

# Andrew Cyrille

Interview & Photo by Ken Weiss

Hear Andrew Cyrille with Andy Milne  
 Monday, August 26, 7:30pm & 9:30pm  
 Dizzy's Club Coca Cola  
 Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway, NYC  
[www.jalc.org/dizzys](http://www.jalc.org/dizzys)

*Andrew Cyrille (November 10, 1939) grew up in Brooklyn to become one of the preeminent free jazz percussionists of the '80s and beyond. He has successfully merged the tradition with the modern, synthesizing many musical styles, and expanded the language of the drum solo. Early on, he worked with mainstream giants such as Illinois Jacquet, Mary Lou Williams, Roland Hanna and Junior Mance, before succeeding Sunny Murray as Cecil Taylor's drummer in 1964, making many influential recordings with the iconoclastic pianist over the next ten years. In addition to recording as a bandleader, he has recorded and/or performed with Milford Graves, Rashied Ali, Anthony Braxton, Charlie Haden, Coleman Hawkins, David Murray, Carla Bley, and he remains a member of Trio 3, the long-standing all-star group with Oliver Lake and Reggie Workman. This four hour interview took place on May 13, 2013 in Philadelphia, the morning after Cyrille's duet with saxophonist Odean Pope.*

"Most of the people that I used to admire and have the opportunity to hang out with on occasion, like Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Roy Haynes, Arthur Taylor and Frankie Dunlop, stressed that you had to make your contribution so I had to think about how was it that I was going to make my contribution."

**Jazz Inside Magazine:** Joachim-Ernst Berendt wrote [*The Jazz Book*, Chicago Review Press] that "At the risk of oversimplification, [Andrew Cyrille] could be called the intellectual among free-jazz drummers." It's an interesting quote in that he manages to insult all the other drummers while pointing out your deep-thinking talent. What do you think of his impression?

**Andrew Cyrille:** I don't necessarily agree with his impression of a lack of intellectual drummers. Milford [Graves] is an intellectual, Michael Carvin, Pheeroan akLaff and Barry Alt-

schul are no slouches. It's a great compliment that he wrote that and I've been aware of it. I accept the praise but I don't necessarily agree. All music is based on mathematics and I don't know that my mathematics is better than anyone else's. A lot of times I hear drummers play and I say, 'How come I couldn't think of that?'

**JJ:** The critics have been impressed that you've studied the great past drum masters such as Baby Dodds, Chick Webb, Jo Jones and Sonny Greer. How has knowing their work advanced your playing?

**AC:** I don't know if I've actually studied them because if I had I would be trying to duplicate some of the things they played in the way that they played it. I know about those people. One of the first and last times I saw Sonny Greer, he was working with a blind piano player on First Avenue, and the way he was playing was magic to me. The people you mentioned kind of came out the theatrical era, out of Vaudeville, and I remember watching Sonny Greer and when he would hit with his left hand on the snare drum, he'd open his jacket and turn to the right. It was a show as well as the music he was playing. The people that I really studied were the bebop people because that's when I came in on the scene. The people that I studied on a scientific basis to try and analyze what it was that they were play-

ing and, to some degree, I'm still trying to figure out what the sticking was are people like Philly Joe Jones, Max Roach, and even Buddy Rich. Buddy Rich was really fast and sometimes it's really hard to decipher what the ingredients were that he was using.

**JJ:** In the past, you've credited Philly Joe Jones as an influence, as have many other drummers, including Mickey Roker and Billy Cobham. I've heard all three of you say the same thing about Philly Joe that he let you hang with him but only once in a while would he reveal something about drumming. Why was this camaraderie with him

so important to so many drummers?

**AC:** Joe was a very charismatic personality. He was somebody that was very beguiling. He was another showman, and he would do certain things, and you would try to figure out why he did it the way he did. But the thing about Joe was that his musicianship was at such a high caliber and he had such high intellect. He knew how to play certain things — we call them rudiments — in a particular way, so that they would come up representing the music he was playing so exactly. He was a heavy point of light within a certain period of this music. He used to take me to sessions with Stan Getz, Bud Powell and Miles Davis and my tongue would be hanging out just checking them out. I remember one time, and Gary Bartz always teases me about this, he and I were at Julliard and we'd go down and listen at the old clubs — like the original Birdland. Gary and I were sitting in the seats right below the bandstand, and one night Joe was playing and he said, "Andrew, this is a Double Ratamacue, Andrew, this is a Drag Paradiddle" while he was playing the music. Gary got such a laugh out of that because Joe was teaching me from the bandstand in terms of what he was playing. I think the attraction that a lot of us had from him was that, and of course, how he applied it and also the exacting technique that he had in terms of the tempo, how the force was, and his creativity in putting everything together was just fantastic.

**JJ:** What aspect of your playing, if anything, do you feel still needs work?

**AC:** There's three major pieces of creativity that make up music. Number one, you have to have technique, you need to know how you're going to do certain things. They say it takes about ten years to get your technique together to solve the problems that are presented to you as a drummer. The next thing has to do with the concepts that are being proposed to you. The last thing, which may be the most difficult, is the communication, the spirit, the feeling that you're trying to get. So if you ask me what I'm still working on, I'm really working on all three.

**JJ:** What do you feel is your greatest strength?

**AC:** As I'm getting older and wiser, which they say age brings, it's getting easier to say what I want to say, when I want to say it. I couldn't do what I do now maybe 25-30 years ago.

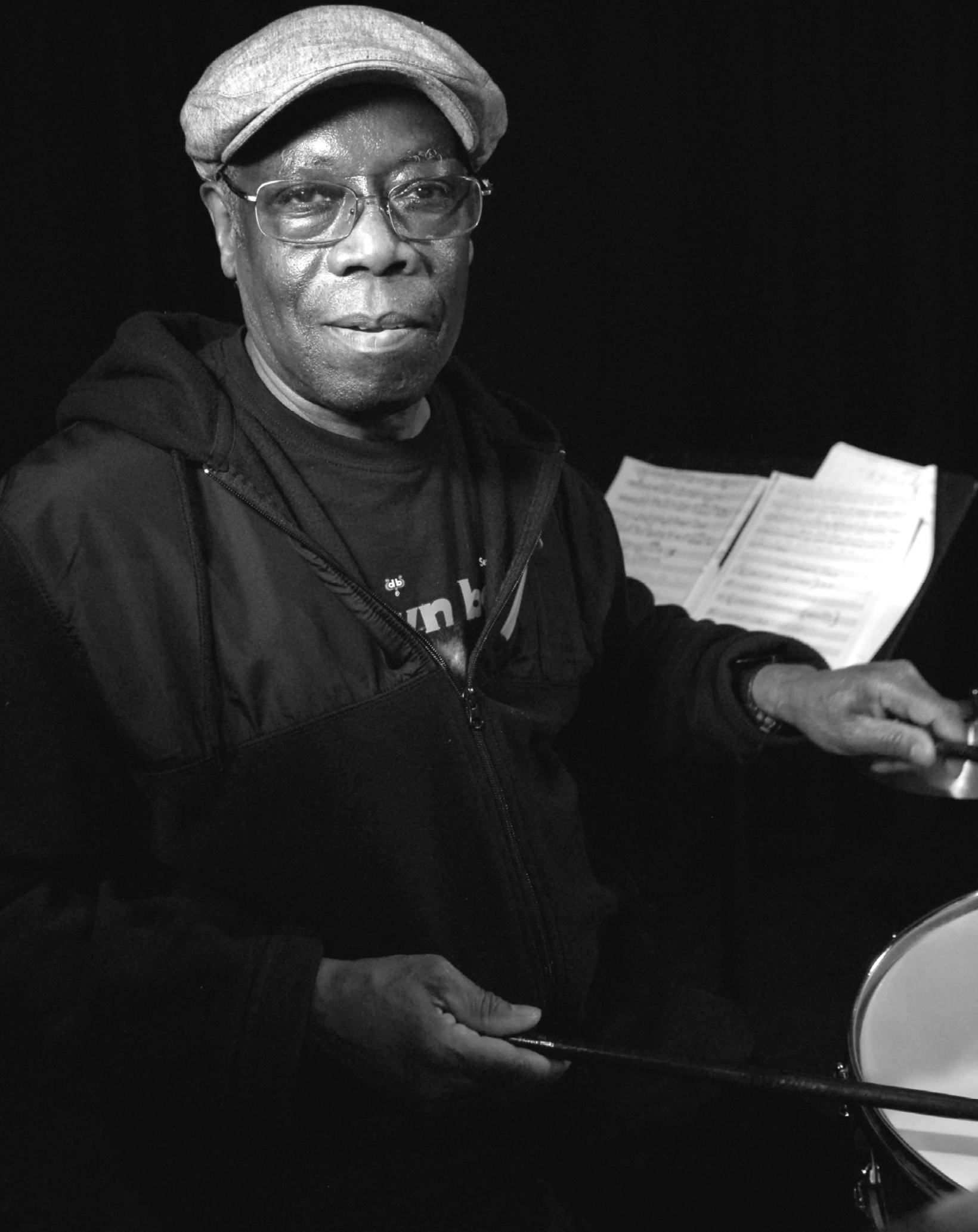
**JJ:** Do you believe that improvisation passes mystically through the performer or is it totally a conscious process?

**AC:** You're asking me some heavy questions! Mystically? [*Laughs*]

**JJ:** You're a heavy guy.

**AC:** Well, I guess you can call it mysticism. We feel each other, we feel the music. It's a spiritual, metaphysical plateau that you want to reach. Sonny Rollins said to me, "Every night I'd like

(Continued on page 32)



# Andrew Cyrille

(Continued from page 30)

to get to that place with the band where we're all one unit."

**JJ:** During performances you often make a point of dedicating songs to other drummers. When you do that, are you utilizing their forms or is it always your own style?

**AC:** It has to do with my feeling for the gift of their spirit that they gave me. I'm thanking them for being who they were and what they gave to us. I'm using music and not words to express that.

**JJ:** You were among the first wave of drummers, along with Sunny Murray, Milford Graves and Rashied Ali, to develop a new form of percussion that was freed from constant meter. How did your interest in that start?

**AC:** Most of the people that I used to admire and have the opportunity to hang out with on occasion, like Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Roy Haynes, Arthur Taylor and Frankie Dunlop, stressed that you had to make your contribution so I had to think about how was it that I was going to make my contribution. I remember working with Mary Lou Williams and I said, 'Gee, Mary, I'd like to be able to play the ride beat a little differently than it has been played traditionally,' and she said to me, "Yeah, you can do that but you'll never find any work." I understood what she was saying but then came along Cecil Taylor and he gave me the opportunity to do whatever I wanted. In the eleven years straight that I worked with him, he never said a word. He'd say, "Well, you know what drum-

"Early on Cecil [Taylor] asked me, 'How do you think of rhythm?' I said, 'I think of rhythm in relationship to the dance,' and that struck a chord between us because he thought the same way. I had worked a lot with dancers when I graduated Julliard."

mers do." So I approached this as my way to make a genuine contribution in terms of the feeling and not letting down all of the great drumming that had come before me. I wanted to do something that was a part of tradition but evolving to some degree. A lot of the things that I was able to do with Cecil, I just did it with other people also. Cecil gave me a license to play how I feel.

**JJ:** Who was the first drummer you heard playing free and who had biggest influence on you?

**AC:** I don't know about influence but I was with Walt Dickerson and we were walking by a club on Bleeker Street and I heard Sonny and

Cecil playing. Another person I heard early was Milford. I was playing a dance with a trombone player and Milford was playing with another band there. The next time I heard him he had moved along with his concept. I was studying at the Hartnett School of Music and I was in a composition class, and Giuseppe Logan came in with a recording and announced that he'd like everyone to hear the drummer on the record, Milford Graves — because he had some new stuff going on. Everything goes back into Africa. I've got recordings at home where it's almost impossible to say what meter this music is being played in. I remember one day hanging out at the house with Max Roach and I said, 'OK, I'm gonna' get Max.' So I brought this record from Uganda in, and it's one of those without meter, and I said, 'Ok Max, you Max Roach, right?' So he looks at me and I say, 'Tell me where one is?' So you know him and his kind of reserved and intellectual way, and he says, "One is when the music starts!" [Laughs] What was I gonna' do with that? He was right!

**JJ:** Denis Charles and Sunny Murray preceded you in Cecil Taylor's band, how aware of their work with him were you when you joined him?

**AC:** I remember Denis Charles playing up in Harlem in the early '60s and he always reminded me of Art Blakey. He played a lot of his stylings. When I heard Denis playing with Cecil, he was playing in meter. Also, Cecil didn't always play the way he plays now, he played in meter also until he decided that he wanted to change. Cecil always talked about being connected to the tradition and about people like Ellington being his father.

**JJ:** You spent 10 years with Cecil Taylor starting at the age of 24. Cecil Taylor opened up your playing but he didn't tell you what to play. How

intimidating was it to play with him the first time? Would you have liked him to have instructed you on what he wanted?

**AC:** I met Cecil Taylor when I was playing with another piano player named Leslie Brathwaite and also Eric Gale and we were rehearsing one day at a place in Brooklyn and Ted Curson and Harold Ousley walked in and said, "We heard this music outside and we just wanted to see what's going on." Ted told me he had this piano player that he was supposed to have a rehearsal with in New York City named Cecil Taylor — and that he didn't play piano like anyone else. So I went with Ted to Hartnett and there was Cecil playing the piano and Ted introduced me and

asked if I could play with them. We played together some and then the school closed and Ted left but I told Cecil of a place on Amsterdam Avenue that was open and we took the train there. I knew the bartender and he let us play. I took out my snare drum and we played and talked and had fun. After that, I would see Cecil from time to time on the scene. I was playing with many other people like Ahmed Abdul-Malik, Roland Hanna and George Tucker and Cecil would come down and listen. One night after playing with Roland Hanna at the Five Spot, I spoke with Cecil at the bar and he told me he wanted to do some stuff with me and in 1964. At Hartnett I was playing in the school's big band and Cecil came into the room and told me about a gig he had at Brandeis that Sonny Murray hadn't shown up for, and he wanted me to join him in another room at the school after the practice. So I walked in the room and there was Cecil with Jimmy Lyons and Albert Ayler and Cecil said, "Look, you want to make this gig?" And that was the beginning of our professional relationship.

**JJ:** Would you give some perspective on your experience recording Taylor's early seminal recordings *Unit Structures* and *Conquistador!* [Blue Note, 1966]?

**AC:** Well, we rehearsed quite a bit, a lot of people don't think that but we rehearsed every day. It was Jimmy, I and Alan Silva up there in Cecil's loft on 22nd Street I believe and when we decided that we would do the recording, we added people like Ken McIntyre and Henry Grimes and Eddie Gale. There was music written for them, he would give them notes to play in relationship to what his idea of the composition should be and where things should change, but with me, he never said do this or don't do that. It was up to me to add to the whole and make it stronger, or at least larger. My remembrance is that I had to do something which had to deal with the tradition, was genuine, and people could relate to. After I knew what I was going to play in these different sections, it was repetitive. If I played something in the front of the composition in the rehearsal, that's how it was going to be done at the recording only I didn't write it out.

**JJ:** There was such great energy on those recordings.

**AC:** Well, the energy was the fact that we were recording for the renowned Blue Note Records with all those great people who had recorded on that label before us so that when we got to the studio, it was fantastic. It was fantastic for me and I know it had to be fantastic for the others. The atmosphere in the studio with Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff and Rudy Van Gelder all came into play along with everything else became transferred to the music and the fact that we were doing something historical.

**JJ:** When the two albums were released, what was the reaction you received from the public and from fellow musicians?

(Continued on page 33)

# Andrew Cyrille

(Continued from page 32)

**AC:** I can say, even to this day, some people like it and some people don't. Some say it's the best stuff ever and some cats say it doesn't move them at all. I guess it's like looking at a painting by Miro or Braque, some people want to see a photograph painted.

**JJ:** Can you bring up some names of musicians who had harsh words?

**AC:** I'm not going to bring up names, but it was some who didn't like and still don't like it. Somebody said to me the other day that they listened to it the first time and put it away in the closet and now they're kind of getting around to it. I remember going down to the Five Spot to listen to Ornette when he first came there with Charlie Haden, Don Cherry and Billy Higgins or Ed Blackwell and I remember being in the club, which was filled with musicians, and there were people arguing while they were playing – "No, I can't go for that!" And they were talking about playing changes because playing changes is not an easy exercise, you have to know a lot about theory and chords to play those things from one particular point to another and they have to come together at certain places, you have to crosshairs. Some people couldn't take these geometrical shapes. Other people really liked what they were doing and the thing about Ornette's music was that it was so forceful with the energy and the feeling that you couldn't deny it. There was something that was going on and whether it was "legitimate" or not was a matter of philosophical discussion.

**JJ:** Taylor really bonded with you because you both thought of jazz performance in terms of dance. Do you still think of jazz in that way? People haven't danced to jazz for 50 years.

**AC:** Early on Cecil asked me, "How do you think of rhythm?" I said, 'I think of rhythm in relationship to the dance,' and that struck a chord between us because he thought the same way. I had worked a lot with dancers when I graduated Julliard. I had also worked early on with many different people and styles, people like Illinois Jacquet, Babatunde Olatunji, who was from Nigeria and played with African rhythms, and here's another piece – the guy who used to write some of the tunes for Olatunji was Sun Ra so I got to play with Marshall Allen, John Gilmore and Pat Patrick. So by time I got to Cecil, I was able to apply all of it to the music. That's why when you hear what the drums are playing on *Unit Structures* or *Conquistador*; Cecil didn't tell me to do that. I did that from my own experiences and creativity and what made him so great was that he applied his stuff to what I was doing in terms of the rhythms. That's how I came to being in the free situation. So when you ask me what is my strength, it's the ability to summon a lot of those things when I feel I want or I need to. As far as actually dancing to the music, well, if you want to dance, I could

play some stuff to get you to dance right now! [Laughs] music and dance go together, as does working with someone painting while I'm playing. That's another great experience. The problem today has to do with technology. A lot of the stuff that's being played now at parties is the canned stuff, it's synthesized in a lot of ways. You go to a club now and you can hear canned music, even with dance companies you hear prerecorded music. The younger generation has to learn how they're going to play the music that's of their generation. How do you play jazz with all the other competition from the synthesizer business?

**JJ:** After your many years of playing open with Taylor, you played with other leaders holding down a more traditional drummer's role. How was it playing with restrictions after playing free for so long?

**AC:** Who said the tradition wasn't free? [Laughs] It's always free whether you play in meter or not. It's the concept and what you do with what is being proposed. In a scientific sense, how do you get to certain things? Jazz has to do with being able to play the same thing over and over and making it fresh.

**JJ:** What other important early playing experiences did you have?

**AC:** The first drummer and gig that Freddie Hubbard had in New York was with me and my band.

**JJ:** What do you recall about your early recording session with Coleman Hawkins on *The Hawk Relaxes* [Moodsville, 1961]?

**AC:** He never really said a word to me either.



(Continued on page 34)

# Andrew Cyrille

(Continued from page 33)

When it was time for me to play that music in the tradition, in meter, there were certain things that I had learned while doing all those dances when I was a teenager that I was able to bring to that session. I remember him and Kenny Burrell and Ron Carter deciding what they were going to do and how to play it and me being the drummer, I was to play what came naturally. I was really afraid that they were going to send me home because they didn't like what I was playing, I was like 21 years old. He never said a word to me besides, "Hello" and then "Thank you" and "Goodbye." And the thing that really scared me at first was when he was warming up in Rudy Van Gelder's studio playing those long tones – it sounded like a boat's foghorn. This was Coleman Hawkins and the interesting thing about it was that I had never seen Coleman Hawkins in person before, never heard him in person, only on the radio.

**JJ:** For those of us who never had the opportunity to experience him live what can you say about his presence?

**AC:** He was majestic. He was Coleman Hawkins! [Laughs] You know, what else am I supposed to think — me being who I was, and him being who he was. I was just glad to be there and it was an accident how I got to be there. It just happened that I was doing a session with Walt Dickerson for Prestige and the A & R man, Esmond Edwards, said to me, "I've got this session with Coleman Hawkins in about a week and Charlie Persip can't make it, you want to do it?" That's how I got the session and never played with him again after that. I look at that as a gift to be able to play with that guy and so many people have given me credit because I did some-

"He was majestic. He was Coleman Hawkins! .....  
what else am I supposed to think — me being who I  
was, and him being who he was. I was just glad to be  
there and it was an accident how I got to be there."

thing with, in a sense, the father of the saxophone, parallel to Lester Young. Even the young cats who don't want to play free relate to that!

**JJ:** In the mid 1970s, you were part of a trio of drummers, along with Milford Graves and Rashied Ali, that put on a series of shows called "Dialogue of the Drums." How did that project come about and what were you looking to accomplish?

**AC:** It came about and both questions are connected. Number one, I knew we were doing something different in terms of playing rhythms and how we were assigning rhythms. I had been playing with Cecil, Milford had been playing with Albert Ayler and Giuseppe Logan, doing his thing, Rashied was playing with Coltrane, so I

thought to myself how could we get together and document this? I talked to Milford and we played a few duets and we related, there was no problem to connect. We decided to bring in - Rashied as a third person. Rashied had his studio down on Greene Street and we'd go there and play. The connection had to do with us wanting to document what we were doing in an evolutionary sense.

**JJ:** You've played with many culturally different musicians including those from Africa, Korea, Japan and India. When you play with someone from a very different background, are you looking to assimilate what new things they bring or do you maintain your established foundation?

**AC:** I remember doing a concert in Israel in '87 for the 20th anniversary for the Six Day War and there were drummers there from Iran, Morocco, three Arabs from the West Bank, an Indian drummer from India and me on a drum set. Everyone else but me, more or less, played hand drums. Backstage a few of the people didn't speak English yet we had to decide how we were going to play this music as an ensemble. So when you talk about assimilation, first of all, you have to find something in common in order to assimilate so one of the easiest meters to play in is 3, and everybody has their version of playing 3. So when we started playing, everybody felt the pulse – no problem. The Iranian did what he did, the Moroccan did what he did, and down the line. The only person who had some difficulty was the Indian because they don't conceive of rhythm metrically in a digital sense the way that we do. Their rhythms are in scales of beats that are called taal. As far as assimilation, yeah, you assimilate after you find out what the common denominator is, and in this particular case it was 3. Now as far as the Indian, we said play what you play and we will relate to what it is and what you hear us doing. Do the best you can. We did the best we could to become the Tower of Babel.

It's like if you go somewhere and you're a cook, you may take the native ingredients and put them all together but you're still doing it your way, it's not the same as the native cooks.

**JJ:** Are there any world musics out there you'd still like to become acquainted with?

**AC:** [Laughs] Universe music! I hear things, yeah, Chinese music is very interesting. They don't particularly count the way we count in the West. I like Indonesian music with the metallic gongs that they use. There's not anything that I'm chasing. I would just like to hear as much as I can and perhaps utilize some of the things that I hear in what it is that I do.

**JJ:** What would you say has been your most unusual or surprising collaboration?

**AC:** One thing that I can't say it was surprising but what I delighted in was my duets with Richard Teitelbaum, and him playing synthesized sounds on something which was inorganic. He put his thoughts into the computer and me being organic, in terms of not being programmed through electricity. It was a lot of fun.

**JJ:** Let's talk about a few of your recordings. Your first release as a leader featured your group Maono and was called *Metamusicians' Stomp* [Black Saint, 1978]. What's behind the metamusicians term?

**AC:** Meta means more than. I was looking for a term and stomp had to do with the tune which had them stomping with their feet.

**JJ:** You released *My Friend Louis* in 1992 [DIW] as a dedication to South African drummer Louis Moholo. Why did you single him out?

**AC:** Because I had done a duet with Louis in England. Out of all the African cultures, the South African culture is closest to the American culture simply because of the English and the Dutch influence. I remember when we were together rehearsing for what we were going to play and I said to Louis, 'Let's play this shuffle,' he knew what I was talking about. If I went to Ghana or Nigeria and said, 'Let's play a shuffle,' they wouldn't know what I meant.

**JJ:** Your *Ode to the Living Tree* [Evidence, 1997] [Editor's Note: *Jazz Inside's Associate Publisher, Jerry Gordon, was the founder of Evidence Records*] was the first jazz record ever made in Senegal and acknowledged the spiritual connection between American and African musicians. How did it feel to step on African soil the first time and be the first jazz musician to record in Senegal?

**AC:** In a political social way, many of us African Americans were brought here to this country and so many of us have never been to Africa, and there are so many African retentions that have been passed down that a lot of people don't even recognize as an African retention. So getting the opportunity to go to Africa was like something resuscitating for me. My parents are from Haiti and many say that Haiti is probably the most African-like of all the Caribbean countries, but it's still not Africa. When you go to Africa, you see the big picture, you see the whole thing as to what went down and why we black people in this country are the way we are and what contributed to that. It's like if you go to Europe, you see the genesis of the Europeans that have come to this country. I kind of look at it like a funnel. I only went to two countries, Ghana and Senegal but still, you see all of those people that more or less look like you and also how they live life on a daily basis. Some of it's good, some of it's not so good, but it's still a celebration, and you learn why certain things are the way they are. I'll say this to you, and this is

(Continued on page 35)

# Andrew Cyrille

(Continued from page 34)

something that I feel deeply. We were in Senegal and visited those slave dungeons for the people before they were put on the boats, and when you got ready to go on the boat, there was this door, they called it The Door of No Return, and one felt, I felt, very emotionally moved by that and also by having the opportunity to go back to the original continent so many years later. We don't even know what tribes we come from because we're all mixed up, especially in a place like Haiti.

**JJ:** *C/D/E* [Jazz Magnet, 2001] is a recording you made with Mark Dresser and Marty Ehrlich. It contains "Aeolus," the beautiful tune by the late Thomas Chapin. It's a most heart wrenching composition and Ehrlich is transcendent playing flute on the recording. How do you approach playing percussion on such a quietly stirring piece such as "Aeolus?"

**AC:** Play it with brushes or mallets! [Laughs]

**JJ:** But how do you add your own voice and not just give warm support to something so tender?

**AC:** Well, interpreting the music in terms of how I feel it. As far as the written score, you have certain points of expression. It's like reading a page out of a book. You read it the way you think it should be read. Both of us would read the page a little differently, emphasize certain words differently. Here's my point, a lot of times when music is given to a drummer, the composer doesn't want the drummer to play exactly what's written. It's a guide to do what drummers do, and drummers do different stuff from what the other instrumentalists do. They say the band is as good as its drummer. If you have a fucked up drummer, you've got a fucked up band. Great drummers can make musicians that are not so great sound good and bad drummers can make great musicians sound poor. If you have a great drummer with other great musicians, the whole thing raises. That's why you talk about Philly Joe Jones in relationship to the bands he played with. He just made them sound great.

**JJ:** You recorded *Route De Freres* [TUM, 2011] in 2005 along with your Haitian Fascination Band. You were 66 at the time and it was your first extensive work exploring your Haitian roots. Why did it take so long to delve into your own heritage?

**AC:** The first recording that I did with a Haitian was with percussionist Alphonse Cimber on *Celebration* (IPS, 1975). One of the tunes on that recording was "Haitian Heritage." This new recording, *Route De Freres*, was the first time anybody gave me the opportunity to record what I wanted to do in regards to my heritage and it turned out to be a Finn - Petri Haussila of Tum Records. I had done some other things with Petri and I said, 'Hey man, I'd like to do something

with Haitian music' and he said to go for it.

**JJ:** Is there much similarity between African and Haitian rhythms?

**AC:** Yeah, all those rhythms that come out of the Caribbean come out of Africa. It's just a branch of the same tree.

"[The network's] basic response was that they didn't care what was being shown on television as long as somebody would sponsor the programming. They said when people come home from work ... they want to be entertained and not hear about how bad things are. We were told if we could find somebody who would sponsor us, they'd give us a program."

**JJ:** Would you talk about your memories of the Voodoo ceremony you experienced in Haiti at age seven?

**AC:** Oh, boy! I remember my uncle running around with a machete, chopping down trees and just doing whatever the ceremony called for. I guess in the Catholic Church they have the Eucharist as the body of Christ, so every belief has its own symbolic things. All of this is so relative in terms of the human species and what we do in order to survive. So you take Voodoo and you take the Loa, which is the spirits, the Gods - the Catholic Church has the same saints and those saints do the same things that the Voodoo Gods do for the people. There are Gods in both religions that take you safely across the river. I did see a woman who got possessed at the ceremony and it was just like getting possessed at Daddy Grace's church in Harlem. I remember a few days after seeing the woman get possessed, she was passing through my uncle's farm and got into a conversation with him. My hand was on the fence and this woman backed into my hand while she was talking and I couldn't get my hand loose so I was wondering if it was because she had gotten the spirit, [Laughs] but of course not.

**JJ:** You've made some very powerful and creative music with Oliver Lake [sax] and Reggie Workman [bass] in Trio 3. What's special about sharing with those two masters?

**AC:** Because we love each other! [Laughs] No, we have a business and we respect each other. Our motto is music is the leader, there is no leader. We all contribute to the whole and we play our compositions, as well as other peoples', and we've been doing it now for about 23 years. We have an understanding. We have meetings and the majority rules. It's been good business and great music. We're going to record soon with Vijay Iyer.

**JJ:** In the early '70s, you were part of the Jazz

& People's Movement, a political collective that interrupted TV show tapings [including the Dick Cavett, Merv Griffin and Johnny Carson shows] to demand more jazz and Black musicians on TV. Would you talk about that experience?

**AC:** That came about through Rahsaan Roland Kirk and I guess how that stuff starts is that you look at the social situation. You look at why

things are. It was really still around that period of time when "black is beautiful" [became a cultural movement] and the civil rights movement was very much on everybody's mind. Rahsaan, after having a dream, came up with the idea to protest the fact that there was not very much Black music or jazz on television, just some on Steve Allen's show. Rahsaan had some of us call other musicians to meet in front of ABC or CBS studios and protest. Max Gordon gave us the use of the Village Vanguard in the afternoons to talk about what we were gonna' do. There were a lot of people who agreed with us, not only Black people. We did it on two programs. We couldn't do it on the *Johnny Carson Show* because they had gotten wind of it already. The first one was Merv Griffin and we took our instruments and went into the studio while they were filming. There were some people in the house band like Snooky Young and Jerome Richardson. A signal was given and all the musicians in the audience got up and started making noise and startled Merv Griffin. We told him what our grievance was - that Black musicians were not being portrayed on television and there were a lack of Black producers and camera men. As a result, it was decided that we should meet with some of the producers from the television studios. So we sent certain musicians to meet with the producers to make our concerns known and could they do something about it. Their basic response was that they didn't care what was being shown on television as long as somebody would sponsor the programming. They said when people come home from work, they don't want to watch music on television, they want to see action, they want to be entertained and not hear about how bad things are. We were told if we could find somebody who would sponsor us, they'd give us a program. They just wanted to make some money. Dick Cavett was smart. He didn't want us to interrupt his show so he invited Freddie Hubbard, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, but he was out of town and couldn't make it so his wife went in his place. Jesse Jackson was also sup-

(Continued on page 36)

# Andrew Cyrille

(Continued from page 35)

posed to go but he didn't show up. I was backstage so they told me to go in place of Jesse Jackson. The problem, in my estimation, was the fact that Rahsaan really had no further ideas of what to do with getting the programs that we needed on television. The other problem was that musicians travel on the road all the time so if the TV station wanted to have a meeting, they'd be meeting with different people all the time, there was no consistency. I thought that what we should have done was hire a lawyer to represent us at each one of those meetings with the stations. Without being more focused, it eventually all petered out but the statement was made and what did happen though was CBS gave Mingus, Rahsaan, and maybe Frank Foster, a show.

**JJ:** The Ed Sullivan Show aired a jazz band headed by Roland Kirk in order to avoid trouble. Sullivan gave a memorable quote when asked by Kirk why he'd never booked John Coltrane on his program. Sullivan asked, "Does John Coltrane have any recordings out?"

**AC:** We all suffer from ignorance. It was also said, and of course this was backstage, that a lot of people don't like to look at blind people playing because their eyes aren't focused right and then maybe the way Elvin [Jones] looked the way he did when he played, that wasn't something that people wanted to see. Also, understand that there were other movements started by people like Randy Weston in Brooklyn who got musicians to protest the conditions of work. When looking at today's younger generation, what are they about as far as being artists concerned within this society? What is it that they're saying about the conditions? Artists have the ability to influence. See, outside of art the next thing to influence change is war and fighting.

**JJ:** What are your interests outside of music?

**AC:** I like to read and exercise. I've been eating corn bread lately. I don't look at a lot of television except for documentaries. I like the news programs and how the politicians debate each other. I don't watch reality TV.

**JJ:** If music wasn't an option, what other career would you choose?

**AC:** I started off as a chemistry major at St.

John's University but I was still playing gigs at night with people like Duke Jordan and Cecil Payne. I had to decide what I was going to do with my life and I remember once they had a university night at school and the kids could come and perform. So I brought my drums up and played a drum solo and afterwards the others said, "Man, with you playing drums like that what are you doing in here!?" [Laughs] I ended up moving on to Julliard and never looked back except in the beginning of my career when I realized I had to make some money. Then I thought I should have stayed in chemistry! [Laughs]

**JJ:** The last questions are from other musicians. **Howard Johnson** (baritone sax/tuba) said - "Ask him about the day he walked down the street and saw other drummers washing a car."

**AC:** Aggggh, that had to do with Max Roach. I remember one day walking down Gates Avenue, coming home from school, and I saw drummer Willie Jones. He was one of the older musicians who was helping us youngsters learn about rudiments and he was always talking about how great Max was. Jones was with a few other drummers and they were all washing Max Roach's Oldsmobile and Max was sitting on the stoop watching them and I thought - 'Wow, this guy must really be something else.' I heard Max direct them to wash one of the wheels better. When I actually met Max for the first time it was because Max's first wife, Mildred, was the sister of my best friend in grade school. I'd go over to my friend Bernard's house and there was Max's drum set, which he would leave there when he went on the road, and we would play on them.

**JJ:** Did you pick up a rag and join in at the car washing?

**AC:** No, I was a kid, I don't know if I would have did that for Max! [Laughs] You know Philly Joe Jones wanted me to be his protégé but I told him, 'No, I don't want to be your protégé, I want to find my own stuff.' That's the kind of kid I was.

**Adam Cruz** asked - "On New Year's Eve, I was with bassist Ben Street and some friends and Ben called Andrew. Andrew said he was practicing and we were very impressed by the fact that he was practicing on New Year's Eve. It got me wondering what does Andrew practice these days, both at drums and away from them? How has his practice changed over time?"

**AC:** I practice the basics - rolls and how to keep my strength. I practice so that I can move around the drum set so that when the ideas come - and you know, it's not that I don't struggle, I struggle because there's things that I can't do and I have to practice them in order to get to the end so that I can be satisfied. A lot of it has to do with being able to lift the drum sticks up and down and do certain things in certain tempos and sometimes I find myself within a particular piece and I'm trying to do something that needs a certain technique and sometimes the technique is

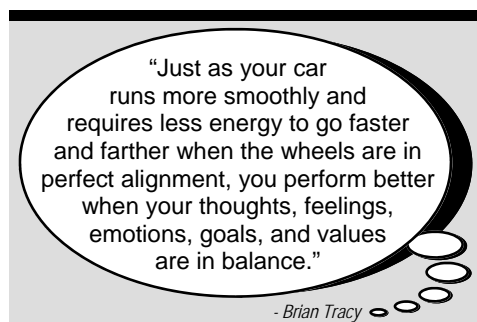
not there so I say to myself 'Gee, I've got to practice that so I can play the piece the way I want to play it he next time.' So I go home and practice it, repetition is the mother of study. I'm always searching for new things. The other thing is that a lot of times I get music that's written by other composers and they want certain things from the drums and some of these things are not easy. I have to analyze them and then I have to solve the problem of being able to execute what is being asked of me. A lot of people don't realize, they don't see this part of the mathematics when they see musicians playing, but we are counting and with the count you can play parts of the beat that are fractionalized. You have to look at the music and be able to do it without thinking so you have to practice that because sometimes it goes against the grain, it's not a natural thing that you would do. So if somebody's asking you to play one kind of beat against another kind of beat, you have to practice that. There are certain things that I still haven't solved, I'm still trying to figure it out. How do I get this leg or this foot to be independent from this or that in almost an automatic way? What happens too, playing with drums, is muscle memory so that if you do it enough, it's just there, you don't have to think about it. You just have to do it long enough.

Adam Cruz (drums) also commented that - "Andrew is a master drummer of course. One thing I love about him is how he seems to manifest both strength and humility in his playing at the same time. Other qualities I appreciate are his strong clarity of intention, his great patience, and his sense of orchestration. I always feel it's a great learning experience after hearing him play. I took a private lesson from Andrew in order to get closer to him, ask some questions, and share some concerns about my own drumming. It was very helpful and I still think about moments from that lesson, particularly when he demonstrated a part of his process, not on the drums, but air-drumming and playing his knees and the music stand in front of him. He got into a flow that was so vibrant and then stopped himself and said, "I could do this all night." And I could have listened all night as well! There was a depth there and all his musical ideas were filled with great meaning and resonance. Andrew is a musician who really knows how to tune into the magic right away, or perhaps it's better to say he's always tuned into it and therefore when he plays, it just becomes apparent."

**Justin Faulkner** (drums) commented - "Andrew Cyrille is one of the most musically sensitive drummers that I've ever heard in my life, from the way that he actually pays attention to the detail within the groove of a song, to the overall picture. He's always building and trying to create something so that the music is honest and genuine. He is truly one of the great drum masters who's still here today and hasn't let up a bit and the rest of us are still trying to catch up."

**AC:** I'm trying to catch up too.

(Continued on page 46)



# Andrew Cyrille

**Yoron Israel** (drums) said - "I saw Andrew play with Cecil Taylor when I was a youngster and I've always wanted to ask him what it was like to play with Cecil Taylor because the forms and the music is so open. What kind of thinking goes into the preparation of playing with him? I know a lot of it is spontaneous but how did he approach playing with Cecil night after night?"

**AC:** It was just what am I going to do with this sound now? How am I going to orchestrate it? What is going to be the rhythmical structure that I play? I remember playing with Cecil in the beginning and on occasion, I tried playing in meter but it didn't work. I could have stayed there and done that but it wasn't conducive to what we were doing and what was going on in terms of a conversation. It's a give and take as far as what's being proposed so you go from the beginning of a phrase to its natural conclusion. As I'm speaking, I come to a rest and then I begin again and I say, "What did you say?" And that might be the question in a musical sense.

**Cindy Blackman Santana** asked - "Can you please describe the feeling, differences, inspirations, and learning's of your experiences with Illinois Jacquet, John Coltrane and Mary Lou Williams?"

**AC:** Well, I only sat in with Coltrane but I did have lengthy experiences with Illinois and Mary

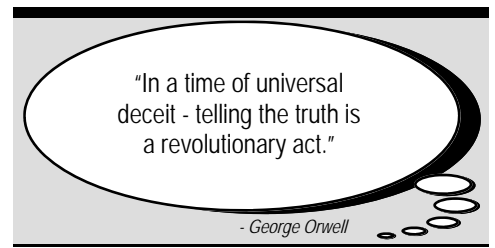
Lou. With Illinois, I learned how to fundamentally play swing music. The drummer that Illinois liked very much was Jo Jones so I had to be able to at least consider what Jo Jones was doing, even though I'd never be able to duplicate that at the age of 19. Mary Lou was deeply ingrained with swing also but it was a little looser so I could play a lot of the bop type figures. The language was the same but the wording was a little different. She'd also comment on how I would solo. When I sat in with Coltrane, he was so powerful it was like a vacuum cleaner. I was only 18 or 19 and that was an experience that I'll never forget, it was magical.

**Oliver Lake** (sax) asked - "Andrew, from the years of playing with you, I have always noticed how the drum solos you play are so melodic. Who is one of the drummers who influenced you from a melodic perspective?"

**AC:** Max Roach and also Philly Joe Jones.

**Billy Hart** (drums) said - "This will be humorous for Andrew but as far as I'm concerned, it's a deep, deep question. It's one of the first questions I ever asked him, that's why he might enjoy it. How can he play or concentrate so long without stopping? Andrew is very deep, he's a real innovator. I look at myself as more of a pattern player, not unlike Herbie Hancock. I put pieces of the puzzle into place, but Andrew creates constantly and I'd like to know how he does that.

**AC:** I just think about what I want to say next, where am I going? To be honest with you, all of us have clichés. People often say, "You know"



when they talk. Why do they say that? It's because they're thinking about what they want to say next. You can either say "You know" or you can just be quiet, even though you're thinking "You know," and then say what you want to say. A cliché is like a rest period where you're thinking about what you want to say. You know what I mean? You know, you know?

**JJ:** Do you have any final comments?

**AC:** This was a long interview but thank you. I will say that music is a celebration of life and if I had the say to do it, I would just want to feel good all the time, which is impossible because that's not the way life really is, but if I could do things, from moment to moment, as what life is, one thing after another, I'd always do one thing after another that would make me feel good, and that's the way I would like to celebrate my life and celebrate music. That's kind of what I think about when I play — it's to have fun. It's serious though. It's the same for the athletes. It's game time baby, let's have some fun!

□ □ □

# Satoko Fujii

(Continued from page 38)

**SF:** I have duo, trio, quartet projects with Japanese, American, and European musicians. I think

one of my interesting projects is my fifteen or sixteen piece large ensemble. The instrumentation is the same as a traditional jazz big band. I started this project at Berklee in 1988, and at the New England Conservatory from 1993-1996. I moved to New York City and I formed the "Satoko Fujii Orchestra New York" in 1996. I

moved back to Tokyo and I formed the "Satoko Fujii Orchestra Tokyo" in 1997. And then I also got a chance to form orchestras in Nagoya and Kobe. I still play with four large orchestras: New York City, Tokyo, Nagoya and Chicago. I am very lucky because in Nagoya, guitar player, Yasuhiro Usui produces the performances, and in Kobe, a club owner, Tetsumasa Kondo produces. Without their big help, these big projects couldn't happen. Also...a wonderful thing is that the Chicago Orchestra will appear in this summer's Chicago Jazz Festival, featuring great Chicago musicians. I am very excited!!

**JJ:** How are you able to take time to relax with this unparalleled work schedule?

**SF:** I probably am some kind of workaholic. I can relax when I work. Making music is the best thing for me to relax.

**JJ:** Thank you, Satoko-san. Is there anything you'd like to mention?

**SF:** I think I already talked too much. Well, after the Stone, I will have one more show at the Spectrum NYC on August 27. This is very different from all my other shows at the Stone. It would be great if you would mention it!

□ □ □

## Satoko Fujii

New York Performances, August 2013

### THE STONE

Tue. 8/20,

- 8PM: Duo with Tom Rainey
- 10PM: Briggan Krauss (sax), Kappa Maki (trumpet), Nels Cline (guitar), Michael T.A. Thompson (drums)

Wed. 8/21,

- 8PM: Fujii Trio with Rene Hart (bass) and David Miller (drums)
- 10PM: Junk Box — Kappa Maki (trumpet), John Hollenbeck (drums)

Thu. 8/22,

- 8PM: Duo with Ikue Mori
- 10PM: Fujii Quartet — Kappa Maki (trumpet), Rene Hart (bass), David Miller (drums)

Fri. 8/23, 8PM: Min-Yoh Ensemble — Kappa Maki (trumpet), Curtis Hasselbring (trombone), Andrea Parkins (accordion)

10PM: Kaze and Steve Dalachinsky (poet)

Sat. 8/24,

- 8PM: Fujii Large Ensemble — Andrew D'Angelo (alto sax), Petr Cancura (tenor sax), Josh Sinton (baritone sax), Curtis Hasselbring (trombone), Joe Morris (guitar), Rene Hart (bass), David Miller (drums) + KAZE
- 10PM: Minamo — Duo with Carla Kihlstedt (violin)

Sun. 8/25, 8PM: Brass and Percussion Ensemble

- KAZE with Frank London (trumpet), Nate Wooley (trumpet)
- 10PM: Fujii Trio with Hart and Miller

### SPECTRUM NYC

Tue. 8/27, 7PM & 9PM

Dos Dos — Nina Inai (percussive dance), Kappa Maki (trumpet), Satoko Fujii (piano), Rafael Lariviere (percussion). <http://spectrumnyc.com/blog/>