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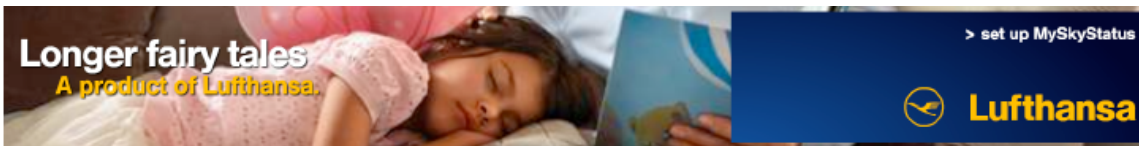
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MUSIC REVIEW | VIJAY IYER TRIO

Mowing Down Bar Lines in Virtuoso Banter

By BEN RATLIFF
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Vijay Iyer's trio lights up through improvised, viruslike rhythms. It's not a situation in which the drummer's steady swing underpins whatever the pianist is doing; that did happen sometimes at the Jazz Standard on Friday, but it wasn't where the action was.

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Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

Vijay Iyer Trio Mr. Iyer on piano, Stephan Crump on bass and Justin Brown on drums performing at the Jazz Standard on East 27th Street.

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perspective.

Since Mr. Iyer is kind of a drummer himself on the keyboard, this is a group that makes you think about rhythmic bloodlines. If Andrew Hill was one of Mr. Iyer's clear antecedents — melodies made from prickly, stubborn phrases, overlapping rhythms, dark and dense harmony turning into beauty — then bebop rhythm was to Hill as funk is to

What you look forward to with this bright, aggressive group is when pianist and drummer lock into the same gestures, building a simultaneous, virtuosic, percussive improvisation. The drummer follows the pianist, the pianist follows the drummer, down long, chattering rhythmic chutes. It stretches harmony and mows down bar lines, until Mr. Iyer plays a cue and the music changes. Someone's got to be the Holy Spirit, representing your faith that this jazz will breathe, and not just become a bramble of polytonality in a drum clinic. It's the bassist, of course, cutting through with big, wise, rounded notes.

Really good piano trios are studies in balance, and with the release of his new album, "Historicity," his first piano-trio record, Mr. Iyer gives us a new one. The trio on Friday consisted of Mr. Iyer on piano, Stephan Crump on bass and Justin Brown substituting for Marcus Gilmore on drums. The band members were tired, having played at the Berlin Jazz Festival the night before, and though the two drummers' styles are close, the group doesn't have the same magic fluidity without Mr. Gilmore. But it was still impressive, and made good sense in jazz's larger

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Mr. Iyer. The funk bobbed and weaved, came into sight and then disappeared. It turned up in the set during the bold 11-beat rhythm of Julius Hemphill’s “Dogon A.D.” and in a version of [Stevie Wonder](#)’s “Big Brother,” transformed with a blizzard of piano improvising around the melody. It even showed up in Mr. Hill’s fragmented, rhapsodic, tumultuous “Smokestack,” which became a kind of concerto for Mr. Brown, building patterns all over the kit while keeping a steady pulse.

The group gives you the positive shudder of hearing a new idea, or at least a contemporary idea. (Its rhythmic concept has much in common with that of Jason Moran’s trio.) But it doesn’t only do postmodern onslaught. Mr. Iyer’s music contains echoes of piano trios going a long way back in jazz — maybe not all the way to [Bud Powell](#), but certainly to Ahmad Jamal.

Mr. Iyer knows how to pace a set, too. There were quiet moments at necessary places — in “Big Brother,” during a piano solo, the drums died down to a pitter-patter of brushes on snare — and ballad moments, like his own “Our Lives,” with a chain of chords borrowed from Ellington’s “Sophisticated Lady.” Mr. Iyer is a sentimentalist, as well as everything else.

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