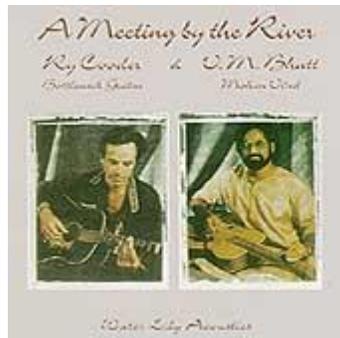


# Rolling Stone



## Ry Cooder

A Meeting By The River

RS: 4 of 5 Stars Average User Rating: 5 of 5 Stars

1993

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East-meets-west musical experiments have often been doomed to failure, foiled by good intentions gone awry. Attempts at synthesizing Western music's linear qualities with the more ethereal stuff of North Indian classical traditions can result in cultural collision rather than collusion. And that lack of worthy precedents is partly what makes *A Meeting by the River* such a remarkable and ear-opening piece of music making.

Ry Cooder's bone-deep sense of Americana has never kept him from outside ethnic influences. When he heard a Water Lily Acoustics recording of V.M. Bhatt's haunting playing on the *Mohan vina* – an expanded slide-guitar-like instrument of Bhatt's own invention – Cooder heard a potential for collaboration that couldn't be ignored. The similarities and differences of approach to their related instruments, based on the microtonal palette of the slide guitar, add up to a world-music stew that blends references from Delta blues to New Delhi.

Joined by tabla player Sukhvinder Singh Namdhari and by Ry's son Joachim on the *dumbek* (a Middle Eastern drum), the two slide players explore a surprising common ground. They get along famously, strangers turned to instant friends by a shared language. Cooder and Bhatt meet halfway without mimicking each other's traditions. Bhatt's is a virtuoso, highly nuanced style of slide playing, whereas Cooder works in the loose-jointed, slip 'n' slide tricks of the bottleneck-blues trade. Though the album's four tracks clock in at just under forty minutes, the project has an expansive feel, covering a spacious musical landscape.

The title track is a kind of celebratory major-mode fanfare. "Longing" has the yearning and sweet sadness of Indian classical music, while "Ganges Delta Blues," as the sly title implies, is

two-thirds American grit, one-third Indian stateliness. "Isa Lei," the only piece not written by the players, closes the set on a note of calm resolution.

*A Meeting by the River* represents a tone-poem side of Cooder not heard on a recording since his music for the soundtrack to *Paris, Texas*. More important are the album's sonic and symbolic pleasures. The merger of these players, from two very different corners of the globe, unfolds as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

*A Meeting by the River* is available from Water Lily Acoustics, P.O. Box 91448, Santa Barbara, CA 93190. (RS 656)

JOSEF WOODARD

(Posted: May 13, 1993)