

I Biography & Exhibition

Gursharan Chana (Born Uganda, 1971), aka the Boy Chana

Born in Uganda, East Africa, the young 'Boy Chana' emigrated very early in his life due to the dictatorship of Idi Amin – an arrival that caused the death of hundreds of thousands of Ugandans. Initially the family were housed in an army campus in Gaydon near the picturesque English town of Leamington spa – a cultural shift by anyone's reckoning. However, they soon moved to Birmingham arriving in Lozells when the 'Boy Chana' was between 3 and 4 years old.

In an already culturally diverse community, the family were made welcome, as Chana recounts, "English people helped us a lot as my father was blind." He recalls street celebrations with the Queen's Silver Jubilee and Charles and Diana's wedding day. His family faced hardship however with the early death of one of his sisters, typical of the times, the information provided about her illness was patchy and the family received little support in coping with their loss.

His experiences of growing up in Birmingham were mixed, on the one side there was the sense of community found amongst local people, on the other side there was the prejudice experienced by many Asian migrants. Chana distinctly remembers National Front marches taking place, recalling how predictions suggested that one march would be of a particularly large scale, and people were advised to stay indoors. He remembers a real sense of feeling that they were going to be kicked out of the country. His response was to gather stones and hide up in the attic, looking back Chana comments, "it seems funny now but at that time we were determined that if the National Front was going to come up our street, we were going to defend ourselves – nor were we alone in feeling that way. As it was, we'd expected thousands of people and there were hardly any!"

This march happened shortly before his life changing experience with the Handsworth uprisings in 1985. Chana and his family were at the geographical heart of the uprisings. He experienced the sights, sounds and smells of these history-changing events in Birmingham. For Chana “the day started off like any other day, I went to the temple with my mother, but whilst there, we were told to stay there. In the end we stayed at the temple right through the night, till 5 or 6 in the morning when it had calmed down enough for us to go home. We could see the flames in the reflection of windows, and the services – fire, police, ambulance – were all stationed there, it was scary, we saw petrol bombs and fighting, in the temple there was such uncertainty – mainly about why it was happening.”

The following day, it continued, Chana was in his house and saw police involved in fighting, “I saw a rioter cutting a fire hose, and scuffles take place with the police, it was a scary time. I saw the debris afterwards, I saw how tired the police and firemen were and the damage that had been inflicted on the area, far worse than the physical damage was a crowd of Asian people gathering round the local post office – two people had been in the burnt down post office and they’d died. I was shocked that this could happen.”

Yet, he also comments that it was something which seemed as though it was just waiting to happen, “the police were constantly harassing people, although mainly African Caribbean people, and the National Front march had left its mark on the community, they were poorly served in terms of the services available and they were utterly disillusioned.” Unsurprisingly, the usual suspects – politicians – visited afterwards, Douglas Hurd was one of the un-welcomed guests, none of them had visited after the National Front march, it was unlikely that they were to be welcomed now. However, as Chana comments “we saw improvements immediately afterwards.”

Chana also saw, close to hand, as they used his family’s phone, shelter and facilities, the journalists recording, documenting, writing, and crucially,

photographing the stories unfolding before him. To an impressionable young man, they made a big impact – as had the difficulties endured by the police - and this set him out on a different life course, one documented in this exhibition. At this time, much of Boy Chana's cultural experiences had been based around the gurdwara, he was a frequent visitor, supporting his father, and remembers music being an integral part of temple visits.

The Boy Chana hadn't intended to become a photographer. He first picked up a camera at the age of 14, during GCSE photography. He'd grown up seeking the status of a job with the police force, along with the sense of being and belonging that he felt the job would bring him. For someone who had travelled continents before making his home in Birmingham, this wasn't so surprising. Instead, however, Chana chose to document the cultural changes he saw happening all around him, to photograph and to write, but also vitally, to experience for himself the music – bhangra – the events – daytimers - and the stories of his time.

His growing interest in art, music and culture, inspired him to look for magazines, papers, radio stations and events that brought him in touch with what was happening locally. To start with this was hard, the popular press weren't writing about Asian culture, and bhangra music was very much seen as being part of Asian culture. Finally, at 16, he came across 'Multimag' a locally produced magazine that looked at community awareness and health, but our fledgling journalist managed to persuade them to widen out and he began to write about local events and crucially, music. His writing developed alongside the popular press's interest in reaching out to Asian communities and he began to write for a magazine called 'Merivoli', or 'My Language.' Then, a year later, a new paper on the block caught his eye, and The Boy Chana began to write for Eastern Eye – a paper he carried on writing for right into the late 90's. He reviewed live events as well as singles, albums and gigs. Bhangra inspires considerable passion in its fans and some of 'Boy Chana's' reviews weren't too complimentary, on four occasions he received death threats for his less than flattering critical feedback.

Journalism wasn't an easy or obvious choice, and there weren't the routes of accessing the profession that there are now – especially not for a young Asian. Papers weren't interested in hearing about Asian culture and competition was fierce for the few papers that existed. However, Chana continued to write for a range of papers for many years, joining the National Union of Journalists. He also did some voluntary work at Pebble Mill, manning the phones for the Asian programmes Unit, on programmes such as 'Bollywood or Bust', but finally he had to start thinking about paid employment.

At the same time, Chana began to attend the new phenomena of 'Daytimers' – along the same lines as a club night but during the day! His first daytimer was at the exclusive venue of 'Bonkers', an event for which he skived off from school. The origins of daytimers began with large birthday parties. These were originally held in pubs, with young people bringing tapes, then their stereos and then as the events grew they moved to clubs. Chana had been a frequent visitor to the pubs, including well known venues such as The Farcroft and Red Cow. His first visit was at the ripe old age of 16 when, along with his brother, he went to see bands such as Golden Star, DCS, Heera and Alaap.

Musically, it was local boys Apna Sangeet and DCS, who were starting to fuse bhangra with rock, that inspired Chana. His first tapes were by DCS, '123 Go' and 'Shankum'. Sampling became increasingly popular as bands such as Pardesi were quickly followed up by new acts like Bally Sagoo. Chana wasn't alone in rating the new fusions that were opening up, producers were starting to search for new sounds and samples, exploring beatbox, and contemplating electric sampling, but always at the core was bhangra.

Daytimers were led by young Asian people looking for opportunities and spaces to celebrate and enjoy music that was never heard in clubs. Economics were also a key factor as it was far cheaper to use clubs during the day since regular

clubbers wouldn't dream of going to a club during the day! There were also more opportunities for Asian promoters new to the club scene. Chana recalls how one of the key spaces in the development of daytimers was Matthew Bolton College, since, without the involvement or interest of the local media, promoters relied on the college as a place to distribute information on events, daytimers, live bands and as a ticket outlet. The promoters there, Birmingham Posse Promotions, better known as BP Promotions, were vital in promoting events that lived through word of mouth contacts.

For Chana, these first daytimer events were awe-inspiring. As he recalls, "at that time it was amazing to see so many Asian kids in one area and in a nightclub! It was an entirely new experience, bringing for many a real sense of belonging, the buzz of being there was sufficient." Chana had found the sense of belonging that he had, at one time, looked to the police force for. He wanted to do more than simply partake of this heady time however, so he began to photograph - the people, the places, the scenes, the sights and with it, the atmosphere. For the first time, clubs were filled with young Asians in both Western and traditional club wear – only this included lengha, shalwar kameez and even sari's dancing next to tight jeans, flares and batwing tops!

It wasn't just dress style that was a changing arena ... the moves were crucial and our boy was equally into the dancing. His moves, to Naramjayee by Golden Star, won him a dance competition at the Dome, where he was awarded his prize by the renown Malkit Singh co-presented by the rising BBC reporter Anita Bhalla.

Liking what he experienced, The Boy Chana sought to engage far more than simply attending the events. Joining forces with three other emerging DJ's they each put £100 towards lights, decks and crucially, records. Their first stop was Don Christie's record shop, long since replaced by the Bull Ring, where they bought a mix of Reggae and R & B as well as bhangra sourced from local shops. So the Boy Chana began to DJ, first of all at school discos but later at a number

of club events. At his first big event, at The Hummingbird, he started out with between 100 to 150 people, by the end of the night there were between 600 and 700 people on the dance floor. Bhangra had finally found an outlet.

So, you're probably asking, where did the name 'Boy Chana' come from? The boy explains, "I was bit zany when I was young, into Jean-Paul Gautier style clothing, I had a Black Levi jacket that I wore with added Jean-Paul Gautier style. I needed a DJ name and this jacket had 'Boy' on the back so, partly because of 'Boy George' being about at the time – with his own distinct style – the name 'Boy Chana' came about."

As his Djing progressed, Chana moved into radio, playing out on Buzz FM, now called Galaxy, he worked nights from 2 till 6am, playing a range of music that always included Bhangra. The djing took a new twist when he started to play for the new Asian Radio on the block, Radio XL in the early 90's, the first local radio station to transmit in Punjabi. On his first day he played music for one hour solid, of this time he comments, "I was too scared to speak till the station director suggested it might be an idea to talk on the airwaves!"

Sadly, daytimers came with their own difficulties, being held during the day meant that young people were missing school and college to attend. There were also frictions between groups, erupting into violence based on religion and territory – both geographical and female. The Sikh's from Handsworth formed the 'Shere Punjab' gang, whilst Muslims took ownership of Aston with the Panthers – the gangs existing today came a long time after these groups existed. For our man, however, the gangs held no attraction – it was always about the music.

Ultimately, pressure was put on the live acts to stay away, the pressures frequently coming from places of worship. Religious elders from a range of religions and places of worship visited daytimers, along with local authority

officers and the growing issue of daytimers even became a subject for the mainstream media, such as with Ed Doolan's radio programme. The backlash reached a peak in the late 80's and early 90's that saw daytimers gradually dying out and slowly being replaced by night time events. Yet, for the Boy Chana, these would never incite the excitement that those original events held. He comments, "whilst I'm aware of the club nights that happen it does feel as if much of the honesty and passion from going to a bhangra gig has been lost. Promoters are no longer so interested in the music – and the realisation that a space for playing bhangra can be created – as they are interested in the money."

Today, 'Boy Chana' no longer Dj's or writes professionally, but continues to be interested in the Bhangra scene. As Chana comments "now a new generation of Dj's have come up that are playing at weddings, mixing new styles and moving bhangra on, but I'll always be glad – and excited – about that period of time, there was an energy and originality to it that young people don't have today."

Chana's role in the emergence of bhangra and the role played by Birmingham's clubs, pubs, producers, artists and audiences is one explored through this exhibition. As Chana comments:

"I'm proud to have represented Bhangra music over this time and thrilled to be able to show you some of the incredible people who persevered to make Bhangra the music that we now know. For so many people, Bhangra has become music for the people of the world, a unifying, creative, musical force.

I started to deejay in the late 80's, and first played out at family functions in 1987. Soon after that I helped out a friend at a Birthday party at the legendary Birmingham club, The Hummingbird, a birthday party for 50 people. Once word got out, it turned into a daytimer, with hundreds of people, this became the first of many events where I dj'd.

I've never stopped collecting music as well as insisting that family and friends listen to the latest sounds, the oldest tunes and the best melodies!

This collection shows just a small fraction of the photographs and memorabilia that have been collected from the 70's right up until today. I hope that you can experience the passion that Bhangra inspired from people right from the 70's through into the 80's, as well as the impact it made on mainstream music in the 90's.

This exhibition also hopes to remember many of the people who were invisible in mainstream music, yet consistently worked to profile bhangra, the people, the culture, but most importantly the sounds. I'm delighted that the routes of bhangra, as well as the roots of bhangra, have grown stronger with every Bhangra Top Ten chart hit, because of this I very much hope that this exhibition goes some way to ensuring that we never forget those roots, or the routes that musical pioneers took to plant the seeds."

The 'Boy Chana' writes

My journalism career started by a chance meeting with an old school friend at the first Nottingham mela and I became the first ever male to celebrate British made Bhangra music in 1988.

Prior to that I was slowly moving up the ladder as a local deejay with my own roadshow. This had an amazing impact on my life as I was living the dream that I thought couldn't be lived.

Playing music for people and promoting music for people in a land that had recently been rocked by the worst 'race' riots it had ever seen.

I stayed at home because the Midlands were booming, with new talent and innovations. Soon London based bands started to travel up the M6 as the Midlands claimed bhangra supremacy. Whilst London was the start of Punjabi Pop, Bhangra music established itself from the roots of Punjabi folk being played out in the many pubs of Birmingham.

One of the most lasting memories I have is turning up with a bag of cassettes - as cassettes it was in those days - to play music for a friend's Birthday party in the Hummingbird. At midnight it was a birthday party for 50 people, by 1pm there was no room on the dance floor as the club was heaving, a crucial reason why I continued to be a dj - to enjoy people 'having it large' from the adrenalin of music.

Another lasting memory is of the first time I walked into the Dome nightclub in Birmingham. I saw crowds of people in the dome's spherical dance floor and it blew me away. What made it even more awe-inspiring was that they were dancing, in every conceivable space, to live Bhangra music. Bhangra had arrived and has proven that it is here to stay - it can never be beaten!

Ends

Exhibition Labels

"Boy Chana"

"We used to call him 'Hoi! Chana' – he just loves his Bhangra" Ammo Talwar, Punch Records

Born in Uganda, the three-month-old **Gursharan Chana** came to Handsworth in 1972. After a brief stopover at a resettlement camp near Leamington Spa, it was in Lozells, Birmingham that "Boy Chana" found his home. Soho Road was the centre of family life for many, and it was in this already diverse community that his family was made welcome. Gursharan recounts; "Most English people we met were helpful, and we appreciated it; our father was blind." Like many of that generation he has vivid recollections of street parties, both for the Queen's Silver Jubilee and Charles and Diana's wedding. His family faced more hardship with the early death of a sister, and now he saw another side of England; bureaucratic, disengaged and officious. The young Gursharan saw his future self as a police officer, redressing the balance and helping local people.

His aspirations changed with the Handsworth riots in 1985. Gursharan and his family were at the geographical heart of the uprising. In the unprecedented media attention his house soon became a base for journalists, using the family phone and facilities to record, document and dispatch their stories. Gursharan had never imagined the possibility of a career in journalism – he had first picked up a camera at the age of 14 for GCSE photography classes. Compulsively and perhaps idealistically, Gursharan began to document the cultural and social changes happening around him through his own photography and writing. At this time he became associated with the rise of Bhangra music as he documented for the first time the stories and personalities behind the new sound, his **Boy Chana** byline appeared first with **Multi Mag** in 1987, and then at **Eastern Eye** the following year. Pirate radio work in 1988 became legitimate on **Radio XL** after six years. Gursharan's writing developed alongside the popular press' growing

interest in British Asian culture, and he began to write for a magazine called **Meri Boli**. (*My Language*) A year later, a new publication caught his eye, and Gursharan began to write for **Eastern Eye** – a paper he continued a relationship with into the late 1990's.

This exhibition is drawn from his archives, his experiences and his relationships with the founders of Bhangra music and dance.

From Soho Road...

"If you go to India and you say; 'Soho Road', they still know our music there today" Ravi Singh, local retailer.

Handsworth was almost unique in Birmingham in the 1970s; it still had plenty of semi skilled work to offer to those who wanted it; it least if you wanted to work hard. Handsworth - part of Staffordshire until 1911 – was an unremarkable village until 1764 when **Matthew Boulton** - an associate of James Watt - set up the Soho Manufactory on the Heath. Boulton was an entrepreneur, and something of an intellectual and an inventor. Coins, plated metal and steam engines were soon making their way from Soho to customers across the globe.

In its day the **Soho Manufactory** was the biggest in the world, and it was an holistic enterprise, not unlike the Cadbury's Bournbrook project over a hundred years later. Businessmen crossed Europe to see it. The site was landscaped and accommodation was built to house factory workers. In 1851, there were over six thousand people living in the fledgling township and by 1911 there were nearly seventy thousand. The fortunes of the business declined, however, leaving only Boulton's home on Soho Avenue and a variety of metal pressing business and foundries as its legacy.

European refugees and young men and women from the Caribbean Islands arrived during the Second World War, assembling armaments and munitions.

They found the grand houses near the Soho Road empty; many of Birmingham's rich and prosperous had fled the city fearing bombing. With Irish and other working class white communities already well represented, Handsworth and Lozells were vibrant with forthright, hardy and hard working communities by the time new migrants came in the 1960's. Boy Chana was one of these – predominantly Sikh and mostly already at a remove from their homeland, they carried its music in their hearts and heads. Steadily the landscape began to change; community centres, temples and late night music, dance and drinking venues appeared. The Soho Road became ablaze with brightly coloured fruit and vegetables from “the old countries” – which at that time no supermarket had any interest in stocking. The future sound of Handsworth was being born.

... To the Punjab

“My inspiration is the soil” Bhagat Singh, freedom fighter

Bhangra is a drum-driven dance music that originated in India. At least six hundred years after Punjabis distilled it from other Asiatic dance forms such as Kathak, young Asians in Handsworth would turn it into a transnational sound that would reach all the way back to the land of its origin. The Punjab is fertile farming country whose name means, “*Land of the Five Rivers*”, but for many periods in its history much of it has been divided between other political entities.

Regardless, Punjabis have a robust sense of cultural identity which, like that of other divided peoples carries itself with pride all over the world. Many - but not all - Punjabis are **Sikh**, following the syncretistic and holistic teachings of Guru Nanak who founded their religion about five hundred years ago. The Sikh way of life became more martial and self aware in response to political and military pressure in the 17th century but retained its egalitarian and practical outlook. In the 20th century, hard work, hard play and dedication to the family are virtues which served many Punjabis equally well in the British Armed Forces or at colonial trade outposts and they carried their music with them.

Punjabi folk celebration and dance, which gave rise to Bhangra, centres around harvest festival celebrations in April. The term “Bhangra” embraces a series of these folk dances including **Jhumar**, **Luddi**, **Julli**, **Daankara**, **Dhamal**, **Saami**, **Kikli**, and **Gatka**. Bhangra is the masculine type; women have a no less energetic and lively form called **Giddha**. The **dhol** is the drum that drives the dancers, played by at least one person. Others may play the flute, the smaller **dholak** drum, or the **vaja** (*harmonium*). A dhol is made from a section of tree, usually with the smaller dholak and **tabla** being cut from inside it, and traditionally finished with goatskin drumheads. The dhol is a slender barrel, double sided and capable of both bass and treble voices. It is usually worn like a guitar from a strap over the shoulder, allowing movement, and beaten with a cane for the treble end and a distinctive bent wooden stick for the bass (See Educational Resources Section for more information). In Handsworth, electric instruments would later be added to the Bhangra sound.

Foundry Worker, Bhangra Star!

“Youngsters, they need to know the words of our Bhangra – they can only better themselves” Gurcharan Mall, “Dhol Blasters”

The larger combined local community was the incubator for the Birmingham Bhangra development. Handsworth consisted of very tightly knit communities that wove around each other in daily life. From outside it might have given the appearance of a melting pot, but in reality each community ran on fixed rails that only now are starting to fuse together. Each shared all of the very working class facilities that Handsworth had to offer – such as pubs – by using them at different times or meeting up in different rooms. Nevertheless over the years each community exerted a kind of cultural gravity that influenced the dress, the language and music of its neighbours. It was this new blend that would come to reinvigorate Bhangra music globally.

It was natural to Punjabis that after a day sweating in the foundry a man should pass the evening singing and playing well-remembered songs by **Surinder Kaur**, **Gurdass Mann** or **Kuldip Manak**. Initially “music from home” was part of the cultural support network that Punjabis developed for themselves; amateur sessions at local temples such as the second Sikh temple in Britain, the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, which opened in Smethwick in 1962. More joyful occasions such as parties and wedding receptions were held initially at the local hall or temple. As these became established they grew to pack out a network of local pubs – including the Red Cow, the Red Lion and the Farcroft. These key venues in the “north west corridor” of Birmingham were known to the Bhangra faithful by alternative Punjabi names, and became the launch pad for bands such as **Bhujangy** and **Anari Sangeet**, who helped lay the foundation of the UK Bhangra scene. Balbir and Dalbir Singh’s Bhujangy were seen as innovators, recording since 1967 and are today the longest running Bhangra act. Anari Sangeet ‘s seminal 'Mere Lus Lus' was considered risqué at the time, but its traditional handling gave it wide appeal.

The Bhangra Business

“Through the Bhangra we wanted to tell our story, what was really happening, in song” Tarlochan Singh Bilga, Golden Star

Responding to demand, local entrepreneurs set up labels - prominent amongst these being the **Oriental Star Agency** on Moseley Road - initially licensing compilations of Punjabi music from abroad. As the UK scene matured they were in a position to sign the first, self financed UK Bhangra artists. These bands were getting themselves recorded at local studios such as **Zella** in Edgbaston and then selling their own seven-inch records through local pubs. The new entrepreneurs were able to mass market these recordings on cassette, which found ready distribution through a network of local electrical shops. Later West

Midlands successes included **Panjabi MC** from **Nachural Records** of Ladypool Road and **Surjit Bindrakhia**, brought to the UK by **Roma Music Bank** in Handsworth

A national success story and pioneer, Oriental Star Agencies was established in 1966 by Ayub Khan in a small shop selling transistor radios. Sensing the potential demand he approached EMI in London to license and import Indian and Pakistani records; the success was immediate. In 1969 Oriental Star moved beyond wholesaling records and signed local heroes **Anari Sangeet** and **Bhujangy**. Anari Sangeet's "Mere Lus Lus Karde Ang Nee" was a big seller in Asian communities across the UK. Bhujangy's "Bhabiye Akh Larr Gayee," which was released in the early seventies, was the first recording in which modern western musical instruments were used alongside traditional Asian music and sounds. In a recent Sunday Times poll of the "One Thousand Top Music Makers of All Time", only four were from the Indian subcontinent. Two of these, **Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan** and **Bally Sagoo**, were released at one time or another on the Oriental Star label. As the Bhangra scene matured, artists looked for labels with multinational backing; **Apache Indian** signed to Island, the label that brought Bob Marley to the world. The entrepreneurs who had backed Bhangra with their cash began to consolidate their businesses, **Multitone** Records, one of the major recording labels associated with Bhangra in the eighties and nineties, was bought by the huge BMG group.

Pump up the Bhangra!

"We have to change, but we can change slowly" - Tarlochan Singh Bilga, Golden Star

With tapes available in the high street, Bhangra now found its place in the home; many interviewed for this exhibition recall "Dad's Bhangra tapes" next to "Mom's Hindi songs" in the living room. With an audience receptive to such innovation,

Bhujangy and **Saathies** began to further explore the use of western instruments, principally guitars, in their music. The genuine fusion of Bhangra with rock came from local band **DCS**; the first tape Boy Chana owned was 'Teri Shaun' by **DCS**. The willingness to experiment that these musicians evidenced was backed up by their confidence and acceptance as a visible – and audible – community on the streets of Handsworth. Apna Sangeet 's "Mera Yaar Vajaye Dho" and "Soho Road Utey" were hugely successful. **Chirag Pehchan's** notorious dance along classic "Rail Gaddi" has become a wedding anthem. **Mick St Clair** took the music onto the streets; emulating the reggae sound systems with transnational cultural appeal.

Outside of Birmingham, maverick London producer **Deepak Khazanchi** successfully mixed Western drums and synthesizers with traditional Punjabi instruments. Another successful performer drawn to the area was **Malkit Singh**. Born in India, "The Golden Voice of the Punjab" became a worldwide star after his first, Punjabi recorded, album. Malkit and his band decided to move to the UK to further their careers, and signed to Oriental Star.

This confident, professionally produced Bhangra sound became very popular with the first generation of Asians to be born and educated in the UK, now attending university or college and many living away from home. This was the music they took with them and shared with the people they met – many of whom were Asians from different classes, castes, cultures and faiths. This mixing, particularly with the East London Asian underground that brought forward more cerebral artists like **Talvin Singh** would affect the later development of Bhangra.

Bhangramuffin Beats

"We wanted the traditional mixed up with the modern" Amarjit Sidhu, Asian Pop Awards promoter

Asian youth in Handsworth was now confident both with its own identity and its maturity in appropriating elements from the wider cultural mix. This confidence and willingness to take risks was one of the reasons Bhangra moved forward in Handsworth rather than elsewhere in the UK. At this time Boy Chana was engaging with the music and the Bhangra scene on a deeper level, He became one of the first professional Bhangra DJs; starting at school discos and later moving on to big club events. His first major event was at **The Hummingbird** nightclub, Dale End, and he recalls that at the end of the evening there were nearly seven hundred people on the dance floor. Indeed, at that time capacity regulations for many of the venues seem to have been taken as guidelines only; frequent ticket piracy meant that hundreds of extra “Bhangramuffins” would turn up by the end of the night.

In playing and recording Bhangra music, **DCS**, **Pardesi** and **Achanak** carried on the innovations within the sound, bringing in elaborate stage presentations, modern keyboards and truly fusing together musical styles for the first time. Bhangra music now reached a broader Asian audience through local community radio such as Radio XL - the first local radio station to transmit in Punjabi – where Boy Chana worked until 1992, On his first day he played records for a solid hour – too scared to speak to the unprecedented audience. Bhangra style was photographed and on show in the lively new Asian media such as Eastern Eye. National Asian music awards ceremonies held in Birmingham recognised London bands **Alaap** and **Heera** along with Handsworth stalwarts such as DCS and TSB. This was a unique forum where Bhangra musicians and the emergent entrepreneurs behind them were able to take themselves seriously for the first time. Meanwhile, the Asian youth who were deep in the Bhangra scene now had expectations and experiences that the industry professionals hadn’t had; it would be their generation, and iconoclastic “Bhangramuffins” like Apache Indian who would take the next step.

The Future Sound of Bhangra.

“We need to come back to the song writing and the playing – real music”

Apache Indian

In the late 1990's, **Safri Boyz**, **Malkit Singh** and other Bhangra mainstays made determined efforts to find lasting success outside the Asian music scene. Many felt it was only a matter of time; and when it came the breakthrough was from Handsworth - **Apache Indian**. His music and image had the freshness, style and cross-cultural appeal to open up the mainstream UK charts to Asian artists for the first time. British Bhangra was by this time influencing Punjabi communities across the world, particularly in Canada and the USA. Simultaneously a new generation of US musicians was seeking to draw from sources beyond funk and R&B. Beats and rhythms sampled from Eastern musical traditions sounded new, and the driving dance drums of Bhangra were an inspired choice. When US producers **Timbaland** and **Dr. Dre** reused beats from the Bhangra scene, this moment had arrived. Within months, dozens of mainstream acts such as Missy Elliot, Britney Spears and Craig David wanted Bhangra beats or a “Bhangra style” club remix. Not only did this establish Bhangra as a valid youth music tradition in Western eyes, to Asian youth this outside acceptance made it a credible contender, and the records that had been sampled now began to sell in large quantities.

Asian artists such as **Punjabi MC**, **Dr Zeus** and the **Punjabi Hit Squad** were not slow to use samples themselves, either from Western music or from well-known Bhangra mainstays. This had been introduced and made acceptable by popular bands such as **Pardesi** and quickly followed up by the next wave of new acts like **Bally Sagoo**. However, the emphasis on artificially created beats has moved the focus of Bhangra music making into the studio. Many commentators feel that the heart of Bhangra is in the live performance and this essence risks being eclipsed again.

The future may lie with successful leftfield Asian super club collectives like Birmingham based **Shaanti**. These are the young Asian men and women who studied away from home and have now returned as cultural amateurs. While away they immersed themselves in other styles and traditions of progressive Asian music as well as the contemporary influences of Hip Hop and R'n'B. They have a more holistic approach to culture clash, to technology and to the playful use of the media that may well open the next door for Bhangra.

Daytimers

“It wasn’t right to bunk off school or college, but the worst that would happen was that you might drink!” Ravi Singh, local retailer

A unique and pioneering facet of the Bhangra scene was the **Daytimer**. Analogous to live events in Northern Soul or Chicago House, Daytimers were the response by Asian youth whose music was ignored by both the UK "mainstream" and the "underground" - they would do it for themselves. Promoters like **Chahalco** and **B.P** found that clubs were cheap and partygoers were available during the day, so thousands packed large Birmingham venues such as **The Hummingbird** and **The Dome**. These events brought young Asians and others together from across the country, and created lucrative opportunities for DJs, bands and organisers. One of the key links in the chain was the local **Matthew Boulton College**, which local promoters relied on both to distribute information and to sell tickets.

For Boy Chana, these first daytimer events were awe-inspiring. As he recalls, “At that time it was amazing to see so many Asian kids in one area and in a nightclub! It was an entirely new experience, bringing for many a real sense of belonging, the buzz of being there was sufficient.” Boy Chana was among the few who photographed "western" clubs filled for the first time with young Asians, dressed in a mix of lenghas, shalwar kameez, sari's, 501 jeans, flares and batwing tops.

Daytimers came with their own difficulties; young people were apt to miss school and college to attend. Temples and community leaders would frequently put pressure upon live acts to stay away and some elders even visited clubs, along with Council officials, to help the youth prioritise their education. This backlash reached its peak in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Daytimers began to gradually die out and were replaced by nighttime events as attendees got older and expectations changed. For Boy Chana and others like him, these new events would never quite match the excitement of the original scene; to them much of the honesty and passion inherent in a Bhangra gig has been lost. Promoters no longer need to struggle to create a time and a space for Bhangra, and many pioneers feel those unique days will not return

Chak de Phathey ! (Rock the House !)

“There was this one guy, man, used to wave a sword in the middle of the dance floor. Nobody ever arrested him. Don't know why, he was a lunatic”
Reno Rehman, promoter

Bhangra is a joyful party music, sung in an energetic and fierce manner to a persuasive rhythm accompaniment. It is very far removed from the complex sitar pieces often associated with India. Ironically these sounds were reaching an elite audience in the UK through the Beatles "Sergeant Pepper" album just as the authentic article was establishing itself in Handsworth. Despite its seeming simplicity, however, Bhangra is rich with subtleties and permutations. Punjabi lyrics may sound exotic to the Western ear but usually recount universal if old-fashioned themes; love, loss, beautiful ladies and having a wild time. More traditional pieces recount the exploits of folk heroes such as **Udham Singh** and **Bhagat Singh** (See also Chronological section).

Dance is integral to Bhangra, and dancers will typically add their own vocal effects such as "**Balle Balle**" and "**Hoi Hoi**" while they participate. Bhangra dancing ranges from the simple repetition of well known variations to elaborate competitive performances by organised teams, often in full folk costume. Traditionally, male Bhangra dancers and players wear **lunghas** - a colourful piece of cloth - wrapped around the waist. Men also may wear a **kurta**, the long Punjabi-style shirt. Typically they may also wear the iconic Sikh turban. Women commonly wear the traditional Punjabi dress, **shalwar kameez** - a long colourful shirt and full, light trousers. Women may also wear **duppattas**, colorful pieces of cloth around the head.

Teams compete in Bhangra competitions for trophies or prize money. Previously a fixture in the Punjab, Bhangra dance competitions have spread very successfully to universities in North America and Canada, as well as at community centres in the UK. Birmingham has its own Bhangra dancing world champions; Gurcharan Mall's **Nachda Sansaar** team returned from Chicago with the World Bhangra Dance trophy for the second year running, Boy Chana himself won a local dance competition held at The Powerhouse in 1989. Punjabi expatriates in America have also started to market Bhangra as a kind of keep fit dance aerobics. Whatever it may become and wherever it is played and enjoyed, however, Bhangra will always remain a powerful, popular dance music.