



Bio information: **REZ ABBASI & JUNCTION**

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / JAZZ-ROCK / ELECTRIC JAZZ / FUSION

**21st Century Jazz-Rock and Much More:  
Guitarist Rez Abbasi & Junction Bring Together a Vast World of Influences on  
*Behind the Vibration***

*“it was time for all these musical worlds to collide.” –Rez Abbasi*

A junction is the point at which several things converge. For the visionary and award-winning jazz guitarist **Rez Abbasi**, his new band **Junction** weaves together musical currents he’s spent his career navigating. Abbasi has been at the center of some of the most enthralling and culturally expansive music of the past two decades, and his **Cuneiform** debut *Behind the Vibration* introduces a bracing new body of music, a sinewy 21st century approach to jazz-rock inspired by his far-flung influences.

In myriad inspired collaborations, from the **South Asian** jazz synthesis of alto saxophonist **Rudresh Mahanthappa’s Indo-Pak Coalition** to the **Punjab-meets-Tuareg** vocal flights of **Kiran Ahluwalia**, Abbasi has manifested an uncommon gift for creating new sounds in settings deeply inflected by traditional forms. In his own projects, the **Pakistani-American** musician has displayed similarly fierce creativity, like his gorgeous unplugged reimagining of jazz-rock classics with the **Rez Abbasi Acoustic Quartet’s (RAAQ)** critically hailed 2015 album *Intents and Purposes (Enja)*, and his all-star quintet (and sometimes sextet) *Invocation* with Mahanthappa, **Vijay Iyer**, bassist **Johannes Weidenmueller**, drummer **Dan Weiss**, (and latest addition cellist **Elizabeth Means**).

“Everything I do musically is stimulated by call and response,” Abbasi says. “I did the Acoustic Quartet project of covers from the ‘70s jazz-rock period and that impacted me to want to do an electric project of all originals. The new album reflects a continuum of what I’ve been doing all along – finding fresh orchestrations to present my music through. In some ways this project connects me more directly back to my first love, the energy that comes out of rock music. I wrote new tunes for this band and it was time for all these musical worlds to collide.”

**Junction**, the electric project that Abbasi formed to bring his original tunes to life, features **Mark Shim** on tenor saxophone and the electronic MIDI Wind Controller, **Ben Stivers** on keyboards, B-3 organ and Rhodes, and drummer **Kenny Grohowski**. The band is a supremely malleable ensemble that has forged a poised and texturally accute group approach. While exploring a vivid palette of electronic sounds and aggressive grooves, Junction maintains the dynamics, precise calibration, and interactive imperative of an inspired jazz ‘acoustic’ combo.

Sonically surprising, the album opens with **“Holy Butter,”** a piece inspired by a collaboration with classical **South Indian** dancers. In the first of many sonic feints, what sounds like a deeply funky bass solo is actually Shim getting down with his MIDI Wind Controller. Indeed, not having a defined bass player is a significant element of Junction, opening up the band’s sound as Stivers and Shim alternate low end responsibilities.

Inspired by the Arab Spring, **“Groundswell”** is a slowly ascending tune that, while originally written for another ensemble, comes home in Junction, with Stivers on B-3—“the first electric keyboard instrument,” Abbasi notes—and a searing Abbasi solo followed by Shim’s oragami-angular tenor. If that piece evokes the mounting of external pressure, **“Uncommon Sense”** suggests a wending internal spiritual journey with a hypnotically sinuous opening guitar line. As Abbasi puts it, “The title refers to a ‘sense’ that’s beyond our five and one that’s more difficult to connect to due to the clutter in our minds.” Before long, the becalmed lyricism gives way to a frantic search powered by Grohowski’s exceptionally deft trap work.

A sparsely decorated noir scene that emerges and departs without pausing for a solo, **“And I You”** is a brief, cinematic mood piece that arrives mid-album like a shimmering urban oasis. **“Self-Brewing”** is one of the album’s most fusion-y pieces, with a steeplechase theme introduced by Abbasi and Shim on Midi Wind Controller. The album closes with **“Matter Falls,”** a mid-tempo anthem that hints at **South Asian** cadences. Both grand and invitingly intimate, it’s a crunching tune that points to further explorations. Clearly, Junction is just one stop on a spectacularly rich and incident-filled sojourn.

More than a meeting place, Junction is a communion of four distinct voices. Born in **Jamaica** and raised in **Richmond, Virginia**, saxophonist **Mark Shim** has been a stand out on the New York scene since the mid-1990s. He first gained attention via bari legend **Hamiett Bluiett**, who featured him on his classic 1995 album *Young Warrior, Old Warrior (Mapleshade)*. He went on to work with

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heavyweights like **Elvin Jones**, **Betty Carter**, **David Murray**, **Greg Osby**, and the **Mingus Big Band**. More recently, he's played a key role in the adventurous bands led by altoist **Steve Lehman** and pianist **Vijay Iyer**.

"Mark is a ridiculous tenor saxophone player, but he's also really into production, working with drum machines and producing people's records," Abbasi says. "He's tapped into the Zeitgeist, the vibe that's going on now and I'm open to all of it."

Raised in **Las Vegas** in a highly musical family, trained in classical and jazz, **Ben Stivers** got his start on the **Miami** studio scene collaborating extensively with the **Bee Gees**. A highly versatile player, he's been sought out by the likes of **Ricky Martin**, **Chris Botti**, **Matchbox Twenty**, and **Jose Feliciano**. Since moving to **New York**, he's also worked extensively in jazz settings.

Drummer **Kenny Grohowski** is engaged in a similarly expansive array of projects. Raised in **Miami**, he's a member of several internationally acclaimed ensembles, including bassist **Lonnie Plaxico**'s band, the heavy metal band **Secret Chiefs 3** and Haitian singer **Emeline Michel**'s **Acoustic Quintet**. He's collaborated with artists ranging from **Vernon Reid**, **John Zorn** and **Bobby Sanabria** to **Bill T. Jones**, **Cassandra Wilson**, **Giovanni Hidalgo**, and **Daniel Bernard Roumain** (a.k.a. **DBR**).

"You don't have many musicians as eclectic as these in the past," Abbasi says. "For example, Kenny has all this modern heavy metal language and then he can turn around and earnestly play like **Paul Motian** or **Tony Williams**. Ben has been musical director and keyboardist for some huge pop acts but has also performed my complex Hindustani-influenced jazz music. The versatility is pretty unusual and tangible and that's what this project is about, capturing and containing that vastness of energy in a 'jazz' experience."

Born in **Pakistan**'s teeming commercial metropolis **Karachi** and raised in **Southern California**, Abbasi is anything but a usual jazz player himself. He's spent his creative life navigating the crossroads of disparate musical realms. Growing up in **Torrance**, he first gravitated to the guitar under the sway of rock bands like **Rush**, **Van Halen** and **Led Zeppelin**. Straight ahead jazz had caught his ear by the time he started **Palos Verdes High School** and he thrived in the school's respected band program (future tenor sax star **Mark Turner** was a classmate). He had his first guitar epiphany when a friend took him to see **Joe Pass** and **Ella Fitzgerald**.

"I was 16 and at that age, technique and virtuosity are elements that bring you in," Abbasi says. "The idea that an older gentleman could play circles around **Eddie Van Halen** was really striking. I realized I had a lot of work ahead of me. That same year, I saw **Allan Holdsworth**, the polar opposite of **Pass**, and that was another ear and eye opener that lead me into a different direction." I do still love **Pass** and **Holdsworth**, but they didn't end up becoming big influences, rather, in combination they revealed two very opposing sides of jazz."

He wasn't drawn to **Hindustani** music until he happened to attend a private party down the street from his house where tabla maestro **Zakir Hussain** was performing with santoor master **Shivkumar Sharma** "and it blew me away," he recalls. "I felt that same elation when I saw **Pass** and **Holdsworth**. Sitting five feet away from these gentlemen, I was amazed by the striking sounds coming out of their instruments. I thought, I've got to get more involved with this side of my life, my roots."

After attending the University of Southern California, Abbasi made the move to **New York City** in the late 1980s to study jazz and classical music at **Manhattan School of Music** (while immersing himself in **North Indian** classical music on a pilgrimage to India under the tutelage of tabla giant **Ustad Alla Rakha**, **Zakir Hussain**'s father). He made his recording debut as a leader in 1995 with **Third Ear**. Recognized as a strikingly original voice, Abbasi released a series of landmark sessions in the succeeding two decades focusing on his original compositions, including 2005's Indo-jazz **Snake Charmer** with Indian-born vocalist/songwriter and now wife, **Kiran Ahluwalia**, and 2009's **Things To Come (Sunnyside)** with **Ahluwalia**, **Vijay Iyer**, **Rudresh Mahanthappa**, **Johannes Weidenmueller** and **Dan Weiss** (an album hailed by **DownBeat** as one of the decade's top CDs).

In many ways 2009 was a banner year, as Abbasi received a prestigious **Chamber Music America** commission to compose new works for the same ensemble, **Invocation**. He also formed the **Rez Abbasi Acoustic Quartet**, or **RAAQ**, with vibraphonist **Bill Ware**, drummer **Eric McPherson** and bassist **Stephan Crump**, to explore both originals and cover tunes. He introduced a new trio with bassist **John Hebert** and drummer **Satoshi Takeishi** on 2013's **Continuous Beat (Enja)**, a group that like **RAAQ** interprets originals and ingenious modern jazz compositions.

While best known for his work as an improviser, and composer, Abbasi also performs internationally with **Kiran Ahluwalia**, and serves as musical director, arranger and producer in their evolving artistic collaboration. Their creatively charged relationship has resulted in several **Juno Award**-winning albums hailed as world music masterpieces (such as 2008's **Wanderlust** and 2011's collaboration with Tuareg rockers **Tinariwen**, **Aam Zameen/Common Ground**). Over the years he's performed with a dazzling pantheon of giants such as **Ruth Brown**, **Peter Erskine**, **Kenny Werner**, **Barre Phillips**, **Tim Berne**, **Michael Formanek**, **Gary Thomas**, **Dave Douglas**, **Mike Clark**, **Ronu Majumdar**, **Kadri Gopalnath**, **Vishwa Mohan Bhatt**, **Greg Osby**, **Howard Levy** and many others.

With this newest album, **Behind the Vibration**, realized via his new electric **Junction**, Abbasi takes another bold step, embracing his rock 'n' roll roots with a bear hug that encompasses post-bop, **South Asian** traditions, and state of the art sonics. "More than anything that I've ever recorded, this album is the convergence of everything I'm interested in," he says. "The musicians I've chosen are versatile enough to pull it off. It's not only all of the influences that have come up to this point, it's also the process of merging it with the technology of today. This is music that could've only happened now."

*For more information on Rez Abbasi & Junction:*

[www.reztone.com](http://www.reztone.com) – [www.twitter.com/RezAbbasi](https://www.twitter.com/RezAbbasi) – [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)

### **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS: REZ ABBASI & JUNCTION**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the **Rez Abbasi** artist page @ [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)



#### **REZ ABBASI & JUNCTION:**

**Rez Abbasi** – guitar; compositions

**Kenny Grohowski** - drums

**Ben Stivers** - keyboards, B-3 organ and Rhodes

**Mark Shim** tenor saxophone and the electronic MIDI Wind Controller

***“The versatility is pretty unusual and tangible and that’s what this project is about, capturing and containing that vastness of energy in a ‘jazz’ experience.” – Rez Abbasi***

### **PRESS QUOTES ABOUT REZ ABBASI:**

“In his hands, the globe’s music feels relentlessly new and progressive.” - *LA Times*

"absorbing...engaging...and he’s judicious with his impressively fluent technique." - *New York Times*

"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 way of thinking through his solos in a linear way—reminiscent of his guitar hero Jim Hall—makes every line of music seem like a story putting you on the edge of your seat." - *Popmatters.com*

“Searching complexity...elegant eccentricity...unpredictable melodies...” - *DownBeat* magazine

“Mr. Abbasi has fashioned a career out of contemporary fusions, with keen insight and fleet technique” - *New York Times*

### **FEATURES ON REZ ABBASI:**

“**Rez Abbasi: Unplugged Fusion**” by Allen Morrison, *DownBeat*, March 2015

“**Rez Abbasi: Defusing Fusion. Giving jazz-rock classics a modern acoustic treatment**”

by Michael J. West, *JazzTimes*, May 17, 2015

“**Intuitions Unsaid but Issued in Rhythms**” by Nate Chinen, *New York Times*, August 12, 2011

“**Rez Abbasi: Thoroughly Modern Marvel**” by Lawrence Peryer, *All About Jazz*, January 2, 2012

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/rez-abbasi-thoroughly-modern-marvel-rez-abbasi-by-lawrence-peryer.php>