Final Assignment

The Cultural Fusion in “Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental”

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Historically, music is believed to be the universal language that surpasses barriers. As an art form, it allows musicians to express themselves and provides a platform for cultural display. “Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental*”* from the album *Remember Shakti* by John McLaughlin (guitar) and Hariprasad Chaurasia (*Bansuri/*Flute) is a perfect example of this. It blends two prominent musical genres: jazz and Indian classical music. This piece uses elements of jazz such as harmony and improvisation, combined with complex melodic and rhythmic forms of Indian classical music. This rendition was performed live by the Shakti band; it is an exemplary piece for its fusion of music and culture. Through an examination of its musical elements and placement within historical and social contexts, this paper will analyze how “Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental” highlights the possibility of innovation and cultural exchange through cross-genre collaborations.

To truly understand the essence and significance of “Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental*”*, one must first grasp the basic principles of both jazz and Indian Classical music. Jazz is a musical genre that originated during the early 20th century in the United States, deeply rooted in African-American tradition. Throughout this paper, many jazz terms will be used: modal harmony (the use of scales rather than a major or minor key center), syncopation (a technique where emphasis is placed on the off-beat), counterpoint (the interaction of independent melodic lines), and chord voicings (the arrangement of notes in a chord) (Levine, 1995). On to Indian classical music, a tradition that has made its way through centuries of evolution. It is based on two big pillars, *Raag* (the melodic framework) and *Taal* (the rhythmic cycle). The genre enriches itself through on-the-spot improvisation and deep spiritual connection. A common theme in both genres is improvisation; they are similar, yet they differ in their approach. Jazz musicians experiment with harmonies and scales, while Indian classical

musicians explore the notes of a particular Raag and play with the Taal. Through the seven elements of music, these aspects are the foundation on which this fusion is built upon.

The melody in Lotus Feet is derived from Raag *Darbari Kanada*. A Raag mostly performed at night, meant to evoke meditative and introspective emotions. The seriousness of the Raag reveals itself through the flat third (ga komal) and the flat sixth (dha komal). Considering the fusion aspect of this collaboration, there is no strict adherence to the Raag and it is simply used as a baseline. McLaughlin complements the Raag using modal harmony and embellishments through the silences of the Bansuri, which adds a jazz flavour to the piece. The musicians were able to balance the melodic framework, combining both the bansuri and the guitar under the greater structure of the Raag.

Rhythm is the path on which music reveals itself and is used delicately in this piece. The percussionists, Zakir Hussain (*Tabla*) and T.H. "Vikku" Vinayakram (*Ghatam*), provide a base rhythmic framework in Taal *Dadra.* This Taal is a 6-beat rhythmic cycle that is a light classical Taal, commonly used in folk and semi-classical compositions. It makes sense that it was used in this composition, as it is not based on hardcore Indian classical music; rather, it pulls on its main ideas. The percussionists do a great job of using rhythm to complement the melody. You can notice at minute 2:50, Hussain adds an ornamentation which fills the silence from Chaurasia. The percussionists aren't the only ones using rhythm; McLaughlin was able to use syncopated rhythms, a characteristic of jazz, which creates a beautiful interplay between the base rhythm and his off-beat accents. The rhythm is very creatively dealt with in this piece.

Lotus Feet uses a polyphonic texture; it has separate melodies from all the artists. The melodies and rhythms work independently and weave together to create the piece. The guitar serves as a base layer over which the bansuri is played, and then at minute 2:16 the *tekha* is introduced, providing the underlying rhythm on which all the melody is working. The layering creates a sense of serenity and highlights the importance of each musician to capture the essence of this piece.

The harmony of this piece mainly comes from the guitar; the use of modal harmony from McLaughlin supports the melodies of Chaurasia, based in the raag rather than a harmony. McLaughlin is very careful not to overpower the bansuri, a more delicate instrument. This is evident around the 3:37 mark; McLaughlin was given time to express himself, he uses the Dorian Mode, with a raised sixth, to create a sense of serenity. The musicianship of McLaughlin is evident when the elements of jazz complement the overall piece. He also uses extended voicings, shifting the mood, introducing emotional depth to the piece. This use of harmony allowed for musical freedom and improvisation, bridging the gap between the genres.

The timbre of the piece is very important; it reflects the cross-cultural/cross-genre nature of this piece. The bansuri gives a sense of breeze, using resonant sounds to support this. The guitar, on the other hand, gives a sense of electricity, keeping the sense of free flow. The percussion adds a sense of grounding, as if the tabla were actually singing along with the piece. It provided stability, contributing to the free-flowing and improvisational nature. Overall, these elements interconnect to make the piece feel enriching and heartwarming.

Delving into the historical and social context of this piece, jazz became a musical phenomenon in the 20th century, pulling on aspects of many traditions. By the time the

original Shakti group was formed, the level of improvisation and adaptiveness had reached a new level, allowing for this collaboration to happen. Indian classical music is a centuries-old tradition tracing back to the times of the Hindu gods. The genre has many sub-genres, making it vast and applicable to different contexts. This genre made its way from Asia to the West thanks to the efforts of Ravi Shankar. His role in spreading this music to the West was pivotal, and he was the first of his kind to do it. He initially toured the West in the 50s, pioneering this idea of blending Indian classical music with other genres. He worked with artists such as jazz saxophonist John Coltrane and many others(Ravi Shankar | Biography, Music, & Facts | Britannica). "Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental*"* reflects how far both genres have come, serving as a link between the East and the West. At that time, cultural exchange through music was just being explored, and it is evident that this piece heavily influenced fusion's trajectory as its own sound in music.

Cross- genre music does have a place in this world, and this collaboration shows us how. The artists managed to find the commonality between their respective genres: improvisation, to navigate this piece. They were able to adhere to both disciplines while also allowing for musical conversation to flow naturally. This creation surpasses many boundaries that traditionalists might have created, and it fostered its own sound. The balance between innovation and tradition exemplifies music as a universal language.

"Lotus Feet - Live/Instrumental*"* by John McLaughlin and Hariprasad Chaurasia demonstrates the power of collaboration. They were able to blend Indian classical music in its nuanced form with jazz to create their own sound. The piece explored aspects of melody, rhythm, and harmony and proved that musical creativity is not limited to one genre. Through the examination of musical elements, along with the historical and social contexts of "Lotus

Feet - Live/Instrumental*”*, this paper demonstrates how cross-genre collaboration promotes innovation and cultural exchange. Reinforcing the age-old belief that music is a universal language that transcends boundaries.

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