

Asia Society
Presents

Rez Abbasi's
Invocation



Photo by Ken Weiss

Thursday-Friday, December 15-16
8:00 P.M.

Asia Society
725 Park Avenue at 70th Street
New York City



Rez Abbasi's *Invocations*

Rez Abbasi, Guitar/Composition

Vijay Iyer, Piano

Rudresh Mahanthappa, Alto Saxophone

Elizabeth Means, Cello

Johannes Weidenmueller, Bass

Dan Weiss, Drums

“Abbasi creates a sinuous, sometimes haunting, and always evocative blend of contemporary jazz and Asian influences.” —*Time Out New York*

“neither Eastern nor Western, but effortlessly global ... proof that jazz can be as vital and boundary-pushing as ever.” —*All About Jazz*

Invocation is Pakistani-born American jazz guitarist **Rez Abbasi**'s sextet featuring pianist **Vijay Iyer** and saxophonist **Rudresh Mahanthappa**. In this performance, the group unveils new compositions that explore Carnatic classical music from Southern India through the idiom of jazz. This is the final installment in a triptych made by Abbasi that puts a jazz lens on the musical traditions of South Asia; *Invocation* previously explored Hindustani music and *qawwali* in a pair of critically acclaimed recordings.

Abbasi — along with Iyer and Mahanthappa — is one of a trio of jazz musicians who are forging distinctly South Asian-inflected voices on the contemporary scene. Abbasi comes to this endeavor honestly: he is one of the foremost guitar players in modern jazz, a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, but early in his career he made a pilgrimage to India to study under the guidance of tabla master Ustad Alla Rakha, father of Zakir Hussain. The mission of *Invocation*'s music, Abbasi declares, is “to create a global-based music steeped in jazz. This tradition follows in the footsteps of some of the greatest jazz musicians. Coltrane, Ellington, and Gillespie all immersed themselves in music from around the world.”

This performance of Rez Abbasi's Invocation, presented in collaboration with Duke Performances and Walker Art Center, is supported by the Presenter Consortium for Jazz, a program of Chamber Music America funded through the generosity of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

About the Artists:

Rez Abbasi

Voted #1 Rising-Star Guitarist in the 2013 DownBeat Critics Poll and placed in the "top-ten Guitarists" in 2015 and 2016, Rez Abbasi is among a rare breed of artists that continue to push boundaries while preserving the traditions he has embraced.

Born in Karachi, Pakistan, removed at the age of four to the vastness of Southern California, schooled at the University of Southern California and the Manhattan School of Music in jazz and classical music, along with a pilgrimage to India under the guidance of master percussionist, Ustad Alla Rakha, Abbasi is a vivid synthesis of all the above stated influences and genres. Making New York home for the past 25 years, he has developed a unique sound both as a composer and an instrumentalist and is considered by many to be one of the foremost modern jazz guitar players the world over.

With twelve albums of mostly original compositions, Abbasi continues to forge new ground with his many projects. From his 2005 organ trio recording *Snake Charmer* that features Indian vocal sensation Kiran Ahluwalia, to his recent *Behind the Vibration*, he captures provocative sounds rarely heard in jazz. Abbasi's sixth album, *Things To Come* (2009) features a star-studded group of Vijay Iyer, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Dan Weiss, Johannes Weidenmueller and Ahluwalia and was included in DownBeat's "top CD's of the decade." The same year he was awarded the prestigious Chamber Music America (CMA) commission to compose new works for the same ensemble, *Invocation*.

In 2010, Abbasi reconvened his group Invocation to record the follow-up to *Things To Come*. *Suno Suno* features his CMA commissioned compositions that are informed by Qawwali - spiritual music from Pakistan. The power, joy and depth that Qawwali encompasses can be heard throughout *Suno Suno*.

2017 will see the release of *Unfiltered Universe*, Abbasi's third of a trilogy of albums with his group, Invocation. The compositions are based on his experiences performing with Carnatic musicians and dancers and were once again commissioned by CMA. Abbasi was also recently commissioned by the New York Guitar Festival to write and perform a film score to the 1929 silent film *Throw of Dice*, based on an episode from the Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*. The premiere will take place May 19th at the Brookfield Place Winter Garden in NYC. www.RezTone.com

Vijay Iyer

A Grammy nominee, **Vijay Iyer** was named DownBeat Magazine's 2015 Artist of the Year and 2014 Pianist of the Year, a 2013 MacArthur Fellow, and a 2012 Doris Duke Performing Artist. *The New York Times* observes, "There's probably no frame wide enough to encompass the creative output of the pianist Vijay Iyer." Iyer has released twenty recordings under his own name. The latest, on the ECM label, include *Mutations*, featuring his compositions for piano, string quartet and electronics; *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi*, a film by Prashant Bhargava, with Iyer's score performed by International Contemporary Ensemble; and *Break Stuff*, featuring the Vijay Iyer Trio.

Over the years, Iyer has worked with a wide array of artists across genres and disciplines, ranging from Steve Coleman, George Lewis and Amiri Baraka, to Wadada Leo Smith, Butch Morris, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Steve Lehman, Craig Taborn, Ambrose Akinmusire, Oliver Lake, poet Mike Ladd, novelist Teju Cole, and rapper Himanshu Suri.

Iyer is the Franklin D. and Florence Rosenblatt Professor of the Arts in the Department of Music at Harvard University, and the director of the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music. His compositions have been commissioned by Arturo O'Farrill, American Composers Orchestra, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Brentano Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, Imani Winds, ICE, Jennifer Koh, and Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. He is a Steinway artist.

Rudresh Mahanthappa

Few musicians share the ability of alto saxophonist/composer **Rudresh Mahanthappa** to embody the expansive possibilities of his music with his culture. What has materialized is a sound that hybridizes progressive jazz and South Indian classical music in a fluid and forward-looking form that reflects Mahanthappa's own experience growing up a second-generation Indian-American. The current manifestations of that trajectory include his latest project *Bird Calls* (2015), which was named #1 album of the year by both Downbeat and NPR Music's Jazz Critics Poll.

Mahanthappa has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, two New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships, and numerous commissions. He has been named alto saxophonist of the year four of the past five years in Downbeat Magazine's International Critics

Polls and for five years running by the Jazz Journalists' Association. In April 2013, he received a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, one of the most prominent arts awards in the world. In 2015, he was named a United States Artists Fellow.

Elizabeth Means

Cellist **Elizabeth Means** is a versatile artist performing as a concert soloist, recitalist, orchestral and chamber musician throughout Europe and North America. She made her Carnegie Hall debut as soloist with Pinchas Zuckerman and the Manhattan School of Music's Chamber Sinfonia and was a three-time Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, performing and recording with some of the most prominent artists of our time including James Levine, Bernard Haitink, John Williams, and Renee Fleming. For her spectacular performances at Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra awarded her the Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Prize.

Recipient of a generous fellowship from the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, she moved to Berlin, Germany to study with former principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic, Wolfgang Boettcher. Following this intense period of studies, Ms. Means served as principal cellist of Lorin Maazel's Castleton Festival Orchestra, the Kurt Masur Seminar Orchestra and for the Elliott Carter Centenary Celebration at the Tanglewood Music Center's Festival of Contemporary Music. She was a member of the prestigious contemporary music Claremont Ensemble led by the famed composer Richard Danielpour and has had master classes with Yo-Yo Ma, Isaac Stern, and Lynn Harrell among others.

A believer in the life long process of renewal and growth, Ms. Means enjoys honing and diversifying her talents, expressing her kaleidoscopic sound in a variety of diverse musical genres. As a core principal player with New York City's Distinguished Concerts Orchestra, she appears regularly at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in a myriad of cross-cultural programs. Her upcoming performances include classical recitals in Mexico City at the Palacio de Bellas Artes with pianist Santiago Piñeirúa Zueras and a US tour and recording with jazz guitarist Rez Abassi and his band, *Invocation*.

Johannes Weidenmueller

Bassist **Johannes Weidenmueller** has been a first call performer with a long list of jazz greats since settling in New York City 20 years ago. He has been a member of the Hank Jones trio, Ray Barretto's New World Spirit, the Carl Allen-Vincent Herring quintet, the John Abercrombie quartet, the Joe Lovano trio and the Kenny Werner trio. Other associations include Brad Mehldau, George Benson, John Scofield, Dewey Redman, Randy Brecker, Kenny Wheeler, Toots Thielemans, Wynton Marsalis, Joshua Redman, Gary Bartz, Jonny Coles, Clifford Jordan, Joe Chambers, and many others. French newspaper *Le Monde* said that Weidenmueller is "one of the most interesting and explosive bass players to come along in a long time."

Born in Heidelberg, Germany Johannes was introduced to music early on. He started playing cello at the age of 6 and kept a busy performance schedule throughout his high school years, participating in many local and regional chamber music and orchestral events. After switching to the double bass at age 16, he went on to study jazz bass at the Conservatory in Cologne and soon after made the move to study at the prestigious Jazz and Contemporary Music program of the New School University in New York. Here he was able to study with jazz greats such as Ron Carter, Dave Holland and Buster Williams. In 1991 he joined the trio of legendary pianist Hank Jones and performed with him throughout North America. Playing with Hank Jones paved the way to becoming a full time professional bass player and countless performances with many other jazz greats have since followed.

While being busy performing over 200 concerts a year around the world, Johannes is also a committed educator. He has been on the faculty of the New School's jazz and contemporary music program since 1997 where he teaches bass and ensemble and ear-training.

Dan Weiss

Dan Weiss began playing the drums at the age of 6. He received his bachelor's degree at Manhattan School of Music with a major in jazz percussion and minor in classical composition. Soon after getting his formal education, he began touring the world and recording with musicians such as David Binney, Lee Konitz, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Tim Berne, Miguel Zenon, Kenny Werner and many others.

In addition to the drums, Weiss has been studying the tabla under his guru Pandit Samir Chatterjee for almost 20 years. This apprenticeship has been a major influence in his musical aesthetic, exemplified in two of his records where he performs classical Indian repertoire on drum set. David Adler (*All About Jazz*) wrote, "Weiss is arguably unique among today's jazz drummers, transposing ideas from his tabla study to the drum kit, as heard most clearly on Tintal Drum Set Solo (Chhandayan, 2005) and Jhaptal Drum Set Solo." Weiss was also named 'The Top Up and Coming Percussionist' 2 years in a row in the 60th and 61st annual Downbeat's Critic's Poll and was featured in the New York Times as 'One of the 5 Most Promising Drummers of the New Generation'.

Weiss has led his trio, which includes Jacob Sacks on piano and Thomas Morgan on bass, for over a decade. Their two releases, "Now Yes When" and "Timshel" have been critically acclaimed for their unique approach to song structure and endlessly creative improvisation. In addition to the trio, Weiss leads his unique large ensemble that features some of NYC's most gifted musicians. The album '14' released on the Pi record label made it into New York Time's top ten records of 2014.

About Performing Arts at Asia Society

Asia Society's Performing Arts Program is an intrinsic component of Asia Society's commitment to sharing vital aspects of Asian culture by placing creative expression at the center of a more comprehensive understanding of culture. Whether it is experimental artists exploring new territory or traditional artists bringing to life the voices of a great legacy, the Performing Arts Program has created a powerful platform for connecting and engaging with Asian culture within a deeper cultural context. We have presented extraordinary artists from renowned names such as Lang Lang, Tan Dun, Abida Parveen, Shen Wei, David Henry Hwang, Sardono and Malavika Sarukkai, to the latest emerging voices. Beginning in 1957, with New York's first performance by Indian maestro Ravi Shankar, the Performing Arts Program has since presented over a thousand performances, including original commissioned work from Asian and Asian-American artists, as well as American artists influenced by Asia, such as Phillip Glass, DJ Spooky and Vijay Iyer. From Indonesian hip-hop to electronica from Shanghai; experimental dance to the deeply moving traditions of India's *Kuttiyatam*, Burmese *Zat Pwe*, we foster artistic exchange and provide creative opportunities for artists. For more information, please visit AsiaSociety.org

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