



### **Red Baraat at The Bridgewater Hall**

**Reviewed by Emma Short September 2012**

The Bridgewater Hall played host to Sunny Jain and his 8 piece Brooklyn based collective Red Baraat on their debut UK tour as part of the London 2012 Festival. Supported by the Asian Arts Agency whose vision is to mainstream high quality Asian arts in the UK increasing cultural diversity in the creative industries, they hit the hall with force. A veritable explosion of the North Indian Bhangra rhythm, funk, salsa, go-go hip hop style syncopation and audience call and response, within a strong grounding of jazz, brought their fusion flavour alive to the eagerly awaiting audience.

Sunny Jain 'the Hendrix of Dohl', as an audience member appropriately commented, has an accomplished history of jazz drumming and is self-taught on his instrument of choice - the Indian Dohl drum. He was joined by the paired yet competing brass tones of MiWi La Lupa on bass trumpet and Ernest Stuart on trombone, Ben Stapp on sousaphone providing hearty bass riffs whilst Alexander Hamlin on saxophone reached the intricate highs and Sonny Singh on trumpet pushed the tin to the limit. Fellow percussionists Rohin Khemani & Tomas Fujiwara complimented the dohl in every which way leaving no eardrum unsatisfied nor untouched.

The name Red Baraat contains within its title the Hindi word for 'wedding procession' and translates literally as red wedding procession having its origins in when the original collective

formed back in 2008, funnily enough for Sunny Jain's wedding who gathered together friends to perform as a marching band during the ceremony. What a wedding it must have been!

The chemistry on stage was infectious with bursts of spontaneous Bollywood dance grooves and Sonny Singh exploding into action with unreserved fever at times. La Lupa (Michael Williams) helped Jain rouse the audience to their feet and loosen their vocal chords and dormant dancing muscles opening the arena to an energetic exchange of movement and chorus.



The small numbers in the stalls at the Bridgewater Hall and slightly reserved nature of the audience must have been a stark difference compared to the numbers and crowds the Red Baraat are used to at home, at festivals across the globe and recently over the year as a whole with a visit to the Whitehouse in April and numerous appearances dotted around London and various cities in the UK (see <http://www.redbaraat.com/> for previous and current gig listings). Their upcoming appearance at the closing ceremony of the Paralympics this Sunday and the end of their UK tour at St George's in Bristol on 10 September will bring a close to their pond

hopping debut experience.

The musicianship was flawless, with all members of the band being highly accomplished musicians in their own right, the performance was delivered through an unwavering stream of passion. Chaal Baby, Shruggy Ji, Tunak Tunak Tun & Fully-Fantastic were some of the songs that were for me highlights of the show with at least one traditional Punjabi song in the mix too. The energy and punk spirit behind Red Baraat is astounding and despite the size of the crowd they performed as ever, with insuppressibly, uncompromising rawness & gusto.

Promoted as dohl 'n' brass their sound has an intimately personal and culturally important crossover too from east to west with identity at its core. The personal reconciliation Jain openly expresses on stage surrounding his identity as an American of Punjabi upbringing in New York and the marginalisation he felt as a child growing up isn't a solitary experience for those in the band. Sonny Singh particularly, a social activist for the Sikh religion in the US, works hard to readdress a balance in the face of prejudicial experiences he experienced as a child and today due to his religion. The intensity, vibrancy and sheer passion of this band is overwhelming – an experience to be had if the opportunity presents itself.

Asian Arts Agency is funded by Arts Council England and Bristol City Council <http://www.asianartsagency.co.uk/>

**Editor's Note:** [Are the Arts having a renaissance?](#) Well if you want to discuss this particular topic you should come along to the Manchester Salon on Monday 10 September and join in trying to answer the interminable question of **how we contemplate art today**

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