

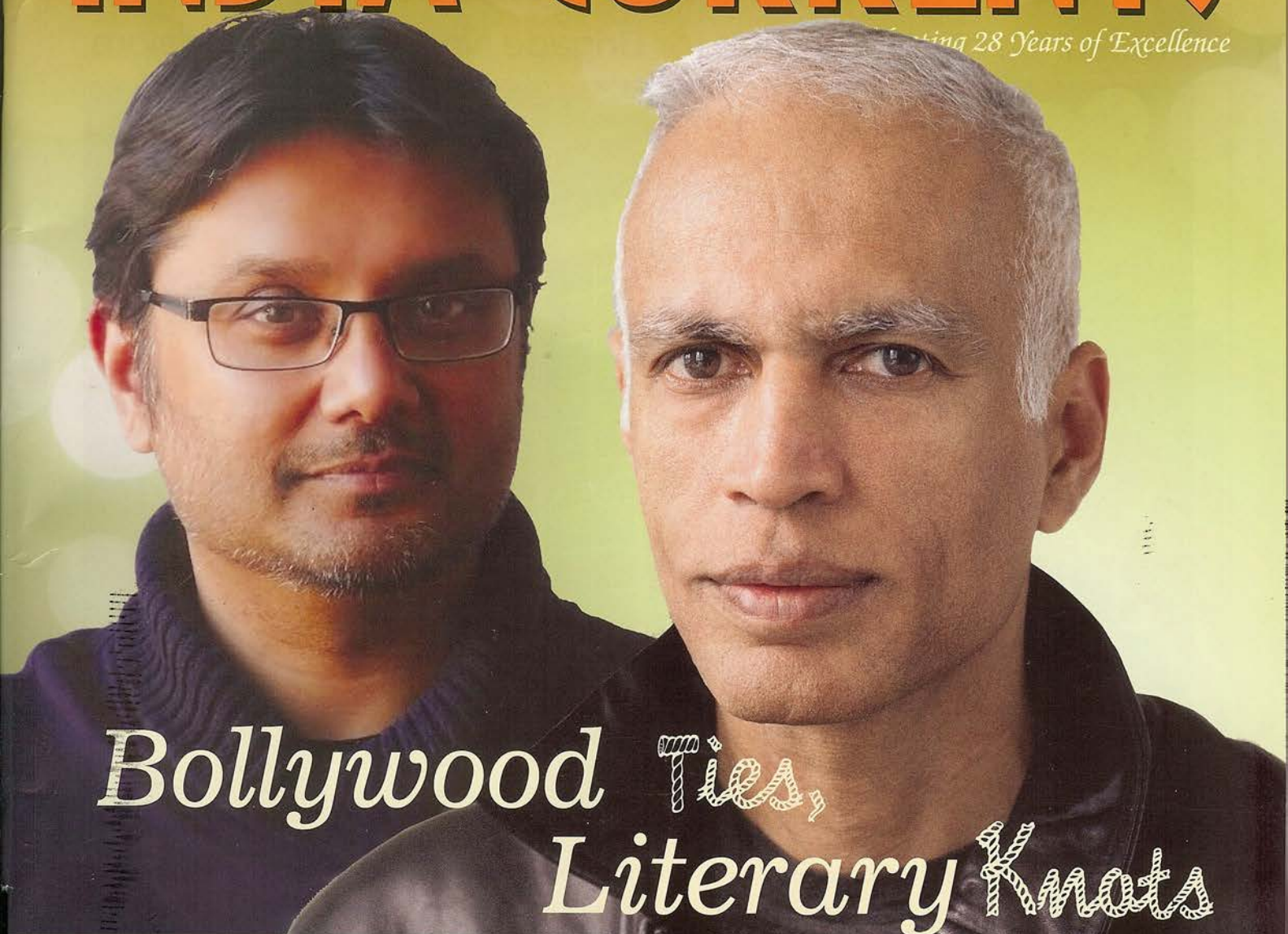
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# INDIA CURRENTS

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## Bollywood Ties Literary Knots

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A conversation between two authors, Manil Suri and A.X. Ahmad, on Bollywood and literature.

*Edited by Jeanne E. Fredriksen*

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# Matt On Matt

By Priya Das

An artistic temperament is conventionally associated with eccentricity and attitude. What is not commonly seen is the other, good side of the said temperament, the one that drives artists to stay true to their art and foster an environment that nurtures its growth. The Californian band *Ancient Future* led by Matthew Montfort, is an excellent example of this. Formed in 1978, *Ancient Future* is the world's first and longest running ensemble dedicated exclusively to the mission of creating and producing world fusion music.

The group's "Yearning for the Wind" was released in July 2014. It presents Montfort's composition on the scalloped fretboard guitar, harnessing *raag Kalyan* in a nine beat cycle, accompanied by Vishal Nagar, the upcoming tabla virtuoso.

The piece is part of a larger repertoire, called, "The Archive of Future Ancient Recordings" (AFAR), which is a series of collaborative-music recordings entirely funded by music-lovers. It is a work in progress and already features artists such as Abbas Kosimov (Uzbeki percussion), Bui Huu Nhut (dan bau), Pandit Habib Khan (sitar), Paul McCandless (Grammy winning reed player of the group Oregon), and Ancient Future alumni Benjy Wertheimer (tabla), Doug McKeehan (keyboards), Ian Dogole (percussion), Kash Killion (bass), and Mariah Parker (santur, piano).

Excerpts from an interview with Mont-



Matthew Montfort and Vishal Nagar

fort:

*IC: Why raag Kalyan? Is there a story behind the selection of this raag?*

MM: It was the first raag I studied with Ali Akbar Khan. My childhood friend Benjy Wertheimer and I had moved to California together in 1977 to study at the Ali Akbar College of Music. I was very excited to practice the music Ali Akbar Khan gave me that raag, and I awoke early one morning to start my enthusiastic practice. It felt great, so I just had to convince Benjy to play it with me on tabla. This didn't go so well and we had our first fight as roommates.

Then, when we went to the college that afternoon, Ali Akbar Khan told the class not to play *raag Kalyan* in the morning. "This is an evening raga. If you play it in the morning, you will have a fight in your family," he said. Oops!

*IC: A nine beat taal (rhythm) is rather unusual, what made you set the piece to it?*

MM: I just wrote the piece. The really interesting thing is after I created the main melody, I went to write it down and my heart sank as I realized it was in a nine beat cycle. I didn't know of a nine beat taal and I wanted to be able to play this piece with Indian musicians. So I went online and found *matta taal*. The amazing thing is that the version of the taal, with two fast three's (beats) at the end, fit perfectly with my melody! When Vishal and I performed this for the first time in public, and shared the story, he

informed the audience and me that "matt" means "don't" (in Hindi) and so *matta taal* means "don't play this taal." That is why it is so rare! It is a very difficult rhythmic cycle to master improvising in.

*IC: Where can our readers experience Ancient-Future live?*

MM: Ancient Future is playing with Aditya Kalyanpur at the Stone Soup Festival in Grover Beach near San Luis Obispo on August 23 at 4 pm. I've written another piece in *raag Kalyan* that I want to record for the AFAR. That one is in *teen-taal*

and the melody is really evocative. I guess I have an affinity for this raag!

*IC: Speaking of AFAR, how did you come up with the idea?*

MM: For Planet Passion (released in 2010), we had an investor plan, but it didn't work out because the music business collapsed because of the tech industry disruption. It became almost impossible to pay for recording through record sales.

So, I had the idea to just ask people to support the music in advance. Then I had the idea for creating an archive that supporters could access as we recorded the project. Given that the name of the band is Ancient Future I decided to turn that around, hence the name.

*IC: What is next for AFAR?*

MM: We have already rehearsed tracks with Shenshen Zhang (Chinese pipa). And when we raise more money we have a lot of musicians that we want to work with, but I shouldn't name them until the time is right.

I would love for *India Currents* readers to support the cause and suggest whom we should be working with next! (For more on AFAR and to contact Montfort, please visit [www.ancient-future.com](http://www.ancient-future.com)). ■

"Yearning for the Wind" is available on iTunes, \$1.29.

Priya Das is an enthusiastic follower of world music and avidly tracks intersecting points between folk, classical, jazz, and other genres.



Album Cover: Yearning