



**THE JAZZ JOURNALIST ASSOCIATION'S 2010 MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR,
PIANIST/COMPOSER VIJAY IYER RELEASES *SOLO*,
HIS FIRST SOLO PIANO ALBUM AND HIS SECOND RELEASE FOR ACT MUSIC,
ON AUGUST 31, 2010**

**Follow-Up To His Acclaimed Trio Album *Historicity*
Features Five Originals Alongside Thelonious Monk & Duke Ellington Repertory
And Covers Of Steve Coleman & Michael Jackson**

In the liner notes to *Solo*, composer-pianist Vijay Iyer notes that making music alone can allow the performer an outside view of his creative process and of the energies that determine its course. *Solo* is the document of Iyer's continuing dialogue with history, both his own and that of the music to which he has dedicated his life; it encapsulates both his career and his distinctive approach to his instrument.

In many ways, Vijay Iyer's career can be seen as a path toward *Solo*. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Iyer performed and recorded extensively with some of the leading lights of creative music, including M-Base pioneer Steve Coleman, poet/activist Amiri Baraka, and AACM luminaries Wadada Leo Smith and Roscoe Mitchell. More recently he has received justified plaudits for his award-winning trio with Marcus Gilmore and Stephan Crump (who made *Historicity* the critics' #1 jazz album of 2009), his innovations with altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa and with the collective Fieldwork, and his excellent forays with Mike Ladd, Talvin Singh, Karsh Kale, DJ Spooky, ETHEL, Burnt Sugar, and many others. And above all, he is rooted in the music of composer-pianists Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, and Andrew Hill; his unique playing style and intricate compositions owe much to the influence of these masters.

This diversity of experience infuses each note of *Solo*. "The ACT label invited me to make a solo album," he explains, "And it felt right. I've performed solo a lot over the last couple of years, including a few solo tours, so some ideas about sound, presentation and repertoire have finally coalesced for me." For Iyer, the mere act of playing alone isn't enough. The solo performer must sculpt a journey, for himself and for the listener, by creating contrasts and realizing the possibilities they generate. "I try to use the full spectrum of sounds the instrument can produce, so that I can shape the performance as a whole."

Iyer constructed *Solo* to reflect these discoveries and revelations. "I approach albums in a cinematic way," Iyer explains. "I found *Solo*'s final shape intuitively, but it came together in large sections, like acts in a narrative." The first centers on music of the past, presenting Iyer's interpretations of music from the jazz canon. In this way, the disc might be viewed as an extension of 2009's *Historicity*, a trio project in which older and more recent music received new life via Iyer's rhythmic and harmonic language. *Solo* allows Iyer's pianism to evoke the mystery and wonder in his chosen material. "I like to play with possibility with these songs," he smiles. "I can't just reveal Epistrophy's melody right away, and I don't want to play Human Nature verbatim." Despite his innovative treatments, these tunes still evoke myriad memories and associations, both personal and more broadly historical. "I feel a real connection to this music," states Iyer. His familiarity with Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" dates back to when Iyer was

eleven. After the singer's passing last year, Iyer started playing the song "in tribute to the King." Iyer's versions of Ellington conjure another facet of creative music's long history. "When I was about fourteen I learned Black and Tan Fantasy from a book that contained Duke's original published piano score." Iyer is also well acquainted with Monk's 1955 performance of that standard: "I quoted both versions." Indeed Monk's playing is integral to Iyer's style, from his often fierce attack to the forthright striding left hand he employs at just the right moments.

His own compositions, dominating the album's second act, demonstrate how completely he has assimilated and brought his own vision to creative music. The ascending arc of *Autoscopy* suggests Cecil Taylor's music while never resorting to imitation. Iyer points to his first concert experiences with Roscoe Mitchell as its genesis. "It became necessary for me to find a different style of playing in his group," he explains. "When I found it, I felt as if I wasn't the one playing the piano." This was the out-of-body experience described by the piece's title. By contrast, the ferocious swing and blues inflections of "One for Blount" inhabits a different but equally fertile plain, evoking older shades of history. This homage to Sun Ra ends with a startling single-note decay whose crystalline overtones demonstrate the extraordinary attention to sonic detail, as one has come to expect with Iyer's recordings.

For Iyer, the new album embodies both departure and return. It is his first full-length solo statement; to record it, Iyer escaped the mêlée of New York City, his home since 1998, and revisited his past – returning to the Bay Area (where he spent pivotal years in the 1990s) to record these tracks with Grammy-winning engineer Cookie Marenco. "I've worked with her many times before, so the surroundings were comfortable," says Iyer. He sounds very much at home on this piano, and the recording captures every register and nuance with pristine clarity.

Solo is a monumental step forward and a defining moment in Vijay Iyer's artistic life. With this powerful, subtle homage to Monk, Ellington, Taylor, Hill, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Randy Weston, Iyer joins the ranks of these and many other artists who have recorded great, enduring, original solo piano statements.

Tracks:

- 01 Human Nature (Steve Porcaro / John Bettis) 6:07
 - 02 Epistrophy (Thelonious Monk / Kenny Clarke) 4:56
 - 03 Darn That Dream (Jimmy Van Heusen / Eddie Delange) 4:14
 - 04 Black & Tan Fantasy (Bubber Miley / Edward K. "Duke" Ellington) 4:50
 - 05 Prelude: Heartpiece (Vijay Iyer) 2:06
 - 06 Autoscopy (Vijay Iyer) 6:38
 - 07 Patterns (Vijay Iyer) 8:29
 - 08 Desiring (Vijay Iyer) 4:50
 - 09 Games (Steve Coleman) 3:37
 - 10 Fleurette Africaine (Edward K. "Duke" Ellington) 7:56
 - 11 One For Blount (Vijay Iyer) 3:03
- Total time 57:04

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