SONGLINES

∘ BEST ALBUMS OF 2008 ∘

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6 Debashish Bhattacharya
Calcutta Chronicles: Indian Slide Guitar Odyssey
(Riverboat Records)

India isn't perhaps the first place you'd look for an outstanding guitar talent, but Kolkata-based Bhattacharya certainly is one. He plays slide guitar, an instrument that was introduced to this cosmopolitan city by the legendary Hawaiian guitarist Tau Moe in the late 1920s. This inspirational solo album (with his brother on *tabla*) reflects artistic and cultural aspects of his home city with Hindu, Muslim and Gypsy influences. A major achievement.
Reviewed in Songlines #53

7 Kiran Ahluwalia
Wanderlust
(World Connection)

If there's one album I've come back to again and again through the year, it's this one. She's won accolades across the Atlantic but it's time for the rest of the world to discover her. Kiran Ahluwalia was born in India, raised in Toronto and now lives in New York. She's got a gorgeous voice and an affinity with Urdu *ghazal* music and other stimulating international sounds – for instance the Portuguese guitar on the opening track, 'Jo Dil'. Ahluwalia is something special and deserves international recognition, if not fame. It's rare to encounter a glorious new voice and talent with such potential as this.
Reviewed in Songlines #54

8 Puerto Plata
Mujer de Cabaret
(iASO)

The arrival of iASO Records is hugely welcome. As well as this disc of warm, acoustic *son* and *merengue* from an old master of the Dominican Republic, the label also released *Bachata Roja*, a wonderful collection of classic tracks from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. *Mujer de Cabaret* is the debut album from 84-year-old singer and guitarist José Manuel Cobles, nicknamed 'Puerto Plata' after the port city where he was born in 1923. Many of the songs are in Cuban *guaracha* style – his speciality – but there's fizzing guitar-led merengue too – plus the intriguing 'Los Pirates', a new song about the terrorist attack of 9/11. Swinging guitar from Edilio Paredes and Frank Mendez too.

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