

TIZER

Downbeat

Driven by an explosive mix of jazz, rock, classical, jam band influences and Afro Cuban and world rhythms, *Downbeat*—the first studio album by TIZER, a multi-cultural band led by Boulder, CO native, keyboardist/composer Lao Tizer—throws down a high powered collection of 12 brand-new originals on this scintillating release of fresh instrumental music from one of today's rising stars of the world-fusion genre. Establishing themselves in the contemporary jazz world over the past few years, TIZER has spurred comparisons of a modern twist to the 70s and early 80s heyday of jazz fusion, when trailblazing ensembles like Return To Forever, Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report set the aesthetic standard.

Truly embodying the title and spirit of his 2007 solo album *Diversify*, Lao assembled a group of veteran world-class musicians to create a dynamic rich with new melodic, harmonic and improvisational possibilities. Co-produced by Lao and guitarist Jeff Kollman, the eclectic set includes five original compositions by Lao and numerous collaborations with his cohorts, including the first single “World In Rhythm,” co-written with *Emmy* winner and *Grammy* nominated guitarist Chieli Minucci, best-known as the founder and leader of *Special EFX*.

Over the past few years, TIZER—a 2011 nominee for “*Jazz Group of the Year*”—has taken their multi-faceted world fusion vibe around the globe, galvanizing thousands at events including the Java Jazz Festival in Jakarta, the Joy of Jazz Festival in Johannesburg, the Dubai Jazz Festival, Barbados Jazz Festival, the Caribbean Sea Jazz Festival and the Festival International Providencia Jazz in Santiago, Chile. In addition to their usual whirlwind of U.S. dates, their 2012 schedule in support of *Downbeat* includes the Jarasum International Jazz Festival in South Korea and four shows in Russia. While Lao was a “*Best New Jazz Artist*” nominee in 2002 and *Diversify* spent many weeks on the *Billboard* Contemporary Jazz chart, TIZER has a multi-genre, multi-national appeal that expands beyond just jazz enthusiasts. Their diverse resume includes performance slots alongside the likes of Zappa Plays Zappa, Jethro Tull, Isaac Hayes, Al Jarreau, Spyro Gyra, George Benson, Soulive, Babyface, Bruce Hornsby and Robin Thicke.

Those who haven't yet experienced TIZER's intensity, expansive arrangements and exciting soloing in concert got the next best thing with the group's 2010 debut release *TIZER Live*, which captured the vibrant interaction of what Lao calls “the ultimate cultural and musical melting pot”; Italian-American New Yorker Minucci, African American violin great Karen Briggs and Cuban born drummer/percussionist Raul Pineda, in addition to Kollman, Steve Nieves (sax/vocals/percussion) and Lao himself, who grew up in Boulder, Colorado. Bassist Rufus Philpot, who joined TIZER after that recording, hails from London. The concert recording at the world renowned Musicians Institute in Hollywood was TIZER's very first live performance as a group; it included fresh interpretations of seven songs from Lao's earlier recordings, including *Diversify* and *Golden Soul* (2001). Footage from the show was spliced with interview clips with band members to create an unforgettable 20 minute promo video, available for viewing on Lao's website and (in two parts) YouTube.

“TIZER is still me, it's my baby and I'm the engine that makes it go, but the group concept has opened up an amazing array of new sonic adventures,” says Lao, whose solo discography also includes the 2009 classical world music set *Passages*. “Everyone brings their unique voice and

talents to the group, and it's exciting to have a true band identity in a genre where there aren't many bands. Some call what we do 'world jazz fusion,' but it's more than that, and as we evolve, we're able to stretch the boundaries even beyond where we are on *Downbeat*. I grew so much as an artist once I let go of trying to fit my music into one specific genre and stayed true to the music that was emerging with these great musicians. Everyone has busy careers outside TIZER, but as we emerged as a bona fide group, all the pieces fell into the place when it came time to tour. The passion we had for the music made it easy to commit our time."

The collective resume of the members of TIZER is impressive. Renowned jazz guitarist, composer and producer Chieli Minucci has recorded over 25 CDs as a solo artist and as co-founder of Special EFX; he has also worked with numerous pop greats, including Celine Dion, Lionel Richie, Jennifer Lopez, Jewel and Mark Anthony. Minucci has been a champion of Lao's music and a frequent collaborator whose ties to Lao are the longest of any of the band's members; he first met the keyboardist when Lao moved to L.A. in 1997 at age 18 to pursue his musical dreams. He helped Lao form his original band lineup in 1998, produced *Golden Soul*, appeared on *Diversify* and co-produced *Passages*.

Violinist Karen Briggs, best known as "the lady in red," made her Carnegie Hall debut in 1994 with Dave Grusin, and is renowned for her multiple tours with Yanni. Briggs has worked with Kenny Loggins, Chaka Khan and En Vogue among others. Rufus Philpot is bandleader for the U.K. groove band Down To The Bone and has played with jazz legends Allan Holdsworth, Randy Brecker and Al Di Meola. Steve Nieves has worked with Loggins & Messina, Clint Black, Special EFX and formed his own pop/jazz band Jango in the early 2000s. *Grammy* winning drummer Raul Pineda has performed and recorded with Chucho Valdes, Michel Camilo and Juan Gabriel.

Lao's longest term band member and worldwide Fender clinician Jeff Kollman, who produced *Diversify* and co-produced *Passages* with Minucci, has been voted among the top 20 favorite guitarists in Young Guitar Magazines readers poll. He has played and or recorded with Jill Scott, UFO, Glenn Hughes (Deep Purple), and Miranda Lambert in addition to his latest venture with his 70's influenced rock /funk group The Bombastic Meatbats featuring drummer Chad Smith (Red Hot Chili Peppers). He has written and produced 15 solo and band recordings on his own label and has written songs for film and television with credits including "Sahara," "Failure To Launch," "Clerks 2" and "Fantastic 4."

Downbeat marks the first time that Lao has co-produced one of his albums. Loving the big sound of the band and all the intricacies it has in the live setting inspired his simple concept when it came time to write and record the album. "Producing and mixing with Jeff, my goal was to give listeners a taste of the energy TIZER creates in the live setting, so most of the recording was done live in the studio," he says. "While no solo on disc can capture what happens onstage, we wanted *Downbeat* to have the same blend and balance via strong, detailed arrangements and studio production. It all starts with a completely live rhythm section—drums, bass, percussion, keys—and that translates to an organic foundation to build from. It's very world percussion oriented and it was fun to accentuate that. I actually agonized over the album title for a while, but felt that '*Downbeat*' captured our edgy approach and executive perfectly."

With most of the tracks running from five to nine minutes, TIZER's members have multiple opportunities to fulfill Lao's original vision. *Downbeat* launches with a funky, high energy

baptism of “Acid Rain,” driven by a wild swirl of guitar, sax, percussion and old school synth textures. “Pulse” begins with haunting piano chords and a moody flair before evolving into a propulsive, freewheeling jam featuring Minucci and Lao soaring together with Briggs’ percussive violin and Kollman’s blazing guitar trades. Sly at the start yet ultimately blistering, “The Slip” at first finds Lao’s playful piano dancing around chomping funk grooves, then mixes a mid tempo sax melody with Rhodes and Hammond B-3 textures. Propelled by Minucci & Kollman’s jangling acoustic guitar foundation, the dusty Western film vibe of “Coming Of Age” starts on the front porch before soaring high with wordless vocals and Briggs’ dancing in the stratosphere. The thematic showcase of the collection, “World In Rhythm,” alternately showcases Minucci’s crisp electric guitar, Lao’s fiery piano runs, Briggs’ sweet duality with Lao—all leading to a sparkling, high-octane celebration.

Following a nine minute, high powered twist and turn filled romp through various realms of jazz exotica on “Tanzanika,” Lao brings the listener back to his core melodic jazz piano flow on the easy rolling ballad “Essence”—allowing for an increase in rhythmic intensity along the way. A collaborative composition effort, “Dreamcatcher” booms along like a turbocharged time machine that harkens back to old school soul-jazz (via Lao’s haunting Rhodes and Wurlitzer flavor mixed with Briggs’ exotic violin musings), then takes us back to present day with an African vibe that expands to incorporate varied world rhythms. “Jazz-funk” and “piano pounding” are the dominant forces on the next track, which finds Kollman and Briggs generating a lot of dual electricity while playfully “Chasing The Sunset.” The title track “Downbeat” has a light rock-jazz energy highlighted by a fun piano-guitar dance, while “Reunion” has a distinctive Latin lilt with its easy rolling bass lines and plucky piano and guitar interaction. Lao closes *Downbeat* in reflective place, showcasing his elegant solo piano magic on the intimate “The Next Step.”

Speaking of which, what’s “The Next Step” for TIZER?

Lao says, “Co-producing for the first time took me to a whole new level of creativity and responsibility as an artist. My past as a solo artist is interesting and different from most, and I feel I’ve grown up as a bandleader, building upon my musical background in some very exciting ways on *Downbeat*. I think the key to my development and confidence is the fact that I’ve always been open to learning from these great musicians I’m fortunate to work with every day. TIZER has a unique cast of characters and I always feel like I’m challenging myself to up my game to match what they’re doing around me. Our foundation is jazz, but there is much more to us. It’s exciting to have the opportunity keep sharing this music with fans of all kinds of music, from all different backgrounds. It’s cool to be in a band where there’s no limit and we’re always taking our sound to new places.”

