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## Vijay Iyer Biography

“By now, there can be no doubt that pianist-composer Iyer stands among the most daringly original jazz artists of the under-40 generation,” writes Howard Reich in the *Chicago Tribune*. The American-born son of Indian immigrants, **VIJAY IYER** (pronounced “VID-jay EYE-yer”) was described by *The Village Voice* as “the most commanding pianist and composer to emerge in recent years,” by *The New Yorker* as one of “today’s most important pianists... extravagantly gifted,” and by the *L.A. Weekly* as “a boundless and deeply important young star.” In the **2010 Jazz Awards**, the Jazz Journalists Association voted Iyer **Musician of the Year**, an honor previously given to Herbie Hancock, Ornette Coleman, Wayne Shorter, and Dave Holland.

Iyer’s fourteen recordings have covered so much ground at such a high level of acclaim that it is easy to forget that they all belong to the same person. **In August 2010 he released *Solo***, his most personal statement yet, a kaleidoscopic piano album on the German label ACT: “Bursting with both emotion and intelligence... a dispatch from the vibrant forefront of jazz.” (*Utne Reader*) Iyer’s previous release, ***Historicity*** (ACT), a piano-trio set of originals and surprising covers in his signature style, “became one of the decade’s landmark jazz albums. *Historicity* was chosen as **THE #1 JAZZ ALBUM OF THE YEAR** by the *Downbeat* International Critics Poll, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Detroit Metro Times*, National Public Radio, PopMatters.com, and the *Village Voice* Jazz Critics Poll, and it reached #1 on the CMJ jazz radio charts. The Vijay Iyer Trio went on to win the **2010 Echo Jazz Award** (the “German Grammy”) for best international ensemble and the 2010 *Downbeat* Critics Poll for rising star jazz group. “Presto! Here is the great new jazz piano trio.” (*New York Times*) “Truly astonishing... they make challenging music sound immediately enjoyable.” (National Public Radio) “A jewel... 9 out of 10” (PopMatters.com)

Over the previous ten years, Iyer’s celebrated quartet featuring award-winning saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa mined “the magical and murky, imagined interzone, where the music of the Indo-Asian Diaspora meets the Western Jazz tradition... establishing the next extension in both traditions” (*All Music Guide*). They documented “some of the freshest, most compelling jazz today” (NPR) on four landmark discs, *Panoptic Modes* (2001), *Blood Sutra* (2003), *Reimagining* (2005), and *Tragicomic* (2008), each garnering worldwide praise.

Alongside these works sit several vastly different, groundbreaking collaborations. Among the best known are *In What Language?* (2004), *Still Life with Commentator* (2007), and the work-in-progress *Holding it Down*, three politically searing, stylistically omnivorous large-scale works created by Iyer with poet-performer Mike Ladd (“unfailingly imaginative and significant” - *JazzTimes*; “powerful narrative invention and ravishing trance-jazz... an eloquent tribute to the stubborn, regenerative powers of the human spirit” - *Rolling Stone*). On another end of the spectrum, *Your Life Flashes* (2002), *Simulated Progress* (2005), and *Door* (2008) capture the

innovations of the experimental collective Fieldwork (“phenomenal... incredible, challenging, and forward-thinking” - *All Music Guide*). And *Raw Materials* (2006, “a total triumph from beginning to end” - *All About Jazz*) documents “one of the great partnerships in jazz” (Chicago Tribune) - the piano-saxophone duo of Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa. All of Iyer’s albums have appeared on best-of-the-year lists in dozens of major media, ranging from *JazzTimes*, *Jazzwise*, *Jazzman*, *Downbeat*, and *The Wire*, to *ArtForum*, *National Public Radio*, *The Utne Reader*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Village Voice*.

Iyer's accomplishments extend well beyond his recordings. His quintet suite *Far From Over*, commissioned by the 2008 Chicago Jazz Festival and debuted before an audience of 30,000, was praised in the *Chicago Tribune* as “making music history... a potential masterpiece... searing, original, and dramatically charged... a shattering, epic composition.” His orchestral work *Interventions* was commissioned and premiered by the American Composers Orchestra in March 2007 under the baton of Dennis Russell Davies. It was praised by *The New York Times* as “all spiky and sonorous,” and by the Philadelphia City Paper for its “heft and dramatic vision and a daring sense of soundscape.” Other works include *Mutations I-X* (2005) commissioned and premiered by the string quartet ETHEL; *Three Episodes for Wind Quintet* (1999) written for Imani Winds; a “ravishing” (*Variety*) score for the original theater/dance work *Betrothed* (2007); the prize-winning film score for *Teza* (2008) by legendary filmmaker Haile Gerima; a suite of acoustic jazz cues for the sports channel ESPN (2009); and the award-winning audiovisual installation *Release* (2010) in collaboration with filmmaker Bill Morrison. An accomplished electronic musician and producer, Iyer has remixed tracks for British Asian electronica pioneer Talvin Singh, Islamic punk band The Kominas, and composer-performer Meredith Monk.

Across this diverse output, Iyer's artistic vision remains unmistakable. His powerful, cutting-edge music is firmly grounded in groove and pulse, but also rhythmically intricate and highly interactive; fluidly improvisational, yet uncannily orchestrated; emotionally compelling, as well as innovative in texture, style, and musical form. Its many points of reference include jazz piano titans such as Monk, Ellington, Tyner, Alice Coltrane, Andrew Hill, and Randy Weston; the classical sonorities of composers such as Reich, Ligeti, Messiaen, and Bartok; the low-end sonics of rock, soul, funk, hip-hop, dub, and electronica; the intricate polyphonies of African drumming; and the vital, hypnotic music of Iyer's Indian heritage.

A perennial critical favorite, Iyer won the Jazz Journalists Association Jazz Awards for **2010 Musician of the Year** and 2004 Up & Coming Musician of the Year. He has repeatedly won multiple categories of the Downbeat Magazine International Critics' Poll, including Rising Star Jazz Artist (2006, 2007), Rising Star Composer (2006, 2007), Rising Star Pianist (2009), Jazz Group of the Year (2010), and **Album of the Year** (2010). He has appeared on the covers of six international music magazines: Downbeat (US), Jazzwise (UK), JazzThetik and JazzPodium (Germany), Concerto (Austria), and Jazz'n'More (Switzerland). He was recently chosen by **GQ India** as one of 50 Most Influential Global Indians. His many other honors include the prestigious 2003 CalArts Alpert Award in the Arts and a 2006 Fellowship in Music Composition from New York Foundation for the Arts. As a composer/performer, Iyer has received commissioning grants from the Rockefeller Foundation MAP Fund, the New York State Council on the Arts, Creative Capital Foundation, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, American Composers Forum, Chamber Music America, Meet The Composer, and Jazz Institute of Chicago.

Iyer has joined forces with a wide range of contemporary artists, including Steve Coleman, Roscoe Mitchell, Amiri Baraka, Wadada Leo Smith, Dead Prez, Amina Claudine Myers, Butch Morris, George Lewis, Craig Taborn, Oliver Lake, Miya Masaoka, Matana Roberts, Trichy Sankaran, Talvin Singh, Pamela Z, Imani Uzuri, Will Power, Suphala, Dafnis Prieto, Burnt Sugar, Karsh Kale, Shujaat Khan, DJ Spooky, High Priest of Antipop Consortium, John Zorn,

Bill Morrison, and many others.

A polymath whose work has spanned the sciences, arts, and humanities, Iyer holds a B.S. in Mathematics and Physics from Yale College, and a Masters in Physics and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Technology and the Arts from the University of California at Berkeley. He was chosen as one of nine “Revolutionary Minds” in the science magazine *Seed*, and his research in music cognition has been featured on the radio programs *This Week in Science* and *Studio 360*. A faculty member at Manhattan School of Music, New York University, and The New School, he has also given master classes and lectures in music, cognitive science, jazz studies, and performance studies at California Institute of the Arts, Columbia University, Harvard University, Berklee School of Music, University of California campuses, and the School for Improvisational Music, among others. His writings appear in *Music Perception*, *Current Musicology*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, *Journal for the Society of American Music*, *The Guardian*, *The Wire*, *JazzTimes*, and the anthologies *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (Columbia University Press), *Sound Unbound* (MIT Press), *Arcana IV* (Hips Road), and *The Best Writing on Mathematics: 2010* (Princeton University Press). He is a Steinway artist and uses Ableton Live software.