

Sarod & Cello

folk fiction



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MAXIME GRAND, May 2015

website

www.sarodcello.com

project

Sarod & Cello is two musicians and two instruments. Two creative, Swiss musicians who invent some mischievous, imaginary folklore for sarod and cello, two instruments – one western and the other eastern – both descendants of the Arabian rubab.

Both these closely related instruments have expressive sounds that slide and bounce and are supple and sensitive like those of the human voice.

Two musicians, two instruments, two minds, two men who draw from several Indo-European cultures to produce their fascinatingly original and organic music.

“We bring our separate worlds of music and our imaginations together in a musical discussion, so to speak, and we find common territory; we find a place where the music in each of us meets, a place where there is room to play, room for each to speak, and for us to melt into the sounds.”

When Jacques Bouduban and Olivier Nussbaum express themselves together through their instruments, a musical architecture made of the most simple and intimate elements opens up. It is lively and at the same time delicate, bringing us serenity. With their heads in the clouds, but their feet on the ground, the two very present musicians centre and produce colours and timbres that have their sources in both East and West. We sense their authenticity, their generosity, and their shedding of non-essentials. The audience is enchanted.



folk

Coconut, goatskin, metal, horsehair, maple wood, spruce, mahogany, ebony, teak, whalebone, cowhide, steel, ivory, gold, pernambuco, gold, mother-of-pearl, and silver; such are the materials, coming from all corners of the world, that make up their instruments.

Twenty-five strings on the Indian sarod and four on the European cello: twenty-nine strings vibrating in harmony to weave new, many-splendored Indo-European music opening out to all five continents.

Two smooth fingerboards without a bar, one metallic and shiny, reflecting light; the other dark and wooden. It's like yin and yang singing together. "Our music grows with each phrase, each layer, and gradually develops its own shape, oneness, and direction, which it impresses on us as being obvious. Being music of studied simplicity, it is full of life and richness, and whatever complexity it holds is organic, natural, and homogenous. Things come to us and lead us on to a place where sounds are ahead of humans."

fiction

Sarod & Cello's creative universe brings together many different timbres, types of character, and cultures. It binds the deep sound of the sarod and its strings resonating in sympathy with the rich, woody song of the cello. Colours from East and West blend as Bollywood meets Hollywood.

"Our music is a collage of plucked, stitched, or rubbed strings, glissandi, rhythmic games, and clear, plain, precise themes from which spring soft, melodious lines that touch the heart, and at other times repetitive passages of blues and ethnic sounds."

"Our repertory as a duo grew with every meeting between Jacques and me. Our music is trying to find itself; its identity appears more and more clearly to us as we go. An idea is suggested, basic material is laid out, then we experiment with it and question it until it in turn leads to new ideas and a structure, architecture or development which makes sense to us. We add touches and layers here and there until a unity and form emerge that seem to be the music telling us this is what it was meant to be."

There is something transparent in Sarod & Cello's music. Completely devoid of frills or shows of technical prowess, this is music full of life, of organic richness and of natural complexity.



words

"The challenge for us is that we each have a melodic instrument that already gives fine music without being tempered with. It's exciting for me to be doing this balancing act together with an instrument for which I don't have the same background experience as I do for the bass or the double bass. Sometimes it's a bit like tightrope walking, dangerous and delicate; yet we are really just two musicians having fun, two who enjoy sharing the playfulness of music."

"What I bring to the form of music we play as a duo are elements from the music of northern India and various ways that culture has of treating certain tunes and rhythms. In my own compositions, I favour my personal world of sound and music as I seek for balance between melody and form; but when I work with Jacques, I let go slightly of my preferences so as to let something new and unexpected emerge and develop from our combined inner resources."

"Sarod & Cello works only with the natural sounds of the sarod and the cello. There are no electronics, no extra effects; the very moving delicacy and simple peace we produce comes merely from the richness and complementarity of timbres of these two instruments. Listening to each other, rather than bringing in anything artificial from outside, is what is basic and vital to our work."

Olivier Nussbaum

"When I'm on stage, it's very often in a duo. A duo is like a dialogue, a lovely conversation. I enjoy the responsibility it involves; I like not being able to hide or turn away; I like the excitement of working without a safety net, of having to be very present and fully okay with each of my choices. The pleasure is immediate and it involves a direct connection with the other player. There's intense emotion between us and the audience at these times, too."

"I do know some of the basics of Indian music and I've been reflecting for quite a while now on the ideas of traditional music, acoustic music, and folk music. Living in a time of 'globalization', standardization, 'world music', and individuation, I envisage folk art coming from individual people, as if each person carries his own folklore and all traditions are ready to be reinvented."

"As far as our compositions are concerned, there's always this idea of folklore in the background; the music pours out just as a folk tale is told. We find what to say as we go along, because the music is telling things we recognize from before. The elements I use are rhythmical and melodic, natural and consistent. My music is not simplistic, but simplified, expressing essence. Its colours and tones, its rhythmical cycles and sequences resonate well with the more complicated Indian music and with myself."

Jacques Bouduban



olivier nussbaum +

After first acquiring solid experience as an electric bassist in various groups ranging from duos to big bands, in the mid '90's Olivier discovered the acoustic sounds of the double bass and began exploring its many facets, gradually learning to say very essential things with his music, in a style of playing that emphasizes intuition and spontaneity. His flexibility and open-mindedness have enabled him to bring his instrument to a wide range of repertoires, from baroque to contemporary and everything in between, such as rock, blues, jazz, or world music.

His concerts and tours have seen him happily joining on the stage with many noteworthy musicians. He has participated in several renowned international festivals, such as the International Jazz Festival in Havana, Cuba; the Festival international de jazz in Montreal, Canada; the Euro Pop Days in Freiburg im Brisgau, Germany; the Festival d'Avignon in France; or the Francosonic Festival of London, England.

Olivier is fascinated by – and indeed finds daily nourishment from – all the different aspects of composing, improvising, and research in sound. Through this, he has been able to express the wealth of possibilities within him in collaborating on over twenty multimedia creations and in leading or co-leading the design and production of projects such as Le chant de Planètes, Corpus, Le Tour du Cadran, Naïma, and Zzhr 4tet, to name a few.

Since 2013, Olivier has had this enthrallment with Hindustani music. He has the good fortune of being able to study its depth and complexity under Ken Zuckerman, who in turn studied for over thirty years under the great master, Ali Akbar Khan, thereby belonging in his own humble way to the prestigious Maihar Gharana School.



jacques bouduban +

Having been a living arts cellist for the past several decades, Jacques' work has involved playing for a variety of creations in Switzerland and the rest of Europe. He has been immersed in worlds of theatre and music since childhood, and today enjoys improvising, inventing, writing, composing, and doing research. Each of these activities, he says, brings him new language, learnings, and friendships.

Jacques' rhythms and jazz have enhanced so many different events. He played at Montreux in 1987. From 1990 on, he has been the music creator behind plays given at the Théâtre de la Grenouille and for duo stage productions, such as that with the Swiss storyteller, Philippe Campiche, in Avignon and in Paris, as well as closer to home. He learned more about stage arts, acting, and singing from the wonderful mime artist of American origin, Branch Worsham, and together they developed shows involving all these skills and which have also delighted audiences in Austria and Germany.

When we see how his palette has expanded over the years with the addition of baroque, classical, traditional, popular, jazz, ethnic, and contemporary music; plus skills in acting, mime, comic, singing, and even occasionally as a clown or a lights technician, we can truly say that Jacques Bouduban is an adventurer whose path points to more exciting times ahead.



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Hollywood Duo au carrefour des traditions

J eudi passé, la Fondation Anne et Robert Bloch (FARB) accueillait à Delémont l'Hollywood Duo, constitué du violoncelliste jurassien Jacques Bouduban et du bassiste chaux-de-fonnier Olivier Nussbaum muni pour l'occasion d'un sarod.

L'engouement récent de Nussbaum pour cet instrument indien à 25 cordes et la prédilection de Bouduban pour des tandems novateurs donne le jour à une succession de pièces inédites et présentées avec humour, à la croisée des chemins culturels. La pratique occidentale du jazz y rejoint le déroulement d'un raga indien, tous deux favorisant la co-construction intersubjective en temps réel au détriment de l'orchestration intellectuelle et une musicalité qui émane de

l'exploration des possibilités de l'instrument. La mélancolie et la rêverie du blues et du slow s'agrègent à la spiritualité des modes indiens et des mind (glissandi) du sarod, faisant éclore une méditation synchrétique. D'un instant à l'autre, le violoncelle caméléon de Bouduban se fait élégant, lancinant, balkanique, sauvage, africain, kirghize, irlandais, alors que le sarod ôte parfois son tilak, se meut en guitare folk américaine et se glisse dans une harmonie proprement pop.

Originale et accessible

Chaque thème – une parcimonieuse série de notes – est exposé à l'unisson, dans un riche mariage de timbres grâce aux cordes sympathiques du sarod, est développé en variations rythmiques ou

harmoniques, se retrouve en filigrane durant l'alternance des soli avant d'être ré-exposé. Cette structure forte garantit la cohésion de chaque opus, tout en libérant la forte sensibilité, l'intense complicité et la liberté créatrice des artistes. Renonçant autant à la virtuosité qu'à l'extravagance post-moderne, la musique d'Hollywood Duo, optant pour la simplicité «organique», renoue avec l'essence de la musique et présente l'avantage d'être aussi originale qu'accessible à un large public.

MAXIME GRAND

Prochaines dates: demain 8 mai, 20 h 30, Pantographe, Moutier; samedi 9 mai, 19 h 30, Le Cellier, Le Locle; dimanche 10 mai, 11h, Café du Soleil, Saignelégier. www.hollywood.ch

> REVIEW

The Hollywood Duo, crossroads of several traditions

Last Thursday in Delémont the Anne and Robert Bloch Foundation (FARB) had the pleasure of welcoming the Hollywood Duo, comprised of Jacques Bouduban, well-known cellist from Jura, and Olivier Nussbaum, a bassist from La Chaux-de-Fonds, now playing the sarod. When Olivier's recently acquired enthusiasm for the 25-string Indian instrument met up with Jacques' interest in new forms of duos, the result became this charming and humorously presented programme of all original pieces, representing a meeting point of several cultural paths. As the Western way of jazz joins with the unfolding of the Indian raga form, we hear a fresh construction which delightfully explores the best possibilities of each instrument while avoiding any intellectual orchestration. The melancholy and dreamy moods of blues and slow numbers combine with the spirituality of Indian styles and the sarod's glissandi in an enchanting meditation. While the sounds from Bouduban's cello are at one moment elegant and the next moment haunting, and then wild, or remind us of sounds from Africa, Kirgizstan, Ireland, or the Balkans, the sarod now and again removes its tilak and switches to an American folk guitar mood with real pop music harmony.

Original and accessible

Each theme – a parsimonious series of notes – is first presented in unison in a rich blending of timbres especially from the sarod's many strings, is then developed in variations of rhythm or of harmonics, is heard again beneath the surface of each soloist's part, and finally is presented once again. This firm structure ensures the cohesion of each piece while at the same time allowing plenty of room for the artists' great sensitivity, creative freedom, and intense complicity. Hollywood Duo's music shuns both virtuosity and post-modern extravagance in favour of organic simplicity and thus reconnects with the essence of music and treats us to a concert which is at once original and accessible to a wide audience.

MAXIME GRAND



Chronique culturelle

Hollywood

La Maison du Concert porte bien son nom. On y entend de plus en plus de bonne musique et c'est tant mieux. Par exemple: l'excellente Olivia Pedrolí s'y produira en trio le 20 mai prochain. Et ce week-end, nous y avons découvert le non moins excellent duo Hollywood (toute ressemblance avec Hollywood, voire Bollywood serait purement fortuite) formé du violoncelliste Jacques Bouduban et du contrebassiste Olivier Nussbaum qui joue en l'occurrence d'un instrument à cordes pincées, le sarod, sorte de luth originaire du nord de l'Inde. Ces deux-là s'entendent comme larrons en foire pour distiller une musique d'une exquise finesse – servie par un éclairage d'exception – dans laquelle le jazz et l'Orient se jouent des tours. Ce «folklore de composition» – dixit Hollywood Duo – fruit d'un mélange de musique savante et de divertissement nous fait découvrir le si subtile sarod et redécouvrir le violoncelle dont Jacques Bouduban tire des sons étonnants. De plus en plus de musique (et de danse) donc à la Maison du Concert! Et pourquoi pas? Reste que les théâtres se font rares... désormais représentés par la seule compagnie Frenesi, de Teresa Larraga, qui vient de rejoindre le collectif des résidents.

Patrice Neuenschwander

Cultural chonical

Hollywood

At the well-named 'Maison du Concert' (House of Concerts, in Neuchâtel) we've been treated to more and more truly good music recently. For example, (...) this past weekend we discovered the very excellent new duo called 'Hollywood' (absolutely no connection with Hollywood or Bollywood apart from the name!) formed by the cellist, Jacques Bouduban, and the bassist, Olivier Nussbaum, here playing the sarod, which is a sort of many stringed lute originating from northern India. There is a really joyful complicity between the two of them as they brew us up an exquisite blend of music wherein jazz and the Far East flow and dance playfully. This 'composed folk music', as they call it, the product of a combining of serious music and music for entertainment, introduces us to the subtle sounds of the sarod and treats us to amazing new sounds from the cello as well.

So, (...) good things are happening and more good things are in store at the 'Maison du Concert' (...).

Patrice Neuenschwander

CONCERT Olivier Nussbaum et Jacques Bouduban fusionnent leurs talents.
Un drôle de dialogue de cordes



An article which appeared in "Le Mag", the culture section of "L'Express-L'Impartial", on April 21st, 2015, after an interview by Jacques Rossat:

CONCERT: Olivier Nussbaum and Jacques Bouduban merge their talents.

A curious dialogue of strings

This is a story about two teenagers who met at a music camp and became chums: Olivier Nussbaum, called "Oli" by his friends (which gives us 'Holly'), and Jacques Bouduban, nicknamed "Boud" (pronounced 'bood'). Each has a successful career in music; they get out of touch, meet up again, lose sight of each other again, and then run into each other not very long ago at the Théâtre du Passage in Neuchâtel, where the conversation goes something like this: "What are you doing these days?" "Playing Indian music." "Oh, I'm interested in that area, too. Why don't we do something together?" And so the Hollybood Duo was born.

Their premier will be this weekend at the Théâtre du Concert in Neuchâtel and then ten more dates are on the agenda in various venues in French-speaking Switzerland. It was a most joyful discussion I had with these two fellows, who are so much in tune with each other that answers to my questions often came from both sides, so I'll not bother mentioning who said what.

One basic question: What is Hollybood Duo?

It's a musical universe all of our own; call it composed folklore. Both our pasts are in jazz and the form of music we play here is rather like that of jazz in that we take off from a theme, do a lot of improvising, and then come back to the theme. That's the structure of jazz ...and it's also the structure of Indian music! We don't play Indian music, but our pieces are very close to it in structure and in overall sound. Don't worry, however; we don't get worked up about it. The reference to Indian music is more second-degree. Some of our compositions are playful and comical, yet there's always emotion. The spirit of blues and jazz is ever present, too, even if it's a little perverted in places ...

And your repertory?

One of us, usually it's Jacques, as he's particularly prolific, puts forth an idea; it can be a phrase from a previous improvisation or a show he wrote music for in the past or a piece of folk music. Then we work on it together. As we said before, the form and the sound remind one of Indian music. Ragas, for example, begin with an introduction by the soloist; this is the alap which calls forth the spirit of the piece. The second musician joins in on the succeeding phrases. Many of our pieces begin with an alap.

Combining a sarod with a cello could hardly be called a classic blend ...

Although we in the West have been familiar with the cello for a long time, we only recently discovered that both cello and sarod have their roots in Afghan rabab! The sarod has so very many strings: four main strings, tuned C-G-C-A; six drone strings, especially used for accompaniment; and fifteen strings that resonate in sympathy. Those, plus the fact that you strum with the fingernail, rather than the pad as for the guitar, are what give the typically Indian sound. Also, there is no fret on a sarod, so you have to be very precise.

Tell me how your two musical paths came together as Hollybood.

Bood: From my beginnings with blues, with friends, in cafés, I listened to old style jazz and came into that music through what's called 'walking', studied classical music on cello, all kinds of rock and jazz, then turned to musical shows. I composed; I went on tours with the poet, Alexandre Voisard and with storytellers and with mime artists. Now I want to get back to just music. My view is wide-angle and I'm open to the entire world's music, from Swiss folk music to music of the Balkans, which – by the way – I have played a lot of and where you find asymmetrical rhythms, just as in Indian music.

Holly: My first, painful steps were in eurhythmics, theory, and the recorder, all of which I studied with equal loathing. Things really got started for me when, at age twelve, I was given an electric bass guitar and was allowed to play some rock music in G. Actually I had chosen the wrong instrument. I was fantasizing about a wonderful Gibson guitar, whereas I was forced to play bass in my brother's band. Then came rock, jazz rock, jazz, free improvisation, and creating some multi-media shows, as well as work in the jazz department of the Neuchâtel Conservatory of Music. In the summer of 2013 I was introduced to the sarod and it was love at first sight; for the moment this is the only instrument I play. I've been studying in Basel, under Ken Zuckermann, one of the best sarod players in the West, and it feels a little conceited on my part to be jumping into public performance after only two years' study. Oh well, I suppose one has to dare to take the first steps sometime.