



Simon Broughton

Faiz Ali Faiz

The leading voice in Sufi devotional music, known as *qawwali*, is breaking new ground with his various live collaborations and projects. **Simon Broughton** reports

Faiz Ali Faiz sings like a force of nature. He launches his powerful vocals heavenwards with a wave of his hands or throwing his arms aloft. *Qawwali*, the form of Islamic music he sings, has a 700-year history and it's become the most popular style of Sufi music because of its unstoppable melodic and rhythmic force. Alongside the lead vocal, *qawwali* groups have two or three more vocalists whose voices thrillingly overlap and intertwine. The ecstatic vocal melodies are backed by harmonium, clapping and drums.

Faiz is one of the masters of the form. He's a regular singer at the shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore and at festivals around the world. But he's also been involved in some of the most interesting *qawwali* fusions with flamenco and gospel music.

Born in Lahore in 1962, Faiz is the ninth generation of *qawwali* musicians in his family. He learned first from his father and then Abdul Rahim Faridi became his *qawwali* teacher and Ghulam Shabir Khan and Ghulam Jafar Khan were his gurus for Indian classical music. He formed his own

qawwali group in 1978. Faiz sings in Punjabi, Urdu and Persian, the language of Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), the creator of *qawwali*. He's performed at the Nizamuddin shrine in Delhi, where Khusrau is buried and also in Hindu temples in Indian Punjab.

There's one name that dominates the *qawwali* music scene, of course, and that is the late, great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948-1997). Faiz first saw him in 1983 at a shrine near Nusrat's home town of Faisalabad, where they were both invited to perform. Although Faiz had his own teachers, it was Nusrat who lit his fire: "My initial influence was from Nusrat," says Faiz. "His singing empowered me and I sing under his inspiration. I try to follow the traditional Punjabi style of *qawwali*, which is the Nusrat style."

Faiz's first international trip was to South Africa in 1992 where he stayed six months and sang at several of the country's Sufi shrines. Since teaming up with the French

record company Accords Croisés in 1999 he's made several recordings and toured extensively. He recorded for the Bollywood film *Kartooos* (Cartridge) in 1999, where his voice was used alongside that of Nusrat. But, unlike Nusrat in this respect, he prefers to stick to the traditional *qawwali* form.

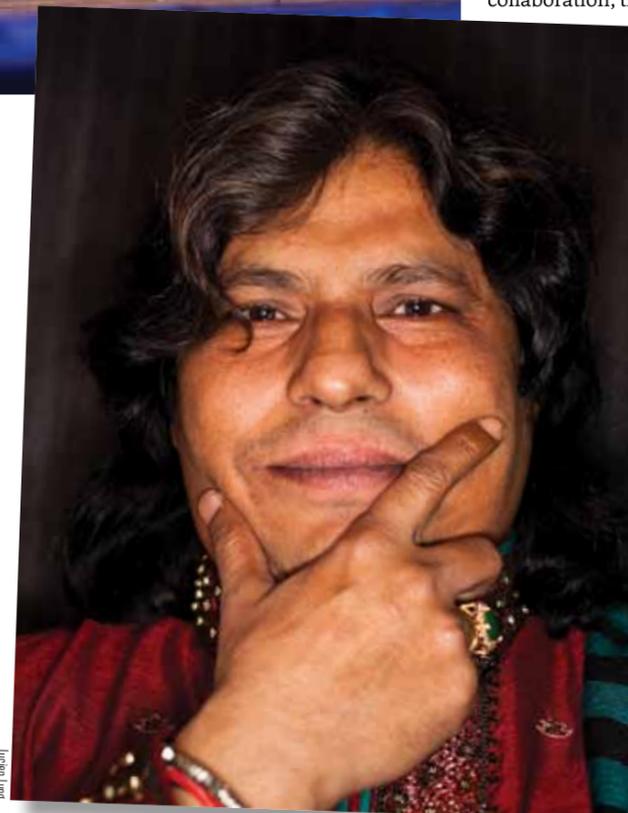
Though, this hasn't stopped him taking part in some exhilarating fusions and collaborations, notably the *Qawwali Flamenco* project, which premiered in Barcelona in 2003. Faiz's *qawwali* party joined singers Miguel Poveda and Duquende and guitarist Chicuelo in a spectacular juxtaposition and combination of the two forms. "It was difficult at first," admits Faiz, "but I like to be challenged. The flamenco singing style sounds similar to Rajasthani music and there are lots of similar rhythmic patterns. And Chicuelo, particularly, got our music."

A couple of years later he embarked on a different collaboration, *Qawwali Gospel*, with New Orleans-based Craig Adams with the Voices of New Orleans. Here the musical styles were very different, but the aim of the songs was identical – to praise the Lord. As Derek Beres wrote in *The Huffington Post* after their Brooklyn performance: "In meaning, they could not be more similar: devotional music in homage to the divine. And in this Allah and Jesus meet and dance."

In 2009, there came yet another collaboration, this time with the maverick

French guitarist and lover of Gypsy music, Titi Robin. They'd first met in 2006 and both been struck by each other's music and this time it was a meeting of musicians rather than genres. The result was *Jaadu: Magic* (a Top of the World in #65) featuring compositions by Robin and arrangements of *qawwali* pieces. A sublime example showing that while Faiz Ali Faiz, as one of the greatest living *qawwali* musicians, stays true to the tradition, he can also take the music into new realms. ♦

+ DATE Faiz Ali Faiz will perform as part of the *Transcender Festival at the Barbican on September 27*, see *Gig Guide* for details



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BEST ALBUMS

The New Qawwali Voice (World Village, 2002)

Faiz's very impressive debut disc. He doesn't try to show off a little bit of everything, but sticks to a traditional sequence of four songs, some nearly 20 minutes long that really convey the powerful ebb and flow of *qawwali*. And he's not afraid to do the Nusrat staple 'Allah Hoo'. A live recording from Gerona and reviewed in #16.

Your Love Makes Me Dance (Accords Croisés, 2004)

The album takes its title from a famous lyric by the Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah, which is one of the five songs included in this 'homage to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.' He ends with a variant of Nusrat's favourite closing piece 'Mast Qalandar'. A live concert recording from Lille, reviewed in #27.

Various Artists Qawwali Flamenco (Accords Croisés, 2006)

This is a pretty impressive package of two CDs plus a DVD of the performance at the Fes Festival of Sacred Music. Alongside Faiz's group it features Duquende, Miguel Poveda and Chicuelo. They perform several numbers separately, but four are performed together. A Top of the World review in #37.

Faiz Ali Faiz & Titi Robin Jaadu: Magic (Accords Croisés, 2009)

A unique disc on which Titi Robin (on guitar and *buzuq*) creates new compositions and makes memorable arrangements for a small instrumental group and the *qawwali* party. A Top of the World review in #65.

IF YOU LIKE FAIZ ALI FAIZ TRY....

Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali

Day of Colours (Real World, 2004)

This group is led by two nephews of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who are also based in Lahore. They've recorded several albums for Real World and have been regular visitors to WOMAD festivals. The seven tracks include compositions by Khusrau, Rumi and Bulleh Shah. Reviewed in #27.