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**Napoleon Revels-Bey plays the drums at his home in Uniondale.**  
■ Video: [Newsday.com/act2](http://newsday.com/act2)

RAYCHEL BRIGHTMAN

**BY RON MARGE**  
*Special to Newsday*

**I**n a career spanning more than four decades, drummer Napoleon Revels-Bey has pounded many beats, from concert stages with such legends as Aretha Franklin and Gladys Knight to the white lights of Broadway. Now, the Hempstead-born musician has found his rhythm as an educator.

"I have a mission deep within me that drives me, and that is to help people through music and the arts," said Revels-Bey, 70, who now lives in Uniondale. "I have had a blessed career with lots of mentors and good luck. I decided a long time ago to give back to the community."

For Revels-Bey, giving back meant creating a series called 21st Century Community Engagement & Development Outreach Programs, designed

# Learning to the beat of a devoted **DRUMMER**

to teach musical education to students in Long Island and New York City public schools. The programs cover such diverse subjects as the Joy of Jazz, which examines the genre's history and its significance in American society, and Music in the Classroom, a drumming program for preschoolers to teens. Adventures in Music and Aviation is an inspirational multimedia

program that uses 300 images and eight original songs to celebrate the pioneers of aerospace.

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the kids, works with the teachers, plans activities that are best suited for the kids and teachers and always presents himself in a polished and professional manner."

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that I have to come up with programs that can catch their interest immediately, so at the end of the hour they have an appreciation for music and the arts," he said.

The reward has been seeing many of his students make music their careers. "I recently received a message on Facebook from one of my former drum students . . . who told me he just finished his degree in music at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and wanted to thank me for preparing him so well as a drummer and percussionist," said Revels-Bey.

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**See DRUMMER on E40**



Napoleon Revels-Bey gets on the sticks with the tools of his trade.

RAYCHEL BRIGHTMAN

# Teaching is now his beat



A longtime drummer, Revels-Bey teaches musical education to students in Long Island and New York City public schools.

## DRUMMER from E39

borhood had a piano in their house, used mostly for gospel music," recalled Revels-Bey, who was recently dressed in his signature performance outfit: a patterned vest, a white shirt, black pants with white stripes and a fez as a nod to his Muslim faith.

His first exposure to the drums didn't come until he was 15.

"A few of my friends at Hempstead High School played the drums, and they were having fun playing in bands," said Revels-Bey. "I had to try the drums."

A year later, he was sitting in with bands and performing locally at parties, weddings and local night spots like the Stereo Club in Hempstead. "My dad loved music and would bring me to the local clubs," he said. "He would ask the owners if I could sit in on a few songs with the band. They often would let me."

Revels-Bey took formal drum lessons from Charles Perry, who played in many famous big bands, including those of Benny Goodman and Woody Herman. "Charlie taught me the basics of drumming and music theory," Revels-Bey said. "His teaching helped me develop my technique and timing."

His spare time was spent at his father's television and radio repair shop in Hempstead. Many of the clientele were local musicians who worked in New York City. Revels-Bey said he remembers joining his father on a house call to repair a television for a well-known musician. "He was the legendary lead trumpeter for 'The Ed Sullivan Show,' Jimmy Nottingham," Revels-Bey said. "He had a large house with a pool. For the first time, I saw that musicians can do pretty well."

After a stint in Vietnam as a radar operator on a destroyer, Revels-Bey attended Nassau Community College and then studied music at SUNY Old Westbury. Among his teachers was Ronald Gould, a principal percussionist with the New York City Ballet Orchestra, and Warren Smith, a percussionist who worked with Lena Horne on Broadway.

"I owe a lot of my successes to my

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NAPOLEON REVELS-BEY'S COLLECTIO

Revels-Bey shares his love of music with students at Nassau Performing Arts Inc.

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Smith's nephew, Frank Derrick, was the 1976 musical's lead drummer. "Frank called me in to learn the book, and I was hired to be on the 'bus and truck' touring company," he said.

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"The gig was at Westbury and the band did a few rehearsals prior to the show," Revels-Bey recalled.

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**Time on the road**

Revels-Bey's transition from professional musician to a music educator and goodwill ambassador began in the 1980s, when he was approached by John Devol, a fellow Broadway musician who founded the Festival of Music community programs (renamed Arts Horizon in 1995). Devol asked him to join his new community arts youth program as a percussionist in the demonstration band.

"John told me that it wouldn't interfere with my night gigs and that I can do the youth community programs during the day and still gig at night," Revels-Bey said.

At the time, Revels-Bey was ready to reduce his time on the road and welcomed employment alternatives. Less travel meant more time with Pearl, his wife of 46 years, and daughters Carmen and Amirah. He also has four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

**LIVE SHOWS**

When Napoleon Revels-Bey isn't teaching, he often can be found on stage with his drums. Here are some upcoming performances.

**NOV. 26**

Noon, Kitchen 21, 3052 W. 21st St., Brooklyn  
**INFO** Free; 718-954-9801, kitchen-21.com

**DEC. 20**

5 p.m., Great South Bay YMCA, 200 W. Main St., Bay Shore  
**INFO** Free; 631-665-4255, ymcali.org

Devol trained Revels-Bey on the community arts programs and taught him to write and prepare study guides, which are essential to working with school systems and obtaining grants.

Revels-Bey continued to play on Broadway and in other venues while developing the study guides. His first programs were with Hempstead public schools through grants from BOCES of Long Island and support from Tyree Curry, a well-known Hempstead public school administrator.

As his program offerings grew, he founded Revels-Bey Music Inc. in 1993 and then the nonprofit Nassau Performing Arts Inc. in 1998 to acquire larger grants and reach more organizations on Long Island and in New York City. Revels-Bey is most proud of receiving the 2017 Jubilation Fellow Award for the Arts grant, which is presented to individuals who work to help young people through rhythm as expressed in dance, music and poetry. The fellowship is for two years and awards \$5,000 annually.

Over the years, the benefits of Revels-Bey's outreach programs have not been just to the thousands of children he has instructed.

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**Newsday**



# Uniondale drummer finds harmony teaching kids the joy of music

Napoleon Revels-Bey has gone from the Broadway stage to the classroom

## A journey from Gladys Knight to teaching artist

He's played the drums for some big names including Aretha Franklin and Gladys Knight. Now Napoleon Revels-Bey of Uniondale is a teaching artist who aims to inspire youth.

Uniondale Music and Art Festival; <https://vimeo.com/238816735>



By Ron Marge Special to Newsday  
Updated November 16, 2017 8:59 PM

Nov. 8, 2017 (Credit: Newsday / Raychel Brightman <https://vimeo.com/243353652>)

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For Revels-Bey, giving back meant creating a series called 21st Century Community Engagement & Development Outreach Programs, [www.nassauperformingarts.org](http://www.nassauperformingarts.org) <https://vimeo.com/95529270> designed to teach musical education to students in Long Island and New York City public schools. The programs cover such diverse subjects as the Joy of Jazz, which examines the genre's history and its significance in American society, and Music in the Classroom, a drumming program for preschoolers to teens. Adventures in Music and Aviation is an inspirational multimedia program that uses 300 images and eight original songs to celebrate the pioneers of aerospace.



Drummer Napoleon Revels-Bey of Uniondale shares his love of music with his students at the Jubilation Fellow Nassau Performing Arts Inc. Photo Credit: Napoleon Revels-Bey's collection

"Napoleon always brings our children to the music," said Kim Lowenborg-Coyne, director of music and art for the North Babylon Union Free School District. "He is not satisfied with merely presenting a concert, packing up and leaving a space. He meets with the kids, works with the teachers, plans activities that are best-suited for the kids and teachers and always presents himself in a polished and professional manner." <https://vimeo.com/89007874>

Revels-Bey creates programs that weave in the history of music around the world, but tailors them to newcomers. <https://vimeo.com/89008298>

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Drummer Napoleon Revels-Bey has made teaching children about music his passion. Photo Credit: Napoleon Revels-Bey collection

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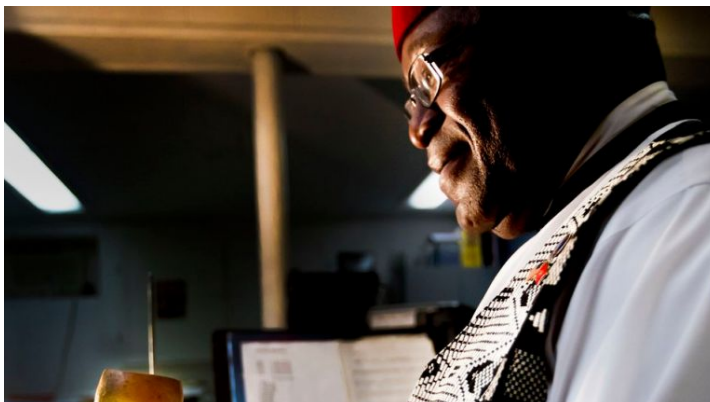


Photo Credit: Raychel Brightman



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Napoleon Revels-Bey plays on his drumset inside his Uniondale home.  
Photo Credit: Raychel Brightman

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[www.revels-bey.com](http://www.revels-bey.com)



## Time on the road

Napoleon Revels-Bey has played drums on Broadway and for big acts, such as Aretha Franklin.  
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 FB: <https://www.facebook.com/npainc.org/>

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