of Iranian poetry with traditional Indian music and jazz on the ten tracks on *Will You?* They were recorded during two days in May and August 2016 at Tedesco Studio, Paramus, New Jersey. This is how albums used to be recorded.

Nowadays, bands can take months even years to record an album. Especially the followup to a critically acclaimed debut album. That wasn't the case when Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee recorded *Will You?* These experienced and talented musicians spent just two days recording this beautiful, emotive, ruminative, thoughtful and melodic music. Other times, the music is

atmospheric, chilling, dramatic, mellow and mesmeric. Everyone plays the part in the sound and success of Will You? Especially, Katayoun Goudarzi who delivers a series of vocals that are heartfelt, impassioned and full of emotion.

Meanwhile, the rest of the ensemble respond react to Katayoun Goudarzi's series of vocal masterclasses. In doing so, they play their part the sound and success of the Will You? the latest cross cultural collaboration between Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee who it seems can do no wrong.

Shujaat Husain Khan, Kevin Hays, Katayoun Goudarzi, Tim Ries, Dibyarka Chatterjee-Will You?