

**Friday, November 3 at 8pm, 2006
Bowker Auditorium**

NIYAZ

Azam Ali
Loga Ramin Torkian
Carmen Rizzo
Satnam Ramgotra
James Mahlis

Program will be announced from the stage

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UMass Amherst Campus Center Hotel**

About the Artists

Three prominent artists, Azam Ali, best known as the vocalist of the successful world music group Vas, Loga Ramin Torkian, the multi-instrumentalist and composer for the critically acclaimed group Axiom of Choice, and Carmen Rizzo, a two time Grammy Award nominee producer/remixer, have joined forces to create a globe-spanning sound that the trio calls "world music for the 21st century." Known collectively as **Niyaz**, which means yearning in both Farsi and Urdu, the trio's first eponymous release is a hypnotic, ecstatic, and eminently danceable album that represents the best of both traditional world music and electronic music. All three of these musicians have built impressive individual careers.

Iranian born, Indian raised Azam Ali is internationally recognized for her work with Vas, the best-selling world music duo she co-founded in 1996 with percussionist Greg Ellis. In a career which spans over a decade and includes eight collaborative and solo albums, **Azam Ali** has confirmed her place as one of the most prolific, versatile, and gifted singers on the world music stage today. *Billboard* magazine has described her voice as, "a glorious, unforgettable instrument." Azam's dedication to defying cultural specificity in music, her unwillingness to settle into one form of musical expression, and her emotive performances on each of her albums have earned her not only the respect of her peers, but much critical acclaim and have solidified her place as a highly respected singer in the World music scene. Her singing has been heard in several major motion pictures including *The Matrix: Revolutions* and on many television programs such as *Alias* and *Prison Break*.

Iranian born Loga Ramin Torkian has won much recognition in his native Iran as well as in the west as the composer and multi-instrumentalist for the world music group Axiom of Choice whose music is deeply rooted in the traditional music of Iran. Although Torkian is a highly accomplished on many instruments such as the Guitar, Lafta, Djura etc., his two main instruments are the Turkish Saz, which is from the family of lutes, and the electric GuitarViol, a bowed guitar inspired by a 14th century instrument. Loga is one of the few musicians who performs the GuitarViol live. With its haunting sound that mesmerizes audiences, what makes Loga's style so singular is the fact that he applies Persian traditional bowing techniques and melodies to his playing. A highly gifted and talented composer, Loga is respected for his ability to adapt the Persian classical repertoire, known as Radif, into his own unique and modern compositions.

Carmen Rizzo, a two-time **Grammy** Award nominee, is well known for his cutting edge work as a producer, programmer, and remixer. He has collaborated with a diverse range of artists, including **Seal, Coldplay, Alanis Morissette, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Khaled, Ekova, and Cirque du Soleil** as well as **Paul Oakenfold, BT, Esthero, Jem, Alpha, Tiesto** and **Grant Lee Phillips**. Carving out a very eclectic career for himself, Carmen is well known for his lush and cinematic sound. What sets his work apart as a programmer and producer is his understanding and respect for traditional instruments and his ability to adapt modern electronics to acoustic instrumentation without sounding forced or compromising the integrity of the performances.

For these three artists, *Niyaz* represents a real departure from their usual avenues of artistic expression. Their first joint album weaves together traditional folk songs and mystical poems written by some of the greatest Sufi poets of all time, with music accessible to a contemporary audience. Azam sings in both Farsi (the Persian language) as well as in Urdu, a language widely spoken in India and in Pakistan. Mingling the textures of traditional acoustic music with new electronica, their music represents cultural blendings of the highest order, crossing back and forth over centuries of musical expression to combine ancient instruments, rhythms, and tonalities with brand new sounds. For Loga and Azam, who together write all the music for *Niyaz*, it is about much more than just creating modern electronic/ acoustic music. Their music represents a generation of Iranians who like themselves have grown up outside of their homeland. The sense of homelessness they have experienced combined with the influence of living in the West have enabled them to create something which while retaining its cultural roots, is accessible enough to

westerners and can offer insight into the lives of a generation of Iranians who struggle to retain their cultural identity in a part of the world where they are for the most part portrayed very negatively in the media. But mostly for Azam and Loga, Niyaz is about creating something of substance which although danceable, is still introspective and reflects the universal spiritual quest and longing of man.

Niyaz's debut CD has been hailed by critics worldwide as one of the most groundbreaking of its time. The album debuted at #1 on iTunes world music chart and remained there for numerous weeks, and it charted on *Billboard's* world music chart for four consecutive weeks, peaking at #12. Niyaz also entered WMCE, the World Music Charts of Europe, at #76 and was the only Iranian group whose CD made it into the top 150 of the best albums of 2005. Since the release of their debut album Niyaz have also become international touring artists. With a debut concert in Delhi, India in March of 2005, Niyaz have since performed in the United States, France, Japan, Spain, Turkey, and Canada, including two prestigious showcases in - Globalfest in New York City, and WOMEX in Sevilla, Spain. In 2006 the Canadian Council for the Arts provided Niyaz with one of the largest grants ever given to a non-Canadian group in order to make a full tour of Canada possible. Niyaz has performed in numerous prominent festivals such as Montreal Jazz Festival, Vancouver Jazz Festival, and the Calgary Folk Festival.

For their live performances, Niyaz has included the talents of two virtuoso musicians who have become an integral part of their sound and have also been featured on their debut recording as guest performers.

Tabla player Satnam Ramgotra, of Indian decent, was born and raised in Canada. At the age of ten Satnam began formal training on both drum set and Indian classical Tabla which he studied under the guidance of world renowned Tabla master Swapan Chaudhri. Satnam relocated to California to further his musical education at the renowned Percussion Institute of Technology, where he immediately began performing live and recording with many of his instructors. It is his versatility and command of rhythm which have made Satnam a highly sought after drummer and percussionist. For the past twelve years Satnam has toured extensively with artists such as Nikka Costa, Beck, Sting, Seal, Lili Haydn, and Jada Pinkett. He has also recorded and performed with prominent artists such as Macey Gray, Hans Zimmer, Aaron Zigman, David Lynch, and Ustad Salamat Ali Khan, among others. Satnam also has his own project called Alien Chatter which he co-founded with Rodney Lee.

James Mahlis is a multi-instrumentalist and composer. Of Greek decent, Dimitris is a graduate of the prestigious Berklee School of Music where he earned a degree in Jazz composition. He is renowned for his virtuoso performance on oud, bouzouki, as well as electric and acoustic Guitar. Combining his in depth knowledge of Western musical concepts, and an innate understanding of the rhythms and melodies of his Greek heritage, James has developed a unique playing and compositional style that is very progressive. He has toured extensively all over the world with several Greek musical legends as well as other international artists. In Niyaz James is featured mainly on oud, which is a lute type instrument native to most countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

For tonight's performance, Niyaz will be performing much of the material featured on their debut recording. Most of the songs are based on traditional Farsi and Urdu mystical poetry written by some of the greatest Sufi poets of all time, one of whom is the now world famous Mevlana Jallaludin Rumi. In addition to these Niyaz will also be performing some traditional folk songs from Khorassan, Iran. Each song reflects the multiple cultural and artistic lenses each of these accomplished artists brings to this project and represents a finely-tuned balance of acoustic and electronic music that ushers in a new era of artistic possibilities for Iranian music.