



REZA KHAN

CONTEMPORARY JAZZ



BIO



Over the course of his six previous albums, starting with his debut *Painted Diaries* in 2009, Reza Khan has worked with some of the biggest names in contemporary jazz while developing a fascinating trademark fusion of pop, jazz, soul and world influences. His empowering world jazz guitar music is steeped in his international roots and status as a socially conscious musical citizen of the world. Along the way, the Bangladesh-born, NYC-based composer and guitarist has enjoyed several breakthrough hits on the Billboard Jazz chart, including his first Top Ten single "Drop of Faith" (featuring Nils) from his critically acclaimed fifth album *Next Train Home* and "Waiting for the Sky" from the 2021 collection *Imaginary Road*. Despite this airplay success, he's always been told that the music he writes and produces is designed more for musicians to play than for the average contemporary jazz listener to simply enjoy.

With Khan's latest album, the intriguingly titled *Mystical*, he aims to change all that and create songs as infectious and radio friendly as they are brilliantly performed. Rather than have an overriding narrative concept, his goal was to collaborate with some familiar cohorts (Philippe Saisse, Mark Egan, David Mann, Nils) and others who could bring a fresh, magical, and yes, mystical quality to his songs. His first call was to David Mann, the veteran saxophonist who had brought great horn textures and arrangements to previous albums. He sought his production expertise, but just as importantly, felt that straight on compositional collaboration would be the ticket to unlocking this magic. Mann became an essential co-writer, composer, arranger and producer for the album.

While some of the original Khan/Mann tunes like "The Falcon" and "Whispering Trees" indeed tell fascinating, poetic stories of their own, the guitarist began with a different overall vision. He co-wrote every one of the new tracks with a specific well-known genre musician in mind as a featured artist, hoping their positive replies would lead to incredible individual tracks with hit potential that could take the song in a magical/mystical direction Khan couldn't have imagined upon writing the song.

Building off a foundation of Khan on lead guitar, Bern Schoenhardt on rhythm guitar, Mann on keys and sax, Khan's guest list – all of whom immediately agreed to participate – includes two time Grammy winner Bob James, three time Grammy winner Jimmy Haslip, Grammy winner Jeff Lorber, Grammy nominee Saisse, Keiko Matsui, a unique array of bassists (Egan, Jimmy Haslip, Brendan Rothwell, Mel Browne) and drummers Gary Novak, Brian Dunne and Lionel Cordew. Though their participation on *Mystical* will no doubt gain attention, the all-stars ultimately serve as sidekicks to Khan's infectious melodies and front and center dynamic electric and acoustic playing, along with Mann's vibrant arrangements.

Because the project was recorded during the pandemic, the basic tracks were recorded at Khan's home studio in Long Island, with Mann putting together remotely created tracks in his NYC studio. It was a unique opportunity that could happen at no other time, with usually busy and booked musicians having time available and grateful for the work. "It was gratifying to see how we all found ways to help each other survive the pandemic era, creatively, emotionally and financially," says Khan. "We all found unique ways to communicate with each other during this difficult time."

Another unique, truly *Mystical* aspect of the collection is the opportunity to experience new versions of three classic tracks from Khan's early projects via Mann's contemporary 2022 productions with new lineups of musicians – "Bahia Mama" (featuring the original vocal by Jennifer Grimm) and "Catalina's Dream" from *Painted Diaries* and "Language of Love" from *A Simple Plan* (2011). The fact that "Language of Love" and "Catalina's Dream" are in the cue for future single releases show that Khan's composing style was always in the pocket, with great hit potential. He simply needed Mann's expertise behind the boards to take it to the next level.

Though album artwork in this digital age is sometimes given short shrift, Brazilian artist Renata Schiavon's compelling hand drawn imagery throughout the packaging connects beautifully and essentially to the music and themes of *Mystical*. The cover features a small silhouette on Reza in the eye of a falcon, and there are impressionistic images of guitar, saxophone and piano to reflect the album's fusion of sounds and touch on other elements created by nature and man, i.e. piano keys that look like skyscrapers in a city skyline.

The release of *Mystical* was delayed for over a year due to some health setbacks in Khan's life and a necessary period of recovery. But he's back in the groove and excited to resume his career. "My goal with *Mystical* was to imagine a very magical album where David and I write songs together for certain individual musicians we wanted to bring to the recording," he says. "Every track evolved organically until it became a very different type of conceptual album, with each tune having magical, mysterious elements. I had always composed every song by myself, and I enjoyed the exciting learning curve of collaborating differently on each tune. My idea was to focus on how they could appeal broadly to fans of contemporary and global jazz without limiting the inspiration and motivation that has driven me in the past."





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ON STAGE



Over the past five years, Reza Khan has built a loyal East Coast fan base and performed (and sold-out!) NYC hotspots like BB Kings, Iridium, Drom, Zinc Bar and City Winery. As noted above, he has also expanded his international presence via gigs with his band in Spain and Europe. While releasing his steady stream of ensemble albums, he has attracted the attention of numerous contemporary jazz heavy hitters eager to help him craft his live performances as well as develop his studio recordings.

NOTABLE LIVE PERFORMANCES



- Blue Note Jazz Festival – New York, NY (sold out show)
- BB KINGS – New York, NY (sold out CD release party - CD **Dreamwalker**)
- Iridium Jazz Club – New York, NY (sold out CD release party - CD **Wind Dance**)
- DROM Brazilian Jazz Festival – New York, NY
- City Winery – New York, NY (sold out show on the main stage)
- Highline Ball Room – New York, NY (opened for Blondie)
- NAMM - Austin, TX (Music Festival)
- Waldorf Astoria, New York, NY (Fund Raising Event for ASPCA)
- Central Park Summer Stage, New York, NY
- Rock and Roll Hall of Fame– Cleveland, OH (w/ Joe Walsh, 38 Special)
- Venetian Casino - Las Vegas, NV (corporate Event)
- Embarcadero Center - San Diego, CA (opened for Mel Torme)
- JW Marriott – Dubai, UAE (Dubai Jazz Festival)
- Radisson Blue – Kuwait City, Kuwait (Corporate Event)
- United Nations – New York, NY (Earth Day Celebrations)
- Zinc Bar – New York, NY (Sold out shows)
- Blue Note Napa Valley (w/ Nils, Jeff Kashiwa and Tony Saunders)
- Crooners Supper Club Mainstage – Minneapolis (w / Jeff Kashiwa, Jennifer Grimm)
- Blue Note New York – New York, NY (sold out shows)



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MUSIC

Reza Khan made the fascinating decision on *Mystical* to co-write songs (for the first time in his career) with longtime associate and veteran saxophonist David Mann and target each composition towards an intended guest artist. It's the perfect approach to tell his fascinating musical story, starting with "Falcon" and including the five tracks targeted as potential singles. Two of them, "Language of Love" (the first lead single) and "Catalina's Dream" are re-imagined versions of older Khan tracks, produced by Mann and featuring all new musicians.

Building off the initial eight bars Mann composed, Khan turns "The Falcon" – which sets the scene and tone for the entire collection – into one of the album's great conceptual pieces, a lilting and atmospheric, then sly, sensual and lightly funky soundtrack to a majestic vision of a large bird with the power to see the whole universe with eyes that zoom in on different places and elements of the natural world. While Khan lays the thematic foundation with an easy grooving strum and creates a dreamy duality with Mann's sax, the real star of the piece is Jeff Lorber, who brings his trademark lively old school Fender Rhodes and mini Moog dazzle to the mix via a wild solo spot. In this case, when Mann reached out to Lorber, Lorber was willing to give Khan a song to record; Khan's response was that he already had the perfect tune for Lorber to play on. While another reworked older song, "Catalina's Dream" includes a whimsical Philippe Saisse piano solo, the focus of this tropically tinged exotic pop-jazz track is the fanciful dance between Khan and Mann, those extra horn textures and the bustling groove created by bassist Mel Browne and drummer Brian Dunne.

Originally appearing on *A Simple Plan*, "Language of Love" is a high-spirited mid-tempo funk gem with a snappy lead guitar melody and some playful interaction between Khan and Mann, then Khan with guest star Bob James' high energy piano. The "magic" Khan believes happened on every track especially manifests here on James' whimsical, jazzy improvisation. Towards the end, it becomes a playful jam featuring Khan, Mann and James freewheeling off of each other's energies. When Khan contacted hit-making guitarist Nils to work on his previous hit "Drop of Faith," he asked Nils to add his unique guitar sound to a previously written tune. For the lighthearted, seductive, snappy and infectiously funky new track "Look at the Bright Side" (a title which perfectly captures the Earth, Wind & Fire flavored tune's sunny vibe), he took the opposite approach – he asked Nils if he had a song he (Nils) could give him (Khan). Khan enjoyed shifting out of his usual comfort zone and imprinting his own cracking guitar magic onto what seems to be a sure-fire future radio hit.

Reza Khan compares the haunting and trippy atmospheric intro to the title track "Mystical" something of a Coldplay sounding moment – an indicator that this track, like most others on the album, is very different from most earlier tunes in Khan's catalog. With the breezy acoustic melody, Khan and Mann create a chill vibe with a touch of Eastern influence, then adding a hypnotic outro guitar riff reminiscent of the popular "Hotel California". The track is full of unique soundscape and exotic percussion touches over the tight rhythm section pocket of the legendary Jimmy Haslip and Gary Novak. The tune also features a whimsical soprano sax solo by Mann.

Two other tracks are worth a closer look. Getting Keiko Matsui to bring her mystical, ethereal, and deeply jazzy keyboard magic to the breezy, atmospheric and easy rolling charmer "Strum" was a special coup for Khan. A huge fan of Matsui's for 25 years, the guitarist has fond memories of listening to her while on the road with his day job as program manager for the UN. In particular, he recalls driving once from Kuwait City to the Iraqi border in a scary sandstorm. The keyboardist's music offered a sense of solace and calm. The hypnotic, gently reflective closing ballad "Whispering Trees," the album's only song not featuring drums, includes a gorgeous string arrangement as part of an atmosphere that, like "The Falcon," is designed to provoke images of nature. In Khan's view, this nature walk is one that may allow us to think about our lives and feel the magical presence of the universe around us. The movement of the song captures the idea of shadows and light playing all kind of tricks, with creatures and leaves of different colors flying around, almost like a mythical fairy tale.





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FROM THE BEGINNING >>>

Born into a musical family in what is now Bangladesh, Reza Khan and his brothers received a firm grounding in Indian classical music from their father, an instrumentalist, composer and poet. While he was trained in Indian percussion from the time he was eight or nine, Khan's musical world changed forever when his brother brought home a bootleg copy of **Frampton Comes Alive**. Khan's introduction to American pop/rock – including Eagles, Grand Funk and America – led him to put aside his training on tabla, sitar and sarod, and embrace the guitar as his primary instrument. Later influences include Pat Metheny (who "made me want to make myself better and better musically"), The Rippingtons, Acoustic Alchemy and the musical genres of Brazil (bossa nova, samba, tropicalia). Khan formed his first band, Yours Sincerely, in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka. The group's lone album, **Members Only**, sold an incredible half a million copies, but Khan soon set his musical pursuits aside to develop his burgeoning career in international relations.

A graduate of Queens College with a degree in computer science, Khan's calling as a humanitarian has led him everywhere from Asia (where his introduction to poverty and human rights abuses inspired him to work for the UN) to Angola, where he was a member of a peacekeeping force in that war torn country. In the late 90s, he lived in South Africa, where he performed and composed music and also married and started a family.

REVIEW

"Usually when one uses the term mystical in reference to music, it applies to production values and sonics that lean towards new age, ambient or atmospheric vibes, with gentle touches of exotica for good measure. There are definite elements of these on Reza Khan's latest epic work, but the **Mystical** he's talking about with his provocative title is the opening of fresh possibilities – and unexpected magic – that can only come with new approaches to his art. His acclaim as a guitarist, composer and globally conscious musical visionary over the past 13 years has earned him the respect of the contemporary jazz community and many high-profile collaborations. What he's lacked for the most part, despite a few minor radio hits, is widespread recognition and appreciation as a top-tier contemporary jazz artist. Throughout **Mystical**, Khan opens the door to new creative opportunities by looking outside himself and his usual crew of greats. Its stellar tracks include sparkling reworkings of old songs, excellent hit-bound new tunes written with saxophonist David Mann, and songs featuring legendary genre artists Khan had in mind when crafting the songs. There's no doubt that working from a different mindset has led to a new level of infectious creative transcendence. It should be exciting to see (and hear) if the songs ultimately serve his goal to become a true global jazz star. My money's on plenty of top ten hits spinning on the radio throughout 2024!" – Jonathan Widran

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