

Compositions and Collaborations: Speaking in Rhythms 3rd Annual Benefit Concert

On Friday, March 17, The Speaking in Rhythms Percussion Ensemble (formally know as The CPE 2 Percussion Ensemble) will hold its 3rd annual benefit concert entitled *Compositions and Collaborations* at The New York Academy of Medicine located at 1216 5th Avenue (103rd Street). This event is a culmination of a process in which, members of the percussion ensemble engage in "The music-making experience." The music-making experience allows members to explore elements of music within various contexts that include different music genres and styles, and a variety of cultural music expression from countries around the world. The primary goal of these music making experiences is to create opportunities that will foster musical thinking and creative expression. An environment is created that allows members to feel free to tap into the depths of their inner selves and express in musical ways their self and cultural identities. These musical expressions provide the springboard for creative music making. Working within the context of musical form, students, along with the guidance of DeVeor Rainey (the ensemble's director), compose and /or arrange music compositions for the purpose of creating meaningful performances.

In addition to the music-making experience, the percussion ensemble seeks to collaborate with professional artists and community institutions. These collaborations add a richness to the program that models a community collectively working together.

In this collaborative spirit, **On Saturday, March 18,** The Speaking in Rhythms Percussion Ensemble will participate in a workshop at The Museum of the City of

New York entitled *"Polyrhythmic Explorations: A Musical Look at Gullah/Geechee Culture"*. David Pleasant, world renowned percussionist and educator will facilitate this participatory workshop.

The Speaking in Rhythms Percussion Ensemble warmly invites the community to join us at both events, to feel the beat, and share in the joy of making music.



The Speaking in Rhythms Percussion Ensemble

Syncopated New York: A Project in the Making

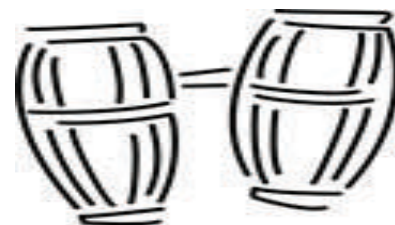
Syncopated New York is a project designed to expose members of the percussion ensemble to styles of music of various cultures. Each year, students learn the musical characteristics and technical applications of a musical style of a particular culture. This musical study also serves as a cultural awareness study that organically fits in with the music-making experience. As students expand their knowledge of different musical styles, they acquire a wealth of information that is available to them to strengthen their creative

and critical approach to music composition.

We began the Syncopated New York Project last year, in the summer of 2006. Selected members participated in a week-long program in Puerto Rico. There, members studied an Afro-Puerto Rican style of music and dance called Bomba. Ensemble members learned about the music and dance in various learning settings. Some settings were very academic in nature, while others were communities setting of activities that local Puerto Rican engage in.

Within the context of culture, members learned various other interconnecting aspects of the culture, such as geography, social activities, education, economics and etc.

The trip to Puerto Rico provided students with a comprehensive understand of the style.



Syncopated New York 2006: Polyrhythmic Explorations- A Musical Look at Gullah/Geechee Culture



“ . . .this workshop highlights the unique percussion approaches of Gullah/Geechee. . .

Members of the Speaking in Rhythms Percussion Ensemble are taking a musical journey that comes out the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands. They are currently participating in a workshop entitled “Polyrhythmic Explorations: A Musical Look at Gullah/Geechee Culture.”

Designed by David Pleasant, this workshop highlights the unique percussion approaches of Gullah/Geechee such as ring shout, ring play, Juba, hand jive, tambourine, Janissary, hambone, banjoy/banja, and rhap. The members of the ensemble engage in a hands on, intensive music and movement master class that incorporates peculiar poly-rhythms, voice and/

or harmonica into a pre-trap set form. Mr. Pleasant guide students to compose original music using rap, spoken word, and poetry. Students synthesize features of early African American forms and contemporary models (blues, rap, hip-hop) that still retain fundamental Gullah/Geechee qualities.



David Pleasant working with members of The Speaking in Rhythms ensemble

David Pleasant is a multi-faceted percussion virtuoso, rhythm effects vocalist, and lecturer who specializes in African-American traditions.

Born in Savannah, Georgia and raised in McIntosh County, Pleasant grew up immersed in the rich Gullah /Geechee (Georgia and South Carolina Sea Island) culture, which continues to thrive in that area. The Gullah culture, particularly juba, hand jive, pattin', `rhappin" and shout has played a major role in the development of David Pleasant's RiddimAthon!®, a performance and teaching method developed from a synthesis of African, Caribbean and African American musical traditions.

Pleasant has been a featured performer and/or consultant for: ABC Nightline; Disney Channel; the Today Show; Reading Rainbow (PBS); ABC Evening News; CBS The Early Show; ABC Good Morning America; Essence Awards; Brave New World (ABC) and numerous PBS showings. As a guest speaker at NYU's Jazz Symposium; Columbia University's Jazz Symposium; International Association of Jazz Educators; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and Lincoln Center Master Improvisers series, he is the first percussionist to bridge early Low Country forms to contemporary music formats.



Gullah/Geechee Culture in the United States

The Gullah/Geechee people live along the Atlantic coastal plain on a chain of sea islands that run parallel to the coast of northern Florida, Georgia, south Carolina, and North Carolina. Gullah people are descendants of enslaved African who worked on and managed rice plantations. These Africans were imported from the “Rice coast” or Windward Coast” that stretched from Senegal down to Sierra Leone and Liberia. Both regions in West Africa and the southern areas in the United States shared semi-tropical climate and swampy terrain that were excellent conditions for the cultivation of rice. The skills and technology of

enslaved Africans completely transformed the southern coasts of the United States into an agricultural empire. The Africans that came from these regions inherited resistance to tropical diseases, such as malaria and yellow fever. These diseases thrived in the environmental conditions of the swampy coastal plains and semi-tropical climate of the sea islands. Planters (plantations owners) were extremely vulnerable to these diseases, and as a result, they lived away from the rice fields and had very little contact with enslaved Africans who managed the rice plantations. The isolation from planters and in-land Blacks allowed Gullah people to retain a certain

degree of independence in which many elements of African language and culture flourished.

Musical responses from their immediate social and political circumstances resulted in the amalgamation of many musical elements. The McIntosh county style shout is a prime example of African form as it is synthesized in a new environment. It is a percussion, vocal and movement style that retains key features of an African drum ethic: pitch variation, polyrhythm, improvisation, call and response and syncopation. The form thrived in an environment in which overt African expression were outlawed.