

Béla Fleck-Zakir Hussain-Edgar Meyer

with special guest Rakesh Chaurasia

There's a bit of the sorcerer in Béla Fleck (banjo), Zakir Hussain (tabla), Edgar Meyer (double bass), and their special guest Rakesh Chaurasia (bansuri – Indian flute). Most musicians hope at most for proficiency in their chosen form, but these gentlemen move from bluegrass to Western classical to Indian classical to jazz, transmuting genres into something uniquely their own as though they'd gotten hold of the alchemist's tools that legendarily changed lead into gold. In any case, it's music that transcends description; ineffable, indefinable, and very beautiful.

The story begins around 1980 when Edgar's friends Sam Bush and John Cowan told him about a guy they thought he'd enjoy playing with, Béla Fleck by name. "We first played together in Aspen, just busking, but we were pretty close pretty early. The thing we had in common was that both of us were completely comfortable talking about music 24/7 – playing, instruments, technology, the machinations of human beings involved, any part of music." They played even more. "As players," Edgar added, "we were at a formative stage, so to some degree we were shaped by each other. Béla's inventive, he cares about the details, and he's willing to put rhythm above other things, to prioritize it." And rhythm led to the next step,

Béla recalled, "I met Zakir at a workshop at a festival that he did with (Flecktone member) Future Man. Both Edgar and I thought we could learn a lot from him. When the Nashville Symphony built its new building, they asked Edgar and I to write a concerto. Since we'd recently premiered a double concerto, they suggested a triple concerto with someone special. Zakir immediately came to mind. At first we only composed together, working on *The Melody of Rhythm* concerto. Then we added the six trio pieces to complete the album, but it was in the touring that we really started to develop a serious musical rapport."

Working on the concerto with Béla and Edgar was "a revelation," Zakir says, "an eye-opener, a whole other way to make music, especially for me as an Indian classical musician. I had not imagined that tabla could be incorporated into the world of Western classical music and bluegrass all at the same time. It opened up a whole new avenue for me to explore."

Béla continues: "As a banjo player, with short percussive notes, I often feel like a percussionist. Playing with like beings who possess a powerful command of time can set me free. Zakir brings flow, support, and an uncommonly strong sense of time to the

playing, so I can relax and flow too. And he's a forward leaner, by which I mean it feels natural to him to let the tempo pick up subtly, as we do in bluegrass music.

He brings a sense of effortless mastery to his art, so that he's often not working at things, just flowing. He doesn't feel he has to play at 100% difficulty rate at all times, and he knows how complicated to make it for the people that he's playing with. He plays what's appropriate and gives you just the level of stimulation you need."

Edgar concurs. "As to playing with Zakir, it's still a honeymoon for me to be playing with him. He's the most interesting musician I've encountered in the second half of my life. I try to enjoy it as well as seeing how much I can learn. He's just a unique rhythmic force."

"This tour will include new music," Béla adds, "and ideally we'll develop a new album out of it. And the new great thing is that this time we'll also have Rakesh as a regular component, which really opens up the sonic palette. Edgar has a sustain buddy now. Rakesh came out and played with us a good number of times, and it was a profound connection—he's easy to play with and fun to be around, and it balances the band not only culturally but in terms of sustain." Edgar added, "Each person in the band is clearly devoted to being a great accompanist as well as a strong soloist. Rakesh will be interacting with Béla and I all the time."

Zakir: "Rakesh is one of a new breed of Indian classical musicians. We witness him being able to seamlessly flow and interact with many forms of music since he has been exposed to them since the time of his earliest training. Rakesh is the finest young bamboo flutist of Indian classical music and a natural fit with our trio."

Béla sums it up: "We all provide things that differ from each other. Edgar brings in a powerful bass sense, and accesses levels of harmony that neither Zakir nor I can offer; he's really figured out how to interface harmony with Indian music. I don't know what I bring, but I'm glad neither of them can play banjo! And Rakesh is just the frosting on the cake, or actually on a hipper level, the sherry in the she crab soup. This is going to be fun."

Edgar concludes, "I'm looking forward to a great four-way dialogue, and it will be unique."

Biographies

“Béla Fleck has taken banjo playing to some very unlikely places — not just bluegrass and country and “newgrass,” but also into classical concertos, jazz and a documentary about the banjo’s deep African roots, not to mention the time he toured with throat singers from Tuva. He’s also baffled the Grammy awards, winning for country and jazz in the same year and also winning in pop, world music, classical crossover and, yes, folk. That’s a lot of territory for five strings.” – Jon Pareles, The New York Times

Just in case you aren't familiar with Béla Fleck, there are some who say he's the world's premier banjo player. Others claim that Béla has virtually reinvented the image and the sound of the banjo through a remarkable performing and recording career that has taken him all over the musical map and on a range of solo projects and collaborations. If you *are* familiar with Béla, you know that he just loves to play the banjo, often reimagining it in unique settings.

The 15-time Grammy Award winner has been nominated in more categories than any other artist in Grammy history, and remains a powerfully creative force globally in bluegrass, jazz, classical pop, rock and world beat.

His groundbreaking quartet *Béla Fleck & The Flecktones* is celebrating 30 years with a North American tour in the summer of 2018. Fleck and his wife Abigail Washburn took home the 2016 Grammy for Best Folk Album, and released the acclaimed follow up LP *Echo in the Valley* in 2017.

The impact of fatherhood sparked *Juno Concerto*, a piece for banjo and orchestra, recorded with the Colorado Symphony and conducted by José Luis Gomez. Companion pieces to the *Juno Concerto* include “Griff” (G riff), featuring Béla with the Brooklyn Rider string quartet.

Any world-class musician born with the names Béla (for Bartók), Anton (for Dvořák) and Leos (for Janáček) would seem destined to play classical music. Fleck made the classical connection with *Perpetual Motion*, his critically acclaimed 2001 Sony Classical recording that went on to win a pair of Grammys, including Best Classical Crossover Album. Collaborating with Fleck on *Perpetual Motion* was his long-time friend and colleague, Edgar Meyer, an amazing bassist/composer whose virtuosity defies labels.

In 2009, Béla produced the award-winning documentary and recordings, *Throw Down Your Heart*, where he journeyed across Africa to research the origins of the banjo.

In 2011, Fleck premiered his first stand-alone banjo concerto, *The Impostor*, with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, which commissioned the work. It has now been performed over 50 times worldwide.

These days, Fleck performs in an astonishing variety of contexts: his concertos, a duo with Chick Corea, tonight's trio with Edgar Meyer and Zakir Hussain and guest Rakesh Chaurasia, with the Brooklyn Rider string quartet, in banjo duet with Abigail Washburn, banjo and mandolin duet with Chris Thile, and occasionally back to bluegrass with his old friends Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Stuart Duncan, Bryan Sutton, and others. He collaborates with African artists such as Oumou Sangare and Toumani Diabate, in a jazz setting with The Marcus Roberts Trio, and with *Béla Fleck and the Flecktones*, who continue to perform together 30 years after the band's inception. Béla has recently accepted a commission to create his third concerto, which premiered 2018 in New Orleans.

Zakir Hussain is today appreciated both in the field of percussion and in the music world at large as an international phenomenon and one of the greatest musicians of our time. A classical tabla virtuoso of the highest order, his consistently brilliant and exciting performances have established him as a national treasure in his own country, India, and as one of India's reigning cultural ambassadors. Along with his legendary father and teacher, Ustad Allarakha, he has elevated the status of his instrument both in India and around the world. His playing is marked by uncanny intuition and masterful improvisational dexterity, founded in formidable knowledge and study.

Widely considered a chief architect of the contemporary world music movement, Zakir's contribution to world music has been unique, with many historic collaborations, including *Shakti*, which he founded with John McLaughlin and L. Shankar, *Remember Shakti*, the *Diga Rhythm Band*, *Making Music*, *Planet Drum* with Mickey Hart, *Tabla Beat Science*, *Sangam* with Charles Lloyd and Eric Harland, and recordings and performances with artists as diverse as George Harrison, YoYo Ma, Joe Henderson, Van Morrison, Airto Moreira, Pharoah Sanders, Billy Cobham, Mark Morris, Rennie Harris, Herbie Hancock, and the Kodo drummers. His music and extraordinary contribution to the music world were honored in April 2009, with four widely heralded and sold-out concerts at Carnegie Hall's *Artist Perspective* series.

In 2007, readers' polls from both *Modern Drummer* and *Drum!* magazines named him Best World Music and Best Worldbeat Drummer respectively, and the *Downbeat* Critics'

Poll named him Best Percussionist in 2012. On February 8, 2009, Zakir received a Grammy in the Best Contemporary World Music category for *Global Drum Project*, his group with Mickey Hart, Giovanni Hidalgo and Sikiru Adepoju.

A child prodigy, Zakir was touring by the age of twelve. He came to the United States in 1970, performing his first USA concert at the Fillmore East in New York City with Pandit Ravi Shankar. A prolific composer and recording artist, Zakir has received widespread recognition for his many ensembles and collaborations. In 1987, his first solo release, *Making Music*, was acclaimed as “one of the most inspired East-West fusion albums ever recorded.” In 1992, *Planet Drum*, an album co-created and produced by Zakir and Mickey Hart, became the first recording to win a Grammy in the Best World Music category, the *Downbeat* Critics’ Poll for Best World Beat Album and the NARM Indie Best Seller Award for World Music Recording.

Zakir received the distinct honor of co-composing the opening music for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. He was commissioned to compose music for Alonzo King’s *Lines* Ballet (for which he received an Isadora Duncan Award), and to compose an original work for the San Francisco Jazz Festival, both in 1998. He went on to compose three more scores for *Lines* Ballet, receiving another “Izzie.” He has received numerous grants, including participation in the Meet the Composer programs funded by the Pew Memorial Trust.

In 2002, his commissioned work for choreographer Mark Morris’ “Kolam” premiered as part of YoYo Ma’s “Silk Road Project” with YoYo Ma and Zakir performing Zakir’s composition live for the performance. In September 2006, *Triple Concerto for Banjo, Bass and Tabla*, a piece co-composed by Zakir, Edgar Meyer and Béla Fleck, was performed by them with the Nashville Symphony at the gala opening of the Schermerhorn Symphony Hall in Nashville. In January 2009, it was re-created with the Detroit Symphony, again under the baton of Leonard Slatkin. This performance and new original works composed by Zakir, Edgar and Béla, was released as the Grammy-nominated *The Melody of Rhythm* in 2009.

Zakir’s second concerto, *Concerto for Four Soloists*, a special commission for the National Symphony Orchestra, was performed at Kennedy Center in March 2011, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach. His third concerto, *Peshkar*, the first-ever tabla concerto, was premiered in September 2015, by the Symphony Orchestra of India, in Europe in January 2016, and in the United States in April, 2017, by the National Symphony Orchestra.

Zakir is the recipient of the 1999 National Heritage Fellowship, the United States' most

prestigious honor for a master in the traditional arts, presented by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at the United States Senate on September 28, 1999. In 2005, he was named an Old Dominion Fellow by the Humanities Council at Princeton University, where he resided for the 2005-2006 autumn semester as full professor; he taught again at Stanford University and the University of Washington. On January 18, 2017, Zakir was presented with SFJazz's Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition of his "unparalleled contribution to the world of music".

In 1992, Zakir founded Moment! Records, which features original collaborations in the field of contemporary world music and live concert performances by great masters of the classical music of India. Moment! Records' 2006 release, *Golden Strings of the Sarode* with Aashish Khan and Zakir Hussain, was nominated for a Grammy in the Best Traditional World Music category for that year. Moment Records' recent DVD release, *Zakir Hussain: The SF Jazz Sessions*, featuring a host of Zakir's world-class collaborators, has been critically acclaimed.

In demand as both a performer and a composer, **Edgar Meyer** has formed a role in the music world unlike any other. Hailed by *The New Yorker* as "...the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively un-chronicled history of his instrument", Mr. Meyer's unparalleled technique and musicianship, in combination with his gift for composition, have brought him to the fore, where he is appreciated by a vast, varied audience. His uniqueness in the field was recognized by a MacArthur Award in 2002.

As a solo classical bassist, Mr. Meyer can be heard on a concerto album with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra conducted by Hugh Wolff featuring Bottesini's *Gran Duo* with Joshua Bell, Meyer's own *Double Concerto for Bass and Cello* with Yo-Yo Ma, Bottesini's *Bass Concerto No. 2*, and Meyer's own *Concerto in D for Bass*. He has also recorded an album featuring three of Bach's *Unaccompanied Suites for Cello*.

In 2006, he released a self-titled solo recording on which he wrote and recorded all of the music, incorporating piano, guitar, mandolin, dobro, banjo, gamba, and double bass. In 2007, recognizing his wide-ranging recording achievements, Sony/BMG released a compilation of *The Best of Edgar Meyer*. In 2011 Mr. Meyer joined cellist Yo-Yo Ma, mandolinist Chris Thile, and fiddler Stuart Duncan for the Sony Masterworks recording *The Goat Rodeo Sessions* which was awarded the 2012 Grammy Award for Best Folk Album.

Mr. Meyer was honored with his fifth Grammy Award in 2015 for Best Contemporary Instrumental album for his *Bass & Mandolin* collaboration with his long-time partner, fellow MacArthur Awardee Chris Thile. This Nonesuch release was a follow-up to their

genre-bending 2008 CD/DVD, *Edgar Meyer and Chris Thile*. His most recent recording is a 2017 collection of Bach Trios with Thile and Yo-Yo Ma.

As a composer, Mr. Meyer has carved out a remarkable and unique niche in the musical world. One of his most recent compositions is the *Double Concerto for Double Bass and Violin*, which received its world premiere July 2012 with Joshua Bell at the Tanglewood Music Festival with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Meyer and Mr. Bell have also performed the work at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Aspen Music Festival, and with the Nashville and Toronto symphony orchestras. In the 2011-12 season, Mr. Meyer was composer in residence with the Alabama Symphony, where he premiered his third concerto for double bass and orchestra.

Other compositions of Mr. Meyer's include a violin/piano work which has been performed by Joshua Bell at New York's Lincoln Center, a quintet for bass and string quartet premiered with the Emerson String Quartet and recorded on Deutsche Grammophon, a *Double Concerto for Bass and Cello* premiered with Yo-Yo Ma and The Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa, and a violin concerto written for Hilary Hahn which was premiered and recorded by Ms. Hahn with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra led by Hugh Wolff.

Collaborations are a central part of Mr. Meyer's work, and include performing and recording in a duo with Béla Fleck, a quartet with Joshua Bell, Sam Bush, and Mike Marshall, a trio with Béla Fleck and Mike Marshall, and a trio with Yo-Yo Ma and Mark O'Connor. The latter combined to create the 1996 *Appalachia Waltz* release, which soared to the top of the charts and remained there for 16 weeks. Their follow-up recording, *Appalachian Journey*, was honored with a Grammy Award. In the 2006-2007 season, Mr. Meyer premiered a piece for double bass and piano performed with Emanuel Ax.

Mr. Meyer began studying bass at the age of five under the instruction of his father and continued further to study with Stuart Sankey. In 1994 he received the Avery Fisher Career Grant and in 2000 became the only bassist to receive the Avery Fisher Prize. Currently, he is Visiting Professor of Double Bass at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Rakesh Chaurasia, the nephew and child prodigy of flute maestro Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, has a famous name to live up to. Amongst the promising musicians of the second generation, Rakesh has carved a niche for himself as an accomplished flautist. Infusing his personal style with the tradition of his renowned uncle, he has evolved an

approach that maintains the purity of the flute while also managing to capture the attention of young listeners. The most accomplished of his uncle's disciples, he promises to carry the Chaurasia legacy to new heights.

Rakesh's flute has matched note and rhythm with wind instruments of other cultures as well as having performed with Carnatic and world famous instrumentalists. Rakesh's forte is in blending his flute without really losing its identity in mixed instruments' concerts. Rakesh has already globe-trotted many times over, enthraling audiences at classical and non-classical concerts .He is also an accomplished studio musician, having recorded with most of the leading stalwarts of the Indian film industry.

Rakesh has been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades. He received the Indian Music Academy Award, presented by the Honourable President Of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in 2007, the Aditya Birla Kalakiran Puraskar in 2008, the Guru Shishya Award in 2011, IWAP-Pandit Jasraj Sangeet Ratna Award in 2013 and the Pannalal Ghosh Puraskar 2013.

Despite his experimental work, Rakesh has never deviated from his main goal of becoming a full-fledged classical musician. He has regularly appeared in prominent festivals such as the WOMAD festival in Athens, Womad Earthstation in Europe, and the 'Festivals of India' in Russia, Japan, the US, and Europe, His growing maturity and status has brought him invitations to perform solo at major events within India and abroad, including the Festival of Saint-Denis in Paris and the Leicester International Music Festival in England. Most notably, Rakesh was invited to conclude the twenty-four hour live BBC Radio broadcast celebrating Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee, reaching audiences worldwide.

Recently Rakesh toured with legendary tabla virtuoso Ustad Zakir Hussain both as a duo for classical concerts as well as for The Masters of Percussion at prestigious venues across the globe. Rakesh has also performed with such international names as Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and Joshua Redman. Rakesh's most recent venture is his fusion band Rakesh and Friends (RAF) which creates music that appeals to the young without sacrificing the essence of classical music.