

THE VIJAY IYER TRIO

Composer-pianist Vijay Iyer has carved out a unique path as an influential, shape-shifting presence in 21st-century music. His deeply interactive, powerfully expressive musical language is indebted to the composer-pianist lineage from Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk to Alice Coltrane and Geri Allen, the creative music movement of the 60s and 70s, and rhythmic traditions of South Asia and West Africa. As *MinnPost* recently observed, “twining composition and improvisation is rightfully his most celebrated métier.” He has released twenty-six widely praised albums; received three Grammy nominations, numerous national and international prizes, and a MacArthur Fellowship; composed for orchestras, soloists, and chamber ensembles; and collaborated with poets, filmmakers, choreographers, and music-makers from across the planet. But Iyer’s artistry finds perhaps its purest expression in his most celebrated group, the Vijay Iyer Trio, praised by NPR as “truly astonishing” and by *The New York Times* as “one of the best bands in jazz.”

Over the years this pivotal ensemble has nurtured a remarkable roster of now-revered young musicians. The first longstanding iteration of Iyer’s trio, featuring bassist Stephan Crump and wunderkind drummer Marcus Gilmore, became one of the definitive ensembles of the 2010s. Their three groundbreaking albums – *Historicity* (ACT, 2009), *Accelerando* (ACT, 2012), and *Break Stuff* (ECM, 2015), received universal acclaim in the jazz and mainstream press, each one winning multiple awards for best album, best jazz group, and best pianist, and cementing a place for Iyer in the modern musical firmament. Their repertoire juxtaposed memorable covers of “Galang,” “Human Nature,” and “The Star of a Story” with Iyer’s intricate, soulful compositions.

In 2021, an all-star incarnation of Iyer’s trio, now with bassist Linda May Han Oh and drummer Tyshawn Sorey, released *Uneasy* (ECM), which was named one of the best jazz albums of 2021 by *Pitchfork*, *The New Yorker*, NPR, the Boston Globe, and numerous other publications. Both *Uneasy* and its riveting 2024 follow-up *Compassion* are the work of an ensemble that bears no small resemblance to that earlier band—retaining Iyer’s attraction to dark colors, elliptical shapes, and plunging momentum—but there’s a more pronounced expression of equal say among the musicians, along with a powerful sense of shared purpose and a stratospheric level of attunement. The two newer recordings are also, in their titular implications and references, more overtly political, featuring Iyer’s compositions “Children of Flint,” “Combat Breathing,” and the memorial tributes “Arch” (for Archbishop Desmond Tutu), and “It Goes” (for Emmett Till).

Iyer’s ever-evolving trio conception, developed over the last 30 years, finds inspiration in the trio music of Ahmad Jamal, the Ellington/Mingus/Roach summit *Money Jungle*, Andrew Hill’s *Smokestack*, McCoy Tyner’s 1970s ensembles, the rhythm-section alchemies of James Brown, Fela Kuti, and the Meters, South Asian rhythmic forms, and the expressive nuance of chamber music. The results, over the span of his trio’s five pivotal recordings and hundreds of performances, have not only defied the old categories, but inaugurated entirely new ones.

“It’s as if this band wants to both seduce you and discomfit you, stripping you of everything but the ability to think and see for yourself.” – *The New York Times*, December 2023

“*Uneasy*,” his first trio recording with the drummer Tyshawn Sorey (a longtime collaborator) and the bassist Linda May Han Oh, is a triumph of small-group interchange and fertile invention. Iyer’s piano work, whether arrestingly skittish or clothed in powerful solemnity,

resounds with a visceral intensity of purpose, and his resourceful compatriots respond in kind. - The New Yorker, April 2021

"The result is a set of modern piano jazz that covers a remarkable range and features three brilliant musical imaginations that play well together...it is dazzling - seeming to give the listener every chance to really understand it..." - Popmatters May 2021

"As improvisers, they've got a few things in common: the ability to play with a lithe range of motion and resplendent clarity, in the style of well-schooled jazz musicians, while stoking a kind of writhing internal tension. Crucial to that balance is their ability to connect with each other in real time, almost telepathically." - New York Times (Giovanni Russonello) April 2021

"Mr. Iyer is a singular thinker about music" - Wall St. Journal (Larry Blumenfeld) April 2021

"...could be the definitive political work of this year...It evokes the highest ideals of creative music: not just taking turns but using one's own to spur another's." - Jazz Times April 2021

"This is hyperarticulate, politically urgent music that speaks to where we are and where we should be." - Nate Chinen, WBGO (NPR) 2021

"[Iyer] is a social conscience, multimedia collaborator, system builder, rhapsodist, historical thinker, and multicultural gateway." - The New York Times