

## Rahul Guha Roy Revisits Folk Music from Africa to Indonesia

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Rahul Guha Roy. Photo: Another Creative Frontier Pictures

For all the raw anger and aggression that Rahul Guha Roy has exuded on Kolkata rock band Cassini's Division's favorites such as "Glow Worm" and "Story of My Life," there's a calmer, more poetic side to him as a solo artist. Roy kickstarted his solo career in 2013 once he released his debut album *Midnight Train*, which was recorded at Yash Raj Film studios in Mumbai. He says, "That was my first venture into what I do as a solo artist, which is mostly poetry-driven, country and folk rock music."

But for his next release, *Portraiture*, Roy went into the exact opposite direction, teaming up with Kolkata label Amuze Records to record his renditions of traditional folk songs from across the world, ranging from Swahili to Indonesian and American folk, including Bob Dylan and Shillong's oldest rocker, Lou Majaw. Roy has also added one original, an electric blues song called "Needy Blues." He says the album was put together after going through 25-30 different live recordings from his solo shows in Kolkata between 2014 and 2015 and at Amuze Records Studio late last year. Roy adds, "It's to give you a sense of the variety of music I perform. It's essentially a cover album with one original. It's my taste in music as a cover artist."

*Portraiture* is not just a regular old covers album, though. Roy adds an Indian touch to "Five Hundred Miles," referencing growing up in Shillong. The bouncy Swahili folk song "Ina Kupenda Sana" [which translates to 'I love you very much'] was something Roy heard when he moved to Tanzania with his family in the Eighties. Since most of the songs are taken from live recordings, improvisation is the key. Says Roy, "I wanted to avoid making the typical Indian pub rock band's albums, where they copy every song note for note and try very hard to sound like the original." Roy also covers Lou Majaw's "Come Home," which he says was prompted by the need to tell the world there was more to the Shillong veteran musician than just his energetic onstage personality.

Between gigs, Roy is a busy man – he travels to Shillong regularly to research and write what will become Lou Majaw's biography and has plans to record a second solo album of original material. While Cassini's Division's second album *Animal Wisdom* was recorded in 2014 <sup>[1]</sup>, he says it will release later this year. He says it might be their last album, with possible plans to disband. Roy adds, "I don't know if we'll be able to continue with Cassini's Division. Some of the other members are planning on shifting from Kolkata. If that happens, we'll disband, but if not, we'll continue to promote the second album."

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[1] *Animal Wisdom* was recorded in 2014: <http://rollingstoneindia.com/studio-cassinis-division/>

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