

THE AUSTRALIAN

Reviews: Ahluwalia, Maru Tarang, Steve Earle, Vijay Iyer, Shane Howard

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TWO new releases prove global fusion can be so much more than simply a case of cut and paste or connecting dots.

WORLD

Sanata: Stillness

Kiran Ahluwalia

Arc Music/Select

4.5 stars

Blue City

Maru Tarang

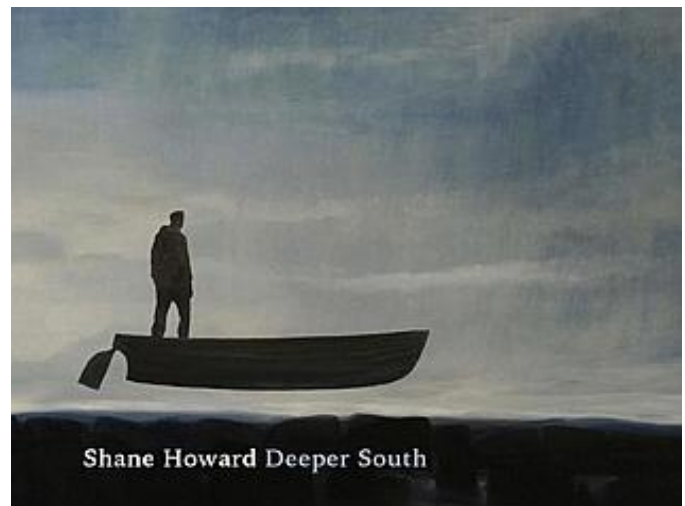
Planet

4 stars

WITH an ever-widening Indian diaspora, it's no surprise to see an escalation in projects involving musicians of subcontinental origin with those from other cultural backgrounds. Sanata: Stillness and Blue City are outstanding recent examples of the high-calibre hybrids that can result when players of skill and sensitivity collaborate with the right intent. In compatible, musically superior hands, global fusion can be so much more than simply a case of cut and paste or connecting dots. Quality of arrangement and composition, let alone the exquisite playing, is sufficient to show the simpatico relationship between the diverse musicians on Kiran Ahluwalia's sixth release — an album that unites this talented migrant from the northeast Indian state of Bihar to Canada and her Pakistan-raised,



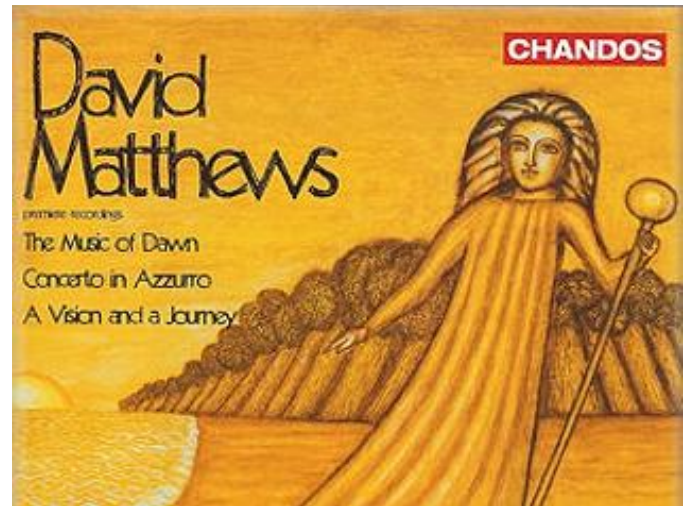
Sanata: Stillness by Kiran Ahluwalia. Source: Supplied



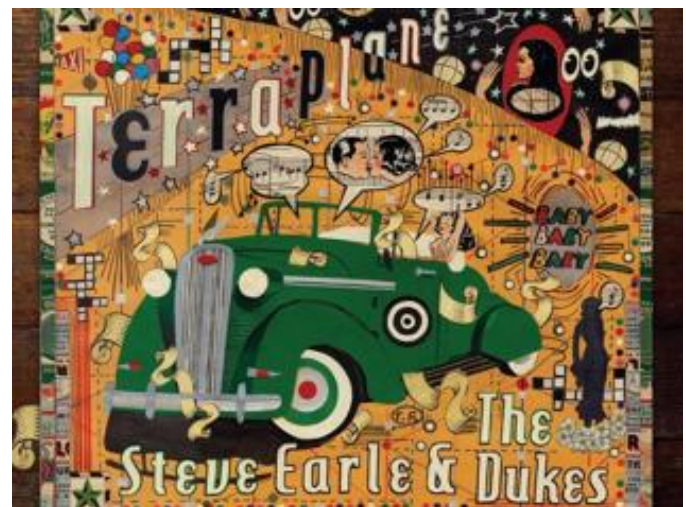
Deeper South by Shane Howard. Source: Supplied

US-based guitarist partner Rez Abbasi with other expats on tabla and harmonium and North American bass and percussion players. There's no shortage of soul or expertise exhibited in Maru Tarang's debut waxing although the liaison between two musicians from the northwest Indian desert region of Rajasthan and Australian slide guitar maestro Jeff Lang and Australian-Indian tabla master Bobby Singh is of a more instinctive and improvisatory nature. Even so, Blue City skirts closer to traditional roots, whereas Sanata: Stillness, while experimental, has an eye and an ear on popular appeal. Interestingly, both albums also display the twin influences of Saharan Tuareg and Sufi devotional music. The self-composed Hayat that constitutes Ahluwalia's breezy opening gambit typifies her album, combining the artist's refined, classically trained Indian singing with desert blues guitar licks, wheezy harmonium and pulsing tabla. The set ends with a rocked-up reading of the legendary Sufi singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's Lament that has overtones of John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra. In between, classic qawwali vocals and swirling harmonium electrify the Punjabi drinking song Jhoom. In Jaane Na, Abbasi's educated jazz chops reflect a player whose accolades include an award from Down Beat magazine. The guitarist's life partner, who has netted two Juno awards (the Canadian equivalent of ARIA gongs) in the world music category, excels in the title track and in Taskeen, the slower paces of those intoxicating Indian-accented pieces illustrating the intricacies of Ahluwalia's ornate vocals. On Blue City, two of Lang's previously recorded songs, Two Worlds and Running by the Rock, and the Robert Johnson Delta blues standard Hellhound on My Trail are counterbalanced by a couple of raags and other traditional Rajasthani folk pieces. All tracks produce virtuosic musical conversations involving thrilling exchanges between the Aussie's intrepid slide guitar and the equally dexterous Asin Langa on sarangi (a short-necked, bowed string instrument), aided and abetted by Bhungar Manganiyar's khartals (Indian castanets) and Singh's metronomic tabla. Langa's rich, powerful vocals also provide a perfect complement to Lang's high-register falsetto. The camaraderie between the musicians throughout a mesmerising set is palpable.

Tony Hillier



David Matthews by BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. Source: Supplied



Terraplane by Steve Earle and the Dukes. Source: Supplied