

BACK TO THE ROOTS
Shah (left) has recorded
with local Indian musicians
on the new record.



Ragas Meet Rock

Falu weaves the thread of Indian classical music into Western sound to create a seamless harmony
By Soleil Nathwani

FALGUNI SHAH, BETTER known by her eponymous band name and debut album name Falu, first took to the stage in the US a few years ago,

belting out indie rock tunes following an upbringing in Mumbai that involved years of classical training. When I see Falu at home in her studio in New York's West Village, I am immediately aware of an amazing cultural convergence. I hear the cadence of her voice as we talk and I think back to the sensuous lyricism of 'Obsession' and the heady rock of 'Without You,' both songs on her debut album. But yet, I am sitting on a low *gadda* in the luminous

glow of the light in her mandir surrounded by instruments like her *tanpura* which leans against the wall behind me. Falu's music has been described as Sufi rock

CHECKING IN

but it is not a forced attempt to fuse genres. It is a seamless harmony which makes it easy to see why Falu has sold out Carnegie Hall, performed with famed Japanese Cellist Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road

project and most recently wowed the audience at the London Coliseum with a collaborative remix on Philip Glass's famed opera *Satyagraha*. She describes her music as anything but experimental and says, "It is in fact experiential. It is a carefully crafted journey where the East and the West gently overlap like waves."

For Falu, music was where she was destined to be. Her mother and grandmother were both Indian classical singers and she started learning chords at the age of three. However, her decision to follow this path was not forced. "When I was six years old, I had an accident and was in the hospital with head injuries.

The pain was so unbearable that my mother told me to just sing and that really made me forget the pain. That was the moment I decided I was going to be a musician," she says. Falu learned semi-classical music from thumri to ghazals under the tutelage of Kamundi Munshi and then continued studying under the legendary sarangi and vocal master Ustad Sultan Khan who she describes as her guru to this day. Her rigorous training involved singing for 16 hours a day both in school and out. She says, "I had this junoon for music. Everywhere I could learn a chord I would go. All day I would travel with my tanpara in local trains from one teacher to the next to learn what I could."

So this begs the question of how she managed to weave the richest traditions of India into what is now an inventive rock sound. Falu met her husband Gaurav, born and brought up in Texas, when he took a year off to follow his own passion for music by studying it in India. Meeting Gaurav precipitated her exploration of bringing Indian classical music into Western rock and brought her to the US where she learned guitar, piano, western vocals and composition. In 2004, Falu formed a band bringing together people that had backgrounds in hip-hop and rock & roll, R&B and jazz. They wrote their own lyrics and spent months learning from each other's sounds to



"Ten years ago, I could not find my space to experiment and innovate in India the way I did it here. Now things are different; you don't have to be one or the other," says Falu, who has gone back to her roots.

finally create an album that seems to effortlessly blend different styles into a sound that Falu describes as "indie Hindi". The lyrics are English, the melodies are catchy but while staying true to the purity of the raga, Falu manages to bring in the sounds of jazz, funk, hip hop and pop to create something that has a universal appeal. The spirit of collaboration has been the key to the development of Falu's music and she has worked and performed with musicians of every background including P-Funk's godfather

of keyboard Bernie Worrell, Blues Traveler's front man John Popper and multi platinum rapper Wycleaf Jean. This receptivity, this ability to absorb has been crucial to her success. "I feel music, I listen to something and it speaks to me. I try to listen and go in that direction; I have to be a very open musician."

And so Falu has garnered acclaim that has made her the youngest South Asian vocalist to give a solo performance at New York's Carnegie Hall. As she talks about her fairly recent performance with AR Rahman for President Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, she says it was very much a dream come true. But after years of performing in the US, the dream has shifted and she wants more and more to bring her music back to India. She says, "Ten years ago, I could not find my space to experiment and innovate in India the way I did it here. Now things are different; you don't have to be one or the other." Falu is currently working on her second album for release this summer. This time, she has gone back to her roots, and has recorded with local Indian musicians. I ask her what the sound will be like. She gives very little away and says with her infectious smile, "I know that it will be a timeless CD and a groundbreaking album because we have melded many traditions but have not disturbed any of them."

INTHE NEWS

Fuzzy Ducks Quacking

There's another resurrected supergroup on the horizon. Fuzzy Duck, a jam band originally put together by Zubin Balaporia (Rock Machine, Indus Creed) is back with a brand new lineup - Uday Benegal and Aditi Singh Sharma on vocals, Balaporia on keyboards, Ehsaan Noorani on guitars, and Loy Mendonsa on bass - and the band already have a couple of tracks written up. "It's a fun band with music bordering on blues rock, that kind of stuff," says Noorani. "And with the blues the good thing is that you can do a lot of covers, like standards, but we've got started on the writing process. It'll take a little time but we should be ready about October."

Axl Rose Sues Irving Azoff

In a \$5 million lawsuit filed on May 17, Axl Rose blames the poor sales of Guns n' Roses' 2008 flop, Chinese Democracy, on his former manager, Irving Azoff. According to the suit, Azoff "wanted Guns n' Roses to fail by sabotaging its touring and record sales," "lied about a prospective Van Halen tour" and forced "Rose into a position where he would have no choice but to reunite with the original members of Guns n' Roses for a reunion tour." Rose hired Azoff as his manager in March 2008. Azoff resigned last October, then filed a lawsuit in March demanding \$1.9 million in unpaid management fees. Howard King, who represents Azoff, declined to address the specific allegations, but quipped, "He didn't accuse Irving of being on the grassy knoll in Dallas on November 22nd, 1963!"

tantra

makes music



Catch our amazing music range at Shopper's Stop throughout India! Win 2N/3D ticket to Malaysia!

Tantra Store: MUMBAI: Colaba, (Tel: 2552614), Kala Ghodie, Rhythm-Hue (Tel: 42222727), Bandra, Tantra-at-Hill Road (Tel: 25420025), Fort, The Bombay Store (Tel: 40669999), DELHI: DLF (Tel: 4477860), PUNE: Naraina (Tel: 4174000), Lodi Road (Tel: 2490747), INDIA: (Tel: 011-26433045), JAIPUR: (M: 9329163035), KOTA: (M: 9029550897), GUWAHATI: (M: 9864020127), GOA: (M: 9328110031), BANGALORE: (M: 9842022222), CHENNAI: (M: 9842320000), SHIMLA: (M: 9811805025), KAMPUR: (M: 9839101119), ALLAHABAD: (M: 9839101119), AL RO AD: CENTRAL LIFESTYLE (M: 9839101119), Website: www.tantrauniverse.com Email: tantra@bom5.vers.net.in | Tantra H.O. | 022-2282 8219.