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NOTES ON JAZZ

A forum for jazz reviews, discussion of new jazz & blues music, the musicians, reviews of recent and historical releases, reviews of live performances, concerts, interviews and almost anything I find of interest. by Ralph A. Miriello



About Me

Ralph A. Miriello

Music lover, Jazz Journalist; freelance writer; contributor to, the Huffington Post, jazz.com; allaboutjazz and jazzreview Member of Jazz Journalists Association, Green Advocate, Construction professional and geothermal consultant,

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Thursday, October 19, 2017

Saffron Ensemble's "Will You" Exploring the Poem's of Rumi



Saffron Ensemble: *Will You ?*

The Iranian singer Katayoun Goudarzi has been absorbed in Persian poetry for the last thirty years. She has made her native poetry an integral part of her life, studying diligently to be true to the linguistic as well as lyrical integrity of the writings that she either recites or sings.

Of the nine albums she has recorded since 2006, five have concentrated on one poet, the 13th century Sufi Poet Rumi. The sentiment expressed so emotionally in this poet's work seem to transcend time, language and culture. Universal themes of love, longing and loss are all dealt with in an emotionally ringing manner.



Saffron Ensemble: Tim Ries, Shujaat Khan, Katayoun Goudarzi and Kevin Hays

On her latest recording, *Will You?* she is once again joined by the sitar master Shujaat Khan, the multi-reed artist Tim Ries, the jazz pianist Kevin Hays and the tabla player Dibyanka Chatterjeu. Together they call themselves Saffron Ensemble.

The album features Goudarzi's expressive voice in recitation of the spoken word and singing the verse to the music.

As for the music, pianist Kevin Hays provides one composition, "Sweet Caroline," to the program, while the rest of the songs are provided by the sitarist Shujaat Khan.



Khan's process of composition: "I come up with the skeleton of the tunes, but that's really what we build from. We converse to make this music. It's never the same interpretation, the same sound, the same song twice." The recording was done in one sitting without retakes to make it as spontaneous as possible and it has that feeling that comes from inspiration; bubbling creativity that can be so fleeting.

The music has a world-music feel to it and incorporates elements of both middle-eastern and Indian motifs with some jazz-like improvisations.

The drone-like twang of Khan's sitar is a constant presence throughout. A stabilizer that offers a landscape on which the other artists add their colors.

It is **Gourdarzi's** haunting voice that gives the performance it's soul. Her voice soars, quivers, uses guttural sounds, voice modulation and employs a crystalline tone. The result is a heart-wrenching, mysterious and exotic rendering of Rumi's poems in Persian. The only thing that is missing for me is the English translation of the verse.

The two western musicians seem to find their place in this decidedly eastern musical offering. Multi-reedist Tim Ries's lead in soprano solo at the beginning of "Don't" is especially noteworthy. Pianist Kevin Hays provides fluttering notes with a keenly attuned ear.

Dibyanka Chatterjeu's ever present tablas play off Khan's sitar with an assured constancy.

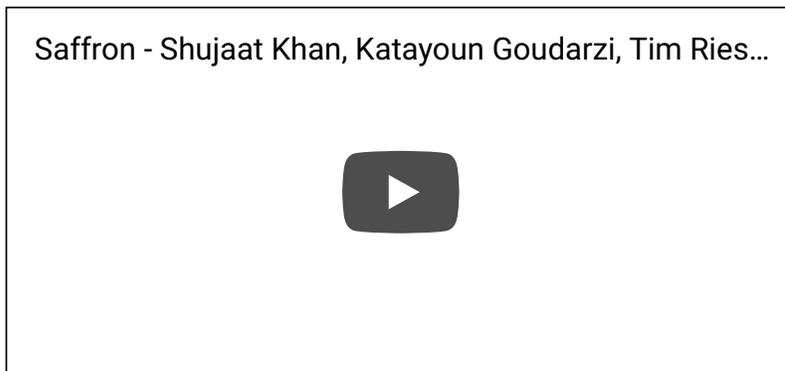
Hays' beautiful "Sweet Caroline" is played as a trio piece. It is the only song whose melodic content is easily identifiable; played without verse or vocals. Khan adds delicate sitar accompaniment here and Chatterjeu keeps the time as Hays offers his own inspired pianistic reading of his thoughtful composition.

The inspired and melodic chanting voice of Khan can be heard opening the contemplative "A Thread" and later, on "The Void."

Gourdarzi's soft-spoken voice draws you in like any good storyteller. Even without knowing the meaning of the words you are moved by the expressiveness of her voice and delivery. Ries has a stirring tenor solo on "A Thread" that adds to the trancelike feeling of this song.

More of a world music album than a jazz album, *Will You?* includes ten inspired songs that, if you allow yourself the pleasure, can be

thoroughly engrossing.



Posted by [Ralph A. Miriello](#) at [3:06 P.M.](#)

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