

Winard Harper

Drummer Winard Harper is passionate about jazz. "This music is powerful," he says. "It can do a lot of good for people. If they'd spend some time each day listening to it, we would see many changes in the world."

Inspired by the musicianship of greats such as Clifford Brown, Max Roach, Jackie McLean, Cannonball Adderley, Dr. Billy Taylor, Art Blakey and Billy Higgins, Harper has been the leader and musical inspiration for a vibrant sextet for almost a decade. The group appears regularly all over the United States from the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. to Yoshi's, the legendary West Coast jazz club. Although clearly the dominant force behind this extraordinarily gifted ensemble, Harper has surrounded himself with superbly talented young guardians of the jazz tradition (including Lawrence Clark, Ameen Saleem, Josh Evans, Stacy Dillard and Alioune Faye), who are as entertaining to watch as they are to listen to.

Born in Baltimore in 1962, Winard had a natural affinity for drumming. He was encouraged to play the drums by his father, who noticed him beating on cans when he was three or four years old. At the age of five, Winard was developing his skills and making guest appearances with his older brother Danny's nightclub band. A turning point was reached when Winard heard a recording of Clifford Brown and Max Roach. It was then that he was irreversibly inspired to play jazz. "I was fascinated hearing Max do the things he did playing with mallets and everything," he remembers.

"Early on," Harper continues, "I transcribed a couple of Max solos, but I really just loved listening to him. He was a big influence as well as Art Blakey, and more so than anybody, Billy Higgins. The joy and the passion and his love of playing really made an impact on me. I could see similarities between myself and him, and then we became such great friends. A lot of the concept of my band was inspired by Billy. A lot of the African influences and different instruments I use in the band, Billy was always exploring as well."

Constantly in reverence of his predecessors while remaining innovative in his own right, Harper has become one of the most celebrated drummers in jazz. He is a virtuoso on the drum set as well as the balafon, the West African equivalent of the marimba. Critics have written that Winard is as pleasing and entertaining to watch as he is to hear. "As tasteful a drummer as one could ask for," according to Jeff Kaliss of *JazzTimes*. Franz Matzner recently wrote in *All About Jazz* that the sextet's performance "culminated in an evening of fireworks with a sustained display of percussive pyrotechnics by Harper so rapid fire, so mind bogglingly dexterous, and so expressively diverse, as to be truly awe-inspiring." And in a *Washington Post* review, Mike Joyce said, "Winard Harper's wonderfully orchestrated solos alone might have forced a corpse to grin!"

Harper's first major gig was with Dexter Gordon in 1982, and shortly thereafter with Johnny Griffin. It wasn't long before his drumming skills captured the attention of Betty Carter. He spent four years working with Ms. Carter's band, inevitably honing his jazz-as-entertainment sense of showmanship.

"With Betty I learned consistency and persistence," Harper recalls. "Working with her prepared me to become a bandleader; I learned a lot about the business from her. When I left Betty's band, I came out with enough information to get the Harper Brothers on the way. She gave me the inside track on bookings, clubs, most of the places we worked were the same places I worked with her."

During the 1980s while Winard worked as a sideman to such jazz legends as Ray Bryant, Abdullah Ibrahim, Pharoah Sanders and Clifford Jordan, he also laid the foundation for what

would become The Harper Brothers band. He and his brother Philip launched a band that would blaze a brilliant trail both on the charts and on the international touring circuit.

"Man for man, The Harper Brothers Quintet ... is the most brilliant new jazz group of the new decade," declared Leonard Feather in his review of the band's Los Angeles performance in early 1990. *Remembrance*, the band's second album went to #1 on Billboard's jazz chart in 1991.

Piadium recording artist Winard Harper is one of the hardest working drummers in jazz today, not only leading his very exciting and hard-swinging sextet, but also continuing as an in-demand sideman. When not touring with his band, Harper continues to work and record with such artists such as Joe Lovano, Avery Sharpe, Steve Turre, Wycliffe Gordon, Frank Wess, Ray Bryant, and Jimmy Heath. His newest CD, *Make It Happen*, goes further than any of his previous six releases to highlight his talent as drummer, composer and bandleader.

And now the Winard Harper Sextet moves to a new level of success. Not only is the band gaining increased air play around the globe, they regularly appear in festivals, on jazz cruises, in concert halls and in top jazz clubs, the Winard Harper Sextet is doing their part to bring the power of jazz to audiences everywhere. The response has been nothing short of remarkable. But then again, so is Winard Harper.

BOOKING & MEDIA/PUBLICITY

Don Jay Smith
LKS Associates
4 Ridge Road
Lebanon, NJ 08833
Phone: (908) 832-1020
Fax: 908-832-9011
donjaysmith@patmedia.net