

# Rez Abbasi

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"An amazing guitarist... unique and beautiful music - and best of all - very original....I'm really impressed." Pat Metheny

"Great music - the writing and playing... and most of all, the concept." David Liebman



photo: John Rogers

## Biography

Voted #1 Rising Star Guitarist in the 2013 DownBeat Critics Poll and placed in the "top-ten Guitarists" in 2015's poll, Rez Abbasi continues to push boundaries.

**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 in India under the tutelage of master percussionist, Ustad Alla Rakha, Rez Abbasi is a vivid synthesis of all the above stated influences and genres.

Making New York home for the past 25 years, Abbasi 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. He has honed his skills with performances throughout Europe, Canada, the U.S., Mexico and India. He has performed and recorded with many jazz greats including, Grammy winner Ruth Brown, Peter Erskine, Kenny Werner, Barre Phillips, Tim Berne, Michael Formanek, Billy Hart, Marvin 'Smitty' Smith, Gary Thomas, Dave Douglas, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Mike Clark, Tony Malaby, George Brooks, Ronu Majumdar, Kadri Gopalnath, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Marilyn Crispell, Greg Osby, Howard Levy and a host of others.

Rez is musical director, arranger and producer for Indian/Canadian multiple Juno award winning vocal sensation, Kiran Ahluwalia. Kiran's 2008 recording, "Wanderlust" was in the top ten European world-music radio charts and also was among the top-ten albums of 2008 in Song-Lines Magazine. Another of Abbasi's highly regarded associations is with heralded saxophonist, Rudresh Mahanthappa. Rez plays an integral role in Mahanthappa's Indo-Pak Coalition and Kinsmen Ensemble. Rez can also be heard as a member of many others projects.

With twelve albums of mostly original compositions under his belt, Abbasi continues to find new groups of musicians to help his musical vision come to life. His 2005 recording **Snake Charmer**, created a stir in the music world partly due to his organic, original approach in blending two complex musical genres together, namely jazz and Indian music. The provocative instrumentation of organ, drums and guitar alongside Indian vocalist Ahluwalia, is on one hand, a sound grounded in jazz and yet uncommon in jazz arenas. 20th Century Guitar reviewed the CD as, "One of the best examples yet of how to merge Indian Classical music with jazz...Snake Charmer really breaks new ground." In 2007, Rez achieved even greater heights with the follow up to Snake Charmer,

### Bazaar.

Bazaar continues the group's journey through territories unheard in today's jazz/world music scene.

**Producing so vivid a music that it can almost be tasted, Abbasi sounds like no one who has gone before him. His compositions are sheer genius...All About Jazz**

Abbasi's sixth album, **Things To Come** (*Sunnyside*, 2009) is yet another leap into uncharted musical territory. It features a star studded group of Vijay Iyer, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Kiran Ahluwalia, Johannes Weidenmueller and Dan Weiss and was included in DownBeat's top CD's of the decade. The same year he was awarded the prestigious Chamber Music America Grant as a commission to compose new works for the same ensemble, Invocation.

At the end of 2009, Abbasi formed a new quartet. The Rez Abbasi Acoustic Quartet, or RAAQ, was conceived for the purposes of featuring Abbasi's acoustic guitar talents. Simultaneously, it serves as an outlet to feature his compositions alongside "gems from other composers that are rarely heard today." Abbasi was well aware of creating a group that would magnify and enhance his acoustic guitar



sound - calling upon vibraphonist, Bill Ware (Steely Dan), bassist, Stephan Crump (Vijay Iyer Trio) and drummer, Eric McPherson (Andrew Hill). RAAQ's debut, **Natural Selection** (*Sunnyside*, 2010) captures the profound sensitivity of the ensemble as it twists and turns through the set, featuring the standout textural cascades created between acoustic guitar and vibraphone. The album was included in JazzTimes' and NPR's 'best of' the year lists and the New York Times did a feature review of the CD release concert. RAAQ performed at the 2010 Newport Jazz Festival which was recorded and broadcasted several times on NPR's JazzSet with Dee Dee Bridgewater.

In 2010, Abbasi reconvened his group, Invocation to record the follow-up to Things To Come. **Suno Suno** (*enja*, 2011) features his new 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. The album was included on multiple top-ten lists of 2011.

As a response to Invocation, with its extended ensemble and highly complex compositions, Abbasi felt the need to do a more intimate project. His new trio was formed and it includes long time cohorts, bassist, John Hebert (Andrew Hill) and drummer, Satoshi Takeishi (Eliane Elias). **Continuous Beat** (*enja*, 2013), is his first trio outing and the results are brimming with adventure and subtlety. Along with his cutting edge compositions, the trio reinterprets music of Monk, Jarrett and others, using guitar electronic manipulation. As he states, "I wanted to excite the listener with a new guitar trio experience. One that retains the warmth of the established trio sound but also employs electronics in order to expand the timbral palette, especially for the melodies. Ultimately, this approach not only gives clarity to the solos but also keeps the listener's aural sense stimulated."

Abbasi soon re-employed his acoustic quartet, RAAQ for another album.

**Intents & Purposes** (*enja*, 2015) acoustically recasts classic jazz-rock music from the '70s, a genre Rez initially was not a fan of due to its over use of synthesizers. He used a fretless guitar to highlight his love for microtonality. Rez was featured in the Wall Street Journal, DownBeat and JazzTimes.

In the summer of 2016 Abbasi will release an album with his new group, Junction.

**Behind the Vibration** (*Cuneiform*), is the inverse of Intents & Purposes in that it is a full-blown electric album of all originals. With Mark Shim on tenor sax & midi wind-controller, Ben Stivers on keyboards, B3 & Rhodes, Kenny Growhowski on drums and Rez employing overdrive and effects, the music moves in very unpredictable ways.



## Press Quotes

"True fusion music from a great Pakistani-American guitarist: jazz and rock and Pakistani music in a great, ingenious amalgam." - *Popmatters.com*

"Miraculously, Abbasi gets it exactly right. Out of all the different elements arises a singular and distinctive statement. Consequently the music convinces and enchants on every level." - *All About Jazz*

"Abbasi's adroit soloing and lean, evolving tunes are generated by exceptional reach and a very musical passion." - *New York Press*

"Abbasi creates a sinuous, sometimes haunting and always evocative blend of contemporary jazz and Asian influences." - *Time Out NY*

"Abbasi's unpredictable phrasing and accomplished writing are what sets him apart from hordes of other technically adept guitarists." - *Bill Milkowski*

"Mr. Abbasi succeeded in making some fairly cerebral intricacies feel intuitive and touched by a higher source." - *New York Times*

"Stimulating new music. Is this soul-jazz, post-bop, fusion, Indian music, or world fusion? The answer has to be: All of them and none of them." 4 1/2 stars - *All Music Guide*

"As jazz increasingly admits sounds from around the globe, Abbasi's efforts rank among the freshest and most compelling. Compositions that stand alone in today's jazz." - *The Ottawa Citizen*

"Eye popping, dazzling virtuosity with considerable writing chops." - *Signal to Noise*

"Though his chops are indeed impressive, listeners will more likely be taken with the intricacy and intrigue of his compositions." - *Hot House NY*