

NEW ALBUMS

Pitch-perfect for the road

The raw energy of Kailash Kher's music, SEL's busy bhangra beats and Agni's gritty debut

Striking out

You've got to hand it to the man for sticking his neck out and experimenting with a range of creative sounds. Kailash Kher's *Kailasa* was a surprising success and *Teri Deewani* made an impact almost entirely on the strength of his vocals. His stark solo, *Allah ke Bande* (from *Waisa Bhi Hota Hai Part II*), sung with just a guitar, has become something of an anthem.

With *Kailasa Jhoomo Re*, Kher and his band-mates, Naresh and Paresh Kamath, have turned one more corner. Every song in the album, good or indifferent, stands out with a distinct sound.

The opening song, *Bam Lahiri*, has incredible energy. Shiva's hearty rallying cry, accompanied by some robust use of the *damru* (the group has recently been joined by percussionist Sanket), is rousing enough to have you nod/tap your feet in rhythm unless you are made of marble. It has very danceable, folksy strains and Kher does a cute penance-on-one-leg type jig with the *damru* in the music video with strobe lights and sundry floating femmes. But the song has merit even off the dance floor. Do pay attention to the lyrics, written by Kher. They remind you of that hoary Hemant Kumar folk-tune from *Munimji*, *Shivji bihane chale*. This one is raring to go for the no. 1 spot.

Kher's take on *Chhap Tilak* by Amir Khusro, a favourite in the qawwali-Sufi music circuit, is quite distinct from what we are familiar with. The band has managed to give a new twist and, again, Kher's vocal skills make all the difference. His is, by and large, an untrained voice, with a lot of theatrical openness. But he handles classical elements with a lot of enthusiasm. Remember his cheery *alaaps* in *Allah ke Bande*? He does an equally good job of the delicate *murkis* (tricky note clusters) in *Chhap Tilak*.

The first romantic number in the album, *Saiyaan*, is in the *Teri Deewani* mould, and carries the



Just out: (clockwise from top) Kailash Kher and his band experiment yet again; Jhoom Barabar Jhoom is full of bhangra sounds; and, *Agnee*'s music is brooding.

strong Sufi brand. So there's nothing really new here. But *Tere Naina* is a gently melodic song and Kher plays down his strong voice for the effect.

With *Jhoomo Re*, the band has proved that *Kailasa* was not a freak success. Here is some truly intelligent music, go for it.

Kailasa Jhoomo Re:
Sony BMG, Rs175.

Bhangra blowout

There is Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, there is Gulzar, there is Abhishek Bachchan with papa, there is director Shaad Ali, there is even Alisha Chinai. You cannot be blamed for hoping for a repeat of the musical riot of *Bunty aur Babli*. But does it happen? Not really. There was something distinct about each of B&B's tracks, but *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom*'s songs melt into each other and you wouldn't even notice. Maybe the movie demands it, maybe Yash Raj Films demands it, but the bhangra beat swamps the track (I'm inclined not to blame SEL).

Of the seven songs, only one does not go *dham-dham-dhak-dham*. The trio has proved in the

The instrument has a lovely melancholy sound and SEL has bravely woven it into the song. And how good it sounds.

Jhoom Barabar Jhoom:
Yash Raj Music, Rs149.

Fire and ice

Agni, as we know it, has been a fixture at the only two major rock events that Mumbai has—Mood Indigo at IIT, Powai, and Independence Rock.

Till 2004, when the band finally split up, you could spot a new vocalist or a new bass player every two years, but regulars at these two events could identify Agni's hard rock-meets-grunge sound. The Pune band is now back with a brand new avatar—as Agnee, and with a totally unrecognizable sound.

Agnee is Mohan (lead vocals, percussions and guitar), Arijit (lead vocals and guitar) and the old Agni member Koko (lead guitar and backing vocals). The album, called *Agnee*, packs in a variety of sounds—the old band's head-banging rock riffs, a bit of jazz notes, 1970s psychedelia (their tribute to Pink Floyd is obvious in a couple of songs) and Carnatic music. The result isn't exactly 'the new face of Indi-rock', as the cover proclaims, for quite a few Indian classical-Western rock fusion bands have come out of India and Pakistan. But the songs are remarkably fresh.

The album starts with *Sadho Re*, a haunting urban ballad that is an adaptation of a Kabir verse by lyricist Ashutosh (all the names credited in the album are strangely just first names). Mohan's Carnatic background shows and it goes seamlessly with Arijit and Koko's rock riffs. *Kabira* has a similar dark edge.

Thereafter, the album takes on a lighter, but reflective, character. *Shaam Tanha* and *Kuch Ankahee* are love songs with mediocre lyrics, but the jazz sound gives them their groove. Mohan's powerful vocals stand out among the rest of the voices. It ends with *The MTV Roadies Theme*, a humorous, upbeat track that just about picks you up. But the aftertaste of the album is its darkness. Overall, *Agnee* is a commendable debut.

Agnee:
Sony & BMG, Rs175

Malini Nair and Sanjukta Sharma. Respond to this review at lounge@livemint.com

past that it is very good at doing an intelligent job of the bhangra theme: *Mahi ve*, *Nach Baliye*, *Rock and Roll Soniye*, were huge hits. But how many ways can one do songs that go *rabba*, *shava*, *makhna*? This is not to say that the theme song will not be a big hit and will soon get remixed and played all over the place.

None of the other peppy numbers—*Kiss of Love* and *Ticket to Hollywood* (both bhangra)—come even this close to the anarchic and inspired *Kajra Re*. Even the fact that Gulzar merrily throws in lines like *Zameen se do inch oopar chalti ho* does not really help.

The only song that stands out is the sweet-sounding *Bol Na Halke Halke*. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan does a competent job of the romantic number with the very talented Mahalaxmi Iyer. Comparisons are odious, but it still doesn't measure up to *Chup Chup Ke* in B&B. But SEL deserve a big pat on the back for using the *sarangi* so effectively here. When was the last time we heard anyone use *sarangi* in a Hindi film since *kothas*, *mujras* and *ghazals* went out of fashion?