IT'S NOT FUSION: HYBRIDITY IN THE MUSIC OF VIJAY IYER
AND RUDRESH MAHANTHAPPA

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This thesis concerns the performance of identity in the music of Indian American jazz musicians Rudresh Mahanthappa and Vijay Iyer. In combining the use of Indian classical music elements with jazz, Iyer and Mahanthappa create music that is inextricably tied to their multifaceted identities. Traditional musicological analysis is juxtaposed with a theoretical framework that draws on postcolonial theory and the history of Asian immigrant populations to the U.S. I chronicle the interactions between Indian and Western music and link it to larger issues of Asian American identity formation and activism through music. Through interviews and transcriptions of studio recordings, I identify specific compositional and improvisational strategies of the musicians. I emphasize the role of individual agency in the formation of second-generation identities, drawing attention to the distinct ways that Iyer and Mahanthappa approach their music. Finally, I connect this research to a larger discourse on Indian American artistic identity.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The combining of Indian classical music and popular genres of Western music has taken place for nearly half a century. The first musicians to do this were primarily white American or European musicians, such as the Beatles and John Mayer, who studied with highly regarded North and South Indian classical musicians in the 1960s. Many of these artists studied in India, and Indian musicians there also explored how to integrate Western musical ideas with an Indian aesthetic, especially in the Bollywood film industry. The emergence of Indian American musicians who incorporate components of Carnatic and Hindustani music into Western music, however, is a much more recent phenomenon that is closely linked to late twentieth century immigration.

Significant modifications to the United States Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965 led to a major increase in Indian immigration, resulting in the creation of a large group of first-generation Indian Americans, and their children, the second generation. Several musicians born into this second generation began to create hybridized styles of music as a direct result of this pattern of immigration. This thesis focuses on Rudresh Mahanthappa and Vijay Iyer, two of the first American-born Indian musicians to play Indian-influenced jazz. Mahanthappa and Iyer were born in 1971 to parents who relocated to the United States after the 1965 changes to immigration law. Mahanthappa, a saxophonist, was raised
in Boulder, Colorado, while Iyer, a pianist, was raised in Rochester, New York. They met in the mid-1990s while pursuing professional careers in jazz at a time when each had already begun experimenting with incorporating Indian classical music elements into jazz. As with many second-generation immigrants, these two struggled with constructing an identity out of multiple, and sometimes contradictory, cultures and value sets. Mahanthappa and Iyer reconcile these differences, in part, through music, ultimately using jazz as a strategy of exploring and forming unique, cohesive, and multifaceted Indian American identities.

This thesis investigates Indian American jazz (or Indo-jazz) through a detailed examination of immigrant identity construction and an analysis of Mahanthappa and Iyer’s music. I use relevant literature on immigration, multiculturalism, and Asian American music, along with additional information gathered from personal interviews and public concerts with Iyer and Mahanthappa. The concerts took place on June 5 and June 11, 2012 at the Discover Jazz Festival in Burlington, VT (a solo concert by Iyer) and the Vision Festival in Brooklyn, NY (Mahanthappa with the Mark Dresser Quintet) respectively. Interviews were conducted in person with Iyer in Manhattan and by phone with Mahanthappa between June 11-19th. Transcriptions using Western notation as well as detailed descriptions of recorded music are used in the fourth chapter. While I did not transcribe the live concerts, attending these shows gave
me a better understanding of the musicians’ improvisational techniques and approaches to their instruments.

Chapter 2, entitled "Construction of Identity Through Music," begins with a brief history of musical interactions between India and the West. I then contextualize the idea of hybrid music within a framework of Asian Americans making music as part of an exploration of hybrid identity. To narrow the scope further, I review past literature on music making in the Indian diaspora, followed by a discussion on how improvisation functions as a method of examining and asserting hybrid identities.

Chapter 3, “Indian Diaspora and Identity,” outlines the history of Indian immigration to the United States and lays the theoretical groundwork for the thesis. Using diaspora as a general frame for understanding the extensive movement of Indians, I explain Indian immigrant identity in relation to postcolonial theory and assimilation theory. Ultimately, I reveal how individual agency plays a vital role in identity construction.

Chapter 4 is the central section of the thesis, focusing on the music of Iyer and Mahanthappa. Beginning with details on their musical backgrounds, I analyze the development of their brands of Indian American jazz chronologically using transcriptions and detailed descriptions of selected excerpts. This chapter highlights how music is used to explore issues of second-generation immigrant identity.
Throughout the work, I refer to the concept of a hybrid identity. In this context, hybridity implies an identity made up of several different cultural components that directly resulted from being a second-generation immigrant. These cultural components can be combined in myriad ways, and hybridity implies neither an even distribution nor a fixed construction. I also differentiate hybridity from fusion\(^1\) in that the musicians’ goal is not to consciously combine disparate music-cultures, but rather to create a music that reflects the intricacies of their realities. I demonstrate how Iyer and Mahanthappa choose to emphasize different aspects of their hybrid identities depending on the musical context.

In conclusion, I draw parallels between these two musicians and the artistic works of other second-generation Indian immigrants, such as fiction writer Jhumpa Lahiri (*Interpreter of Maladies; The Namesake*), filmmaker Gurinder Chadha (*Bend it Like Beckham*), and actors Aziz Ansari and Mindy Kaling in order to place this discourse into the larger discussion of artistic identity formation. The struggles that second-generation immigrants face in creating their identities are unique and distinctive from those of generations before and after because their position as children of immigrants generates social pressures and pulls from different cultures. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in great detail, there are significant recurring themes in all of these artists’ work: weariness of being essentialized, a difficulty in uniting different

\(^1\) I use fusion to refer to the idea of two or more “pure” musical genres being merged together in a way that emphasizes the contrasts between them. In this context, it is unrelated to Indian fusion, a genre of Indian rock music, and *jugalbandi*, the combination of Carnatic and Hindustani music.
cultural values, and a desire to establish a unique second-generation Indian American identity. The use of art is one among many strategies, such as code-switching, clothing choices, and religious affiliation that these artists use in order to enact their identities.

For Iyer and Mahanthappa, music serves as a particularly productive site in which to explore hybridity. It provides a medium in which they can simultaneously maintain individuality while also leaving room for flexibility, improvisation, and change. In live performance, they experiment with different manifestations of their identities in real time; in recordings, they document their evolution as musicians crossing cultural barriers. Through music, Iyer and Mahanthappa are able to confront the complexity of their Indian American identities.
CHAPTER 2
CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH MUSIC

Early Musical Interactions of India and the West

During the first two centuries of the British presence in India, from the seventeenth century through the middle of the nineteenth century, Indian music was of little interest to Westerners. Gerry Farrell explains in his book *Indian Music and the West* that the lack of written notation and functional harmony made Indian music difficult for colonizers to understand (1997, 21-22). As with most other cultures, it was not until a hundred years later that “Indian music could be packaged as a sound and apprehended like other cultural artifacts” such as textiles, scripture, and spices (22). By 1858 when the official rule of India began, some British composers started transcribing and arranging Indian songs using Western notation that were known as Hindustani Airs (Farrell 1997, 28-32; Woodfield 1994; Schofield 2010). Meanwhile the European obsession with Orientalism saw the creation of several operas centered on Indian culture (Reck 1985, 85; Ferrell 1997, 3-4). Of course, the musicians that first attempted to combine Western and Indian ideas were not terribly concerned with authenticity and accuracy; rather, they aimed to force Indian musical ideas to fit into a Western harmonic context and to theatrically exoticize aspects of Indian culture (Woodfield 1994, 194-195).
The popularity of exoticizing all things Asian in the West continued for several decades. Meanwhile, a few Western musicians gained an interest in understanding Indian music on its own terms at the end of the nineteenth century. At this time, musicologists began the task of codifying concepts in Indian classical music, including attempts to notate microtones, or *srutis*, usually opting to use a numeric cipher notation (Farrell 1997, 54-57). Additionally, Indian musicians adopted many Western instruments, including the harmonium and the violin still used today.

Although these early interactions existed, the invention of the gramophone in 1877 allowed Indian and Western music experimentation to increase exponentially. Recording technology not only allowed Indian music to gain more exposure, but it also allowed for unaltered, more authentic representations of Indian music-culture to be disseminated to the general public, rather than it being restricted to a few early specialists (Farrell 1997, 113). Recording began the age of commercialism and music, and this is precisely what allowed the blending of Indian and Western musics to flourish (Farrell 1997, 111-143; Lavezzolli 2006, 5). As recording methods improved through the early twentieth century and the codification of Indian classical music (Hindustani in the north, Carnatic in the south) expanded and increased, this music became accessible to a wider audience allowing for exchanges of new musical ideas to take place.

This exchange was not a one-way street: in India, Hindi film song composers drew upon a number of classical and popular styles, both Indian and
Western, from the inception of the Bollywood film industry in Mumbai in the 1930s. Hindi film song composers mixed elements like the characteristic nasal vocal timbre of Indian singing with both traditional Indian and Western instrumentation. In the 1940s, Indian film composers drew inspiration from Hollywood composers, learning to write background music based upon the film song themes (Morcom 2001, 64). Advances in recording technology in the 1950s resulted in the expansion of Hindi film orchestras to include the large string sections characteristic of Western orchestras (65-66). These exchanges helped familiarize Indians with Western orchestral sounds contextualized in a way that resonated with the general Indian population.

While the British presence in India allowed musicians there to experiment with the blending of different musics, violinist and conductor Yehudi Menuhin’s interactions with Indian music masters planted the seed for the significant exchanges to come in the United States and Europe. Menuhin met the young sitar master Ravi Shankar in Paris, and in 1951 he traveled to India for the first time to study music. In 1955, his recording of *sarod* master Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (*Music of India: Morning and Evening Ragas*) became the first purely Hindustani recording to gain wide popularity (Lavezzolli 2006, 1-3). A decade later, Western musicians like John Mayer, the Beatles, and John Coltrane, made the incorporation of Indian musical concepts into popular music genres a worldwide trend. However, as Lavezzolli explains:

> This phenomenon was markedly different from the Orientalism of the 19th century that gave rise to the thinly veiled racism of institutions like the
Royal Asiatic Society, where Western colonialists sought to appropriate the impenetrable ‘Orient’ for political and material gain. In contrast to this Eurocentric agenda, a growing number of Westerners in the 1960s humbled themselves and became dedicated followers of Eastern spiritual disciplines. Capitalism being what it is, several aspects of this thirst for enlightenment, including music, were inevitably absorbed into Western mass culture and degenerated into little more than a commercial enterprise. But there is no question that the original impetus behind this search was borne of a genuine spiritual need in a time of political and social upheaval. (2006, 6)

Certainly the most widely recognized promoters of Indian spiritual ideas during this time were the Beatles. George Harrison was first introduced to Indian music while filming Help! in an Indian restaurant in early 1965, and he purchased a sitar shortly thereafter (Lavezzolli 2006, 171-199). His studies and collaborations with Ravi Shankar, who was already well known in India, conferred worldwide fame upon the sitar legend, and it familiarized the Western world with the characteristic sounds of Indian music. In fact, their association led to Shankar’s 1967 closing performance of the Monterey Pop Festival, a performance that introduced thousands of people to Indian music for the first time.

While the Beatles’ George Harrison helped to popularize the sounds of the sitar in songs like “Norwegian Wood” and “Within You Without You” (on 1965’s Rubber Soul and 1967’s Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band respectively), British-Indian composer John Mayer (along with Jamaican musician Joe Harriott) and John Coltrane were among the first musicians to incorporate Indian musical concepts into jazz. Mayer and Harriott’s Indo-Jazz Suite (1966) features a ten-piece band, five of whom form a jazz quintet, and five who are Indian classical musicians. Mayer and Harriott’s album made obvious and concrete references to
both jazz and Indian musical influences by using Western and Indian instrumentation, jazz harmonies, and aspects of both Indian rhythm (tala) and Indian melodic (raga) concepts.

John Coltrane, on the other hand, incorporated broader Indian musical concepts in an abstract manner on his albums Impressions (1963) and A Love Supreme (1964). As Lavezzoli (2006, 8-10) points out, pieces like “India” bore overt references to Indian inspiration, but the majority of these influences can be traced more subtly to Coltrane’s experimentation with modal improvisation. Instead of soloing off of chord changes, Coltrane began to write music grounded in particular modes, shifting the focus from functional harmonic relationships to scalar movement. Of course, this modal language did not necessarily have to come from Indian music, as it did not for longtime Coltrane collaborator Miles Davis, but Coltrane’s study of Indian music in the early 1960s clearly influenced the modal direction that he took soon thereafter. Coltrane’s more conceptual approach to Indo-jazz deeply inspired both Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa’s music (personal communication 2012).

Additionally, Coltrane was a pioneer of the free jazz movement along with Davis, and their exploration and escape from the traditional harmonic language played an integral role in the development of Asian American jazz. Lavezzolli writes that the song, “Africa’ represents another step in the internationalization of jazz, as Coltrane took the lead among African-American musicians looking to their ancestral homeland for inspiration” (2006, 277). Beginning in the 1970s,
Fred Ho and other Asian American jazz musicians followed Coltrane’s lead by exploring music rooted in their own ethnicities, ultimately paving the way for Iyer and Mahanthappa to do the same.

Asian American Musics

In the mid-1960s, around the same time that Coltrane, Mayer, and the Beatles were exploring Indian musical ideas, Asian immigration to the United States increased due to significant changes in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. While Indian musicians like Ravi Shankar gained recognition and popular Western musicians explored Indian musical and spiritual concepts, the population of Asian Americans grew exponentially.¹ The cultural landscape of the United States began to change significantly, and a process frequently referred to by mainstream media as “the ‘browning’ of America” began (Zheng 2010, 6). Although this “browning” referred mostly to Hispanic immigrants, Asian immigrants also became a significant presence in middle class neighborhoods, especially in California and New York (Purkayastha 2005, 17-33). The period from the 1960s to the early 2000s saw gradual advancements in technology that have allowed more instantaneous connections with people all over the world, including family members of immigrants that chose to stay in their home country. These overlapping events have led to “unprecedented changes in global

¹ Of course, Hispanic immigration, especially those from Mexico, also began to increase significantly at this time; however, issues relating to Hispanic immigration are beyond the scope of this study.
communication systems, and, most significantly, the recharting of the world demographic map” (Zheng 2010, 7). Asian immigrants who left their families behind in the search for better economic opportunities created scattered populations in a modern diaspora, raising families in newly created global communities.

The first American-born generation, also known as second-generation immigrants, appeared in the mid-1960s to the 1980s. Although many of these immigrants were of non-Indian origin, they faced similar obstacles and fears in learning to negotiate their place in American society: a fear of being essentialized, a difficulty in uniting different cultural values, and a desire to establish a unique second-generation immigrant identity. Some of these immigrants have chosen to negotiate these issues through music.

Su Zheng’s study of music in Chinese American communities, Claiming Diaspora (2010), is an important work on the construction of immigrant identity through music. Zheng asserts that music is a meaningful way to study the complex issues in immigrant identity because “it registers racialized Asian American history while resonating with diasporic cultural politics; it is powerful and meaningful enough to link the two sides of the Pacific, yet insignificant and irrelevant enough to escape the local (mainstream American) media’s attention; and it embraces hybridity and heterogeneity while yearning for a sense of cultural

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2 People who move to their new country as very small children (under age 5) are also considered to be a part of the second generation because their development follows the same patterns as American-born children (Purkayastha 2005). Such is the case with Rudresh Mahanthappa, who was actually born in Europe, but moved to the U.S. when he was still an infant.
belonging” (7). In acknowledging this hybridity, Zheng also draws attention to the issue of exoticization that Asian American artists face in creating their works.

Many of the musicians that Zheng discusses are members of families who immigrated several generations ago. Chinese immigrants were among the first Asians to arrive in the United States, mainly to take advantage of the California Gold Rush of 1849, and over a century before large-scale Indian immigration began. Throughout this first century, Chinese Americans remained essentially on the fringes of society with little political power and perceived racial inferiority (9-14). Chinese music was exoticized similarly to Indian classical music during the Euro-Western obsession with Orientalism (an issue discussed at length by Said 1979), and Chinese opera companies regularly toured throughout North America and Europe in the early twentieth century. Japanese immigrants also came in the early twentieth century, and World War II gave rise to even more hostile relations between whites and Asians in the U.S. The changes in immigration law after World War II, especially after 1965, caused an influx of several different Asian immigrant populations, and with the influence of the Black Power movement in the 1960s, Asian Americans began to band together to assert themselves as important parts of the American culturescape. Some of their children, second-generation immigrants, started to explore what it means to be Asian American during their teenaged years and early adulthood during the 1980s to the early 2000s.

Those who choose to explore issues of second-generation immigrant
identity through music often express dissatisfaction about the lack of Asian American musical representation on a national level. Zheng (2010, 4-5) discusses how the continual absence of Asian and Asian American music throughout the 1990s in the annual “American Roots Fourth of July Concert” in Washington, D.C., which aims to feature music by the diverse communities in the United States, is indicative of the lack of influence that Asian Americans have on mainstream political culture. As an example, in 1995 an enormous event featuring several Chinese and Chinese American musicians and artists in remembrance of the Sino-Japanese War went completely unnoticed by mainstream local media (5). While the national media in the United States is unlikely to cover an event such as this because interest would be limited to a relatively small population, even the local media in areas with high concentrations of Asian Americans largely avoid covering issues specific to Asian Americans. The number of Asian actors, musicians, and artists has grown significantly over the past ten years, yet Asian Americans are frequently typecast. They were nearly absent from the mainstream American media throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the growing diversity since the twentieth century, Asian Americans experience uneven representation and incorporation in American society: Asian-themed restaurants abound, but Asian American artists rarely appear on large national stages.

The desire for greater visibility was the impetus for many Asian American musicians to explore their multifaceted identities in their art. Zheng draws on the
research of Mark Slobin (1982), stating that the difficulty in exploring these
diasporic identities lies in the complex internal and external struggles that
second-generation immigrants face in relating to their families abroad, their
parents, and their non-immigrant peers (Zheng 2010, 18). In placing themselves
in the diasporic discourse, second-generation immigrants are able to participate
“in its powerful critique of oppressive nation-based culture and inequalities of
race, class, gender, and nationality, grounded in transnational perspectives” (19).
In other words, the discourse on diaspora gives musicians the agency to open up
a discussion of their racialized and marginalized statuses.

These Asian American musicians use their art as a way of investigating
and coping with the complex relationships between their ethnic backgrounds and
their place of residence. In essence, music is used as a form of expression,
exploration, and activism. Given the complexity of their identities, it is perhaps no
surprise that the mainstream media has difficulty in acknowledging the existence
of second-generation immigrants, instead continuing to highlight the (no less
complex) black/white dichotomy. Second-generation Asian Americans, as with
virtually all second-generation immigrants, occupy a unique space between two
cultures. They constantly negotiate these two communities to figure out where
they belong, although many feel that they never truly belong to either. As a result,
many second-generation immigrant artists create their own spaces in which they
can investigate and express their identities on their own terms. It is important to
note that a hybrid identity is not a disjointed one. Second-generation immigrants
may use many different strategies to interact with the different communities in which they belong, such as code-switching, but their identities encompass all of these parts into a cohesive whole.

How they choose to assert themselves, however, varies greatly. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou point out in the introduction to *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (2004) that Asian American artists “do not agree on the means by which to assert their presence. For instance, Fred Ho (1999), an Asian American jazz artist, argues that ‘just being there’ is not enough. Moreover, Ho contends that because much of Asian American cultural work is progressive in nature, Asian Americans should be in control of the means of cultural production by establishing their own production companies,” and the only way for Asian American musicians to problematize racialization, to escape essentialism is to dictate their own image (Lee and Zhou 2004, 18-19). It is not enough for a musician to simply play the music he or she wants to play. Rather, an Asian American artist needs to control every aspect of creation and dissemination of his or her art. A musician must be an activist.

Fred Ho is a particularly interesting and influential Chinese American musician. A Boston-bred baritone saxophonist and activist in the Asian American community, Ho was inspired by both the Black Power movement and African American music, especially the music of Cecil Taylor and John Coltrane (Asai 2005, 12). While the history of blacks in the United States differs in significant ways from the Asian American immigrant experience, Ho empathized with
African American efforts to become an important presence in the American political sphere (96-99). He related easily to black activist movements through the 1960s, and his work as a free jazz activist-artist was modeled after these efforts.

Musically, Ho’s new jazz idiom has “resulted in novel sonorities and reaffirmed a diasporic cultural identity for Asian American jazz” and at the same time “it has also provided musicians who play Chinese [or other Asian] traditional instruments more exposure to improvisational skills and the harmonic language of jazz, broader social networks, and higher visibility” (Zheng 2010, 164-165). Both Asians and blacks continue to experience marginalization, racism, and limited political power due to their prescribed statuses as different from the “norm.” Of course, essentializing expectations differ significantly for the two groups, and for Asians they primarily have to do with assumptions of economic success. In establishing a larger network of musicians, Asian American artists are able to assert themselves as a significant part of not only the Asian American community, but also as a part of mainstream American society. This is the ultimate goal of such activism.

Citing similar influences to Fred Ho, the Northern Californian nonprofit record label, Asian Improv aRts, is a collective of Asian American artists that aim “to create innovative works that are rooted in the diasporic experiences of Asian and Pacific Island heritage” (http://asianimprov.org). Formed in 1987, Asian Improv aRts features the music of several Asian American jazz musicians,
especially those in free jazz, of which Vijay Iyer was one in the mid-to-late 1990s. Although those of East Asian descent dominate the non-profit organization, Iyer’s relationship with this group during his years in the Bay Area profoundly affected the way he approached his own music and activism (personal communication 2012).

In her book, *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*, Deborah Wong dedicates her twelfth chapter to Asian Improv aRts. In it, she discusses the connections between African American and Asian American music, stating that “When Asian Americans participate in African American musics, they do not simply inscribe African American histories onto Asian American bodies. Improvisational music and its performers are situated in a particular tradition of politicized music-making, and this music will say more and, indeed, mean more if its social context is understood” (2004, 277). Thus, Wong emphasizes that although these artists utilize concepts that came from African American music, they are not simply comparing themselves to African Americans. Instead, they are recontextualizing their art based upon their own struggles.

The goal of Asian Improv aRts is to serve the needs of the individual first, but always in the context of varied Asian American experiences. Wong contrasts Asian Improv aRts to the Chicago-based black nationalist arts organization, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, stating that the AACM’s main goal was to promote a “Black nationalist aesthetic,” as opposed to Asian Improv aRts who focus on the *individual* “histories behind the bodies” that create
the art (2004, 277). Wong’s implication that the AACM does not value the individual musician’s goals is probably overstated; however, her point is that the AACM’s primary goal is to stand for and celebrate the advancement of the black community first.

In “Cultural Politics: The African American Connection in Asian American Jazz-Based Music,” Susan Asai (2005) discusses several reasons why the Black Power movement in African American culture appealed to Asian American musicians. It was an alternative to the white-dominated mainstream, allowing for the exploration of more complex and often ignored ideas of culture and identity through music (102). In transcending the bounds of the traditional harmonic language of jazz, the free jazz movement of the 1960s laid the groundwork of an appropriate path for Asian American artists to follow, and they began to create new spaces to study their layered identities.

The connection to the African American community has allowed for marginalized communities to work toward similar goals of participating in larger American culture on equal footing with their white counterparts. For Vijay Iyer, these are goals that should be accomplished not in parallel to each other, but together. Though his incorporation of Indian elements in jazz highlights his Indian American identity, Iyer repeatedly feels the need to assert the fact that he is participating in a music-culture with African American roots, pointing to the “history of Asian Americans and African Americans collaborating in political activism and community organizing” that he experienced while working with
Asian Improv aRts in the Bay Area (personal communication 2012). For musicians like Iyer, the influence of the Black Power movement on Asian American organizations is still salient.

Indian Musicians in the Diaspora

Thus far, I have only discussed the music of Asian Americans as a whole, with more emphasis on East Asian jazz musicians. However, Indian musicians in the diaspora face a unique set of issues that are different from those of East Asians. The general public’s inability to differentiate between those of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ancestry results in East Asians frequently being categorized as “Chinese.” South Asians/Indians, on the other hand, look completely different. With darker skin but so-called Aryan features, Indians have always occupied a confusing place in American society because it is frequently unclear in both the mainstream media and in much academic literature when the term “Asian” includes or excludes South Asians. Throughout the last half-century, people have frequently disagreed on how Indians should be categorized. For example, in the mid-1970s when my father emigrated from South India to Oxford, Mississippi to do his Ph.D. in electrical engineering at Ole Miss, he found that the black/white dichotomy was still very strong in the south. So much so, in fact, that when he applied for his first driver’s license, the sheriff (who issued the licenses at the time) changed his racial designation from “other” to “black.” My father was legally black for two years. Although my father’s particular experience may have
been out of the ordinary, it is clear that even now, self-identification and outside perception of culture and ethnicity are often two different matters.

Another difference between East Asian and Indian immigration is that large-scale immigration of Indians increased only two decades after British colonialism ended. Westernization had slowly changed and influenced the landscape of India for two centuries before Indians flocked west. It is important, then, to contextualize Indian musicians in the postcolonial world. In fact, this is exactly what ethnographers of Indian music in the diaspora have done. There have been numerous studies of Indo-American, Indo-British, and Indo-Caribbean musical scenes. A review of these studies will deepen an understanding of Indian musicians in the diaspora, the issues they face, and the many ways in which they use music to assert their cultural diversity.

Chutney

Chutney, a general term for a blended Indian condiment, also refers to a genre of Indo-Caribbean music that gained some worldwide recognition from the 1970s-1990s. The history of chutney, however, goes back much further. Indian immigration to the Caribbean cannot be considered entirely voluntary. It began in the mid-nineteenth century when African Caribbean enslaved peoples were freed. British colonialists became desperate to get others to work their sugar cane fields, so they turned to India. The British convinced hundreds of thousands of Indians to move to Trinidad, Fiji, Guyana, and Suriname as indentured
servants, and in some cases, laborers were forced (Ramnarine 1996, 133; Manuel 1998, 21). Like the Africans who were enslaved before them, these Indians were not part of a monoculture; rather, they represented a diverse group of people from different cultural backgrounds (Ramnarine 1996, 138-139).

As with Asian immigrants in the United States, the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a time when Indo-Caribbeans began asserting themselves as a significant multicultural presence in Caribbean culture with “the ongoing process of creolisation, the concomitant decline of various ancestral traditions (such as caste, ritual and codes of female comportment), and lastly, the revival of interest in Indian culture, itself sparked by the Black Power movement, the increasing affluence of the Indian community, and other factors” (Manuel 1998, 25). Chutney, with its mixture of languages, musical styles, and instruments came to represent the blended Indo-Caribbean identity.

The music has its roots in the Hindu “pre-wedding ritual bathing” ceremony known as mathkor, but developed into a concert-stage genre by the 1970s (Manuel 1998, 25), containing aspects of Indian culture, Caribbean culture, and British culture. The primary purpose of chutney music is to incite audience members to dance (22-24). Chutney is typically sung in mixed Caribbean English and Hindi. Additionally, vocal timbre and slight ornamentations strongly resemble those found in Indian folk genres and Hindi film styles. Vocalists can be male or female, and are typically backed by a band
that consists of keyboards, guitars, the North Indian drum called the *dholak*, and drum machines.

Afro-Caribbean rhythms make up the basis of the music that sounds similar to Caribbean calypso. Unlike calypso, but “In accordance with their secondary importance, chutney texts are simple and repetitive” (Manuel 1998, 29). The simple quadratic folk rhythms on the *dholak* and catchy, unornamented vocals are precisely what persuade audience members to dance (29). While chutney has never become a popular genre of music even in the Caribbean, as its radio airplay is extremely limited, the genre has been adopted by many urban centers around the world such as London, Toronto, and New York City. Chutney, the word and the genre of music, has come to serve as an appropriate metaphor for a blended, multicultural identity of Indian Caribbeans throughout the world.

### British *Bhangra*

*Bhangra* music is probably the Indian-influenced genre most familiar to Westerners, yet it is not very old. Originating in Britain in the early 1980s, *bhangra* has its roots in the Punjabi *ghazal*. According to Sabita Banerji (1988), the *ghazal* is “a complex, intense lyric poem which has its roots in seventh century Persia and conveys, with haiku-like brevity, the heightened emotions of unrequited love” (207). Since people hailing from the northeastern state of Punjab make up the majority of Indian British citizens, musicians began to blend this folk genre with Western music, creating a blend of Punjabi folk styles, rock ‘n’
roll, Afro-British reggae and hip hop, and Western pop (Sharma et al. 1996, 61-62). Like chutney, bhangra is associated with dancing and utilizes the dholak drum. The genre has also developed many incarnations, including “Bhangramuffin,” “Acid Bhangra,” and “Asian Rap and Jungle,” all of which combine bhangra with different Western (mostly African British or African American) genres (Sharma et al. 1996, 33). These dance rhythms are unmistakable and bhangra music and dance is typically included in Indian festivals at universities, Indian weddings, and Indian holiday celebrations in both the United States and Britain.

In contrast to its popularity now, bhangra was originally considered an Indian British youth dance counter-culture, allowing this minority to express themselves in a comfortable venue during a time when many Indian parents were reluctant to let their children participate in mainstream British youth culture. Early studies of the music by Banerji (1988) and Gerd Baumann (1990) supported this claim and portrayed the music as a genre that united a homogenous group of Indian youths (Sharma et al. 1996, 35-36). In the introduction to their edited volume about the Asian dance genres, Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, and Ashwani Sharma directly challenge this assertion by emphasizing the varied experiences of Indian British youth (1996, 36). Sanjay Sharma’s chapter in the book, “Noisy Asians or ‘Asian Noise’?,” continues to challenge this assertion, stating that “Any attempts to map out or explicate the ‘New Asian Dance Music’ immediately encounters the freaky act of cultural categorization, as well as the
poverty of established musical classification” (Sharma et al. 1996, 32). Sharma does not deny the fact that bhangra brings Indian youth together and provides a site for self-exploration; however, he is concerned that by grouping together Indian British youth, Banerji and Baumann reaffirm essentialist ideas that these youth are trying to escape.

Additionally, this kind of essentialism ignores the fact that the Indian British do participate in mainstream British society by consuming popular music and incorporating popular Western genres into bhangra. He clarifies that bhangra is a genre that aims for syncretism, not juxtaposition, of different musical ideas (Sharma et al. 1996, 33). Like the Asian American jazz artists discussed above, Indian British bhangra musicians are attempting to create a cohesive, not disjointed, diasporic musical identity.

Since the late 1990s, bhangra has even become popular among mainstream consumers interested in learning about Indian culture. A quick youtube search yields dozens of results in which youths of Indian and non-Indian origin perform dances at various events to recorded music. Surprisingly, despite the fact that it has become a well-known genre throughout the Western world, the number of academic studies on it are still fairly small, a fact which Sharma et al. lament (1996, 1-17). Nevertheless, bhangra represents a significant contribution to the musical landscape of Indians in the diaspora.
Indo-American Hip Hop

Since the late 1990s, several significant studies on Indian American musical cultures have emerged, especially focusing on communities in New York and Chicago. In all of these studies, the word desi is ascribed to the musicians and consumers, highlighting the differences between Indians and those in the Indian diaspora. Sunaina Maira (2002) and Nitasha Sharma (2010, not to be confused with Sanjay Sharma) have both written significant works on the emergence of American bhangra and hip hop. Their books highlight the varied experiences of Indian American youth. Maira’s ethnography follows several young Indian Americans in the mid-1990s learning to negotiate their discomfort in being neither wholly American nor wholly Indian through various Indian American hip hop dance scenes in New York City. She challenges the essentialist/hybrid discourse, stating that “the very notion of hybridity leads back to the idea of purity” (Maira 2002, 191). Maira’s belief that hybridity implies the essentialization of perceived “pure” music traditions is a valid concern. It does seem possible, however, to recover this idea in the context of an individual’s ability to shape public perception of their image in the manner of Fred Ho and Asian Improv aRts. In this concept of hybridity, artists adopt different aspects of their surroundings by making conscious cultural choices.

Sharma’s book, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (2010) is also about Indians in hip hop, but focuses more on ethnic self-identification. She discusses the complexity of justifying the
appropriation of black ideas into Indian American music “by developing newly racialized identities that express a political consciousness of interminority solidarity” (3). She is quick to assert that class struggles have little to do with Indian American hip hop, as the artists she studies come from both suburban and urban backgrounds. Instead, “hip hop’s nonconformity drew the desi artists to its form, content, and community. Beats and rhymes resonate with the performers, but hip hop was not strictly responsible for developing their nonconformism; instead, their sense of alienation and engagement with the critical thinking inspired this move” (2010, 199). In other words, the Indian American artists in Sharma’s study associated themselves with black music after realizing their invisibility in mainstream American culture. Iyer cites similar reasons for being drawn to the jazz idiom. These musicians chose hip hop or jazz as their medium of exploring identity and activism after recognizing this invisibility.

In his study on the Indian American DJ and dance scene in Chicago, Gregory Dietrich writes that “Desi music culture, though a strong signifier of youth independence and modernity, at times taps into imaginings of India’s ‘ancient tradition’” (1999, 38). Dietrich’s statement highlights the fact that the purpose of creating hybrid music is not necessarily to accurately reflect aspects of traditional Indian music, but to draw upon and implement these ideas in a way that makes the Indian elements recognizable enough that Indian American youths feel connected to their culture. He is also quick to criticize those that label the black influence in the Chicago scene as a form of overt political activism even though
they draw on music, imagery, and clothing styles from black music; instead he views this link as a way of identifying with oppressed minorities in general, but still recognizes the importance in the different manifestations of oppression against blacks versus Indians (43). Additionally, unlike the Asian American jazz musicians in the early 1970s who were struggling to put together a collective of like-minded individuals, this relatively new scene consists of an already cohesive group wishing to celebrate their view of Indian American identity (54-55). In this community, Indian American youth are less interested in widespread recognition. Instead, their ultimate goal is to revel in feelings of solidarity.

Although these authors mostly studied smaller scenes, the similar themes that emerge from Indian American, Indian British, and Indian Caribbean musical contexts include concerns about invisibility, essentialism, assimilation, and homogenization. Each scene is contextualized in the Indian diaspora, but unlike Asian American jazz musicians like Fred Ho, the Indian musicians in this section do not necessarily view their music as activism. The musics of Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa, however, especially during their early years, consciously took on a tone of activism in the vein of Asian Improv aRts and Ho.

Improvisation as a Strategy for Exploring Culture

Improvisation plays an important role in the music of Iyer, Mahanthappa and other Asian American jazz artists. It is an integral part of many musical traditions throughout the world, and it is an especially fundamental concept in
both jazz and Indian music. Though the methods of improvisation differ, the significance of the concept in both music-cultures allows for the creation of hybrid musical ideas. Therefore, I argue that improvisation can be seen as a strategy for exploring culture and identity in and of itself. Edward Sarath points out the advantages of studying improvisation as a cultural strategy, stating that “the very spontaneity which renders improvisation an elusive analytical topic may yield unique expressive and aesthetic principles which spawn new angles of musical inquiry” (1996, 1). Improvisation, then, forces a musician to analyze music differently because the varying approaches to improvisation highlight important musical concepts and draw out distinctive musical characteristics.

Understanding its importance to music studies, Bruno Nettl has edited two different volumes on improvisation, one with Melinda Russell (1998) and the other with Gabriel Solis (2009). In the introduction to In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation (1998), Nettl discusses how musicology has traditionally paid little attention to the concept in order to focus on composition (1-2). He rightly asserts, however, that improvisation is not the antithesis to composition. For example, “In Carnatic music, the large form, raga-tanam-pallavi, proceeds from very general gradually to more restricted models…Moving through the raga-tanam-pallavi, performers gradually have less choice, and the model upon which they improvise increases in specificity” (13-14). Thus, although improvisation plays an essential role in Carnatic music, it is not without structure, not without form. Both Iyer and
Mahanthappa use similar strategies as a way of exploring their musical identities. Additionally, improvisation in Indian music is frequently based upon the reduction and expansion of rhythmic phrases. Although Iyer and Mahanthappa do not have the Indian musical training to be able to incorporate such phrases spontaneously, they frequently use these improvisatory techniques in their compositions.

In the introduction to Nettl and Solis’ volume on improvisation, Solis writes that many new listeners falsely presume that improvisation in jazz is completely random, and listening to free jazz for the first time could serve to affirm this notion (Solis 2009, 1). Of course, in reality improvisation is based upon years of building a vocabulary that musicians draw upon in the moment. Jazz musicians can choose to improvise on the melody line, the chord changes, or they can respond to the other musicians in a musical conversation. Iyer and Mahanthappa draw upon all three of these techniques in their soloing, although the use of one approach is not necessarily at the exclusion of another. For example, as soloists, Iyer and Mahanthappa often react to what the other musicians play while simultaneously staying within (or consciously breaking out of) a given melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic structure.

Often, improvisation in jazz is characterized as telling a continuous story; however, Iyer disagrees that these stories are inevitably successive. In his article, “Exploding the Narrative in Jazz Improvisation” (2004), Iyer writes that “Musicians tell their stories, but not in the traditional linear narrative sense; an exploded narrative is conveyed through a holistic musical personality or attitude”
Iyer is referring to the idea that in jazz improvisation, several processes are working at the same time. Within one solo, a musician’s story may be spontaneous in one moment and calculated in the next. This was particularly evident in the concerts I attended, where Iyer and Mahanthappa would sometimes fixate on a musical motive for long periods of time, and then depart from it at the appearance of a new idea. Furthermore, the nature of improvisation is such that ideas are constantly being renegotiated in real time, so different musical influences can be revealed suddenly. The most important characteristic of improvisation in jazz is that the process belongs to the individual, not the genre as a whole.

A jazz musician strives for his or her own personal identity. Iyer’s view of the exploding jazz narrative plays out even in his and Mahanthappa’s use of Indian elements, choosing at times to follow a rule more strictly, then suddenly breaking out (or “exploding” out) and doing something entirely new. At times, they improvise on a particular Indian mode, while other times, they restrict themselves to traditional Western harmonies. All of these choices are authentic representations of their identities. Iyer and Mahanthappa are drawn to the idea of incorporating Indian heritage into their music because of their desire to assert individuality and unique cultural perspectives. Their musical choices are informed by complex identities, thus demonstrating how improvisation functions as a performance of hybridity.
CHAPTER 3
INDIAN DIASPORA AND IDENTITY

Indians in the United States

Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa were born to South Indian immigrants who moved to the United States after 1965. The first wave of Indian immigrants to the United States, however, were predominantly male Sikhs from the northwestern Punjab region who settled in large numbers to farm in Northern California in the early twentieth century, intermarrying with Mexican immigrants due to the alarmingly small number of female Indian immigrants¹ (Khandelwal 2002, 9-10; Purkayastha 2005, 15-18; Buenker and Ratner 2005, 65-66, Bhatia 2007, 81-85). During World War I, mistrust of Asians led to a large-scale ban on immigration that lasted for several decades. Beginning in the 1920s, naturalized Asians were also stripped of their citizenship (Purkayastha 2005, 15), and in 1923, the Supreme Court officially ruled to categorize Indians as “non-white” Asians in the case of United States versus Bhagat Singh Thind (Bhatia 2007, 86). As a result, the number of Indians in the U.S. remained fairly stable throughout the first half of the twentieth century, making up a relatively insignificant portion of the population.

¹ Very few of these early Punjabi immigrants were married at the time of immigration. Soon after they arrived, Indian immigration ceased completely, making it impossible for them to start families with Punjabi women. Laws at the time prevented miscegenation, but Indians and Mexicans shared a “brown” racial status that made it possible for them to intermarry (see Leonard 1993, 2-5).
In 1946, the U.S. reestablished the right of Asian Indians to become naturalized citizens.\(^2\) This restored the possibility of new immigration, although numbers remained relatively small for another decade due to a strict quota that was set a quarter of a century before (Buenker and Ratner 2005, 66; Tambiah 2000, 173-174; Dietrich 1999, 39). This reopening of the borders coincided closely with Indian Independence in 1947, and Indians, mainly those who had received or were seeking higher education, left the subcontinent due, in no small part, to the perceived benefits of moving to countries with greater economic opportunities, especially to Europe and the United States. While it is unclear as to how many of these immigrants intended to eventually move back to their homelands, the majority of them ended up staying.

This new, though modest, Indian diaspora led to the making of new Indian communities abroad and reimaginings of their old ones. The creation of such communities is common in diasporic populations because the scattering of immigrants “effectively compresses time and space such that it enables the experiences of many places at what would appear to be one moment…Homeland, land of settlement, space for travel, all undergo significant reworking through the concept and object of diaspora” (Shukla 2001, 551).

Whereas the earlier Punjabi population was unable to form a cohesive Indian American group because of restrictive immigration laws, the changes in 1946

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\(^2\) The Luce-Celler Act of 1946 was enacted in response to criticism from the Indian government about treatment of Indian immigrants. Concerned about maintaining a good relationship with the soon-to-be independent nation, Truman’s Congress passed the bill (Hess 1969, 77).
made it easier for men and women to move together, allowing for the creation of these new communities. Continued improvements in communication technology also made maintaining contact with relatives in India easier. Indian immigrants’ perception of home underwent significant changes in the diaspora that often resulted in them accepting their new homes, while still retaining some ties to their old ones.

In 1965 at the height of the civil rights movement, the U.S. made significant changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act that not only reinstated large-scale Asian immigration but also relaxed rules in obtaining U.S. citizenship. These amendments made immigration to the U.S. easy and attractive for the first time since the aftermath of WWI (Brettell 2007, 60). The results of this loosening of the borders were similar to those in 1946, but this time to a much larger degree: thousands of Indians migrated to the U.S. with hopes for better educational opportunities resulting in economic upward mobility over the next several decades. Of course, this growth was not exclusive to Indians, as record numbers of other Asians and Latinos also took advantage of the open borders (2-4). However, those of Indian origin did make up a significant number of the overall Asian immigrants after 1965.

In her book, *Negotiating Ethnicity: Second-Generation South Asian Americans Traverse a Transnational World*, Bandana Purkayastha (2005, 15) makes an important distinction between the waves of South Asian immigrants between 1950-1985 and those that came after: during the first wave, immigrants
tended to be well-educated Indians who were able to work their way into American middle class communities with white-collar jobs such as doctors, engineers, and scientific researchers. After 1985, the types of Indians coming to the U.S. became more varied, some less educated than others, and many who were unable to make a middle class living. While studies of the diversity of Indian immigrants after 1985 will surely yield interesting results contradictory to the stereotyped highly educated and successful Indian immigrant, in this thesis, we will be primarily concerned with the pre-1985 decades of Indian immigration, as both Iyer and Mahanthappa hail from this generation.

Indians immigrating in the 1960s and 1970s were mostly middle-class urbanites born during a transition period right after Indian independence (Khandelwal 2002, 2-6). Although their identities as Indians (as opposed to colonized Indians) were strong, they had also been exposed to many aspects of Western ways of life already, including the residual British education system and clothing styles, both of which allowed for a relatively easy transition to the United States middle class (1). Also, unlike the Indian immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century, there were both men and women from many different regions of India, the vast majority settling into predominantly white suburban communities in New York and California (Purkayastha 2005, 15-18; Sharma 2010, 24-25). Most of them left large numbers of family members behind on the subcontinent, but due to technological advancements, these new Indian Americans were able to retain ties to their former homeland through frequent visits, phone calls, and
later, through online communication. Indian immigrants also constructed new South Asian American communities, both to strengthen ethnic or religious ties, and to garner support for relevant social and political issues.

While literature on first-generation South Asian immigrants has been abundant since the 1990s (for detailed examples see Lessinger 1995; Appadurai 1996; Prashad 2000; Khandelwal 2002), studies on the experiences of second-generation Indian immigrants have only begun to surface in the past few years. These studies are beginning to reveal the major similarities and differences between second-generation immigrants and their parents, and also how their parents’ choices regarding integration and assimilation have affected the construction of their own identities. Kivisto and Rundblad (2000) describe the range of reactions that second-generation immigrants have inside and outside their homes in that “Individuals are torn by conflicting social and cultural demands, while facing the challenge of entry into an unfamiliar and frequently hostile world. Yet the difficulties are not always the same. The process of ‘growing up American’ ranges from smooth acceptance to traumatic confrontation, depending on the characteristics that immigrants and their children bring along and the social context that receives them” (Kivisto and Rundblad 2000, 317). Some parents expect their children to adhere to their cultural customs, while other parents barely acknowledge their cultural background. These kinds of choices have a profound effect on members of the second-generation as they establish their identities.
The number of other immigrants in an area can also contribute to how a second-generation immigrant views him or herself. For example, Rudresh Mahanthappa grew up isolated from areas with larger South Asian populations. He states,

I grew up in Boulder, Colorado, which, there weren’t a lot of other Indian families around. I mean, I think everyone’s situation is a little bit different. My wife is Indian American as well and she grew up more with a sort of community of Indian families, where we did not. And even if there was one, there was sort of a community remotely acceptable, but my parents didn’t really get along with it, so the idea of actually mixing with other Indians in some sort of social way or cultural way, let’s say even if it’s religion or whatever, just didn’t exist for me. (Personal communication 2012)

For Mahanthappa, his parents’ decision to disassociate themselves from any Indian American community that did exist in Boulder resulted in him identifying largely with the white middle class community in which he grew up. In fact, he admits that it was when he arrived at the University of North Texas to do his undergraduate studies in jazz saxophone performance that “I kinda realized that I wasn’t white. I think I realized I wasn’t white by realizing that I wasn’t black, either” (personal communication 2012).

Mahanthappa contrasted his experiences growing up in Boulder with his wife’s and Vijay Iyer’s childhood experiences, both of who grew up in families more involved in the larger Indian American community. Iyer had an awareness of Indian identity well before he entered college; growing up, he was conscious of his status as “other” (personal communication 2012). Despite these contrasting childhood experiences, Iyer and Mahanthappa began exploring their racialized
identities once they reached university, a common theme for many young Indian Americans (Maira 2002; Buenker and Ratner 2005; Purkayastha 2005; Sharma 2010). Their interest in doing so can be contextualized in theories of diaspora, postcolonialism, multiculturalism, and transnationalism.

Diaspora and the Second Generation

I follow James Clifford’s claim that “it is not possible to define diaspora sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to privative oppositions. But it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement” (1994, 310). In doing so, we can engage a nuanced discussion on the effects of diaspora on different immigrant generations. For example, what does it mean to assimilate? Which generation, if any, is no longer associated with their immigrant ancestors? At what point does an immigrant status cease to be relevant, and when does citizenship begin? While I do not think it is possible to provide fixed answers to these questions, they are useful in framing a discussion of the formation of diasporic identities.

Like all immigrants, Indians in the diaspora are constantly navigating their place in their new home, often in relation to the old one. Indian immigrants “maintain (real and/or imagined) connections and commitments to their homeland as well as to recognize themselves and act as a collective community…These non-European/nonwhite diasporic communities bring to the fore the sense of constantly having to negotiate between here and there, past and present,
homeland and host land, self and other” (Bhatia 2007, 31). Ties to their former country are maintained in a variety of ways: through technology, travel, and building new communities to reinforce older ideas and explore appropriate changes. Additionally, while immigrants hold onto some aspects of their former homelands, these should not be taken as accurate representations of the old because immigrants are constantly adjusting these expressions to fit within a new context (Zhou 1997, 80-86). Old ideas are continually being renegotiated, resulting in significantly different cultural manifestations. While immigrants may declare that a performance of their traditions is authentic, they are, nonetheless, adapted performances.

Indians have been particularly successful in creating large communities throughout metropolitan areas in the United States that strengthen cultural ties of the past and present (Brettell 2005, 875-876). The imagined connections that Bhatia (2007, 31) discusses above reference the fact that in creating such communities, Indians and other South Asians in the United States frequently interact in their new country in ways that do not normally occur in their natal homes. For example, I grew up as a part of a large mixed community of Indians in Los Angeles county. Our community consisted of immigrants from both North and South India, with religions ranging from Hinduism to Sikhism to Christianity. While this is fairly typical in the United States, in India, caste, familial connections, geographical range, and religious ties significantly affect interactions between people. Indian immigrants in the diaspora concern
themselves less with such differences; instead they associate with people who
they perceive as similar, even if they may not have interacted with these groups
had they never moved. I would argue that this process is magnified for the
offspring of immigrants, who are often oblivious to cultural biases with which their
parents were preoccupied resulting from caste designations (for Hindus) or
conflicts with other Asian countries (such as the Sino-Indian War in 1962). As a
result, they connect with both South Asian and non-South Asian marginalized
communities to find support.

Even as immigrant families work to navigate their place in their new
communities, this process is not unidirectional: immigrant communities have
noticeable impacts on their continually transforming host societies. The worlds
they enter are not static and unchangeable. Peter Kivisto emphasizes the fluidity
of societies, recognizing that a major deficiency of assimilation theory in the past
was that it focused on the relationship of the immigrant to their new society, but
almost never took into account the changes that societies make when faced with
the constant influx of new immigrants (2001, 571). In the case of Indian
immigrants, these changes can be seen in the commercial sphere: bandhani-
inspired clothing,\(^3\) Indian grocery stores and restaurants, and of course, Indian
influences in music. The increasing availability of these things for consumption by
the general population highlights the feedback loop between the host society and
the immigrant cultures that occupy it. The superficial changes are indicative of

\(^3\) Bandhani is an Indian technique of tie-dying, frequently used on articles of clothing, wall
hangings, pillowcases, and other decorative household items.
deeper structural changes that are more difficult to detect but that affect the larger society nonetheless.

These feedback loops become more complex when contextualized in relation to the second generation of immigrants. While the first generation frequently maintains close ties to their former homeland, especially to immediate family members left behind, second-generation ties are more tenuous. Indian immigrants born in the United States after 1965 occupy an in-between space in Western society, recognizing their differences from the too-often emphasized black/white dichotomy in the United States, but also unable to fully participate in Indian culture. The result is that second-generation Indian immigrants frequently align themselves with groups facing similar issues, especially East Asians. As sociologist Jerry Park explains, second-generation Asian immigrants are categorized together in a way that their parents were not (2008, 545). Before 1965, the label Asian normally referred only to those of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean origin; after 1965, several different cultures were added under the Asian umbrella, including Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Vietnamese, Filipinos, Malaysians, and Indonesians. Asian, as an overdetermined marker of ethnic social status in the U.S., created connections between formerly separate communities whose second generation has come together to address their marginalization as a community of Asians. While Park admits that people infer that the word “Asian” references “East Asian” in the U.S., he notes an interesting phenomenon where second-generation Indians consider themselves both
specifically “Indian American” and more generally “Asian American.” Meanwhile, many second-generation East Asians purposefully exclude all South Asians from their personal definitions of Asian (549). Most of the time, this exclusion is due to perceived differences, especially relating to phenotype.

There are significant cultural (and phenotypic) differences in Asian ethnicities, but Asian American statuses as “other” often bind these groups together (Park 2008; Khandelwal 2002; Maira 2002). Asian organizations throughout the United States have broadened their missions to include South Asian interests. Asian student associations at universities, such as the ones that Park studied, now frequently recruit South Asians because they perceive their cultural concerns as analogous. In fact, “Not only do second-generation Asian Americans view their experience as similar, but they also ascribe similarity to their cultural values. This also complicates ethnic pan-Asianism by pointing out the tension between ascribing similarity and difference to Asian cultures when defining what Asian American [sic] means” (Park 2008, 550). These perceived similar values include highly valuing education, the ability to attain economic stability, and close familial relations. Additionally, Asian Americans face the “model minority” stereotype together because of relative economic and educational successes in the West that are often perceived to be the result of the pan-Asian cultural values mentioned above.

The trope of the model minority can be extremely misleading in several ways. First, it does not take into account the fact that during this period U.S.
immigration specifically favored Asians with strong educational backgrounds and good occupational prospects. The people who came during this period shared similar values because they were essentially recruited based upon these values. Second, the model minority stereotype makes it easy to ignore Asian immigrants who are struggling economically in the U.S. In addition to the increasing economic diversity of Asian immigrants after 1985 described earlier, the population of Asian immigrants in the U.S. before 1965 also consists of a diverse population of Asians, such as the northern Californian Punjabis, some of who have not been so economically successful.

The ways that South Asians have been incorporated into the racial structure of the United States is complex. Gayatri Spivak explains that the difference between Indian immigrants and other oppressed communities is that they do not have the same history of slavery and oppression in the United States as others, such as blacks or Japanese (Spivak 1990, 64). Hence, one-to-one correspondences between racialized experiences of South Asians and blacks are difficult to identify. Consequently, “Spivak here sees Indian immigrants manipulated in order to serve the needs of a power structure that thrives on black racial oppression” (Schueller 2003, 51-52). While both Schueller and Spivak refer to Indians specifically at the exclusion of East Asians, well-educated East Asians immigrating after 1965 certainly shared similar privileges as Indian immigrants, and Asians end up serving as the model citizens that all disadvantaged minorities should emulate. Even though this is a positive stereotype, it has dehumanizing
and reductive effects. Schueller (2003) expands on this idea further, stating that “It is the *nonwhite skins* of Indians, along with their white-associated British (read: privileged) training, that allows Indian immigrants in the United States to be used as evidence against affirmative action” (51-52). Here, Schueller identifies the use of Indian families’ economic success as an indication that minority populations do not need policies such as affirmative action in order to obtain similar success. These ideas essentialize Asian Americans as the ideal minority group. Vijay Prasad echoes this sentiment in a powerful metaphor of model minorities being used as “a weapon in the war against black America” (2000, 4-6). In pitting minority groups against one another, marginalized groups are weakened, unable to work together to improve their statuses in the United States.

Lastly, the model minority paradigm pressures Asians into representing the label. It limits Asian Americans’ abilities to define themselves because it places expectations of financial success upon them. As Park (2008) explains, the consequences of not fitting into the stereotype is “not that the image itself is threatened but that the individual is somehow less authentically Asian American if he or she diverges from it. It is an identity imposed by others and places considerable constraints not only in the area of study one selects but the very trajectory of one’s work and contribution to society” (Park 2008, 552). Vijay Iyer experienced this pressure when, in attending graduate school for physics, he decided to pursue music instead. These expectations narrow the very definition
of what it means to be an Asian American immigrant, putting unwarranted stress on them to conform to outside expectations.

Second-generation Indian immigrants form groups with other Asians to work against these stereotypes, encouraging activism to heighten awareness of the multiplicity of Asian experiences in the larger society. Groups like Asian Improv aRts attempt to thwart stereotypes by emphasizing the role of individual agency in shaping a person’s identity. Similarly, musicians Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa undertake the task of challenging society’s perception of them.

Inclusion and Exclusion in a Postcolonial Context

Edward Said, a foundational figure in what is now regarded as postcolonial theory, challenges Western assumptions of the East in his 1979 work *Orientalism*. Said rejects Western assertions that presume homogeneity and inherent weaknesses of the East allowed colonialism to take place. His work and the works of others such as Bhabha (1990) and Spivak (1990) forced scholars to acknowledge that the racialization of Asians and Africans needed to be contextualized in terms of past history with their Western colonizers. In other words, postcolonial theorists believed that the colonial past itself informed the present state of decolonized nations.

Postcolonial theory is a helpful framework through which to study the residual effects of colonialism. In *American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in*
the Indian Diaspora, Sunil Bhatia (2007, 29) uses Aparajita Sagar’s definition of postcolonialism, which is described as “all the effects of European colonization in the majority of the cultures of the world” (originally in Sagar 1996, 423). This general description of postcolonialism encompasses ideas that directly affect Indians in diaspora. The Western education system that persisted after decolonization allowed these post-1965 immigrants, most of whom were born around the time of Indian independence in 1947, to achieve economic success in the West. This success afforded more opportunities to the subsequent generation, of which Iyer and Mahanthappa are a part. Meanwhile, India has continued to struggle with issues of extreme poverty and political corruption in the decades since statehood.

Postcolonialism is also a useful framework to understand issues of racialization for immigrants of non-European descent in the United States and Europe. Bhatia (2007) explains that

with its emphasis on understanding the construction of self and identity in terms of colonial histories and on present-day transnational migration, postcolonial research is relevant to understanding issues related to acculturation and immigrant identities in the field of cultural psychology and human development. Furthermore, I argue that taking a postcolonial perspective to understand acculturation allows us to consider the distinct experiences of non-Western, non-European immigrants. Race has always played a key role in U.S. state-sponsored immigration, naturalization, and citizenship laws (López 1996; Mohanty 1991). Moreover, given the existence of racial prejudice in American society, non-European/non-white immigrants have been more likely to face exclusion and discrimination than their European counterparts. (31)

Bhatia’s differentiation between European immigrants and non-European immigrants here is significant. While it is true that many white European
immigrants, such as Irish and Italians, faced extreme prejudice upon immigrating to the United States, Purkayastha (2005, 25-56) argues that the eventual acceptance of their statuses as white has allowed these immigrants to assimilate into American society to the point where an individual’s European ancestry only defines them when they choose it to do so. For example, Irish Americans may choose to emphasize this aspect of their identity on St. Patrick’s Day, but their Irish-ness is not a visible marker of their identity. By contrast, scholars suggest traits such as darker skin are intractable.

Outside perception of South Asians is further complicated by the current political climate, and questions about citizenship are also mobilized. As Iyer states, “I know that no one’s going to look at my name and think, ‘Oh, that guy’s just another American,’” because his name incites preconceptions before any visual contact is made (personal communication 2012). In his 2009 article on transnationalism and South Asians, Purkayastha writes that “Young South Asian Americans described how officials and residents of other countries would repeatedly ask them where they were ‘really from’ after they announced they were American. These questions were mostly followed by questions about the location of their families. Equally important, depending on where their geographically dispersed families live, repeated communications with ‘people in suspect countries’, can trigger racial profiling and extra surveillance across the security blocs” (Purkayastha 2009, 90-91). Those of us with brown skin are frequently concerned that our intentions will be looked at as suspect.
Questioning loyalty and identity is a common experience for many South Asians, including myself. On several occasions during my time as an assistant director for a nonprofit organization in California from 2006-2007, clients who met with me after initial phone calls would frequently make remarks such as, “Oh wow. I wasn’t expecting someone Indian. You sound so American on the phone.” That same year, a black co-worker of mine described me as, “An Indian girl who talks like a white girl and sings like a black girl.” Other people's belief that being Indian means talking and dressing a certain way or associating exclusively with Indians is a concern of many second-generation immigrants. In *Desis in the House*, Maira describes how some of her subjects were reluctant to admit to their friends that they associated separately with groups of Indians and non-Indians for fear that this would incite accusations of an inauthentic performance of identity (2002, 97-99). The idea that a person could be simultaneously Indian and American is still frequently disregarded.

Disturbing and dangerous assertions are proliferated when race is mapped onto ethnicity, religion, and culture. For example, in the wake of the Sikh temple shooting in Wisconsin on August 5, 2012, several news outlets surmised that the shooter chose the Sikh temple based upon his mistaking Sikhism for Islam. Friends of mine who understood the difference between the two religions made comments such as, “Sikhs are not Muslims!” on social media sites. This rhetoric almost implies that if the victims had been Muslim, the shooting might have been less tragic. Purkayastha describes this in terms of a religious
hierarchy, suggesting that Christianity is at the top and Islam is at the bottom, with other South Asian religions occupying the space between. The result of this hierarchy is that the loyalties and citizenship of South Asians and Middle Easterners to the United States are constantly challenged (2009, 90). While Muslims bear the biggest burden of misunderstanding in the Western world at present, other dark-skinned people are frequently pitted against Muslims, emphasizing that they are not Muslim in order to gain trust in the United States.4 Vijay Iyer and poet Mike Ladd address such issues of suspicion in their artistic collaborations, *In What Language?* (2003) and *Still Life with Commentator* (2007). In a postcolonial context, discussions about the effects of Westernization on previously colonized nations allow such implications about race, religion, and ethnicity to be challenged.

Relational Identities

In Chapter 2, I mentioned Sunaina Maira’s concern that “the very notion of hybridity leads back to the idea of purity” (2002, 191). For many scholars, hybridity implies an individual emerging from two or more homogenized (“pure”) cultures being thrown together to create a mixed individual. This relates to the American metaphor of the melting pot, in which cultural characteristics are thrown into a giant cauldron, boiled together, and homogenized. Of course,

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4 Of course, this situation is even more complicated by centuries of Hindu-Muslim tensions that have heightened in the decades after the end of colonial rule.
scholars have almost thoroughly refuted the idea of the melting pot, but the concept retains its currency in popular culture.

Also relating to the idea of homogenization is the concept of a multicultural society. Khandelwal explains that “This model assumes that each ethnic group is organized as a unit, with only one culture per group. By accepting this political ideology of an internally homogenous ethnicity, some established Indian leaders become participants in the celebration of American multicultural democracy, but a growing number within their own ‘ethnic’ population, like those in other minority communities, suffered invisible and unacknowledged economic need” (2002, 5). The underlying assumption here is that each individual within a particular ethnic group has the same experiences. It is exactly this notion of homogenization that causes scholars like Maira to reject the idea of hybridity altogether. However, I believe that while it is a valid concern, the total rejection of hybridity is hasty. Ideas of multiculturalism and layered identities can be reclaimed as long as individual agency is recognized. In other words, a second-generation immigrant chooses to create his or her own complex, multicultural identity, and in recognizing the agency of the individual, he or she can affect how others perceive them.

As a marginalized person, it can be difficult to gain influence of outside perception because people immediately judge others based upon phenotype (among other things). Groups like Asian Improv aRts, whose goals are to challenge such assumptions, promote the variances in the lives of individual
Asian American artists. The help of such networks may be essential in successfully acknowledging individual agency. In doing so, the individual is also freed from the idea of an overdetermined identity; he or she can change. Instead of viewing culture as something fixed, we can look at culture as a continual, ever-changing process (Prashad 2000, 109-132). In looking at culture as a process, we also begin to recognize the exchanges that take place between an individual and the society in which he or she lives.

This is where hybridity, assimilation, and transnationalism intersect. Kivisto (2001) discusses how the term transnationalism has been vague in the past and that descriptions vary as to what it means. He prescribes a way to reconcile assimilation theory with transnationalism “by distinguishing assimilation from amalgamation,” instead focusing on how different cultures are constantly negotiating and renegotiating their positions through several generations, sometimes in opposition to each other, other times in sync (Kivisto 2001, 570). This is the type of relationship and process that second-generation immigrants employ in constructing their individual identities. They differentiate themselves both from their parents and their non-immigrant peers, but they do so in a variety of different ways, accepting and rejecting different ideas in an ongoing process.

In addition to an individual’s identity changing over time, second-generation immigrants, especially musicians, present different sides of themselves to an audience based upon specific circumstances. At the pre-concert public interview at the Discover Jazz Festival in Burlington, VT, Iyer
openly discussed how being a second-generation immigrant defines aspects of his music. During the concert itself, he referred to specific Indian or Western inspirations present in his compositions. By contrast, evidence of the Indian influences in Mahanthappa’s music was absent in his playing with the Mark Dresser Quintet at the Brooklyn Vision Festival. In the quintet, Mahanthappa’s role was to work within Dresser’s aesthetic, so his playing remained tied to Western musical ideas.

To put it simply, the context matters. When asked how Vijay Iyer identifies himself culturally, he responded, “Well, it's relational” (personal communication 2012). He goes on to explain:

I find that a lot of it has to do with where I am. Like when I’m in Europe I find myself identifying as an American and as a carrier of American culture. Especially when I'm touring as a musician, I feel like it’s important to kind of uphold that legacy. ‘Cause that’s what helped make me what I am and that’s the field that I participate in. I also find that I identify as a person of color, and that, then also suggests a larger sense of community that’s not tied to ethnicity but more of a common experience particularly within America. You have that kind of America that is not embraced by the mainstream, and so participating in culture and being some kind of cultural worker ends up mattering. The fact that I’m not white matters. It matters because of the power dynamics associated with that and it matters because of the sense of common purpose that I find that I have with other artists of color and other communities of color. And then of course I identify as South Asian American, so that’s kind of more specific within that [and] obviously and has to do with heritage and specifics, I guess the phrase of “identity formations,” around ethnicity. (personal communication 2012)

Here, Iyer aptly highlights how individual agency allows for layered identities to exist. In the next chapter, we will discover how both he and Mahanthappa explore the multifaceted aspects of their identities using music.
CHAPTER 4
THE MUSIC OF VIJAY IYER AND RUDRESH MAHANTHAPPA

Rudresh Mahanthappa and Vijay Iyer’s personal journeys to understand their statuses as children of Indian immigrants parallel their musical journeys. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Mahanthappa and Iyer began to explore their cultural identities in college, and it was shortly thereafter that they started to experiment with the synthesis of Indian music and jazz. The detailed musical background and analysis that follows illustrates how their second-generation identities are reflected in their music.

Musical Background: Mahanthappa

Born in 1971, Rudresh Mahanthappa had his first active musical experiences in an elementary school recorder class. However, unlike the majority of his classmates who would never touch the instrument again, he took it seriously and continued taking private lessons in Baroque recorder for the next two years. During this time, Mahanthappa learned to read music. Once he reached fourth grade, his older brother encouraged him to play alto saxophone so he could join the school's jazz band, a transition that Mahanthappa found to be fairly easy since recorder and saxophone fingerings were similar. He quickly became hooked.
Mahanthappa moved away from a classical repertoire once he picked up the saxophone, explaining that it was more of a pragmatic choice than a conscious decision at the time: “Classical saxophone will never have the presence as say, the violin does.” By presence, Mahanthappa is referring specifically to the quantity of repertoire. Moving out of the classical realm, then, allowed him to have the opportunity to play a larger selection of solo saxophone music. His transition to jazz, however, was a fairly slow one. The first saxophone music that he found inspiring was not John Coltrane or Ornette Coleman, but funk and R&B instrumental music such as Grover Washington, the Brecker Brothers, and the Yellowjackets. Mahanthappa recalls being loaned albums from a friend’s father, an amateur jazz musician, who introduced him to a jazz repertoire. Additionally, he was stimulated by music he heard on the radio in the late 1970s and early 1980s, because “there was a lot of saxophone in Top 40 music back then. There were saxophone solos in songs, and there were horn sections” (personal communication 2012). For fun, he would memorize solos on Bruce Springsteen records and experiment with variations on them, his earliest memories of improvisation.

Mahanthappa’s parents supported and encouraged his musical development, also exposing him to Western classical music and Indian music in the home: Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Ravi Shankar, M.S. Subbulakshmi, and compilations of bhajans.¹ His father, a professor at the University of Colorado at

¹ Bhajans are Hindu devotional songs.
Boulder, bought the family season tickets to the university concert series every year, providing them exposure to a variety of musical events.

Mahanthappa continued to take solo saxophone lessons and play in his school jazz bands through middle school, listening to more jazz with encouragement from his saxophone teacher. During his freshman year of high school, he began to write music and lead small ensembles. He states, “That’s when I really felt a lot of energy as a musician. Like, I felt the connection with my music. [Composition] was something that brought me a lot of joy and performing also brought me a lot of joy, too…And at that point I kind of also in the back of my mind started entertaining doing this as a career” (personal communication 2012). Writing music gave him the creative control that he craved, and he began to take his studies of it more seriously. Mahanthappa’s decision to go into jazz was solidified by his senior year when he applied to the College of Music at the University of North Texas and Berklee School of Music in Boston, where he had attended a summer program the year before. When he was accepted at both, he made the decision to attend UNT upon being offered a scholarship.

Mahanthappa attended UNT for two years, and he credits the school for giving him a solid background in jazz theory and strengthening his basic musicianship skills, such as sight-reading. In spite of this, he transferred to Berklee for his final two years of college, believing that he was unable to develop his creativity on his own terms at UNT. When he arrived at Berklee,
Mahanthappa sought out the education he craved by leading and writing for various bands.

After he finished his bachelor’s degree at Berklee in 1993, Mahanthappa went on to obtain a master’s degree at DePaul University in Chicago in jazz composition. In 1994 during the summer after his first year, he took a self-proclaimed “life changing” trip to South India with a group of Berklee students and alumni. For Mahanthappa, this trip was significantly different than family trips he had taken to India as a child. Not only was it his first solo trip as an adult, but it was also the first time he had “to confront the hybrid nature of my identity…you know, just not being Indian enough,” a feeling that emerged as a result of identifying with the American friends he traveled with and his inability to communicate in Indian languages (personal communication 2012). Additionally, the purpose of this trip was to absorb as much Carnatic music as possible. Mahanthappa recalls connecting to Carnatic music in a way he never had before, and he collected several Carnatic recordings during the trip. He still considers these recordings among the most inspirational ones he owns.

Prior to the trip, Mahanthappa found the task of addressing his Indian-ness too complicated, as he felt that people expected him to be an authentic carrier of Indian culture and music. He was uncomfortable with this role, believing that it was unfair of others to assume that he knew anything about Indian culture having grown up in a middle-class, mostly white suburb of Boulder. As he made his way into adulthood, he became aware of how his cultural background shaped
his identity in a different way than most of his musical peers, magnified by the fact that there were few Indians pursuing a career in jazz at the time. Mahanthappa returned from this trip to India “more inspired to kind of find a place or begin to find a place for Indian music and jazz to connect” (personal communication 2012). Soon after this trip, Mahanthappa recorded and released his first album, *Yatra* (1994), his earliest recorded experimentation with using Indian musical ideas in jazz.

A year later, Mahanthappa attended a jazz saxophone weekend workshop led by Steve Coleman at Stanford University. Coleman had just recorded a few tracks on an album with Vijay Iyer, who, at the time, also lived and worked in the Bay Area. Upon hearing Mahanthappa play, Coleman insisted that the two musicians meet. Their connection was immediate. Since Mahanthappa still lived in Chicago, he stayed in contact with Iyer via telephone, postal mail, and Internet, exchanging both musical and personal ideas. They played their first show together in 1996 at a South Asian festival in Toronto called Desh Pardesh, arriving a week earlier to rehearse. For Mahanthappa, this experience solidified both their friendship and their professional connection. By the time they moved to New York City in 1997, it was clear that they would continue to explore their musical identities together.

Musical Background: Iyer

Also born in 1971, Vijay Iyer’s musical education began at age three with
classical violin lessons that would continue through college. His older sister began studying classical piano at the same time, and although he did not formally study piano until he was much older, he says that he almost immediately began “plunking around” on the instrument (personal communication 2012). He continued to do so throughout elementary and high school, mostly figuring out how to play rock and pop songs (such as Michael Jackson’s “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’”) on the piano and improvising on the melodies. He took his first music theory course in the summer after his freshman year of high school in his hometown of Rochester, NY through a program at Eastman School of Music.

At home, Iyer’s musical exposure was different from Mahanthappa’s in that he and his parents did not attend local concerts as a family activity. Instead, Iyer’s exposure came through participating in musical events with his sister and listening to music on his own. Although his parents occasionally listened to Indian music at home, Iyer admits that he was not terribly interested in it during his formative years.

Having played the piano informally for several years, Iyer decided to audition for his high school jazz band during his sophomore year despite his lack of knowledge in the jazz idiom. His teacher accepted him on the condition that he would take private lessons to improve his jazz theory and reading skills with a local jazz pianist named Andy Calabrese. During these lessons, Iyer first learned how to read a lead sheet, analyze melodies and chords, and use different voicings on the piano. Calabrese also loaned Iyer a few jazz records, which fed
his desire to learn more. He began going to his local public library and listening to jazz records on weekends, absorbing and analyzing all that was available to him.

While beginning his journey in jazz, Iyer continued serious study of classical violin through high school. He did not take his jazz studies lightly, but he was unconvinced that he could be taken seriously as a jazz pianist. He graduated from high school in 1987 and decided to attend Yale for his undergraduate studies. Excelling in both science and classical music, Iyer chose to pursue a degree in physics due to familial pressure to pursue something deemed practical. This left him less time to dedicate to the violin, and by the end of his second year at Yale, he realized that he could not continue to pursue violin at the level he desired unless he dedicated himself fully to it. He decided instead to stop playing entirely. Meanwhile, he continued to play piano during his free time, putting together small jazz groups, writing and arranging music, and playing shows at university venues.

Iyer was not certain what he wanted to do after graduating from Yale, but he applied to do a Ph.D. in physics at UC Berkeley because it seemed practical. Once he arrived in the Bay Area, he began dedicating more and more time to jazz. Though he continued to pursue his physics’ degree during the day, his nights were reserved for music making. He won a jazz piano competition in his first year at Berkeley, receiving his earliest professional validation as a musician. In the end, he reached a point where he said “I can’t reconcile these two realities anymore. So, physics lost. Music won” (public interview at the Burlington
Discover Jazz Festival 2012). Although he gave up his studies in physics around 1994, he did manage to earn a Ph.D. by combining his interests to create a degree in music perception and cognition.

Once Iyer dedicated himself fully to a career in music, he began collaborating with Asian American artists throughout the Bay Area, including the collective Asian Improv aRts (Ala). He credits the organization for giving him an “orientation of music as activism and community building,” and it also helped fund and release his first album, *Memorophilia*, at the beginning of 1995 (personal communication 2012). A year earlier, he had met the influential saxophonist Steve Coleman who, like Ala, contributed to Iyer’s development as a musician-activist. Whereas the artists in Ala exposed him to issues of visibility and representation of Asians in American culture, Coleman taught him to try recontextualizing ideas from outside of the jazz idiom.

Iyer began to experiment with West African rhythm in his music while studying and playing with Coleman. However, Coleman continually encouraged him to find musical inspiration in his South Indian heritage. The Bay Area had a large community of Indians concentrated in the Silicon Valley. Iyer began attending Carnatic concerts there regularly. He absorbed as much as he could at these events, immersing himself in both the music and the Indian American community that sponsored them. He recalls being impressed by the fact that many young children already knew how to keep *tala* on their hands. Iyer bought a book that taught the fundamentals of Indian *tala*, and he began writing and
experimenting with incorporating these rhythmic elements into his music. Some of these elements appear on his first album, *Memorophilia* (1995), which clearly highlights his interest in complex rhythmic ideas. It was soon after the release of this album that Iyer attended the workshop where he would meet Mahanthappa. According to Iyer, Coleman introduced them by stating, “If I can’t make your gigs, you can call this guy.” His praise of Mahanthappa’s musicianship, along with their shared South Indian heritage, sparked a connection.

Iyer and Mahanthappa remember their first interactions as immediately significant, both recalling their excitement at meeting another Indian American jazz musician exploring their second-generation identity. They had just released their first respective records and were already experimenting with using ideas from Indian music in jazz. In addition to being on a similar musical journey, they recall being excited that they could relate to each other on a more personal level due to their similar family backgrounds. Mahanthappa elaborates that

> We could joke about words that our parents mispronounced or you know like, we could rehearse and then say, “Oh man, let’s go find some dosas.” So it was a real different kind of connection. I mean obviously he’s like a colleague, a fellow musician, but in a lot of ways he’s more like a cousin or something like that. So our connection just goes far beyond music and I think that was apparent from the get go. Or just like negotiating life, like we talked about negotiating high school, college, or what was expected of us. And dating! You know? Like do you date Indian women? How do your parents act when you bring home a girl who’s not Indian? In a lot of ways, he was one of the only people I could talk to about stuff like that. (personal communication 2012)

By the time Iyer and Mahanthappa collaborated for their first gig at Desh Pardesh

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2 *dosa*: a savory crepe from South India made of fermented rice and lentils.
in 1996, it was clear to both of them that they wanted to continue collaborating over the next several years. The next year, they both moved to New York City, allowing them to solidify their working relationship while continuing their development as individual musicians. This development is chronicled below.

The Music (A Chronological Survey)


Mahanthappa and Iyer’s first albums, _Yatra_ and _Memorophilia_ respectively, were written and recorded during transitional periods for both musicians. Each had begun informal self-study of Indian music and they were experimenting with how to incorporate these concepts into their own music. These experiments are not always detectible to the listener. Mahanthappa readily admits that _Yatra_, originally released in 1994, at first appears to be a straight-ahead jazz album (personal communication 2012). For example, the fifth track on the album, “Good Hair,” is a standard twelve-bar blues with a head that strongly resembles a Charlie Parker tune. The title track, “Yatra,” and the second track, “Jerry’s Basement,” also take more standard approaches to harmony and rhythm. However, careful analysis of the album reveals the germination of Indian influences. On the track “Hope,” Mahanthappa experiments with extended techniques on his saxophone, at times creating a tense timbre that strongly resembles the _nagaswaram_, a South Indian double-reed instrument. The piece sounds like a free improvisation with melodic material that suggests harmonic
movement, but the nasal quality that Mahanthappa utilizes is suggestive of Indian timbral preferences.

Other pieces on *Yatra* use more overt references to Indian music. The head of “Who’s Got Rhythm?” is based on the Carnatic *raga mayamalavagaula*, or the fifteenth parent scale from the Melakarta system, the equivalent of *raga bhairav* in Hindustani music. The *raga* consists of a flat second, major third, perfect fourth and fifth, minor sixth, and major seventh (S R1 G3 M1 P D1 N3 S, see Appendix). Example 1, I outline the scale\(^3\) used on the recording, which begins on F#.

Example 1.\(^4\) *Raga mayamalavagaula* from “Who’s Got Rhythm?”

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
S & R1 & G3 & M1 & P & D1 & N3 & S \\
\end{array}
\]

This also happens to be the first *raga* that new students of Carnatic or Hindustani music learn, an appropriate choice for Mahanthappa considering that this piece is his debut exploration of an Indian *raga*. Both “Hope” and “Who’s Got Rhythm?” suggest the beginning of his journey as a hybrid jazz musician. Indeed, the title of the album, *Yatra*, is a Sanskrit word for a pilgrimage, no doubt a reference to Mahanthappa’s life changing trip to India earlier in 1994.

The music on Iyer’s *Memorophilia*, originally released on January 1, 1995, consists of songs performed by several different ensembles: a trio, a quartet, a

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\(^3\) When referring to the abstract model devoid of the specific characteristics in a *raga* (such as the *gamakas*), I use the word “scale.”

\(^4\) All scales notated and transcriptions were prepared by Arathi Govind, © 2012.
quintet, and Iyer performing solo. The tracks are so diverse that it sounds like the product of a pianist who had not yet formed a cohesive musical identity.

“Peripatetics” is an electric bass-driven funk piece, but tunes like “Stars Over Mars” and “Memorophilia” sound like straight ahead jazz trios. “Spellbound and Sacrosanct, Cowrie Shells and the Shimmering Sea” is a ballad that also uses more standard harmonic language. In deep contrast to these tunes is the quintet piece in a seven-beat meter, “March & Epilogue,” a frantic piece clearly influenced by one of Iyer’s free jazz heroes, Roscoe Mitchell (personal communication 2012). “Algebra” is the one solo piece that appears on this album, and here Iyer’s improvisation heavily resembles Thelonious Monk’s percussive style.

Although it is extremely difficult to pinpoint any overtly Indian musical ideas, the rhythmic content on Memorophilia is extremely intricate. Iyer credits his study of Indian rhythmic shapes and West African polyrhythm, encouraged by Steven Coleman, for the rhythmic complexity on tracks like “Peripatetics.” Difficult metrical changes or metrical ambiguity is present on most of the tracks. Metrical ambiguity is achieved on tracks like “Off the Top” by accenting normally unaccented beats, deemphasizing strong beats, and constantly changing the rhythmic feel of the piece, techniques that Indian drummers utilize constantly that make it difficult for the listener to keep track of the integrity of the tala. Although the album does not sound completely cohesive due to the vast musical ground
that Iyer covers, his application of diverse ideas clearly indicated his desire to explore a developing musical identity.

*Architextures* (1998)

Between their first and second recordings, Mahanthappa and Iyer moved to New York and continued to experiment more freely with Carnatic and Hindustani ideas. In 1998, Iyer released *Architextures*, his first album with Mahanthappa on saxophone, also including Kevin Ellington Mingus and Jeff Brock on bass, Brad Hargreaves on drums, Erin Crystal and Aaron Stewart on tenor saxophones, and Liberty Ellman on guitar. As with his previous album, Iyer utilizes these players on different tracks with only two tracks featuring the entire octet. However, where *Memorophilia* is all over the place stylistically, *Architextures* demonstrates cohesion.

The harmonic language on *Architextures* is less tied to functional Western harmony overall; instead, Iyer uses modal languages. This is especially apparent on the tracks “Three Peas” and “Sadhu.” Iyer does not actually play on “Three Peas,” but the composition highlights his studies of Indian music. It is rhythmically less complex than many of his works, but the steady rhythmic cycle in 7/4 features a swung eighth-note feel on the drums that resembles a rhythm typically played on the tabla in light classical Hindustani songs called qawali. He uses a hexatonic scale of alternating minor seconds and minor thirds beginning on E (Example 2), resulting in a very Indian-sounding scale.
Example 2. “Three Peas” hexatonic scale.

The three saxophonists play the head in unison three times before entering the solo sections, during which they abandon the form entirely to improvise freely. This transition is surprisingly seamless. In “Three Peas,” we hear the beginning of Iyer’s ability to use Indian elements, with the use of the rhythmic cycle and the modal implications of a raga, in a way that works within the jazz idiom.

Similarly, “Sadhu” is an octet piece that overtly utilizes Indian melodic material from the Carnatic raga called kamavardhini. Kamavardhini is the fifty-first parent scale, similar to mayamalavagaula but with a tritone instead of a perfect fourth (S R1 G3 M2 P D1 N3). The piece begins with an unmetered exposition of the scale played in unison by the horns. Although this exposition is not improvised and the notes are not exposed in the traditional Carnatic way, this section of the piece functions like an alap, introducing the listener to a melodic world. Underneath the horns, Iyer and Hargreaves play tremolos, creating a droning effect as the horns resolve to F, establishing it as the Sa. The horns introduce the main theme in 6/4 together, shown below:

The theme only uses notes within the raga and reestablishes F as the tonal center by ending each two-bar phrase on it. The drums and basses enter after the first measure and Iyer comps in the background, mostly using clustered chords based on the raga. The sixteenth-note triplet turnarounds resemble Indian gamakas, or ornamentations, although tied metrically to the meter more closely than a traditional gamaka would be. The circular theme is repeated three times before entering the solo sections.

“Sadhu” does not use a drone box, but the effects of a drone are heard throughout the piece: someone is nearly always playing F, as it is passed from Iyer to the two bassists, Mingus and Brock, to Ellman on guitar. During the first of the two tenor sax solos, Iyer does not comp at all, effectively thinning out the texture of the piece. He returns during the second tenor sax solo, thickening the texture again as the saxophonist builds up tension. The solos end with a strong declaration of Sa and Pa (F and C) by Iyer on piano, at which time the meter ends. The horns end the piece with a return to the same unmetered melodic material from the exposition. Unlike in “Three Peas,” the horns remain more tied to the established mode during their solos. With its alap-like exposition, its move into the main theme, and the return to melodic material from the beginning, the form of “Sadhu” closely resembles a Carnatic song.

Although these two pieces from Architextures represent the most overt uses of Indian melodic ideas on the album, the rest of album follows suit in that it is overall less tied to jazz harmonies than Memorophilia. Interestingly, in his
experimentation in using these ideas, the tracks on *Architextures* are less rhythmically complex than on his previous album, with the possible exception of “Charms.” Instead, Iyer focused on developing new melodic ideas and breaking free of traditional harmony, a representation of his continued growth as an Indian American musician.


In 2001, Iyer released *Panoptic Modes*, featuring Mahanthappa on alto saxophone, Derrek Phillips on drums and Stephan Crump on bass. In addition to using modal harmonies, Iyer more successfully incorporates Indian ideas of rhythmic complexity into the compositions. This is especially apparent on “Configurations,” the second track on the album. The piece is in 7/8, with Crump and Iyer playing a low D pedal drone throughout the song. “Configurations” is not based upon a traditional *raga*, but Iyer’s transcription in his recent MelBay publication reveals that the melodic movement is based around semitones (Iyer and Viner 2011, 30). This, along with the D pedal ground the piece strongly in a modal world.

The form of “Configurations” is similar to “Sadhu,” playing the head two times, followed by solo sections and a repetition of the head. When Mahanthappa and Iyer reestablish the head after the solos, they slowly begin to manipulate it based upon Indian rhythmic ideas of stretching and compressing time. First, they begin by doubling the rhythmic notes values so that it seems like
time has slowed. They return to the original 7/8 melody for one measure, then begin to manipulate the rhythm, playing the melody with an eighth-note triplet feel for a whole repetition, followed by a sixteenth note feel such that the melody is twice as fast (33-34). This method of manipulating time is extremely common in both the Carnatic and Hindustani music traditions, serving to disturb the listener's sense of regularity and also demonstrating the rhythmic prowess of the musicians. Iyer, however, uses it slightly differently than an Indian musician in that he changes the meter to accommodate the time manipulations rather than retaining the 7/8-meter underneath. Without the benefit of looking at a transcription, which clarifies what is happening rhythmically, his method manages to replicate a similar sense of upheaval for the listener. The piece finishes with a mora, or a short rhythmic phrase that is repeated three times in Carnatic musical practice.

Not all of the pieces on Panoptic Modes use Indian rhythmic ideas so overtly, but this album contains rhythmic complexities throughout that obscure the meter. For example, “Father Spirit,” a tune in which Iyer again channels Monk’s percussive style, is in a moderately-paced 3/4, but the drums’ emphasis on beat two every other measure along with the piano’s disorienting 5/4 ostinato serve to obfuscate the meter. What ends up grounding the piece in 3 is Mahanthappa’s dotted half notes on beat one of each measure beginning in the fourteenth measure. Similarly, on “Invariants” Iyer’s dotted quarter rhythms disguise the 4/4 meter, and several meter changes to 5/4 and 11/4 further
confuse the listener (Iyer and Viner 2011, 54-55). This, along with the continued move away from traditional Western harmony reinforces *Panoptic Modes* as an album grounded in the marriage of Western and Indian ideas. Iyer’s ability to use Indian musical ideas obviously, abstractly, or not at all directly correlates with Iyer’s comment that his identity is relational; at times, he draws more attention to his Indian heritage, while other times, he is simply an American jazz musician.

Mahanthappa released his second album, *Black Water*, in 2002. Along with Iyer, his quartet also includes Elliot Kavee on drums and Francois Moutin on Bass. Seven years passed between this album and his previous one, and the experience that Mahanthappa gained in recording with Iyer during this time is evident. The overall sound of the quartet is cleaner and more consistent than on *Yatra*. He continues to explore *nagaswaram*-like timbres and *gamakas* on pieces like “Simonize” and “Faith (Intro),” but does not use *ragas* strictly on *Black Water*. On “Viraha,” for example, Mahanthappa uses a mode that suggests *natabhairavi* (S R1 G2 M1 P D1 N2 S) or *bhavapriya* (S R1 G2 M2 P D1 N2 S), the difference being the presence of the perfect fourth versus a tritone, both of which are missing in the piece. Additionally, Mahanthappa veers in and out of the mode during his solo.

Despite this, the piece is still grounded in a modal world centering on Eb. “Viraha,” which is Sanskrit for separation or absence of a Divine presence, does have a steady quarter note beat, but Kavee plays cymbal rolls throughout, giving
the piece a non-metered structure that almost seems like a *tanam*.\(^5\) Iyer’s piano work underneath suggests harmony at times, but it is never in a way that pulls the listener out of the modal world. At the end of the piece, Mahanthappa modulates the main motif a few times, melding a harmonic language with the modal one he has created. The piece ends with a reiteration of the main theme, but replacing the minor second with a major second. This change almost sounds like the movement from a minor key to a major key, functioning something like a Picardy third even though it is a second. “Viraha” highlights Mahanthappa’s growing compositional maturity in using Indian elements skillfully within a Western harmonic framework.

While pieces such as “Are There Clouds in India?” and “Joe Made the Face (For Joe Viola)” follow in the same vein as “Viraha,” Mahanthappa explores a bitonal world on “What’s A Jazz?” This complicated piece has Iyer playing fast sixteenth-note rhythms in an F# minor pentatonic scale. Meanwhile, Mahanthappa’s frantic theme is harmonically ambiguous and immediately dissonant to Iyer’s scale, although the notes occasionally overlap. The meter is also ambiguous, but it seems to be in a fast 15/8. The piece is relentless, never slowing down, and the pace along with Mahanthappa’s frenetic soloing is reminiscent of bop. The rhythmic and modal complexities on *Black Water* demonstrate Mahanthappa’s practiced use of melding Indian ideas and jazz.

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\(^5\) A *tanam* is an improvisatory section of a Carnatic song (*krīti*) that comes right after the *alap* where the soloist keeps a steady beat but does not yet enter into a rhythmic cycle.
Since 2001, Iyer and Mahanthappa have released albums nearly every year. They have continued to develop their individual sounds, also gaining more professional recognition. This recognition has allowed them to delve into an expanding number of musical projects in different genres of music. In effect, gaining respect in the music industry has made it possible for Iyer and Mahanthappa to establish control of their careers, achieving the goal of having more individual agency.

In 2003, Iyer released two albums and received the Alpert Award in the Arts from California Institute of the Arts. The first album was *In What Language?*, a hip hop jazz recording co-written with Mike Ladd on spoken word. Iyer’s collaboration with Mike Ladd is an ongoing politically charged multimedia project, the results of which appear on both *In What Language?* and 2007’s *Still Life with Commentary*. Of course, the visual aspects of the projects are absent from the recordings, but the music uses abstract structures and improvisations that reflect the prose. Iyer has an ongoing interest in the use of hip hop in making political statements, and although this duo falls outside of the realm of what Iyer is typically known for, it is a project that he highly values (personal communication 2012).

The second album released in 2003 was *Blood Sutra*. Iyer uses the same quartet as on *Panoptic Modes*, although drummer Kavee is replaced with Tyshawn Sorey. There is a noticeable difference in how the players work
together on this album; they seem more adept at managing the complexity of the compositions. Iyer utilizes many of the same techniques as on *PanopticModes* with drone-like pedals on pieces like “Habeas Corpus” and “Stigmatism.” Perhaps influenced by Mahanthappa’s compositions on *BlackWater*, the harmonic language on *BloodSutra* is more complex, less strictly tied to Indian *ragas*. Pieces like “Imagined Nations” also continue to explore rhythmic intricacies tied to Indian music. This song does not have a regular rhythmic cycle, instead alternating between 9/4 and 7/4, and the main motif drops an eighth note on each repetition, adding them back again gradually. This is similar to how Indian percussionists create rhythmic shapes by reducing and expanding rhythmic phrases. Once again, it serves to distort the underlying meter, confusing the listener.

Iyer is solidly in the jazz idiom on “Because of Guns/Hey Joe Redux,” a reimagining of the Jimi Hendrix tune. This song choice purposefully draws attention to Iyer’s childhood interest in American popular music. In fact, he has continued to reconstruct such songs: Lennon’s “Imagine” on 2005’s *Reimagining*, and Michael Jackson’s “Human Nature” on 2010’s *Solo*. Regarding such song choices, Iyer states that he does not choose these songs merely to challenge peoples’ perception of an Indian American musician, but also because these songs are “probably more important to me than some *bhajan*” (personal communication 2012). Iyer is asserting that he is a genuine participant in American culture.
Iyer’s version of “Hey Joe” is a bluesy ballad on the circle of fifths progression: C-G-D-A-E. Iyer begins alone with a simple statement of the chord progression and the familiar turn-around for the first four bars. On the second recurrence, he begins to improvise a bit, gradually deviating from the progression. The bass enters on the fifth repetition, taking over the groove so that Iyer is able to improvise more freely. The piece grows louder and swings harder after each phrase, with the drums entering on the seventh repetition. As the bass and drums keep the four bar groove steady, Iyer solos busily over it.

The first five minutes of the piece show no hints of Indian ideas, clearly rooted in the jazz idiom. Mahanthappa’s roaring solo enters at 3:58, and Iyer begins comping busily underneath. At 5:15, Iyer and Mahanthappa come together suddenly, playing an extended phrase melodically rooted in the harmony. Up until this section, it is easy to dismiss “Because of Guns” as a straightforward recreation, not particularly unique. When the second iteration of this phrase begins, however, it becomes clear that Iyer has composed a korvai, a long and rhythmically complex phrase repeated three times that typically ends a Carnatic song. The musicians finish the final repetition, but interestingly, Iyer chooses not to end the piece with the korvai. Instead, Mahanthappa and Iyer

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6 Turnaround in “Because of Guns/Hey Joe Redux.”* This turnaround was transcribed by me; however, I subsequently discovered that it appears in Iyer’s Mel Bay publication, **Selected Compositions: 1999-2008** (2011), which confirmed the accuracy of my transcription.
return to soloing industriously over the progression as the tune fades out. My suspicion is that Iyer felt that the circular nature of the progression did not lend itself well to a conclusive resolution, so he preferred to fade it out.

Directly following “Because of Guns” is “Desiring,” the last piece on Blood Sutra. A glance at Iyer’s transcription shows a stepwise chord progression starting on F (Iyer and Viner 2011, 41). Further examination of the progression reveals that the bass motion is actually rooted in raga kamavardhini, the fifty-first parent scale, and the same raga used on the piece “Sadhu” from 1998’s Architextures. Iyer shows significant development in his use of a raga as the basis for harmonic motion on “Desiring.” Between the continued experimentation with rhythmic and harmonic complexity, Blood Sutra expands on Iyer’s vocabulary considerably.

A year after Blood Sutra, Mahanthappa released his third album, Mother Tongue, featuring Iyer, Kavee, and Moutin. For this album, Mahanthappa took a more direct approach at confronting his Indian American heritage into his compositional lexicon. Seven of the eleven tracks are named after languages spoken by Indians in the diaspora: English, Kannada, Gujarati, Telugu, Konkani, Tamil, and Malayalam. His idea was to address a dreaded question that second generation Indian immigrants are frequently asked: Do you speak Indian? Mahanthappa recorded friends and relatives speaking the sentences, “No, I don’t speak Indian. There isn’t such a language,” in their vernacular and then elaborating on the different languages present in India. He transcribed these
recordings both rhythmically and melodically as accurately as possible, using each transcription as a theme for the pieces (Adler 2004, 70). As he states in his Jazz Times interview with David Adler, in the compositions themselves, Mahanthappa attempts to capture the flow of each language, but he takes liberties with the raw transcriptions by stretching rhythmic values and displacing notes by an octave to make the melodies more “playable” (2004, 70). These transcriptions not only appear in the melodic instrument parts, but they are also passed off to Kavee and Moutin on drums and bass.

Mahanthappa’s goal on Mother Tongue was to musically express the diversity present in Indian culture and to directly challenge the mainstream perception that Indian culture is homogenous. The titles of the other four tracks, “The Preserver,” “Circus,” “Point of View,” and “Change of Perspective,” reference ideas about preservation and reinvention of identity. At the very end of “Change of Perspective,” Mahanthappa edited together the recordings of himself, his friends, and his family members speaking the sources of his transcriptions.

For the song “Kannada,” Mahanthappa’s mother left him two voicemails speaking the prescribed sentences. Rather than abandoning one of them, he decided to transcribe both versions: one used for the head in, the other for the head out. The beginning long phrase of the first head can be seen in Example 4.
As Example 4 demonstrates, with the exception of the very first measure, the melody does not outline the 5/4 meter at all. Similarly, Iyer, Kavee, and Moutin react more to the melodic material than the meter, which makes it difficult to follow at times. The melody line wanders, not seeming to follow any discernable patterns, but still staying within a collection of pitches. It is not an easily replicable melody. The phrasing and contour of the melody does reveal a tendency to head up from F# or G# and then to come back down to it at the end of a phrase, ending approximately where it started. The phrase lengths are also irregular. Such wandering melodies and peculiar phrasings appear on all of the language-based pieces on *Mother Tongue*. There is no doubt that this is purposeful; Mahanthappa intended for his works to be discernable as the results of speech patterns, not typical musical patterns. It also makes the pieces sound
close to avant-garde or free jazz, a la Roscoe Mitchell and Wadada Leo Smith, two of his major influences.

By contrast, three of the four non-language based tunes are much more immediately accessible as melodies (the fourth, “Point of View,” is another one of Mahanthappa’s timbre improvisations utilizing a nasal tone). They still contain rhythmic complexity, but he does not obscure the meter nearly as much. Each of the language-based pieces is immediately recognizable when compared to the non-language ones because of the roving movement, even to a novice listener. The stark contrasts in flow and melody of each composition draw attention to major characteristics in each language. Mahanthappa effectively uses music on *Mother Tongue* to draw attention to his complicated Indian American identity.

The title of Iyer’s 2005 album, *Reimagining*, is a reference to the final piece on the album, a “reimagining” of John Lennon’s “Imagine” in 5/4. Once again, Iyer retains his quartet format with Mahanthappa on alto saxophone, Stephan Crump on bass, and Marcus Gilmore on drums. Gilmore’s drumming is much more active and assertive than Sorey’s. On “Phalanx,” we hear a cowbell pattern that is very similar to the West African 12/8 bell pattern, a reminder of Iyer’s continued interest in West African rhythm. The piece itself is in 9/8, and Iyer holds down a low pedal on B throughout the A-section of the piece, switching to a higher octave in the B-section. Two different hexatonic scales are used for sections A and B, and although Iyer’s solo begins in the harmonic world of
section A, he quickly begins to modulate. “Phalanx” is fast and relentless, leaving little room for breath. It ends with a return to the B-section.

By contrast, “Song for Midwood” is in a slow 7/4 with a considerable amount of space in the melody. A Lydian dominant pentatonic scale is used here, allowing for many modal harmonic possibilities (Example 5).

Example 5. “Song For Midwood” pentatonic scale.

The B-section of the piece ends with a mora, a short rhythmic phrase repeated three times (known as a tihai in Hindustani music), that leads into the solo sections. Unlike on “Phalanx,” Iyer and Mahanthappa mostly stay within the mode for their solos. Compositionally, Reimagining does not cover much new ground for the quartet, instead continuing Iyer’s work with harmonic movement based on modal explorations and odd meters.

2006: Raw Materials and Codebook

The year 2006 saw the release of Iyer and Mahanthappa’s duo album, Raw Materials, as well as another quartet album by Mahanthappa called Codebook. Although the two musicians had performed extensively together for nearly a decade, Raw Materials is their first studio album as a duo. The album opens with a piece composed by both musicians entitled “The Shape of Things,” an open improvisation that functions like an alap with a drone on E and B. Iyer
keeps the drone in his left hand, his right hand playing tremolos. Mahanthappa’s improvisation is not in a specific mode, but he aptly explores melodic material based on semitonal movement. Though Mahanthappa uses gamaka-like motifs and microtones on previous albums, his use of them here is clearly more adept. This is the result of a Guggenheim Fellowship that Mahanthappa received in 2004 to study Carnatic music with famed saxophonist Kadri Gopalnath in India. During his month long trip, Mahanthappa studied with Gopalnath for hours each day. Though one month of study is not nearly enough time to master even one Carnatic raga perfectly, Mahanthappa learned specific strategies on how to approach such melodic material (personal communication 2012).

The third tune on Raw Materials, “Forgotten System,” is an intricate piece alternating between a challenging theme (Example 7) and a cell of Ab, A, Bb. The song, written by Mahanthappa, begins with a composed introduction of the melodic material (shown in Example 6). Mahanthappa and Iyer play the first twelve measures in unison, after which Iyer begins to comp, alternating his hands quickly playing clustered chords. As in many of Mahanthappa and Iyer’s compositions, the feel of the meter changes frequently, throwing the listener off balance from the very beginning. This is especially obvious from measures 7-12 in Example 6, where the 5/8 changes from a 3+2 feel to 2+3.

The main theme is equally difficult to follow (Example 7). The melodic material sounds modal because of all of the semitonal movement. Accented notes do not appear regularly, resulting in the loss of a metrical feel. During the
solos, Mahanthappa alternates between improvising on the main theme and the Ab, A, Bb cell. This kind of modal improvisation using cells and themes is similar to how Coltrane used Indian modal ideas in jazz. Iyer initiates the end of the piece with a return to the alternating-hand clustered chords, signaling a return to the main theme. Mahanthappa’s varied compositional strategies, in this case a less overt modal approach, aptly points to his complex identity.


Example 7. “Forgotten System” Main Theme.
Iyer’s compositions are generally mellower than Mahanthappa’s on *Raw Materials*. While his playing on past albums is frequently percussive and hard, Iyer achieves remarkable subtlety on pieces like “Remembrance” and “Inside the Machine,” and Mahanthappa follows suit. This kind of interaction is present throughout the album. In his review of the album for *Jazz Times*, David Adler similarly notes that “Their challenging rhythmic syntax, well documented on their respective quartet discs, takes on a greater immediacy in the duo context” (2006). They expertly respond to one another, reacting to metrical intricacies or thinning and thickening textures seemingly instinctually. *Raw Materials* truly highlights Iyer and Mahanthappa’s vast abilities as both individuals and as a duo, and their continued maturity as composers of hybrid music.

*Codebook*, released only a few months after *Raw Materials*, is another album by Mahanthappa featuring Iyer and Moutin, with Dan Weiss on drums. The rhythmic content on *Codebook* is based on mathematical patterns derived using methods from Indian percussionists. Although his compositions are rarely simple, this is Mahanthappa’s first album that primarily focuses on rhythmic complexity. Weiss’s drumming adds a new dimension to the quartet, as he has studied Carnatic rhythm for several years. Parker-esque melodies still appear on pieces like “Wait it Through” and “Enhanced Performance,” but the overall sound of the album is remarkably different from his other quartet albums. Even with modal melodies, the rhythmic virtuosity on this album is what stands out.
In April of 2008, Iyer released *Tragicomic*, his last quartet album to date. Crump and Gilmore return on bass and drums respectively, and Mahanthappa appears on several tracks. “The Weight of Things” opens the album with a drone on Gb. Iyer plays the drone in his left hand while his right hand glissandos up and down on the piano. Mahanthappa, Crump, and Gilmore improvise using extended techniques on their instruments. As with “The Shape of Things” on *Raw Materials*, this opening statement functions like an *alap*, establishing a sonic world without a steady rhythm. The piece transitions into “Macaca Please,” an extremely fast-paced (quarter note = 300) 4/4 piece using a five-note scale of Gb, Ab, C, Db, and D (Iyer and Viner 2011). The title, “Macaca Please,” is a politically charged reference to an incident in which former Virginia Senator George Allen referred to a young Indian American volunteer as “macaca,” a racial slur for blacks originating in France (Craig and Shear, 2006). Iyer clearly reveals his activist-artist side in referring to the event.

The piece opens with a flurry of eighth notes played by Iyer’s right hand in unison with Mahanthappa, while his left hand plays open fifths, first on Gb and Db, then on D and A. For the second half of the A-section, Mahanthappa plays paired eighth notes within the scale, interspersed with eighth and quarter rests. Iyer and Crump continue to play open fifths, replacing D and A with Ab and Eb. Iyer’s improvisation mostly stays within the mode, but he does add more harmonic movement with his left hand during the second half of his solo. By
contrast, Mahanthappa’s solo is mostly outside the mode. The piece is virtuosic and with significant help from Gilmore, Iyer once again succeeds at obscuring time: the piece sounds metrically ambiguous despite its 4/4 meter.

Many of the pieces, such as the blisteringly fast “Machine Days,” are equally virtuosic and ambiguous, though Iyer also includes more standard material on tracks like “I’m All Smiles” and “Comin’ Up.” “I’m All Smiles” sounds like a straight ahead jazz tune by utilizing traditional harmonies in ways that Iyer abandoned for several years before this. “Comin’ Up” is a fast lilting 6/8 in G. Halfway through the song, Gilmore and Iyer change the emphasis of the beat to the offbeats, momentarily turning the song into a reggae tune. The song is a departure from his frequently complex compositions, instead using more standard approaches to jazz. In many ways, Iyer moves away from an Indian language on *Tragicomic*. Some compositions are modal and the rhythmic language is complicated, but these elements appear in a more abstract way than on previous albums. This once again underscores the fluidity and constant recreation of identity that second-generation immigrants experience.

Heading in quite the opposite direction, Mahanthappa released a duo album with his Carnatic guru, Kadri Gopalnath, in 2008. The album also features the world-renowned Carnatic violinist A. Kanyakumari, Poovalur Sriji on *mridangam*, Rez Abbasi on guitar, Carlo de Rosa on bass, and Royal Hartigan on drumset. The album opens with an expositional *alap*, followed by a piece entitled “Ganesha,” after the elephant-headed Hindu god. In “Ganesha,”
Mahanthappa uses a fourteen beat *tala* called *dhruvataal*, which has a division of 4+2+4+4. Example 8 outlines the fast-paced hexatonic theme.

Example 8. “Ganesha” theme.

The cyclic melody is heavily swung, which contrasts with the straight countermelody that Gopalnath and Kanyakumari play underneath. After the solo sections, Gopalnath and Kanyakumari begin the *sawaal-jawaab*, or call-and-response section of the piece. This section ends with a long *korvai* leading back into the theme. The form of the piece follows the form of a typical Carnatic *kriti*, although with only one theme, instead of three.

The rest of the album alternates between pieces composed by Mahanthappa and *alaps* played by each of the melodic instrumentalists. The album closes with “Convergence,” a piece with two alternating themes shown in Examples 9 and 10. Whereas the first theme is simple and lilting, the second theme is more frantic and Carnatic-sounding with several *gamakas* (not shown in the transcription).

Example 9. “Convergence” Theme 1 (two iterations).

The mode seems to be derived from the forty-seventh parent scale, suvamangi, but it is missing Pa, one of the pillar tones. Theme one is played twice in the opening. It switches to the second theme played three times, then returns to theme one. Underneath the return of theme one, Mahanthappa, Gopalnath, and Abbasi alternate playing a virtuosic cascading line that doubles the speed of theme two. Solos begin one and a half minutes into the piece. Each musician gets ample time to improvise this time, with Sriji and Hartigan sharing a duet to round out the section. The eleven minutes of soloing ends with a complex korvai that once again resolves with a return to the two themes.

On Kinsman, Gopalnath’s playing is easily distinguishable from Mahanthappa’s both in tone and vocabulary. Where Gopalnath’s tone is smooth and open, Mahanthappa’s is husky and raw. Gopalnath’s gamakas are flawless, while Mahanthappa’s are inexact. The former plays straight; the latter swings hard. Despite these stark contrasts, the collaboration is not forced in any way. The musicians are equally skilled in their respective genres: Gopalnath’s playing is steeped in a strict South Indian tradition, while Mahanthappa’s playing reflects his Indian American identity.
2009-Present

Although they have toured together, Iyer and Mahanthappa have not appeared on any recorded studio albums together since 2008. In recent years, their recognition as highly regarded musicians in the jazz world has allowed them to dedicate more time to new projects. However, they have continued to explore their Indian American musical identities in work with several different groups. In 2009, Iyer released a trio album entitled *Historicity*, followed by a solo album (*Solo* 2010). In 2010, Mahanthappa released two titles, *Dual Identity* with fellow alto saxophonist Steve Lehman, and *Apex* with another inspirational altoist named Bunky Green. In 2011, each musician released one album: *Samdhi* (Mahanthappa 2011) and *Tirtha* (Iyer, Prasanna, and Mitta 2011). On *Samdhi*, Mahanthappa uses electronics for the first time with David Gilmore on guitar, Rich Brown on electric bass, Anand Krishnan on *mridangam*, and Damion Reid on drumset. Overall, the album has a more funk/rock feel than previous albums, a purposeful decision by Mahanthappa as an homage to his childhood love of The Yellowjackets and the Brecker Brothers (personal communication 2012). Mahanthappa manages to meld this funk vibe seamlessly within an Indian rhythmic and modal vocabulary. His *gamakas* are more fluid and solid here than on any previous album, and his bebop-influenced melodies are entirely absent. The funk-influenced bass lines and electronic instruments add a new dimension to his music that recalls the influences of his youth.
Tirtha similarly represents maturity in Iyer’s hybrid musical ventures. Co-written with Carnatic/jazz guitarist Prasanna (who studied with violinist Kanyakumari) and tabla player Nittin Mitta, the album opens with “Duality,” a tune written by Iyer. The first twelve measures are shown below in Example 11. “Duality” has an ostinato on A throughout the composition. Iyer uses a specific raga again, dhatuvardhini, the sixty-ninth parent scale (S1 R3 G3 M2 P D1 N3). Mitta plays a typical eight-beat tala cycle known as Keherwa in Hindustani music.

The piece builds slowly, beginning with Iyer’s ostinato. Prasanna enters in the third measure with a countermelody on offbeats. This second melody has a one-measure rhythmic palindrome, creating a pattern that is the same both forwards and backwards. They establish this ostinato melody-countermelody for four measures. Prasanna stops playing in measure seven as Iyer begins to play a sixteenth-note ostinato utilizing a seven-note pattern that obscures the simple rhythmic cycle. In measure eleven, Prasanna returns with his off-beat countermelody, further complicating the metric stability.
Example 11. “Duality” mm 1-12.

*The tablas part is not transcribed exactly; rather, it shows a basic outline of the main rhythm.*
The musicians play various versions of this combination before performing a *mora* that begins the solo sections. Both Iyer and Prasanna’s solos stay strictly embedded in the mode. Prasanna skillfully incorporates a jazz harmonic language into his improvisations, along with subtle but exact *gamakas*. Iyer and Prasanna split compositional duties on *Tirtha*, but their pieces are extremely cohesive. It is a collaboration that came out of Iyer’s interest to see what he could create with Indian musicians of the same generation with equally diverse musical interests (Iyer public interview 2012). Prasanna has a background in jazz, Indian classical music, and Western classical music. He also grew up with a penchant for 1980s heavy metal. Likewise, although Mitta is primarily a Hindustani musician, he grew up in the large South Indian city of Hyderabad, where he was exposed to a great deal of Carnatic and Western music from the film industry (Iyer public interview 2012). All of these influences are present in *Tirtha*, resulting in a unique musical collaboration.
Improvisational Approaches

As mentioned in Chapter 2, both Iyer and Mahanthappa use improvisation as a strategy for negotiating their hybrid identities. Iyer’s improvisations tend to be harmonic, since the piano lends itself easily to this approach. Often, this harmony is rooted in modality rather than traditional Western harmony, but the lines blur frequently. Interestingly, although he explores complex Indian rhythmic shapes in his compositions, Iyer almost never uses these reductions and expansions in his improvisations. This is likely due to the fact that improvising such phrases requires total immersion into the Indian rhythmic language, a process that Carnatic and Hindustani percussionists begin in early childhood. Iyer would never be able to reach this level of proficiency without dedicating most of his musical life to it. This is not to say that his improvisations are rhythmically simple, but they do tend to be rooted in Western rhythm.

Iyer is capable of playing extremely softly and thoughtfully, as he showed in songs like “Patterns” (from Solo 2010) at the Burlington Discover Jazz Festival, but his characteristic style is more often percussive, reminiscent of Monk. His physicality at the piano echoes this: he slouches over the piano with his hands hovering high over the keys, fingers sprawling out like spider legs. His attacks are hard and fast, an approach that is especially apparent on his earlier albums. Over the past four years, Iyer has revealed a more sensitive side to his piano playing.
Mahanthappa’s playing can be typified by one word: aggressive. His improvisations tend to be active and assertive. He retained this characteristic style even in Mark Dresser’s Quintet at the Vision Festival in June, where none of the compositions were his own. His physicality was equally assertive at the concert: he faced the audience head-on bent slightly forward, bouncing on his knees frequently. Both on recordings and in live performance, he is capable of working in and out of the harmonic language of a piece quickly and seamlessly, sometimes choosing to work strictly within a mode, other times completely abandoning it. His approach to improvisation using Indian elements is similarly varied: Mahanthappa sometimes uses gamakas strictly, and other times he simply suggests them in using microtonal turnarounds (personal communication 2012). The bebop influence in Mahanthappa’s playing comes out frequently during his wandering melodic solos. His most commonly used tone is raspy, but he is also a master of experimenting with timbre on his instrument, equally capable of creating smooth, nasal, airy, open, and gruff sounds.

One particular aspect of both Iyer and Mahanthappa’s improvisations and compositions that stands out significantly to me is a startling lack of silence. While both musicians know when to pull back, their compositions and improvisations have a tendency toward the relentless. There are very few moments when the texture of a piece thins out if either of them is soloing. Many jazz musicians utilize silence frequently; by contrast, Indian musicians have a tendency to err on the side of virtuosic activity. It is likely that their tendencies
toward busy solos are from both Indian influences and their bebop heroes, like Charlie Parker.

Fusion or Hybridity?

Both Iyer and Mahanthappa differentiate their music from “fusion.” Iyer admits that even though there have been many “encounters” between Western musicians and Indian musicians since the 1960s, what he does is separate from those interactions (public interview 2012). In discussing *Kinsman*, Mahanthappa shares a similar sentiment, stating that, “People like me and Vijay and Rez are uniquely equipped to deal with this particular synthesizing of ideas, because we’re living it culturally every day. So it’s not so much about trying to achieve the goal of putting these two things together—” rather, it is the result of their personal musical journeys rooted in their hybrid identities (Brady 2009, 36). Both Iyer and Mahanthappa have explored a range of possibilities in their music, sometimes using elements of Indian music overtly, other times subtly, sometimes not at all. Having explored so many of these different possibilities over the past seventeen years, they are now capable of going in and out of several different sound worlds effortlessly.

Iyer and Mahanthappa acknowledge their Indian American roots as being integral to their musical development. While this has helped them gain widespread recognition in the jazz world, they have expressed satisfaction that they are now accepted as musicians first, and Indian Americans second, a feat
that was not possible when they first began their professional careers in the early 1990s (personal communication 2012). They continue to tour together, also retaining several longstanding projects with other musicians in the jazz, Indian, and hip hop idioms. They have certainly influenced each other’s playing in working together for so many years, but their exploration of their musical identities is still grounded in individuality.

This detailed musical analysis reveals how Mahanthappa and Iyer draw attention to different aspects of their identities at different times. At the beginning of his professional career, Iyer had a tendency to use Indian elements strictly and literally, gradually becoming more and more abstract as he reconciled how to incorporate an Indian modal aesthetic into a harmonic context. Mahanthappa moved in the opposite direction, using elements more literally after his Guggenheim Fellowship gave him a better grounding in Indian melodic construction. They consciously forge their own styles, yet neither of them commit to an Indian aesthetic at all times. Instead, their second-generation identities shape their continual process of musical discovery, change, and reinvention.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that Rudresh Mahanthappa and Vijay Iyer's use of Indian elements in jazz developed from a desire to create a distinctly Indian American musical identity, an identity separate from their immigrant parents and their non-immigrant peers. The influx of Indian immigrants at this time subsequently created a group of second-generation immigrants searching for ways to understand the unique cultural space that they occupy. Offspring of Indian immigrants face distinctive struggles for identity in the context of the decolonization of India and the opening of the U.S. borders in the late twentieth century.

Mahanthappa and Iyer are, by no means, the first to combine Indian and Western musical ideas. In Chapter 2, I explained how Indian interactions with the West in the wake of colonialism led to the creation of many different musics, including Hindustani Airs, Bollywood music, modal jazz in the tradition of Coltrane, and uses by popular bands like the Beatles. I then discussed East Asian immigrant artists who utilized the jazz idiom both as a form of activism and exploration of identity. I narrowed the scope by surveying Indian immigrant musical scenes that were created to examine issues particular to their groups and how improvisation itself is a negotiating strategy for doing so. Mahanthappa and Iyer are the threads that connect these different fabrics: strongly influenced
by the East Asian activist-artists, but dealing with similar concerns as other Indian immigrants, they created distinct brands of Indo-jazz.

In the third chapter, I investigated the structural reasons that caused widespread Indian immigration in the context of diaspora, postcolonial theory, and hybridity. I problematized the idea of the model minority, concurring with suggestions that it places unfair expectations on Asian immigrants while also pitting marginalized groups against each other. Furthermore, I discussed how decisions that first-generation immigrants make about assimilation, cultural retention, and community affect their second-generation children’s perception of identity. I demonstrated that postcolonial theory, applied generally as a way of studying the lingering effects of colonialism, is an appropriate framework for studying immigration, racialization, and identity for South Asians. Lastly, I related ideas of assimilation and transnationalism to individual character, showing how both cultural and individual identities are constantly shifting and readjusting based upon circumstances.

In Chapter 4, I began with a summary of Iyer and Mahanthappa’s musical training and followed with a detailed analysis of their musical development using their studio albums. This analysis drew attention to the specific elements of Indian music that the musicians use, the methods by which they use them, and their diverse abilities. I highlighted how their music matured, shifted, and broadened through experimentation and education. I also emphasized that
although they frequently work together, the manifestations of these experiments are different for each musician.

This research demonstrates how Mahanthappa and Iyer use music as a strategy to negotiate cultural differences and feelings of marginalization. Their desires to do so largely arose after recognizing the lack of representation of Indian Americans in political and social spheres. The music I reviewed in Chapter 2 laid the groundwork for them to explore jazz in this manner. John Coltrane, the Beatles’ interactions with Ravi Shankar, and activist-artists like Steve Coleman and Fred Ho inspired them to dig into their cultural roots in music. Additionally, the studies of other Indian diasporic groups illustrate the widespread use of music as a strategy for Indian immigrants to navigate cultural differences.

The theories presented in Chapter 3 reveal why second-generation Indian immigrants occupy a difficult space caught between various cultural demands. Both Mahanthappa and Iyer felt growing pressures to acknowledge these differences once they entered into adulthood. For Mahanthappa, this meant recognizing that he was neither black nor white; for Iyer, it meant believing that he could have a career in jazz despite cultural pressure to work in the sciences. Music became one strategy through which they could delve into ideas about what it means to be an Indian American. The fourth chapter connects these ideas in a concrete way through musical analysis.

Future work would include the issue of audience perception in my study of Iyer and Mahanthappa’s music. This is a complicated issue that involves looking
at reception by several different groups, including fellow jazz musicians and
critics, the typical jazz audience, and the Indian American community at large.
This information would deepen an understanding of the differences between
various consumers, and whether or not the artists have succeeded in shaping
public perception of their images.

In addition, it would be interesting to do more detailed musical analyses of
their improvisations and uses of harmony. Since this study was a survey of music
outlining more general music concepts, this was not possible, but future studies
could reveal subtler ways that Iyer and Mahanthappa have matured as Indo-jazz
musicians. Additionally, there is quite a lot of work that can be done on their non-
Indo-jazz projects. The diversity of their musical endeavors strengthens my
argument about their flexible and complex identities.

Music became the appropriate mode of expression for Iyer and
Mahanthappa to explore their identities because they began studying it when
they were young; there are many second-generation Indian immigrants, however,
who use other forms of artistic expression for similar purposes. Author Jhumpa
Lahiri skillfully writes about Indian immigrants in the diaspora in her collection of
she follows the story of a second-generation immigrant named Gogol, who
initially rebels against his parents’ culture but eventually accepts his hybrid
identity.
Gurinder Chadha, a British-Indian immigrant, tells a similar story in the film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), in which a young Sikh lady secretly joins an amateur women’s soccer league despite her parents’ disapproval. The film aptly portrays the social pressures that second-generation immigrants face from both their Indian families and their non-Indian friends. She eventually gets her parents to understand that adapting to parts of British culture does not require the total rejection of her Indian roots.

While Chadha and Lahiri’s work in the early 2000s directly address these conflicts, second-generation immigrant artists like comedian/actor Aziz Ansari and actress/writer Mindy Kaling have become well known for their recent non-stereotyped roles on television. In NBC’s *Parks and Recreation*, Ansari plays Tom Haverford, a reluctant government employee who sporadically references his Indian American heritage, but ultimately identifies as American. On NBC’s *The Office* and the new Fox show *The Mindy Project*, Kaling portrays similar characters that occasionally play up their Indian heritage, though most of the time they do not stand out as different from their non-immigrant castmates. Roles like these did not exist for Indian Americans in the mid-1990s when Iyer and Mahanthappa began their professional careers. In fact, the only Indian character to regularly appear on television at the time was Apu from *The Simpsons*, who is voiced by Jewish actor Hank Azaria and portrays a stereotyped Indian convenience store owner. The non-stereotyped characters have started to make the presence of Indian Americans less surprising and foreign to mainstream
America. It would be interesting to do further studies on whether activism by Asian Improv aRts and similar groups have contributed to these changes.

At the same time, it is hasty to state that these major strides have eliminated all problems. Articles on Mahanthappa, Iyer, Ansari, and Kaling frequently include “Indian” in the title. As Iyer laments, “I feel like it’s already an issue even before I get to say or play anything…People have to somehow resolve their idea of India through a person like me because I’m available to them or visible to them” (personal communication 2012). The fact that these artists have brown skin and immigrant parents is considered something noteworthy, and, as Iyer points out, they are still expected to be authentic carriers of Indian culture.

In this thesis, I showed how Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa use music as a strategy to navigate their second-generation Indian American statuses. Their musical choices are grounded in individuality, though they often explore the issue together. Iyer and Mahanthappa both prioritize being accepted as talented and motivated artists separate from their Indian heritage, but they also admit that they cannot deny the integral role that their cultural backgrounds play in shaping their musical identities. Iyer sums up this idea succinctly, stating, “I find that I’m proud to be who I am, but I’m also proud to be able to express a certain composite and complicated reality, which is what all of us live. I mean it’s what everybody lives. And sometimes being ethnic means that you’re not given that ability or privilege. I guess I like the juxtaposition that happens and then
watching people respond to it." By challenging these stereotypes through music, Iyer and Mahanthappa are able to subtly change peoples’ perception of what it means to be an Indian American.
APPENDIX

SVARA REPRESENTATION FOR RAGA
The notation used to denote each svara in the raga s represented in the thesis are based on the commonly used notation for the Melakarta system of 72 parent scales. In this system, S = Sa, R = Re, G = Ga, M = Ma, P = Pa, D = Dha, and N = Ni. Since every note in this system except Sa and Pa has more than one possibility, the numbers 1, 2, and 3 denote which is used in a particular scale. For example, if the tonal center is C (Sa), the second note (Re) has three possibilities: Db, D, or D#. These would be denoted as R1, R2, or R3 respectively. The same is true for Ga, Dha, and Ni. For Ma, however, there are only two possibilities that would not overlap with either the third scale degree (G) or the fifth scale degree (P): the perfect fourth (M1) or the tritone (M2). Thus, the numbers after each svara represent more exactly the specific notes present in a particular raga.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


DISCOGRAPHY


