



The leader of *Avataar*, and *Sundar Quartet*, Sundar Viswanathan is a JUNO-award winning and multiple JUNO-nominated jazz and world artist, and as one of Canada's most diversely talented artists, a highly respected international musical ambassador and educator. Equally comfortable within scene as a saxophonist, bansurist, composer, and vocalist, his work has been heard on stages from 'Folk on the Rocks' in Yellowknife, to the Netherlands' North Sea Jazz Festival; from San Francisco's 'Yoshi's', to New York City's 'Blue Note Jazz Club'; and from the 'Awesome Africa Festival' in South Africa to the 'Rocking Walrus Festival' in Igloolik, Nunavut.

Born in India and raised in a musical family in Northern Ontario, Sundar's first musical memories are from his early childhood - his household was filled with the sounds of Indian classical and popular music, calypso, and western pop and country artists, like the Beatles, Gordon Lightfoot, Harry Belafonte, and Jim Reeves. In fact, his earliest influences in music came from popular sources: artists like Pink Floyd, Rush, Yes, Elvis, The Police, Queen, Simon and Garfunkel and Michael Jackson played a strong role in shaping Sundar's perspective on music. A love for jazz and world music developed later, during Sundar's undergraduate studies.

As a brown boy growing up in a Northern Ontario mining town, Sundar was made hyper-aware of his skin colour and difference. Music was a source of comfort and safety to him through his introverted teen years and into his 20s – an intensive study of music began with Sundar retreating to the basement with his saxophone and flute for company. Sundar developed his unique musical personality over several years, performing and/or recording with jazz and world music greats that include Wynton

Marsalis, Kiran Ahluwalia, Dave Douglas, Rez Abbasi, Yair Dalal, Charles Tolliver, Frank Foster, Andrew Hill, Lee Konitz, Joe Lovano, Billy Hart, GURU, Kenny Werner, Don Thompson, Dave Holland, Kenny Wheeler, Vijay Iyer, Marcus Roberts, Chris Potter, John Hicks, Marcus Belgrave, Jim McNeely and many others.

Initially, Sundar's goal was to become a film composer - his first degree is in composition- but music-making quickly took a strong front seat. Interestingly, it was European classical music that set the initial foundation for Sundar. That led to jazz and world music studies. Within the academic world, Sundar's teachers/mentors have included Joe Lovano, George Garzone, Cecil McBee, John McNeil, Phil Woods, Jim McNeely, Frank Foster, Barry Harris, David Baker, Pat LaBarbera and others. Studies at Humber College (Toronto), Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo), New England Conservatory (Boston) and NYU have led him to earn a Diploma, Honours Bachelors, a Masters, and a PhD in jazz, classical and world music performance and composition. Performances with calypso, soca, klezmer, and blues groups through his 20s further solidified Sundar's love for root-based music. And through intensive study of music from many other world cultures, including Brazilian (Bossa-Nova, Choro, Forro), Indian (Hindustani and Carnatic), Turkish Maquam, Cuban and West African, Sundar's unique identity was being developed beyond a jazz and classical foundation.

As evidenced by the diversity of his working ensembles, Sundar's musical expertise ranges widely. "What a Dream I Had", as presented by *Sundar Quartet* presents fresh instrumental and vocal interpretations of standard and popular repertoire: his vocal work has been celebrated by the Toronto Star as "a cross between Kurt Elling and Chet Baker". Alternately, his original recordings stretch the boundaries of world-jazz: "Hope and Infinity" from 2007, with *Sundar's Induswest Project*, features an A-list of this country's jazz heavyweights in a fusion of Indian melodic aesthetic with jazz rhythms and improvisations, and 'Petal', the critically acclaimed 2016 debut recording with Sundar's *Avataar* band is a winner of a 2016 TD Special Projects award from the Toronto Jazz Festival. *Avataar* released its government-supported album *Worldview*, in October 2021 – the album subsequently was nominated and won the 2022 JUNO Award for Jazz Album of The Year (Group). Sundar is also an integral member/composer of

the twice Juno-nominated world band Jaffa Road, whose influences and sound transcends Ladino, Indian, Jazz, and Roots music. This group was also the recipient of a Canadian Folk Music Award and a Grand Prize winner of the John Lennon Songwriting Competition. *Jaffa Road* released its third album *Until When?* in October 2021.

Music has been a continual source of spiritual nourishment for Sundar. Perhaps the most humbling aspect of his engagement with music through the years has been the way it has proved to be a unifying element, regardless of language and culture. The truth has been underscored over and over again, that music makes us WHOLE as a people. Concerts to ecstatic audiences on tours in South Africa, Brazil, Japan and Europe have also proven to Sundar that good music is accessible to all – that if you play authentically and from your heart, people will ‘hear’ it!

Sundar’s mix of confidence and humility, combined with astonishing technique and a voice that is the equal of his instrumental and compositional prowess, make him one of the most sought after and engaging live performers in Canadian music and on the international stage. To him, music is a passport to creative collaboration and enlightenment on a global scale, as a performer, composer, and scholar.