

Music without Borders

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Last week, two countries in a state of antagonism since their inception came together to discuss peace – a process that has been tried many times before. But now more people are hopeful that India and Pakistan will finally end the dispute in Kashmir, despite a bombing days before the summit.

While the two states are negotiating, a couple of singers, one Pakistani and one Indian, have united to show the world that, at least on a small scale, peace is possible. The singers have known each other for years, and toured together in the United States in 2005, titling their collaboration *Sada-e-ghazal*, (Music without Borders). Their tour was successful, with audiences a mix of both nations' communities, and in several cities jointly sponsored by their respective cultural associations. Talat Aziz and Ghulam Ali are famous ghazal singers popular in both countries. As local organiser Anita Garg says,

"These are the two best ghazal singers in India and Pakistan. To the public it doesn't matter that they are Indian or Pakistani, they just like the music." This is understandable; ghazals are a popular form of song in both countries, because of their melodious tunes and harmonious style of singing.

The form is even more engaging through the universal appeal of its subject matter: love. Unrequited love, rejected love and longing for a lover are often the inspiration for the poetic recitations traditionally sung in Urdu. Even if audiences cannot understand the words, a good ghazal singer will be able to convey the emotion, tugging on their heartstrings as he sings of lost love. It is a universal empathy with the music that brings us together.

For their HK performance, *Mehfil*, the singers will be unveiling a fusion of their individual music and lyrics – a true melding of minds and talents. "It's a new sound that hasn't been heard before [in Hong Kong]. The pieces have been newly devised, and we each sing our own songs but they come together and complement each other. It's a two-in-one," laughs Aziz, pinpointing the importance of uniting yet remaining individual and distinct. Audiences who heard the new works during the singers' tour of the US responded very well to it, says Ali. "People applauded a lot... they liked the new style."

Recently many Indian and Pakistani artists have worked in unison to inspire the two countries' statesmen to see that, in the public's eyes, it is time for reconciliation. Many have families that live across the borders, and would wish the ability to see their loved ones did not depend on the volatility of the political situation. Ali remains hopeful that the peace summit will change things and that politicians will take a cue from the artistic community: "We artists share the same platform to entertain people, it helps politically as it can cement cordial relations between both countries," he says.

Does Aziz also feel that cross-cultural exchange can create peace? "Art and culture know no boundaries," he says. "We've had many people from all over come to our concerts and appreciate our music. I hope lots of problems can be solved through art. I don't know if it's possible, but at least we can try."

Mehfil, an evening of ghazals with Ghulam Ali and Talat Aziz, will be performed on March 16 at the Jockey Club Auditorium, Polytechnic University at 7:30pm. Tickets are \$175, \$450 and \$600 available from Jade Group, contact 6019 0621 / 9641 8214 or check their website for details: www.jadegrouphk.com.

