

Profile
Suphala

Taal tales

Suphala's given the tabla a postmodern edge. Get ready to rumble.

PHOTOGRAPHY **APOORVA GUPTAY**

Three months ago, Kabul's moribund live music scene received a shot in the arm when New York-based tabla player Suphala performed there, the first woman to play in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized control of the country in 1996. The concert, held jointly with some of Afghanistan's most renowned classical musicians, was a sell-out. "There was a huge amount of energy and emotion in the hall," says Suphala, who uses only a single name and whose parents emigrated from India to the States before she was born. "I could have played anything and the audience would have appreciated it. They were grateful just cause I showed up."

Suphala started taking tabla lessons in Minneapolis, with an American teacher, who encouraged her to do a workshop with Zakir Hussain at the maestro's residence in California's Bay Area. Seeing her potential, Hussain suggested that she move to Mumbai and study under his illustrious father Allarakha.

Starting in 1993, Suphala spent a few months every year living off Nepean Sea Road with the tabla legend until he passed away five years ago. "I'd wake up and start playing immediately, it was that intense," she says. "Allarakha treated me like a family member and gave me a lot of one-on-one time. My life started revolving around the instrument."

She may be grounded in the classical tradition, but Suphala's first mass-released album, *The Now*, which includes collaborations with Grammy winner Norah Jones, is a blend of music genres from rock to jazz, Hindustani to electronic, creating a sound she describes as a soundtrack to the multi-faceted world we live in.

"Everything has been done before by the great musicians—so it's really about movement using the tools of technology we have in the present," says Suphala. "The album's an expression of personal style. It'll appeal to the cosmopolitan consciousness. It's highbrow and very urban, very street." *CJ Kurrien*
Suphala's The Now will be released this fortnight.