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Cross-cultural Music: the Work of Grand Union

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I'm conscious that it's an invidious position, being an artist and turning up to talk-gatherings, because you stand for what you do as an artist, either as a musician, or a painter or a writer, and no amount of talking about what you do can actually explain or tell anybody what it is you're about. You've chosen some artistic form of expression and that is what you stand for and that's what your life's work is. In my case, I can talk quite articulately about music but basically I'm a musician, a creative musician, and it's what I put on stage that's important.

Manchester and Bradford and Leeds and Newcastle who we regularly work with, and increasingly musicians from abroad on a fairly regular basis. They're all professional. They come from a wide variety of different musical cultures. They fall into roughly three groups, but this oversimplifies. There are jazz musicians, both black and white, in equal number. And there are women throughout the company, in about one third to two-thirds proportion. They're not dominant in the second group particularly either, which is more or less equally split between men and women, which is the singers, who tend to come, again, from a wide range of different musical cultures. You'll see in this particular film a lot of the Grand Union regulars: a Chinese opera singer, a Bangladeshi folk and Indian-classical singer, a Turkish folk singer, as well as Brenda who is a Caribbean jazz and gospel singer, a Chilean male singer, and a folk-rock singer from the north-east, so there's a huge variety. And then finally, the third group are the musicians who play largely non-western instruments: sitar-players, people who play Andean folk instruments, drummers from Africa, steel-pan players, and so on. What characterises these musicians is that they are fascinated by the business of music and musicians. And this is where I distance myself, sometimes over-defensively, from musicology or ethnic music. What interests me is not so much the music of different cultures, but its creative possibilities as expressed through the musicians themselves. And what's fantastic for me, in London but in all the great cities in the country and, as it happens, in an increasing number of rural areas, is the number of very fine musicians there are, who come from all over Asia, South America, the Caribbean, Africa.

So there are fantastic players and representatives of different musical cultures, but why they are in Grand Union is that they want to share, stylistically they want to share, they want to learn, to work with other musicians. One of the founder members

