

Red Baraat Bio

“We feel comfortable not knowing exactly where we’re headed,” says Red Baraat’s founder and bandleader Sunny Jain. “We’re very much about trying things out and taking risks. Sometimes it doesn’t work,” he laughs, “and sometimes we stumble upon things that are really exciting.”

Landing squarely in the latter category is *Gaadi of Truth*, the third and latest full-length studio effort from the New York *dhol* and brass ensemble. While still retaining many of the propulsive and uplifting musical elements that fired their first two albums, 2010’s *Chaal Baby* and 2012’s *Shruggy Ji* — and which led NPR to famously dub Red Baraat “The best party band in years” — *Gaadi of Truth* is an even deeper affair, both instrumentally and conceptually.

“When we originally started in 2008, the group was going to be rooted in Punjabi music,” Jain explains. Born and raised in Rochester, NY as a first generation Indian American, Jain drew upon his early musical education for the concept of Red Baraat. “I grew up hearing Indian classical music and devotional songs at home,” he recalls, “and my dad was always listening to 1960s Bollywood music on reel to reel. For Red Baraat, I really wanted a large band with a massive sound, but just drums and horns. The horns were really looking back at the brass band tradition of India, which was something I’d grown up with and seen since I was five years old. I wanted to put the *dhol* drum in front — the *dhol* is the dance drum of northern India, which you also hear in the film music of Bollywood — and fuse it with the Punjabi rhythms and the Indian brass band tradition. But Red Baraat wasn’t intended to just be a replica of an Indian brass band, it wasn’t intended to be any one thing. I was specifically looking for a diverse cast of players that were going to bring something else to the music.”

As *Gaadi of Truth* reveals, Red Baraat’s sound has broadened considerably over the past six years, expanding to embrace digital and electronic flourishes alongside the band’s original acoustic underpinnings. “With *Gaadi of Truth*, the new steps are that I’m putting the *dhol* through some effects pedals,” Jain explains, “while our sousaphone player is processing his sound through various synth effects.” The band’s open approach to sound and community is also reflected by the participation of indie-rock guitar giant Delicate Steve Marion, who flexes his six-string muscles on “Bhangale” and Sikh MC Mandeep Sethi, who guests on “Zindabad”. The record also includes club-ready remixes of “Layers” and “Horizon Line,” created by Karsh Kale and Lost In The Trees, respectively.

Conceptually and lyrically, *Gaadi of Truth* reflects the band’s experiences since the release of *Shruggy Ji*, which debuted at #1 on the Billboard World Music charts and propelled the band on a two-year world tour that included performances at Bonnaroo, Austin City Limits, and the Monterey Jazz Festival, along with clubs, theatres, and arts centers. Along the way, they sold out rooms as diverse as the Luxembourg Philharmonic and the Bowery Ballroom, and performed at the request of The White House, Peter Gabriel, TED, and the Olympic Games. While the acclaim

and the sold-out shows were incredibly gratifying, the grind of playing 150 dates a year took its toll, as did the challenges that unfortunately still come with the territory of touring as a multi-ethnic ensemble.

Gaadi literally means ‘train’ in Hindi, though it can also mean ‘car’, ‘vehicle’ or ‘journey,’” Jain explains. “From the beginning of the band, the idea behind it was a sense of pluralism; I really wanted a diverse cast of musicians. I wanted different sensibilities, because that would make the vision stronger.” That desire for a sense of pluralism in the music stems from Jain’s lifelong observance of Jainism, one of the world’s oldest religions. Sunny’s father was a founding member of the Jain Association of Rochester, and his family line includes Jain maharaji’s (monks). Along with the vow to cause no harm to living beings, non-absolutism — or pluralism — is among the faith’s primary tenets. “The idea of pluralism and diversity was there from the beginning,” says Jain, “and this idea of the *Gaadi of Truth* — this journey of truth — comes from the fact that we all are traveling together and talking with each other, and because we all come from different backgrounds we have these different viewpoints, which is wonderful. And it’s acknowledging the fact that there is no absolute truth; it’s all relative. Everyone has their own opinion about things, but what’s great is this dialogue that’s occurring. We’re learning, you know? And as we’re going all over the world, traveling by bus, car, train, everything, we’re stumbling upon various communities and we’re meeting different people, and it’s an opportunity for them and us to learn about one another.

“But there’s the dark part of it, as well,” Jain continues. “‘Gaadi of Truth,’ the title track of the album, is addressing the hard realities of traveling and all the work that’s involved in getting from show to show. There hardships of going through TSA at the airport — one of our guys, Sonny Singh, is a Sikh, and he always gets harassed and patted down a lot more than anyone else in the band does, because of his turban. We have two African-Americans in the band, and we’ll be driving in the South and get pulled over by a cop with some nonsense reason. And the constant thing of people remarking on the multi-ethnic makeup of the band, or me being asked questions like, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I’m from Rochester, New York.’ But Jain also views these incursions as an opportunity. “Sometimes I’m offended by things, and I react in that matter — but other times I’m like, ‘Okay, this is an chance to engage. Everybody has a viewpoint, so let’s discuss these things.’”

Many of the other tracks on *Gaadi of Truth* are also rooted in the band’s pluralistic and forward-thinking outlook. “A lot of the songs are addressing the multiplicity of viewpoints,” says Jain. “There’s ‘Zindabad,’ which means ‘Long Live’ in Hindi. In that song, we’re saying that we celebrate life, we celebrate devotion — but we also celebrate agitation and revolution. Question things, and move forward, and support your friends and lovers, and listen to the voice of your heart. Long live all of that; but at the same time, we’re talking about community, about responsibility, about helping one another. When I was writing the song ‘Layers,’ I was reading Robert Lanza’s writings on Biocentrism, which is a different take on how we perceive things — that you have to involve the conscious and the unconscious in order to truly

observe the world. And again that has to do with the Gaadi of Truth, the multiple ways of looking at things.”

But despite the presence of heavier lyrical themes and thoughts on *Gaadi of Truth*, Red Baraat’s music remains as intoxicating and celebratory as ever. “Red Baraat is still a party band,” Jain insists. “It’s not supposed to be a severely intellectual band, but there is an intellectual aspect to it because we’re all thoughtful citizens and individuals, and we’re all traveling around and having discussions. We’re not just slamming beers and going onstage and having fun — though there is that element to it, as well,” he laughs.

Even as you read this, Red Baraat’s music continues to evolve. “Looking back at where this band has come from, and seeing where it’s going, it’s very much like a breathing organism,” says Jain. “While there are certain elements of Punjabi music that will always be there, because of the *dhol* and the horns — having that energy and excitement of a live horn section is very important to me — things continually shape and move depending on the moment we’re in. I mean, we’re already moving on to a different path. We’ll be playing a lot of *Gaadi of Truth* live in the coming year, but we’ll be sounding slightly different, because we’ll be using some different instrumentation and different players.”

“The only consistent thing in this band is change,” he reflects. “We’re heading there, wherever *there* is!”