



News

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Asia Society presents a performance and album launch

TIRTHA

Vijay Iyer – Prasanna – Nitin Mitta

Friday and Saturday, April 1 and 2 at 8:00 p.m.

at Asia Society and Museum

725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), NYC



Tirtha: Nitin Mitta, Vijay Iyer, Prasanna

“bewitching... Iyer’s willingness to take listeners to places they’ve never heard remains something to behold.”

—Los Angeles Times

“...a jazz-informed reflection on the contemporary South Asian diaspora, with three perspectives in creative convergence”

—The New York Times

Pianist-composer **Vijay Iyer**, guitarist-composer **Prasanna**, and tabla player **Nitin Mitta** are highly accomplished artists who shift easily among multiple musical languages. Together, they have achieved an exciting and truly innovative collaboration as a trio called Tirtha, with a newly released and critically acclaimed album of the same title on ACT music. Join Asia Society for the album launch and two performances, April 1 and 2, at 8:00 p.m.

Tirtha was formed by Iyer, one of the most respected young American jazz artists today, in response to an invitation from the Indian government, in 2007, to put together a concert celebrating 60 years of Indian independence. He invited the Chennai (formerly Madras)-born Prasanna, who brings the perspective of Carnatic/south Indian tradition, and Hyderabad native Nitin Mitta, who is a student of Hindustani/north Indian classical expression. Combining the elemental directness of rock, the chamber-like intimacy of raga and bebop’s hard, angular drive, Tirtha achieves a profound interplay of melody and rhythm that characterizes the best jazz.

“We are delighted to host Tirtha for their album launch at two special performances here at Asia Society,” says Rachel Cooper, Director of Cultural Programs and Performing Arts at Asia Society. “Iyer is one of the most creative and innovative musicians today; he creates hybrid forms that build on his dedication to jazz, to Indian music, and to issues around social justice and equity. Through his collaborations with Tirtha and other projects,

he is able to incorporate a broad range of perspectives and draw on the expansive power of the arts to cross boundaries and to create new dialogues, that is mirrored in the mission and work of Asia Society.” In 2002-2003, Asia Society commissioned Iyer and poet/librettist Mike Ladd to create an evening length work addressing racial profiling in a post 9/11 world. That project, titled *In What Language? A Song Cycle of Lives in Transit*, toured across the United States and became an award-winning CD.

Ticket prices for the performances are \$16 members/students/seniors and \$20 for nonmembers. To purchase tickers and for more information, call (212) 517-ASIA or visit www.AsiaSociety.org. Members of the press interested in the performance should contact Asia Society’s Communications office at 212.327.9271 or pr@asiasociety.org.

Asia Society

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is a nonprofit nonpartisan educational institution. Through exhibitions and public programs, Asia Society provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in the work of Asian and Asian American artists, and in both traditional and contemporary Asian art and in Asia today. Asia Society is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. www.AsiaSociety.org

About vijay iyer – prasanna – nitin mitta // TIRTHA

The Sanskrit word *tīrtha* (THEER-tha) literally means a ford, or a shallow place in a river that can be easily crossed over. Within a spiritual context, tīrtha denotes a holy place near a body of water — somewhere where everyday struggles fall away, and where one passes easily into a deeper and more profound state of being. Aptly, *Tirtha* is now also the name of a phenomenal trio featuring three powerhouse musicians who at once honor and traverse the streams of tradition. It is also the name of their exciting new album on ACT.

Individually, Indian-American pianist-composer **Vijay Iyer**, Chennai (formerly Madras)-born guitarist-composer **Prasanna**, and Hyderabad native and tabla player **Nitin Mitta** are already highly accomplished artists who shift easily among multiple musical languages. Together, they have achieved a fully realized, deeply thoughtful, and truly innovative collaboration. Combining the elemental directness of rock, the chamber-like intimacy of raga, and bebop’s hard, angular drive, Tirtha achieves a profound interplay of melody and rhythm that characterizes the best jazz.

In his album notes, the award-winning Iyer describes the group’s genesis:

“Tirtha (the band) formed in response to an invitation. In 2007 I was asked to put together a concert celebrating 60 years of Indian independence. Normally I’ve steered clear of fusion experiments that attempt to mix styles – to “create something,” as John Coltrane famously admonished, “more with labels, you see, than true evolution.” For this event I hoped to avoid those pitfalls, and offer something personal.

“I invited along Prasanna and Nitin Mitta, two outstanding musicians from India who have settled in the States. None of us had collaborated previously, but at our first rehearsal we felt a jolt of recognition. There was no question of “fusion,” no compromise, no attempt to sound more or less “Indian”; just a fluid musical conversation among three individuals, an atmosphere of camaraderie, a sense of beginning.”

Prasanna continues the thought from his unique vantage:

“Tirtha is a logical extension of what I have been doing for many years in my own way - looking at global music today from the perspective of a Carnatic [south Indian classical] musician and looking at the rich tradition of Carnatic music from a contemporary Jazz/Rock/Classical musician’s perspective. In a trio that fosters as much space as Tirtha does, these concepts take on

a musical life that is shared with a unique synergy. Music eventually finds its own simple solution.”

These artists’ musical and cultural experiences are part of their creative DNA. Immediately, for example, you hear the distinctly South Indian, meticulous ornamentations of Prasanna’s guitar in dialogue with Iyer’s gloriously spacious harmonic palette, and Mitta’s superbly crisp Hindustani (north Indian classical) grooves and virtuosic, grounding presence. You hear familiar structural elements of jazz, Hindustani, and Carnatic music. However, the group completely shuns any musical clichés or previously heard “fusions” of those genres.

Instead you hear a band with ideas: the Reich-like rhythmic shifts of the driving opener “Duality”; the rhythmic vocalizing and drummed responses on “Tribal Wisdom”; “Abundance,” an Ellingtonian hymn with Carnatic nuances; the surprise post-punk anthem “Gauntlet”; the subtle majesty of the title track; the shimmering melodies of “Entropy and Time.” The pieces (alternately composed by Iyer and Prasanna) methodically open up to reveal the beating heart of the band’s improvisations: dynamic, astonishingly alive, with a deep sense of purpose.

Tabla player Nitin Mitta describes what the band means to him:

“The Great Vocalist Ustad Amir Khan once said music is something which the Soul speaks and the Soul hears. Tirtha to me is this spiritual journey. Music is universal and Tirtha is a true example of this; a combination of Jazz, Carnatic and Hindustani, elements of each merging together to evolve into music with no tags. I have never felt more challenged thus far in bringing out my creativity as I do with Tirtha.”

Tirtha at once acknowledges and celebrates its diverse heritages, and yet is not restricted or easily reduced to any stereotypes about who these musicians are—or who they “should” be. What the band offers instead is an impassioned and beautiful act of self-definition.

Iyer summarizes:

“For us Tirtha represents a unity that only recently became possible, after several decades of South Asian global mobility, transition, and flow: it’s the sound of a new reality.”

Artist bios

Composer-pianist **VIJAY IYER** is one of today’s most acclaimed and respected young American jazz artists. He received the **Musician of the Year** award in the 2010 Jazz Journalists Association Jazz Awards, the 2010 Echo Award (the “German Grammy”) for best international ensemble with his trio, and the Downbeat Critics Poll for rising star jazz group of the year. His latest recordings on the ACT label include *Solo* (2010) and the trio album *Historicity* (2009). *Historicity* was named **jazz album of the year** by *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, National Public Radio, the annual *Village Voice* jazz critics poll, and the *Downbeat* International Critics Poll. In the past decade, Iyer has won the *Downbeat* Poll in multiple categories, the JJA Jazz Award for Up & Coming Musician of the Year, the CalArts Alpert Award in the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and numerous composer commissions.

Iyer has also composed orchestral and chamber works; scored for film, theater, radio and television; collaborated with poets and choreographers; and joined forces with artists in hip-hop, rock, experimental, electronic, and Indian classical music. He has performed and recorded with Steve Coleman, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Mike Ladd, Roscoe Mitchell, Wadada Leo Smith, Amiri Baraka, Amina Claudine Myers, Butch Morris, Oliver Lake, dead prez, Karsh Kale, Talvin Singh, Imani Uzuri, Craig Taborn, Das Racist, and DJ Spooky, among others. He teaches at Manhattan School of Music, New York University, The New School, and School for Improvisational Music. His writings appear in *Music Perception*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *Current Musicology*, *JazzTimes*, *Wire*, *The Guardian*, and the

anthologies *Uptown Conversation*, *Sound Unbound*, *Arcana IV*, and *The Best Writing on Mathematics: 2010*. For more info: www.vijay-iyer.com

Prasanna has carved a niche for himself as a singular force as a performer and composer in today's music world. He is a pioneer in performing the traditional art of Carnatic music on the guitar, a respected guitarist in contemporary Jazz, Rock and Blues, a composer for an Oscar winning film, and President of India's first professional college for contemporary music. Prasanna has performed and recorded with Airto Moreira, A.R. Rahman, Joe Lovano, Victor Wooten, Hariprasad Chaurasia, Esperanza Spalding, Alex Acuna, Dave Douglas, Umayalpuram Sivaraman, Omar Hakim, Illayaraja, Larry Coryell, Anthony Jackson, Howard Levy, Trilok Gurtu and others. Prasanna's prolific body of work as a leader include 15 albums, a concert DVD and an Instructional DVD, collaborative albums with Raga Bop Trio, Aka Moon and more. He is a member of two critically acclaimed trio projects – 'Tirtha' with Vijay Iyer and Nitin Mitta and 'Raga Bop Trio' with Steve Smith and George Brooks.

Prasanna has composed music for documentary films such as the 2009 Oscar Award winning 'Smile Pinki' and feature films like 'Framed' and many others. His creative collaboration with two-time Oscar winning film composer A.R. Rahman includes arranging and orchestrating the title score of the 2002 Oscar nominated Bollywood Film 'Lagaan' and numerous other guitar playing sessions. Prasanna has also worked with many top Indian film composers on dozens of soundtracks.

Prasanna has given lectures, workshops and residencies at Banff Center for the Arts, Berklee College of Music, Harvard University, Sloan School of Management, Arizona State University etc. He holds degrees in Engineering and music from the Indian Institute of Technology and Berklee College of Music, respectively. Prasanna's passion for music education led him to establish Swarnaboomi Academy of Music, India's newest and largest college of music with a world-class international faculty and a sprawling 4-acre campus near Chennai, India. Prasanna's web site is <http://www.guitarprasanna.com>

NITIN MITTA is one of the most prominent young tabla players in the world of Indian classical music. He has quickly established a reputation as a player with a rare combination of technical virtuosity, spontaneity, clarity of tone, and sensitivity to melodic nuance. He is a highly sought after accompanist having performed with some of India's most celebrated musicians, such as Pandit Jasraj, Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Ustad Shahid Parvez, and Srimati Ashwini Bhide, just to name a few. As a soloist he has performed at many prestigious organizations in India.

Nitin's gurus' include Pt. G. Satyanarayana and Pt. Arvind Mulgaonkar, both of whom were disciples of late Ustad Amir Hussain Khan Saheb, legendary doyen of the Farukhabad Gharana.

Nitin maintains a busy schedule of performances and tabla workshops, traveling throughout the U.S., Europe, Canada and India. He has performed at several prominent venues including the Habitat Centre in New Delhi, the Nehru Centre in Mumbai, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Indian consulate in New York, the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., and a variety of college campuses. He is featured on the Music Today album *Soul Strings*.

Album tracks and credits

1. **duality** (*vijay iyer*) 5:59
2. **tribal wisdom** (*prasanna*) 11:06
3. **tirtha** (*vijay iyer*) 7:04
4. **abundance** (*vijay iyer*) 7:46
5. **falsehood** (*prasanna*) 6:38

6. **gauntlet** (*vijay iyer*) 2:10
7. **polytheism** (*prasanna*) 5:43
8. **remembrance** (*vijay iyer*) 6:09
9. **entropy and time** (*prasanna*) 7:58

total time 1:00:38

vijay iyer, piano, compositions (#1, 3, 4, 6, 8). prasanna, guitar, voice, compositions (#2, 5, 7, 9). nitin mitta, tabla. 'Entropy and Time' is based on the pallavi 'Raghukula' in raga Bilahari, composed by T.R. Subramanyam.