



Vijay Iyer – One of "Today's Most Important Pianists," According to *The New Yorker* – Releases a Visceral New Trio Album, *Accelerando*, in March 2012 via ACT Music + Vision

Accelerando* is the follow-up to the Vijay Iyer Trio's Grammy-nominated *Historicity* – voted the No. 1 jazz album of 2009 around the world, including in the *Downbeat* critics' poll and by *The New York Times

"Truly astonishing, the Vijay Iyer Trio makes challenging music sound immediately enjoyable." — National Public Radio

Pianist-composer Vijay Iyer's career has moved on an ever-accelerating arc over the past decade and a half, with the Indian-American artist earning a slew of international honors for his intrepid, multi-hued vision of 21st-century music. The latest chapter of this compelling story in contemporary jazz comes with the Vijay Iyer Trio's *Accelerando*, an album driven by the visceral, universal, intoxicating experience of rhythm. To be released in March 2012 by the German independent label ACT Music + Vision, *Accelerando* sees Iyer and his telepathic trio mates – bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Marcus Gilmore – go both deep and wide. They light up material that ranges from a brace of bold Iyer originals and pieces by great jazz composers (Duke Ellington, Herbie Nichols, Henry Threadgill) to surprising interpretations of vintage and recent pop and funk tunes (Michael Jackson, Heatwave, Flying Lotus). Absorbing and infectious, this is jazz about not only the mind but the body.

With an advanced education in the hard sciences and his facility for complex music, Iyer could have been pegged as a "cerebral musician." But, he insists, "I actually experience music on a visceral level, the way most people do. Dance is just a bodily way of listening to music – it's a universal response. Jazz has always had some sort of dance impulse at its core. Bebop grew out of swing, which was a dance rhythm that became art music. I never want to lose that foundation of rhythmic communication in my work. That's what *Accelerando* is concerned with, that physical reality of music. For me, music is action."

Iyer has played with Memphis-bred bassist Stephan Crump since 1997 (when the pianist had first moved to New York City) and with Marcus Gilmore since 2003 (when the drummer, grandson of legendary jazz stickman Roy Haynes, was still attending New York's LaGuardia High School). The overwhelming response to the trio's 2009 album, *Historicity*, gave these musicians the opportunity to hone their group interaction in front of audiences around the world for two years. Iyer says: "We found more possibilities for spontaneous arrangement, textural and timbral extremes, and ensemble interplay. Our approach is less

and less soloistic lately; it's more about developing a collective energy and momentum. When you hear us now, you can tell that it's us."

As very contemporary musicians, Iyer and his trio mates have a wide purview when it comes to a group approach to rhythm. "The way we come to rhythm is inspired by Bud Powell and Max Roach, Ahmad Jamal, Ellington and Monk, but it is not limited to that," he says. "There is the way James Brown approached it, and the way Jimi Hendrix, the Meters or Earth, Wind & Fire did it; there is the influence of Indian music, African music, Javanese gamelan. There is a whole world history of groove and pulse to draw on, and we do. When it comes to co-articulating a groove and thinking about the subtle dimensions of the beat, we aim to push and pull, to incorporate as many different ideas of orchestration, touch and dynamics as we can so that the rhythm breathes just like a body does."

The range of material on *Accelerando* – from Ellington to Henry Threadgill to Michael Jackson to Iyer's compositions – is dizzying, wonderfully so. Among Iyer's original compositions, "Optimism" starts with a buoyant feel, but its crescendo "means that it builds way beyond anything hinted at by the opening material," Iyer explains. "It erupts from the light to the visceral, and we have to push ourselves physically to achieve that." The album's title track was initially the final movement of a suite Iyer wrote for choreographer Karole Armitage that was performed in Central Park. "I'm interested in tempo as a structural element," he says, "and this was an experiment to see if a constantly accelerating pulse could be the basis for dance. Luckily it worked. It was an amazing experience to write something for dancers and see it realized."

One of the highlights of *Accelerando* is Iyer's ingenious version of Threadgill's "Little Pocket-Sized Demons." The kaleidoscopic original version included two tubas, two guitars and a French horn. "It took a leap of imagination," Iyer says. "The original has this carnival vibe – polyphonic and surreal. It was hard to express all that counterpoint with just six hands. We used arco bass to thicken up the sound and spread the beat to evoke the tubas. Thread came to a rehearsal and gave us pointers, which was so inspiring. Like Monk, Henry has this composer's approach, but he is also someone, like Monk, who played in the church. You can hear that communicative power when he plays. His relationship to the beat is profound."

The soulful Ellington piece "The Village of the Virgins" comes from his 1970 ballet *The River*. Reducing his orchestral sound to the trio format "involved sleight of hand," Iyer explains. "It both is and isn't the original." Herbie Nichols' "Wildflower" is "a tune I really love," Iyer says. "He was influenced by Duke and the stride pianists and by Stravinsky and Prokofiev. There is a lightness and elegance in spite of this harmonic darkness. It's dissonant, but it makes you smile. It's inspiring when someone reconciles the seemingly irreconcilable." The album's version of the Michael Jackson ballad "Human Nature" is a trio extension of Iyer's solo piano arrangement heard on his 2009 album, *Solo*. "Interpreting a song like 'Human Nature' is about telling your own story, like Miles did not long after the original," Iyer says. "That one or the Heatwave song or the Flying Lotus track were not obvious choices for a piano trio. But it's good for us to reach beyond ourselves to different musical approaches and even beyond our instruments. It leads to discovery – and that's the sound I really like."

Vijay Iyer

Accelerando is Iyer's 16th album and the follow-up to his trio's 2009 disc *Historicity* (ACT Music + Vision), which was nominated for a Grammy Award and voted the No. 1 jazz album

of the year in the *Downbeat* international critics' poll and *Village Voice* jazz critics' poll. It was also voted jazz album of the year by *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and National Public Radio. The Vijay Iyer Trio won the 2010 Echo Award (the "German Grammy") for best international ensemble, and the pianist was named 2010 musician of the year by the Jazz Journalists Association. Iyer's discography also includes *Tirtha* (ACT, 2010), a collaboration with guitarist Prasanna and tabla player Nitin Mitta that *All Music Guide* called "a high-water mark" among exchanges between jazz and South Asian musical traditions. Also earning raves was Iyer's personal, prismatic *Solo* album (ACT, 2009), which the *Utne Reader* declared was "bursting with emotion and intelligence."

From 2001 to 2008, Iyer released four highly praised albums with his quartet featuring award-winning alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa; the pair also documented their longstanding duo on *Raw Materials*, hailed by All About Jazz as "a total triumph from beginning to end." He has also released three discs with the pioneering group Fieldwork, which NPR calls "a jazz power trio for the new century," and two collaborative albums with poet-performer Mike Ladd, which Rolling Stone described as "ravishing... an eloquent tribute to the stubborn, regenerative powers of the human spirit."

Iyer has collaborated with artists in myriad disciplines, from filmmaker Bill Morrison to tabla player/electronica artist Talvin Singh to choreographer Karole Armitage to the American Composers Orchestra, among many others. Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble has commissioned a work from Iyer to premiere in 2012. Iyer is a dedicated educator, serving on the jazz faculties of Manhattan School of Music and New York University, and was just named the new director of the annual Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music in Alberta, Canada.

A polymath whose work and interests encompass not only the arts but the sciences as well, Iyer holds an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in the cognitive science of music from the University of California at Berkeley. Dubbed one of nine "Revolutionary Minds" by the science magazine *Seed*, he teaches across the country and writes for a wide range of publications. Born in 1971 to Indian immigrants and raised in Rochester, N.Y., Iyer was recently named by *GQ India* as one of the 50 most influential global Indians and received the *India Abroad* Award for Excellence.

www.vijay-iyer.com

**For more information on Vijay Iyer,
please contact Matt Merewitz at Fully Altered Media:
(347) 384-2839 or matt@fullyaltered.com**

###