

THE AUSTRALIAN

Indian visitors help to bridge the genre gap



Sandy Evans (left) and Bobby Singh appeared in the Sydney Festival concert Bridge of Dreams at City Recital Hall... PHOTO CREDIT KAREN STEAINS

MUSIC

Shubha Mudgal, Sandy Evans, Sirens Big Band
City Recital Hall, Sydney
January 12

ERIC MYERS

This sold-out concert was the culmination of a monumental project in melding Indian music and Western jazz. More than 1,000 people, alive to a special sense of occasion, reacted enthusiastically to the music, contributing to the generosity of spirit in the air.

Twenty-three musicians were packed onto the stage. They included the Sydney tabla player Bobby Singh, plus two Indian visitors Aneesh Pradhan (tabla), and Sudhir Nayak (harmonium). Behind them was the rhythm section of the Sirens Big Band. The third Indian visitor, Hindustani classical singer Shubha Mudgal,

took centre stage. The principal composer Sandy Evans conducted, facing the audience when playing her saxophone solos. The horn players in the big band were situated to the right, on elevated tiers.

The repertoire came from the recent album *Bridge of Dreams*. The moderate volume level at which Evans's innovative orchestrations were played, largely enabled the music to overcome the CRH's notoriously poor acoustics for jazz.



The three Indian musicians, all supreme improvisers, showed how naturally their artistry was suited to jazz. They also demonstrated how adroitly and subtly they could build their energy level, enabling the music to flare and open outwards, thereby lifting the spirit of the listener.

Beam, Arch, Suspension, composed by Evans and Pradhan, showed how cleverly the two genres could be seamlessly juxtaposed. It included a vocal introduction from Mudgal, and a brilliant harmonium solo from Nayak, who flew effortlessly over a complicated time-signature. A slightly different rhythmic feel underpinned a lyrical solo from trumpeter Ellen Kirkwood. Mudgal's haunting vocal re-entry was followed by a spirited solo from bassist Jessica Dunn who built up a head of steam, and interacted beautifully with drummer Ali Foster. After an orchestral interlude, a harmonium riff underpinned an electrifying tabla solo from Pradhan. It drew huge applause, and foreshadowed what was to come.

Tabla Spiral, another Evans/Pradhan work, was another memorable highlight. Beginning with a lovely piano solo *Gratitude* from pianist Zela Margossian, it led into a percussive verbal recitation from Singh and Pradhan. Evans's score enabled the band to echo the tabla figures. The two tabla players concluded



*L-R, Jessica Dunn (bass), Bobby Singh (tabla), Sandy Evans (saxophones),
Shubha Mudgal (vocals)...*

with some scintillating interaction, which increased in energy and excitement, and built to a crowd-pleasing climax.



For the brilliant Sandy Evans this was her night of nights ...

For the brilliant Sandy Evans this was her night of nights, testimony to her vision that Indian music and Western jazz can live together, without either genre being required to compromise its essential character.