

Michael Wadada's open-source approach to global dub shines with Suns of Arqa



BORDERLESS BASS: Suns of Arqa

by ERIN MACLEOD

"Montreal is really very vibrant," says Michael Wadada, founder of the internationally collaborative, more-than-three-decades-old Suns of Arqa, a project that links heavy dub and classical Indian music.

The group began as a concept in 1979. "I was listening to the melodies of Indian ragas, some of the most complicated music on the planet, but the underlying rhythms have a heartbeat played by the bass tabla. After listening to dub with the bass guitar, I thought, that's similar."

Over the years, Wadada has worked with Adrian Sherwood, a Guy Called Gerald, 808 State, the Orb, Johar Ali Khan, Kadir Durvesh, Prince Far-I and more. He was asked to play at the first WOMAD festival by Peter Gabriel, and it was that moment that caused Suns of Arqa to become a live band. A new album, *Scared Sacred*, is due to be released in April, but Suns of Arqa is already working on new projects here in Montreal. "It's always on to a new thing," says Wadada.

Wadada's philosophy of music is an open-source approach, says Montreal collaborator DJ Guapo, who ended up on stage at Glastonbury with Suns of Arqa after remixing one of the band's tracks for the score of *Pure*, a Montreal-made film about rave culture. The link has continued through various performances and now, at Guapo's studio La Hacienda Creative, new creations are taking shape. Working on an album of original music that takes, according to Guapo, "a journey around the world from Delhi to Mumbai, Paris, Scotland, Vancouver and Montreal," and a record of tracks recorded over a decade ago by the late Muslimgauze combined with elements of Leonard Cohen's poetry, Wadada's passion for connecting the dots between different elements is evident.

Along with his wife, vocalist Angel-Eye, Wadada is working with a powerful Montreal contingent carefully gathered by Guapo—Geeta Sparkle on vocals, Jahsun and Bass One as the rhythm section, Aditya Verma on sarod and Shawn Mativetsky providing the tabla sounds. Adding Montreal to the Suns of Arqa family—already including artists from France, India, Britain, Hungary and beyond—is par for the course. "That's how we work," he laughs.

Performing at Festival Multi-Montreal
Saturday April 17 @ 10pm.