

**Downbeat (US)**  
**November, 2010**  
**Jim Macnie**

*Masterpiece* ★★★★★ *Excellent* ★★★★ *Good* ★★★ *Fair* ★★ *Poor* ★

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**Vijay Iyer**  
*Solo*

ACT 9497

★★★★★

Much of the acclaim Vijay Iyer has earned in the past few years has been tied to the rhythmic concept of his remarkable bands. His drummers are paramount participants, charging the action and goading the pianist to deeper levels of engagement. So there's a bit of daring behind his notion of hitting the studio alone. Here's a guy who has made great investments in the power of interplay—a recital could be wan in comparison. But *Solo* tells another story. By trusting in the act of disclosure, in this case offering his audience another side of his artistry, he has come up with a disc both vital and revealing.

Iyer's keyboard approach has occasionally seemed to be a stream of jabs limned by grace and judiciousness. It's an intriguing blend, if occasionally steely. Lately, however, a new sense of glide has bubbled up. Phrases are beveled, and passages flow in a much more unfettered manner. *Solo* makes the most of such refinements, offering tunefulness in both material and approach. Like its predecessor *Historicity*, it also slants towards the sentiment of repertory. "Darn That Dream" is included because the pianist was wooed by his hero Andrew Hill's version of the standard. Steve Coleman's "Games" reverberates as a salute to an old mentor. A double dip of Ellingtonia exists because Ellington's fierce and feathery ways are pretty much inescapable by all. To a one they're convincers, letting us hear a somewhat idiosyncratic pianist essay more recognizable pieces than the originals he's made his mark on. They woo by featuring a more common form of beauty; his "Fleurette Africaine" is a marvel of lyricism that yields to its source, and Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" is not only a bittersweet valentine, but also the warm handshake that greets you at the door.

These time-tested melodies are balanced by the pianist's own, comparatively abstruse, compositions. The middle of the program is given over to four works that, when combined as they are, have a fantasia feel. The rumbles of "Prelude" morph into jumbles of "Autoscopy" as echoes of Anthony Davis' *Lady Of The Mirrors* drift by; "Patterns" and "Desiring" present taut contours of pulse and rumination. Their flow is a victory; even the barbed sections seem dreamy, and as they're developed, it becomes clear that dynamics and momentum are defining traits of Iyer's esthetic. *Solo* is a demonstration of breadth, no doubt. But it's also proof that the kind of creative tension his trio produces has little trouble being paralleled by his own two hands.

—Jim Macnie

**Solo:** Human Nature; Epistrophy; Darn That Dream; Black And Tan Fantasy; Prelude; Heartpiece; Autoscopy; Patterns; Desiring; Games; Fleurette Africaine; One For Blount. (67:04)  
**Personnel:** Vijay Iyer, piano.  
**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)



Vijay Iyer

DAVID KATZ