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VANCOUVER -- Cultural boundaries don't exist within Kiran Ahluwalia's music.

The India-born, Canadian-raised vocalist and composer holds four releases under her belt, which creatively melt sounds ranging from Portuguese fado to Celtic fiddle with her traditional Indian ghazals and Punjabi folk songs.

The Juno Award-winning artist's fifth and latest album, *Aam Zameen: Common Ground*, is no different. With *Common Ground*, Ahluwalia continues to knock down the partitions that separate us from each other, all while connecting audiences with new amalgamations of music.

"I don't adhere to the rules and boundaries of my own genre," says an assertive Ahluwalia, who now lives in New York. "I'm a person who has citizenship in two cultures, India and Canada, but I'm not bound by those two cultures. I'm a citizen of the world and the entire world is there for me to be influenced by."

Common Ground boasts a unique collaboration with the Saharan desert blues sound of West African Tuareg musicians Tinariwen and Terakaft to create a fresh, rhythm-inspired backdrop to Ahluwalia's celestial voice.

Ahluwalia was first introduced to the hypnotic Tinariwen in 2004 in Toronto, and was immediately inspired by the Tuareg sound.

"I remember thinking [Tinariwen] was very minimalist. They used very few notes, but the right notes. Often times I listen to music and if it's nice, I'd go see the artist again, but the music comes and stops here," she says, waving her hand a foot in front of her chest. "But with Tinariwen it just entered my heart. I was obsessed! I became obsessed with their music. I became one of the cult followers of this group."

Ahluwalia began practising music at the age of six, learning Indian classical music formally but always searching to discover new Punjabi folk songs or Bollywood songs.

While she has had a keen ear for memorizing melodies and lyrics since childhood, Ahluwalia's real musical connection exists on a deeper, metaphysical level.

It was this connection that spawned thoughts of collaboration with Tinariwen.

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“The reason I’m attracted to music, I think, is the things that are within us that we can’t express with words or speaking are sometimes released when you hear a beautiful phrase or rhythm. You hear it and you’re like, ‘Ahh.’

“I listen to a lot of music where I don’t know the words — Tuareg music being one of them,” she says of whether lyrics and language barriers hindered her understanding, and if audiences may lose something in translation.

“And what attracts me to music are those certain phrases and rhythms that touch you. To me, that emotional connection is important. And it’s that emotional connection that I wish to give to my audience.”

Ahluwalia eventually met with Tinariwen and Robert Plant producer Justin Adams while on tour in Europe in 2009.

Adams agreed to produce the collaborative sessions and introduced Ahluwalia to Tinariwen’s leader, Ibrahim Ag Alhabib.

Alhabib was given Ahluwalia’s CD in the Saharan desert, and he liked it.

“He played it in his jeep — the only place that had a CD player. And so it worked out.”

During the recording process, Ahluwalia chose to cover Tinariwen’s Matadjem, a song about an outward enemy (the state of Mali) and the government that oppressed the Tuareg people. Alhabib initially wrote the song to stop infighting so his people could bond together and fight a common enemy.

Ahluwalia also chose to feature Mustt Mustt with Tinariwen, a song from the Muslim culture in Pakistan.

“I thought it would be very neat for Muslims from Africa to interpret the song with their electric guitars and electric bass.

“In the Western media, they always lump the Muslim world together. But it’s not one entity. It’s so diverse.”

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In addition, Ahluwalia found herself composing a song that touched upon the same themes, focusing instead on the enemy within us that hinders our own paths.

From breaking musical boundaries to uniting each other through lyrically foreign songs, it's clear that Ahluwalia will continue to find new ways of challenging the ways we communicate through music.

Even if distance winds up being the roadblock.

"I've already told [Tinariwen's] bass player that he's got to come up with a bass line for my new song. I've been singing it for him on Skype," Ahluwalia laughs.

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