

KIRAN AHLUWALIA



KIRAN AHLUWALIA is a modern exponent of the great vocal styles of India and Pakistan, which she honors intensely yet departs from in masterful, personal ways. With roots in Sufi, Qawalli, Ghazal, and Punjabi folk, she crafts her own contemporary songs that are equal parts reflective and groovy. The 2-time Juno Award Winner embodies the essence of Indian music while embracing influences from Mali and western blues, rock, R&B and jazz. With her 6-piece group of electric guitar, accordion, organ, tabla, bass and drum kit, Ahluwalia creates boundary-breaking songs that invite us to explore the human condition, creating a “transnational sound as fresh as tomorrow”. (Seattle Times),

Born in India, raised in Canada and currently dividing her time between New York City and Toronto, Ahluwalia has long been on a path to master the art of singing and composing. “When I was growing up in India, there were concerts that people from all over would crowd into. These concerts featured a repertoire, language and content that was both demanding and beyond the experience of a child. I was, however, entranced by the sound and feel of the music, even from an early age. My father would play tapes of Indian music for me and we would also listen to Bollywood on the radio,” Ahluwalia recalls. “So

when a song came on that I wanted to learn, my mother would quickly write down the lyrics for me and I would sing along to learn the melody.” From the time she was seven, Ahluwalia immersed herself in Indian music. When the family immigrated to Canada she continued her musical training alongside her regular school. After graduating from the University of Toronto, she returned to India where she spent years of intense deep study in music. Back in Canada in the late 90s she followed more mundane pursuits – she got an MBA in Finance and started working as a Trader on Bay Street. And there it might have ended if Ahluwalia had not had recurring visions of being on her deathbed not having lived out her passion. So she left the world of business and threw herself totally into a life devoted to the making of her own music. Since then she has toured around the world, recorded eight albums, topped the North American & European World Music Charts and won two Juno Awards, a Canadian Folk Music Award and the UK’s Songlines Award. Her songs have featured collaborations with legendary Malian group Tinariwen, Celtic fiddler Natalie MacMaster, fado masters from Portugal and Algeria’s Souad Massi on her new album Comfort Food, which features powerful songs protesting Hindu fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism.

Ahluwalia’s own band is directed by virtuoso guitarist Rez Abbasi, who consistently ranks among the top ten guitarists in the annual DownBeat International Critics Poll. Ahluwalia and Abbasi are a real-life couple – one born in India, the other in Pakistan. Having grown up in the Diaspora they crossed ethnic and religious lines between their two warring motherlands to forge a profound connection in life and music.

In 2018, Ahluwalia was diagnosed with breast cancer. After surviving that and the COVID pandemic that followed, she is happy to be back, releasing new music and performing in front of live audiences. She is currently working on a documentary about her Guru, Vithal Rao, in Hyderabad, India. “He was the last living court musician for the Prince of Hyderabad,” she says. “He lived in the palace for 12 years. He lived an extraordinary life and died an extraordinary death. It’s my passion project to tell the world about him.”

Whether shooting films or making music, Ahluwalia is an artist who reflects what has happened and inspires us to create a world that is beautiful and just for all.

BOOKING: wulf@griot.de