

Rudresh Mahanthappa's **Indo-Pak Coalition** has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "a trio equally grounded in folk tradition and jazz improvisation, propos[ing] a social pact as well as a musical ideal." The ensemble's three formidable talents — Mahanthappa on alto saxophone, Rez Abbasi on guitar, and Dan Weiss on tabla — first documented their group conception in 2008 with *Apti*, which won praise from *The Guardian* for its "irresistible urgency." ***Agrima***, the long-awaited follow-up, finds Mahanthappa and the group expanding aesthetic horizons: adding a modified drum set, incorporating effects and electronics, and working with a broader audio canvas overall. The core of the band's sound, the vibrant presence of Indian rhythmic and melodic elements in a charged, modern improvisational framework born of the New York jazz scene, remains firmly in place. The recording will be available as a \$2 download as well as a limited edition deluxe double LP via <http://rudreshm.com/>.

According to Mahanthappa, "***Agrima***" in Sanskrit simply means "next" or "following." It comes at a propitious time for all three members: Mahanthappa has enjoyed great success with his *Bird Calls* quintet and recently became Director of Jazz Studies at Princeton University. Abbasi, born in Karachi, Pakistan and raised in California, has revealed a rare mastery of guitar in a range of settings including his own RAAQ acoustic quartet and his heavily electric project, *Junction*. Weiss, a voraciously eclectic drummer with interests ranging from classical tabla performance to metal, has garnered acclaim for his work ranging from solo drums to trio to large ensemble.

"I wanted everyone to think about ***Agrima*** as if we were making a rock album," Mahanthappa declares. "*Apti* is almost 10 years old and I think the way that the three of us conceive of non-Western or Indian music sonically and technically has really evolved. So I didn't want us to be concerned with having an overt Indian sound. I wanted to highlight our interactions, which we've developed since 2005 when the band premiered at New York City's Joe's Pub."

From all three instruments we hear a heightening of expressive nuance and possibility. Mahanthappa's alto is transformed in places by software-driven effects to create strange processed timbres, echoes, decays and soundscapes. "Working with electronics is like learning a new instrument," Mahanthappa says. "It takes a bit of thought to figure out how to have a voice in that realm. I ended up doing some work with Neil Leonard [from the Berklee College of Music's program in Electronic Production and Design]. He's also an alto player. He wrote a piece for the two of us, just two altos and our laptops, and he made all these patches for me, allowing me to use them however I wanted. I was always interested in electronics but my initial foray was not until *Samdhi*, (2011). That was really kind of a more instinctive approach but in the end it turned out really cool and I got what I wanted. Electronics was something I always wanted to get back to."

Abbasi's guitar, clean-toned and fluid (at times even acoustic) on *Apti*, becomes something bigger and more foreboding on ***Agrima***: there's an edge and growl to the tone, a looming presence and sustain in the low notes, and more atmosphere thanks to an array of pedal effects that complement Mahanthappa's electronics at every turn. But perhaps the most pronounced shift from the previous record is Weiss's hybrid setup, melding tabla with drum set. "A while back we had a gig coming up in Montreal," Mahanthappa recalls, "and Dan asked what I thought about having him still be seated playing tabla but also with pieces of the drum set around him. We didn't even rehearse it, we just got to that sound check a half-hour early and Dan threw this thing together that ended up being amazing. That's how we've played ever since. On some tunes Dan only plays drum set, in fact. It all stems from our shared experience and our relationship to Indian music and jazz, which transcends the instrumentation."

In January 2017 the Indo-Pak Coalition premiered the new set of music that would become ***Agrima*** at globalFEST in New York. The energy of that encounter carried forward into the studio, from the eerie rubato incantation of “Alap” to the spiky lines and bracing tempo of “Snap,” from the looping synthesized patterns, fractured beats and sunny temperament of “Agrima” to the simpler, moodier medium groove of “Showcase.” The band is in peak form, executing tough thematic material, attending to fine dynamic contrasts, shifting tempos with spellbinding ease, and of course improvising with depth and ferocity.

There are riveting musical stories to be heard within “Rasikapriya” and “Revati,” ambitious works with ever-shifting rhythmic foundations, gamboling between hyper-precision and pure abstraction. Between the slow and measured legato of “Can-Did” and the agitated esprit of “Take-Turns” we hear the play of extremes, of the unexpected, a many-sided adventurousness that is the Indo-Pak Coalition’s reason for being. Inimitably rendered by three of the most mature and compelling players of our time, ***Agrima*** is an album likely to resonate through the years.

## **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.

Hailed by the New York Times as possessing “a roving intellect and a bladelikey articulation,” Mahanthappa has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and commissions from the Rockefeller Foundation MAP Fund, Chamber Music America and the American Composers Forum. He has been named alto saxophonist of the year for six of seven years running in Downbeat Magazine’s International Critics’ Polls (2011-2013, 2015-2017), and for five consecutive years by the Jazz Journalists’ Association (2009-2013) and again in 2016. He won alto saxophonist of the year in the 2016 JazzTimes Magazine Critics’ Poll. 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. In 2016, he was named the Director of Jazz and the Associate Director of the Program in Musical Performance at Princeton University.

*Mahanthappa is a Yamaha artist and uses Vandoren reeds exclusively.*

<http://rudreshm.com/>