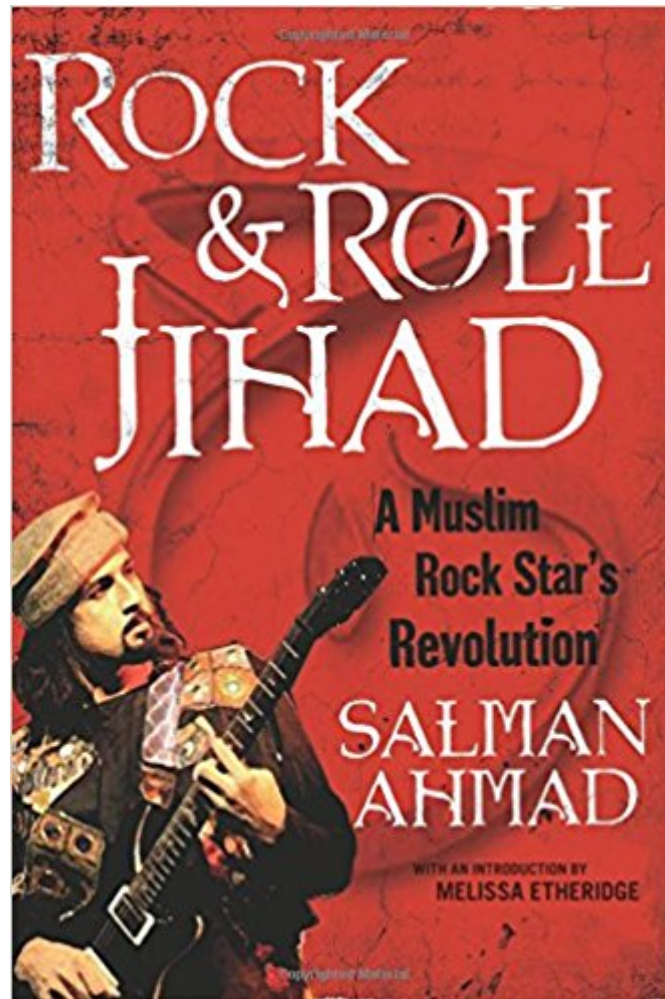


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# Rock & Roll Jihad: A Muslim Rock Star's Revolution



## Synopsis

"The story you are about to read is the story of a light-bringer....Salman Ahmad inspires me to reach always for the greatest heights and never to fear....Know that his story is a part of our history." -- Melissa Etheridge, from the Introduction

With 30 million record sales under his belt, and with fans including Bono and Al Gore, Pakistanborn Salman Ahmad is renowned for being the first rock & roll star to destroy the wall that divides the West and the Muslim world. *Rock & Roll Jihad* is the story of his incredible journey. Facing down angry mullahs and oppressive dictators who wanted all music to be banned from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Salman Ahmad rocketed to the top of the music charts, bringing Westernstyle rock and pop to Pakistani teenagers for the first time. His band Junoon became the U2 of Asia, a sufi - rock group that broke boundaries and sold a record number of albums. But Salman's story began in New York, where he spent his teen years learning to play guitar, listening to Led Zeppelin, hanging out at rock clubs and Beatles Fests, making American friends, and dreaming of rock-star fame. That dream seemed destined to die when his family returned to Pakistan and Salman was forced to follow the strictures of a newly religious -- and stratified -- society. He finished medical school, met his soul mate, and watched his beloved funkytown of Lahore transform with the rest of Pakistan under the rule of Zia into a fundamentalist dictatorship: morality police arrested couples holding hands in public, *Little House on the Prairie* and *Live Aid* were banned from television broadcasts, and Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers proliferated on college campuses via the Afghani resistance to Soviet occupation in the north. Undeterred, the teenage Salman created his own underground jihad: his mission was to bring his beloved rock music to an enthusiastic new audience in South Asia and beyond. He started a traveling guitar club that met in private Lahore spaces, mixing Urdu love poems with Casio synthesizers, tablas with Fender Stratocasters, and ragas with power chords, eventually joining his first pop band, *Vital Signs*. Later, he founded Junoon, South Asia's biggest rock band, which was followed to every corner of the world by a loyal legion of fans called Junoonis. As his music climbed the charts, Salman found himself the target of religious fanatics and power-mad politicians desperate to take him and his band down. But in the center of a new generation of young Pakistanis who go to mosques as well as McDonald's, whose religion gives them compassion for and not fear of the West, and who see modern music as a "rainbow bridge" that links their lives to the rest of the world, nothing could stop Salman's star from rising. Today, Salman continues to play music and is also a UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador, traveling the world as a spokesperson and using the lessons he learned as a musical pioneer to help heal the wounds between East and West -- lessons he shares in this illuminating memoir. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this

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## Customer Reviews

Having grown up listening to this band with its inspiring, upbeat and revolutionary lyrics that tore down the walls of bigotry, hate and racism; I could ostensibly relate parts of it to my own life. An author who sought inspiration from some musical icons in not just the west, but the east created a unique blend of music - which soon became his trademark signature style proved that by doing so he could transcend beyond music and bridge the opposites; be it culture, traditions, religions, nations or races. The book is also a classic tale of a heroic struggle against all odds, for this band unlike many spoon fed bands in the west, was confronted with a dictatorship that abhorred freedom through musical lyrics, powerful religious elements that worked to quell musical/melodic expression, and lack of tools for mass dissemination. Yet, Salman Ahmad's band Junoon rose to new heights and became South Asia's leading rock band. The band incorporated Western Rock, yet never let go of its roots and paid homage to mystic Sufi poets. This book is also a recommended read for people in the west who wish to understand how moderate Muslims adhere to a softer side of Islam, which they believe is the true face of their religion. There is absolutely no room for religious intolerance, violence, and extremism in the true meaning of Islam. Salman engages in challenging spiritual, mental and physical journeys to distinguish the true side of Islam (a religion which literally means peace), from the side that was created as a result of the perception of a religion that was hijacked on Sept 11th 2009 by fanatics and hate mongers. At the same time, he draws parallels and debates

on western talk shows with heavyweight stalwarts such as Bill Mahr on his critically acclaimed show "Politically Incorrect".

While we may not see it easily, the world is in a constant and irreversible state of change--sometimes seemingly for the better, sometimes seemingly for the worse. This is also true in the relationship between east and west. While news of new Taliban suicide bombings in Pakistan and Afghanistan may not seem like the situation is changing for the better, it is on the sidelines. By "sidelines" we mean cross-cultural exchanges and explorations in areas of music and the other arts where the people--and not their governments--come together. Evidence of this change exists in our friend Salman Ahmad, a Pakistan-born Sufi Muslim rock star, who has sold more than 30 million albums with his band Junoon, which the New York Times called, "the U2 of South Asia". Although Junoon's line-up has changed, Salman continues to tour with his new band mates. In mid-January, Salman released his autobiography, *Rock & Roll Jihad*, published by Simon and Schuster, a well-written and enjoyable book which I, Deepak, had the pleasure and privilege to write the back cover notes for. Last September 12th we held the Concert for Pakistan at the UN, Salman's second concert held inside the UN General Assembly Hall. The first concert Salman held inside that prestigious world body was on UN Day in late October 2001, barely six weeks after the tragedy of September 11th. Salman holds the distinction of being the first--and possibly only--rock musician ever to hold a rock concert inside the space where Colin Powell told the world that Saddam Hussein was aiding Al Qaeda, and where Hugo Chavez "smelled the sulfur" of that ol' Diablo, George Bush.

For nearly two decades, Salman Ahmad and his band Junoon have been viewed by critics and fans alike as the "Beatles of South Asia". While not widely known (yet) here in the United States, Junoon has sold 30 million albums worldwide, having amassed a fan base of admirers that includes Melissa Etheridge, Mick Jagger, and Al Gore. Ahmad's newly released autobiography, *Rock & Roll Jihad: A Muslim Rock Star's Revolution*, documents Salman's serendipitous rise from humble beginnings to super-stardom. As a young teenager growing up in Tappan, New York, Ahmad soaks up American culture and is musically and socially affected by an eclectic cast of characters from diverse backgrounds who become his closest friends and influences. Among these are a religious Irish-Catholic guitar-player (Brian O'Connell); a precocious 13-year old with an appreciation for Islamic culture who forms a Beatles tribute band; a teenage Woodstock throwback who keeps kosher; and a pretty Homecoming Princess with whom Salman becomes smitten. Preferring to actively join his friends in their musical endeavors and garage bands rather than play the role of a

musical spectator, he buys his first electric guitar in 1978-- a Les Paul purchased in Paramus, New Jersey-- and starts to play. As the shy Salman proceeds through his high school years, he gains more and more confidence, surpassing his mentors and garage band mates in musicianship and instrumental skill in ways that he could never have imagined possible. His leit motif of bringing people together becomes the new mantra for his musical and spiritual life. Upon his return to Pakistan after graduating from high school, Salman is faced with a nation and community on the verge of a breakdown.

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