

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



KIM CLARKE

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Bassist Kim Clarke has performed with a formidable range of musicians and notable jazz greats such as Joseph Bowie, Joe Henderson, George Braith, Art Blakey, Mary Lou Williams, Steve Coleman, Cassandra Wilson, Cindy Blackman Santana, Sheila Jordan and Kit McClure, to name only some. She is also co-founder and producer of the Lady Got Chops Women's History Month Music and Arts Festival, Inc. This month marks the 18th year of the festival.

The New York City Jazz Record: When this interview is published, the Lady Got Chops Festival will be underway. Are you excited for March?

Kim Clarke: I'm excited because I am a musician and will be working as well. This is the world's longest-running virtual festival.

TNYCJR: What does that mean?

KC: Lady Got Chops Festival is still grassroots: free promotion for any woman that's doing anything in the arts and the production of an event or two. The festival began in March 2003 as a collaborative idea between the mother/daughter team owners of Jazz Spot and I to celebrate Women's History Month and to draw clientele to their venue. Lillithe Meyers and Tiecha Merritt provided the space and I supplied the connection to great women musicians affiliated with Kit McClure's Big Band and others. I was trying to diversify my economic portfolio by teaching myself HTML and I built them a website. My son helped me with a little moving graphic and we put up a calendar. Long story short the place closed in nine years. After the café closed I didn't think I was going to do this thing anymore, but a new friend said, "no, I'm booking the Zinc Bar so you could do some gigs here" and another friend said, "I have a pizza parlor gig, I could give you some of the dates." And we just kept it going. Every year since I've met the owners of Bean Runner Café [in Peekskill], they will support, they will book women for their weekends in March. Headroom Social in New Jersey is a new one to the concept of the festival. I still use that calendar code on our newer website: ladygotchops.com. And I design hard-copy banners for each participating venue that will hang them. My uncle Kevin, a WTC first responder, sponsored five events in 2017. Last year our large concert at Flushing Town Hall was paid for through a grant from the Queens Council on the Arts and my Facebook birthday fundraiser. We were able to pay 15 musicians and a sound crew of 3. As for the free promotion, any women performers, artists, dancers who want to participate simply inform me and I add them to the online calendar.

TNYCJR: So it's extended outside of New York City now?

KC: Oh, yes. Vocalist Rosa Lee Brooks, one of Jimi Hendrix' early girlfriends, performs at Seven Grand in Los Angeles, trumpeter Edwina Thorne is at Harborside

Festival in New Zealand, tap dancer Roxane Butterfly in Paris. My friend, vocalist Ludmila Svarovskaya, has a gig in Moscow. Bassist Endea Owens, of *The Late Show* [with Stephen Colbert], has four nights at Dizzy's Club with her own band. [Saxophonist] Camille Thurman started with us about six years ago and now she's playing with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. I think people are getting used to the idea that women can do this thing. I watched three shows late night last night and all three of them had female bass players, I'm like, "dag, why am I sitting at home!?" (laughs)

TNYCJR: I talked to Terri Lyne Carrington a couple years ago now and she had all-women groups, a trio and a big band she was working with and said the goal wasn't necessarily to put together an all-woman band. They just wanted to put together a great band and it turned out that they were all women. I heard you say one of the reasons for the Lady Got Chops Festival is for the names of these women artists to be remembered.

KC: Absolutely. We do need to try to make our mark on society. So, this year with the online calendar, I've made video links of each of the performers' names so that visitors can click and see what they look like and what they're doing. One of the ladies, vocalist Angeline Butler, I didn't even realize that she was a freedom marcher back in the day. She's Phylicia Rashad's sister and I've got a video about her and she's doing something at Pete Seeger's house up in Beacon. It's an interesting mix of folks this year. I met Erena Terakubo through Vincent Herring about four or five years ago and she had the top jazz album in Japan that year. We got Debbie Knapper; she's been running a successful jam session at the Café Oasis Baldwin for the past 18 years. We used to work with Kit McClure's big band together.

TNYCJR: You've probably worked most extensively with Joseph Bowie and Defunkt, correct?

KC: Yes, I toured most extensively with them, but I wouldn't say I worked only with them. I do a lot of stuff with Bertha Hope and this brother named Rafik Williamson. And then I try and keep in touch with the R&B part and I book several groups. Sometimes they'll want all women, so I'll do that. I've got a project called the Aqua Ninjaz, which features the music of George Duke and Donald Blackman and Jef Lee Johnson, which I really love. They all died around the same time. So, I thought of the band to keep their music alive. Aqua because I love the color blue, but Ninjaz because our keyboard player was Japanese, Yayoi Ikawa. She's pretty fierce, she's starting to work with everybody. Right now I'm working with Bertha Hope's Quintet and that's awesome because we're doing Elmo Hope's music and that's challenging and fun.

TNYCJR: When Bertha Hope joined Frank Lowe's band it was very interesting watching an artist of her caliber,

learning how to interact with his music, which was more free, not completely structured. Without remembering her words, I just remember being so struck by the way she approached the music kind of like a student.

KC: It's funny that you mention that, she's very... oh my god, she's very open, going back to the beginning and working on stuff. It's wonderful! I think we should all be that way. No one can know all of this music anyway so, for a different angle or different perspective, to be open to it is very admirable. Lucianna Padmore, our drummer, took one of Elmo's songs and put a poem over it and we did something with some hip-hop beats.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 12)

Yoon Sun Choi - Jacob Sacks Duo

March 14 - I-Beam Brooklyn - 8pm
April 5 - Piano Place (56 2nd Ave #41 Brooklyn) - 4pm
May 20 - Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall - 8pm



New Album "I Should Care" available at:

Yeahyeahrecords.bandcamp.com
Yoonsunchoi.com & Jacobsacks.com

THE VILLAGE VANGUARD

www.villagevanguard.com

★ MARCH 3RD - MARCH 8TH ★
BILL STEWART TRIO
WALTER SMITH III, VICENTE ARCHER

★ MARCH 10TH - MARCH 15TH ★
PETER BERNSTEIN QUARTET
SULLIVAN FORTNER, DOUG WEISS, JOE FARNSWORTH

★ MARCH 17TH - MARCH 22ND ★
MARCUS ROBERTS TRIO
RODNEY JORDAN, JASON MARSALIS

★ MARCH 24TH - MARCH 29TH ★
THE BAD PLUS
REID ANDERSON, ORRIN EVANS, DAVE KING

★ MARCH 31ST - APRIL 5TH ★
DONNY McCASLIN
JASON LINDNER, TIM LEFEBVRE, ZACH DANZINGER

COMING IN APRIL

★ TOM HARRELL ★
★ JOHN ZORN ★
★ KRIS DAVIS ★
★ GERALD CLAYTON ★

MONDAY NIGHTS ARE RESERVED FOR
THE VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA
MONDAY THRU SUNDAY
8:30PM & 10:30PM
178 7TH AVE. SOUTH AT 11TH STREET 212-255-4037

STEINWAY & SONS

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

TNYCJR: Some funk stuff is hip-hop adjacent, right?

KC: I guess. "Jazz is the teacher, funk is the preacher," said James Blood Ulmer. Hip-hop is the digital baby. It's different. California rappers kind of gravitate more toward the funk stuff, I think.

TNYCJR: Have you been sampled that you know?

KC: Not that I know of. I helped Queen Latifah write one of the songs on her *Black Reign* album and we put a reggae bridge in the middle of it. She wanted to sample Clifford Jordan and I said, "Uncle Clifford?" And she said, "that's your uncle?" I said, no, not really, but I mean I played with him. So we decided to change the song so it wouldn't be like you know [coughs] plagiarism. That's "Wink's Theme" for her brother who died on the motorcycle. That's us playing, [pianist] Rodney Kendrick and myself.

TNYCJR: It's less so now, that musicians and the public would keep jazz and R&B very separate, but you came up with that and you kind of came out of R&B first anyway?

KC: Well, when I first started playing I had R&B records and I put the needle back and that's how I started. I went to two colleges out of state. In my third year of college, at a friend's suggestion, I audited classes at the Jazzmobile workshop and transferred to CCNY. I met Rodney Jones, who gave me a bow and I ended up studying the upright. At the Mobile I walked into Jimmy Heath's class, I studied with Jimmy Owens, Victor Gaskin on electric and later Lisle Atkinson on upright. Then I heard about this National Endowment of

the Arts grant. Cobi Narita told me what to do. I applied three times and got grants to study with Ron Carter, Buster Williams and Lisle Atkinson. But, yeah, there's definitely some disdainful vibe between the two idioms. There's a fear coming from the R&B people of jazz and there's a kind of disdain from some of the jazz people to R&B people. Working with Joe Bowie was great because of our common backgrounds in R&B and straightahead. When I was first out with Joe we had Ronnie Burrage on drums and we got in to some serious straight-walking things. So, we were kind of a mixed idiom band then.

TNYCJR: Looking at the names of those you've played with, it reads like a veritable who's who of jazz.

KC: Absolutely. There are a lot of folks missing there, but most of them are gigs I did with people I met because of Barry Harris. Professor Dr. Barry Harris had rented a place which he called the Jazz Cultural Theater on 29th Street and 8th Avenue. It was a storefront home of jazz classes and performances. Kuni Mikami, Craig Haynes and I hosted the Art Blakey Breakfast Jam, which Art played when he was not on tour. It started at 3 in the morning and went to 8 or 9 am. Everybody came down, Michael Carvin, Tommy Flanagan, Philly Joe Jones, Woody Shaw and all kinds of luminaries who were around during that era, from '82-86. That's how Joe Henderson heard me and I was blessed with "the call".

TNYCJR: That's how you hooked up with Art Blakey?

KC: Actually, no. I met Art Blakey through his son, one of the first jazz musicians I ever met, Art Blakey, Jr. Then, at Jazzmobile, French horn player Sharon Freeman introduced me to Bertha Hope and she to Art Sr.'s daughter Evelyn Blakey. As I started getting some chops, they called me for gigs. Art knew me because I worked with Evelyn.

TNYCJR: What did you do with Mary Lou Williams?

KC: That was one of the very first women's jazz festivals produced by Cobi Narita who I met through Jimmy Owens' Business of Music Class at the Collective Black Artists Space. During the '80s, I think Jimmy Heath was quoted saying that if it wasn't for Cobi, nobody would be working. She had produced a newsletter for her organization, the Universal Jazz Coalition, which basically informed everybody on the mailing list who was playing where. So Cobi rented the original Birdland for a few nights, not the new Birdland on 44th, the one on 52nd Street, and negotiated with the proprietor a specific fee. He was surprised at how many people supported it and wanted to renegotiate, but Cobi stood firm. He was so incensed that he chained the door. I think it was George Wein who stepped in and built a platform in front of their door. We played outside and that's where I played with Mary Lou Williams, in the sun outside of Birdland on 52nd Street.

TNYCJR: Anything you'd like to share in closing?

KC: I just hope that what I'm doing is making a difference. The festival remains a low-budget yet time-consuming effort. I'm not a person raised with a corporate background. I am a freelance musician and a self-trained basic graphic artist/web designer. Producing a festival on the scale of SummerStage or the AfroPunk Festival would be a dream. The focus would have to be a humane and uplifting one. Perhaps in the near future...there's always hope. ❖

For more information, visit ladygotchops.com. Clarke is at Bar Lunatico Mar. 2nd with Roberta Piket, Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church Mar. 6th, St. Albans Congregational Church Mar. 7th, Langston Hughes Public Library Mar. 21st, Jazz 966 Mar. 27th with Bertha Hope and Russian Samovar Mar. 29th, all as part of Lady Got Chops Festival. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Defunkt – *Thermonuclear Sweat* (Hannibal, 1982)
- Bigfood (Bill Bickford/Kim Clarke/Bruce Ditmas) – *Semi Precious Metal* (TUTU, 1990)
- Sibylle Pomorin/Terry Jenoure – *Auguries of Speed* (ITM, 1991)
- Kit McClure Big Band – *Burning* (RedHot, 1996)
- George Braith – *Turn of the Century* (Excellence, 2002)
- Defunkt – *Live At Channel Zero* (ESP-Disk', 2007/2015)

(LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Alongside the desire to bolster innovative artists, Davis, now an Associate Program Director of Creative Development for the Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice at Berklee College of Music, intends the label to promote gender equality. "I'm trying to encourage artists who are thinking about gender equality. So male artists who are hiring women and mentoring them or choosing to work with women, also to find some kind of gender balance in their groups, is really important to me. So it is a part of the decision-making process going forward. And also hiring women as leaders too. So I'm trying to find a balance over the year of these elements."

There are exciting times ahead. "Eric Revis' record is coming out in May. Cory Smythe has another record coming in June. Angelica Sanchez and Marilyn Crispell have a two-piano record that is coming out in September. And Craig Taborn is putting out a Junk Magic record in the Fall." ❖

For more information, visit pyroclasticrecords.com. Artists performing this month include Chris Lightcap at Brooklyn Conservatory of Music Mar. 7th with Rob Garcia and Ben Goldberg at Downtown Music Gallery Mar. 22nd. See Calendar.

Anne Phillips
LIVE
AT THE JAZZ BAKERY



WITH
ROGER KELLAWAY
BOB KINDRED
CHUCK BERGHOFFER

"A worthy bookend for those of us
who still treasure "Born to be Blue"
Rex Reed

"Her original gems feel comfortable alongside
classics by Mel Torme and the Gershwins ...
even more emotionally gripping"
Jonathan Widran JW Vibe

Available at CDBaby.com

"a compelling reflection of the
urgency of this generation"
- Matt Micucci
Jazziz

Album Release Concert



HINDSIGHT
ELSA NILSSON

April 10th, 9 pm
at The Cutting Room.
Tickets available at:
www.thecuttingroomnyc.com