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NEWS RELEASE

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**WHAT: Asian Arts & Culture Program and the Center Series presents:
Niyaz**

WHEN: Friday, November 3rd at 8pm

**WHERE: Bowker Auditorium
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or
go online to www.fineartscenter.com/tickets
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(Ancient Farsi and Indian Poetry Meets Electronic Trance Music in Niyaz)

Billed as "Sufi Fusion", Niyaz performs the traditional sounds and instruments of Persia, Turkey and India intertwined with modern, electronic beats. They bring their unique sound to the UMass Fine Arts Center's Bowker Auditorium on Friday, November 3rd at 8pm. Niyaz's music not only blends East and West but also reaches across the centuries, using both modern and ancient lyrics and instruments.

For its Amherst performance, Niyaz will be performing much of the material featured on their self-titled 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. 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, which means yearning in both Farsi and Urdu, is made up of 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

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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." 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. 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 descent and Dimitris Mahlis is a multi-instrumentalist and composer of Greek descent.

For these three artists, Ali, Torkian and Rizzo, *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. Ali sings in both Farsi (the Persian language) as well as in Urdu, a language widely spoken in India and in Pakistan. People may recognize her voice as it has been heard in several major motion pictures including *The Matrix: Revolutions* and on many television programs such as *Alias* and *Prison Break*. Mingling the textures of traditional acoustic music with new electronica, their music represents cultural blending 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 Torkian and Ali, 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 Ali and Torkian, *Niyaz* is about creating something of substance which although danceable, is still introspective and reflects the universal spiritual quest and longing of man.

Tickets are \$25 and \$15; Youth 17 and under are \$12; and Five College Students are \$10 and \$7. For tickets and information, call the Fine Arts Center Box Office at 413-545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or tickets may be safely purchased online at www.fineartscenter.com. This performance is sponsored by The River 93.9FM, Apple Computers and The Valley Advocate.

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Indian exoticism and beats that are state of the art. Ali's vocals are wholly evocative of another world and another time, which creates a wonderful tension with Torkian and Rizzo's inspired instrumental textures." - **Billboard**

Artist Bios

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 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 perform 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.

Tabla player **Satnam Ramgotra**, of Indian descent, 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.

Dimitris Mahlis is a multi-instrumentalist and composer. Of Greek descent, 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, Dimitris 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 Dimitris is featured mainly on oud, which is a lute type instrument native to most countries in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.