

MUSIC WITHOUT BORDERS Fusion in popular music

Modern technology makes it easy to take sounds from all over the world and mix them into a trendy medley. But to truly understand other cultures, you need more than just a cosmetic patchwork of sounds. The British composer Nitin Sawhney and the Swiss alphorn player Eliana Burki offer two possible routes to a deeper musical understanding.

TEXT_Hanspeter Kuenzler

*Travellers through a musical universe
full of contrasts.*



Global Fusion

Bank Sarasin-Alpen and its investment banking associate, Alpen Capital, organize the musical concert Global Fusion every year for their clients. This flagship event features world-renowned artists from various genres integrated into a single musical experience. The concert was introduced to mark the launch of both companies in Dubai in 2005 and provides a unique platform to showcase and integrate the best of both traditional and contemporary music from different musical heritages. Till date, eight Global Fusion concerts have been held in Dubai, three in Doha and three in Muscat and featured over 85 artistes from all over the world.

Global Fusion also promotes talented local artistes in the Middle East and provides them with an opportunity to work with world renowned musicians and share the same stage with them. In addition to fusing various genres of music, the concerts also include the visual element of dance combined with music and has highlighted some key dance forms such as flamenco, tap dance and sufi kathak to name a few.

Bank Sarasin-Alpen and Alpen Capital were honoured with the prestigious Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Patrons of the Arts Award in 2010 and 2011 for their patronage of music through their Global Fusion concerts.



Mixing together music from different cultures is certainly not an invention originating from the latter part of the 20th century. The roots of European gypsy music can be traced as far back as India. In the USA, rock 'n' roll was the result of a fusion between blues, swing, gospel, and electric guitar. In the early 60s the nightclubs of Senegal were gripped by a passion for Cuban music – and a unique style of Senegalese rumba was soon born. Today this type of fusion is much easier. You don't need lessons in how to play the Argentinean concertina, the bandonéon, to be able to play tango like Astor Piazzolla. All you need is a laptop. Anyone wanting to embellish their techno beats with flutes from Samoa can simply download the relevant samples from the Internet and immediately they have their "Samoa Trance Sound".



"Fusion" as a form of self-expression

But Nitin Sawhney wants nothing to do with this shallow type of "culture surfing". He was born in 1964, just after his parents emigrated from India to a small town near London. He was the only pupil in the school with a dark skin.

That made him an outsider even though he grew up with the same pop culture as his contemporaries: the Beatles, punks and Beano comics. But he didn't feel at home in his parents' culture either: after all, he had never lived in India. Nitin threw himself into music. On the piano he played Bach, Chopin and jazz improvisations, while also studying classical Indian music and Flamenco guitar. Everything that influenced him flowed into his music as well. "The fusion of different musical styles produces nothing if it is merely dabbling in unusual sound combinations," he says. "You have to get heavily involved with different types of music before you can bring them together in such a way that the cogs of their wheels mesh together and create forward motion."

"The fusion of different musical styles produces nothing if it is merely dabbling in unusual sound combinations." _Nitin Sawhney

Sawhney was not the only young offspring of immigrants who tried to define his cultural identity through music. In Bhangra, a genre of folk music from the Punjab, many of his contemporaries discovered a vehicle that was ideally suited to cross-cultural experiments. The term "Asian Underground" was coined for this new musical movement. Sawhney was part of this scene. He wasn't interested in belonging to a fashionable movement, but in trying to tackle everyday issues and prejudices through music. "Beyond politics, beyond national-

ity and beyond skin" – was the credo for "Beyond Skin", his breakthrough work that won the Mercury prize in 2000 for the best British album of the year. Since then Sawhney has tirelessly expanded his perspectives in search of his inner self. The journey has taken him to Nelson Mandela's home, Paul McCartney's studio, to the Native Indians in America and the aborigines in Australia. On his latest album "The Last Days of Meaning" he brings together everything the world has shown him in an attempt to understand an embittered old man who feels alienated in his own country. "Music is a universal language," he says. "It is also an abstract form of expression that speaks directly to people on the subconscious level. Yes, I really think that music can change people."

"Fusion" as a voyage of discovery

Since she was a child, 28-year-old Eliana Burki from Switzerland has been attempting the seemingly impossible: she wants to play the traditional alphorn in an unconventional way. When she first came across the instrument at the age of six she immediately knew: "That's the instrument for me." Three years later she started to rebel. She was the only girl at the yodelling festival and had to wear the traditional costume for that region – otherwise she wouldn't be allowed to play. "I told my mother: Sorry, I can't do this any more." Not only was the costume totally alien to her, but she could hardly breathe when wearing it. "I wanted to play jazz. Miles Davis, Chet Baker and the harpist Andreas Vollenweider were my heroes – despite my tender age!"

"I'm sure my mother must have been embarrassed on a number of occasions when we were out together. I have never minced my words." _Eliana Burki

The official Alphorn Association has ten basic rules governing every aspect of an alphorn performance. For example, it is compulsory to wear the traditional Alpine costume, each melody must not contain more than five tones, and no staccato or rapid tone sequences are permitted. Burki ignored all these conventions – and frequently received letters from incensed traditionalists accusing her of betrayal. Making the move into jazz was also a move towards artistic freedom for her. "Disobedient is not quite the right word," she laughs. "But I'm sure my mother must have been embarrassed on a number of occasions when we were out together. I have never minced my words." Since then Burki has travelled across the entire world, both literally and figuratively, with her alphorn.



On her album "Heartbeat" she mainly played funky pop music. On her latest album "Travellin' Root" you can hear strong influences from North Africa and South America. "The influences come mainly from the countries that we have visited," she says. "You have the chance to get together with local musicians, to absorb their music and to get involved, and this gives you inspiration for your own compositions. Anyone hearing my music relives my own experience of new horizons opening up."



We reached an important milestone at the end of January 2011 with the successful migration of our Asian locations in Hong

Kong and Singapore to the Avaloq banking software. After very intensive project work, our employees in Asia can now access the same system functions as other Avaloq users across the Sarasin Group. In addition, all the functional, legal and regulatory requirements for the operating business in Asia have been fully implemented in the system technology. This lays a cost-effective foundation for the Group's future growth. As far as synergies are concerned, the main benefit is improved efficiency and quality in business processes, the reduction of operational risks, shorter time frames for launching new products and the scalability of systems and processes. _Peter Sami,

Head Logistics