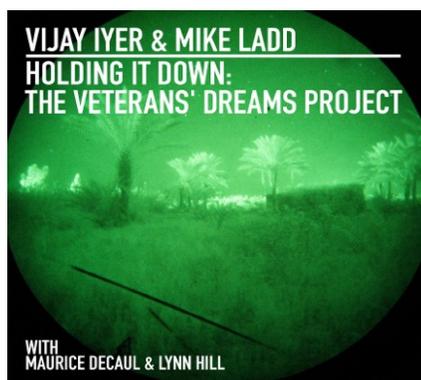


Vijay Iyer and Mike Ladd

Holding It Down: The Veterans' Dreams Project

Pi Recordings 49 – Street date: September 10, 2013



PERFORMERS:

Vijay Iyer: compositions, piano, Fender Rhodes, programming and live electronics

Mike Ladd: lyrics, vocals, analog synthesizer

Maurice Decaul: lyrics, vocals

Lynn Hill: lyrics, vocals

Pamela Z: vocals with live processing, composition (#17)

Guillermo E. Brown: vocals and effects

Liberty Ellman: guitar

Okkyung Lee: cello

Kassa Overall: drums

Holding It Down: The Veterans' Dreams Project is the latest astonishing album to emerge from the longtime collaboration of Grammy-nominated pianist / composer **Vijay Iyer** and poet / performer / librettist / emcee **Mike Ladd**. Three years in the making, the new work focuses on veterans of color from the last decade's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Holding It Down* is a thought-provoking, sometimes frightening, and ultimately exhilarating combination of music, poetry and song, created from the actual dreams of young veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The new album continues in the groundbreaking, politically searing, stylistically omnivorous fashion of their previous works (the award-winning *In What Language?* (Pi 2004), based on interviews with people of color in airports, and the acclaimed *Still Life with Commentator* (2007), an oratorio about 24-hour news culture). These earlier projects were described by *The Boston Globe* as "a triumph of a genre that doesn't exist," hailed by *JazzTimes* as "unfailingly imaginative and significant," and praised for their "powerful narrative invention and ravishing trance-jazz... an eloquent tribute to the stubborn, regenerative powers of the human spirit" in *Rolling Stone*. Together with the earlier Iyer-Ladd creations, *Holding It Down* rounds out a wide-ranging trilogy about American life over a decade of war.

In *Holding It Down*, Iyer and Ladd explore the experiences of American veterans of color of these post-9/11 wars through the medium of dreams. For the project, which was commissioned and premiered at Harlem Stage in New York City, Ladd (along with theater director Patricia McGregor) interviewed scores of veterans — both their aspirations and the visions they experience while sleeping, which are by turns disturbing and mundane, ranging from combat-related nightmares and stress dreams to comically surreal fantasies. Ladd's lyrical adaptations of these accounts are juxtaposed with Iyer's lush, potent music, and with first-person poetic contributions from **Maurice Decaul**, a writer who served with the Marines in Iraq, and **Lynn Hill**, who served in the Air Force and was tasked with piloting drones over Afghanistan from a base in Las Vegas. Decaul and Hill's original, brave, from-the-gut contributions and performances became the soul of this project.

As Iyer said in a 2012 interview for the NEA's blog, "When you're dealing with veterans in a performing arts environment, it's not just a project that's about them, or that's depicting them... it *is* them. So you have the reality of their presence erupting into the work, intervening in this artistic experience." Decaul says about his participation in the project: "At that time, I was just beginning to come to terms with my memories and dreams related to my deployment. I knew that the best way to move forward with my life was to engage with them directly and to learn to manage and accept them as part of the cost of war. I also

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TRACKS:

1. Here (Mike, Cambridge)
2. Derelict Poetry
(Maurice, Brooklyn)
3. Capacity (Lynn, Bronx)
4. Walking with the Duppy
(Rashan, Queens)
5. There is a Man Slouching in
the Stairway
(Maurice, Brooklyn)
6. My Fire
(Brad, Chester, NC)
7. On Patrol
(Maurice, Brooklyn)
8. Dream of an Ex-Ranger
(William, Newton, MA)
9. Name (Lynn, Bronx)
10. Costume
(Mike, Cambridge)
11. Tormented Star of Morning
(Maurice, Brooklyn)
12. Patton
(Calvin, Massapequa, NY)
13. Shush (Maurice, Brooklyn)
14. REM Killer
(Kirk, Lexington, KY)
15. Requiem for an Insomniac
(Maurice, Brooklyn)
16. Dreams in Color
(Lynn, Bronx)
17. Mess Hall
(Merrin, San Diego)

believe it is my duty to write about the war so we don't forget about its effect on those who have served."

Today's soldiers of color often enlist out of need or perceived need; are rapidly deployed into an international arena of war and imperialism; and come home to face indifference, bureaucracy, and disproportionately high unemployment. How do soldiers battle with the psychological remnants of war after returning home? How does the new breed of war veterans go about their irreversibly altered lives? How do they move from the unspeakable back to the speakable? What are they able to dream about? How are they able to hold it down? The songs in this project contain some of their very real and complicated answers.

Vijay Iyer and Pi Recordings are partnering with organizations that serve Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans to help bring awareness to the many complex issues they face. Profits from the sale of CDs will be donated to these charities.

Holding It Down: The Veterans' Dreams Project was commissioned and co-produced by Harlem Stage through its WaterWorks program. The world premiere was at the Harlem Stage Gatehouse September 19-22, 2012. WaterWorks is supported by Time Warner and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Critical praise for performances of *Holding It Down*

"...intense, provocative and honorable." – *The New York Times*

"... an ambitious piece of musical theater based on the phantasmagorical waking visions of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.... True to form, Iyer and Ladd continue to mix music and media, but always with the goal of telling a story that's concise, accessible and as serious as the nightly news." – *Time Out New York*

"Epic in scope, yet poignant in its emotional nuance.... With *Holding It Down* Vijay Iyer and Mike Ladd have offered a model of how artists can present social commentary that is profound yet unsentimental; complex yet focused; provocative yet inviting." – *Sequenza 21*

"... an intensely ambitious, successful work...." – *Washington City Paper*

"... an often discordant, yet always gripping mixture of poetry, music, video monologues, and visual images that reflect the hallucinatory nature of both dreams and war." – *Art Works*

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