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## FRIDAY REVIEW

# Flowing river of arts

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THE RIVER festival, a wonderful week of exhibition of paintings, photography, sculpture, music, theatre and film, ended last Friday night with an evening of music by the guitarist and composer Neil Mukherjee, accompanied by Keith Peters on electric bass guitars and Karthik on the ghatam. It was presented by Travelling Artists Collective.

The connections made in that concert were between the Spanish Flamenco tradition, Indian musical inflections and the American pop/jazz fusion scene. Ragas travelled from India through the Arab world to Spain, where the guitar was fully developed.

Neil began the programme with a solo Flamenco dance accompanied by Karthik's ghatam. The effect served to draw connections between both the Spanish style and Indian rhythmic elaboration, and with the percussion most closely connected with Flamenco, the castanet.

Various guitars were employed throughout the rest of the concert, all electronically amplified, and the changing of colour among the remaining seven pieces kept the audience's attention focused on each new combination of sound. For this listener, however, it would have been interesting and useful, by way of contrast to the constantly loud volume level, to hear Neil play one of his own solo compositions on an unamplified acoustic guitar.

But the music we did hear was wholly satisfying. This music transcended place and also, to a certain extent, time as well, immediately engaging, passionate and thoughtful.



The last item on the concert was a rendition of a Bengali folk song, and for the only time in the concert, the voice was added to the ensemble. The folk song was the least like any other piece on the programme, and for it, Neil chose a Bengali plucked instrument as an accompaniment.

While the character of this music was clearly different from what could be described as the international flavour of the rest of the programme, it nicely tied the programme to the rest of The River festival, whose stated aims were to explore all sorts of connections and reflections offered by the symbol of the river. Altogether, it was a joyous finale to a celebratory week.

**RANDALL GILES**