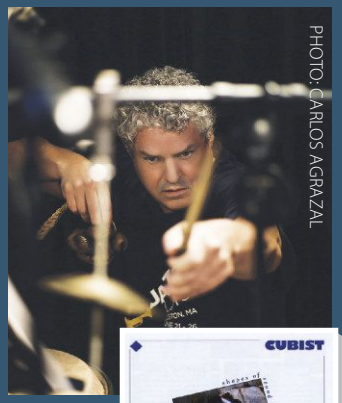
WHAT'S ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

BY CHRISTIAN WISSMULLER

Jerry Leake is an associate professor of percussion at New England Conservatory and Berklee College of Music. He has written eight widely used texts on world percussion and 30 articles on African and Indian repertoire and rhythm theory. Leake is leader of the world-rock-fusion octet Cubist with three albums that feature his diverse percussion background. He is also co-founder of Natraj and Club d'Elf, which combine traditional world music, jazz, and electronica. On tabla, he has accompanied Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Chitravena Ravikiran, and Kadri Golpanath, to name a few. His Harmonic Time method was previously featured in a *JAZZed* article (Nov. 2012), and can be viewed on YouTube as a recent TEDx talk.

Leake studied vibes with Gary Burton and hand percussion with Pablo Landrum. In India he studied with Rajeev Devasthali and T. K. Ramakrishnan, and in Ghana with Dolsi-Naa Ababakari Luna and Godwin Agbeli.

During his thirty years at NEC, Jerry Leake has taught Richie Barshay (Herbie Hancock), Tupac Mantilla and Jorge Roeder (Julian Lage), Sarah Jarosz (Grammy nomination), Bridget Kearney and Michael Calabrese (Lake Street Dive), Ben Davis (Cuddle Magic), Jason Yeager and Aubrey Johnson (Berklee faculty), Eden MacAdam-Somer, Nedelka Prescod, and Henrique Eisenmann (NEC faculty).


PHOTO: CARLOS AGRAZAL



Of his debut *Cubist* album, world percussion master Jamey Haddad (Paul Simon) states: "*Cubist* is well informed on so many fronts that it is rather staggering…mastery on many levels. Only devotion and constant evolution in life and music could produce *Cubist*."

In September of this year, Leake will release his eighth album entitled *Crafty Hands,* further exploring the origins of traditional music realized in modern soundscapes and technology.

1. Gary Burton and Stephane Grappelli – *Paris Encounter*



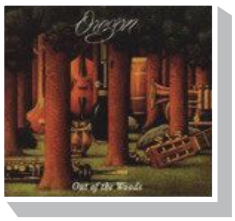
This concise but masterful CD of standards and originals brings together veteran classic violinist Stephane Grappelli and a young Gary Burton on vibraphone, with Steve Swallow on bass and Bill Goodwin on drums. The creative interplay and energy between Grappelli and Burton keeps the music alive and fun without any hint of ego or dominance. As a quartet, *Paris Encounter* is an excellent representation of how a duet should function. The opening track of Django's Daphne features cooking and adventurous solos of two jazz giants from different generations. This is a vastly underrated and under appreciated gem!

2. Salif Keita – *Amen*



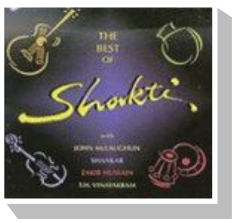
Salif Keita is an afro-pop singer-songwriter from Mali with over 20 albums to his credit. *Amen* is Salif's third studio album, produced Joe Zawinul of Weather Report fame who also plays keyboards and percussion. The music creatively blends Salif's unique vocal style with call and response female singers supported by a wide array of instruments: balafon (log xylophone), djembe, kora, guitars, saxophone and synthesizers. In other hands such a dense combination might result in a cacophony of sound, yet the music is so well orchestrated and crafted that you can't help but get up and dance. Amen is a generous offering of highly melodic, hook-filled tracks with a sense of space, variety and deep pocket groove.

3. Oregon – *Out of the Woods*



As one of the early pioneers of "world fusion" Oregon uniquely blends Indian and Western classical music with jazz, folk, and avant-garde elements. Ralph Towner displays his amazing diversity on guitar, piano, trumpet and synthesizer, with Paul McCandless introducing the world to the concept of jazz oboe and other woodwinds. This 1978 album was my first exposure to world percussion played in an improvisational style with Collin Wolcott combining Indian tabla, congas, cymbals and percussion. Glen Moore's quirky percussive approach to double bass completes the quartet whose music is never in your face with flashy displays of technique or hard edges. Oregon's music is always relaxing and driving with lots of surprises along the way.

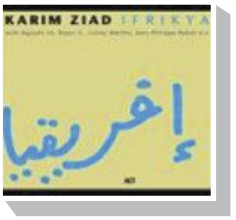
4. Shakti – *The Best of Shakti*



Contrasting Oregon's more ethereal and polished style is the adrenaline edgy and always exciting band Shakti (formed in 1974). Lead by John McLaughlin on acoustic guitar with L. Shankar on violin, their acoustic music draws heavily from North and Sound Indian melodic and rhythmic systems. This compilation from three early recordings features epic solos that are paced with uncanny psychic interplay and collective improvisation. Zakir Hussain's wizardly on tabla couples with T. H. "Vikku" Vinay-

akram's mastery on clay ghatam, with two drumming engines firing on all fronts. There is no shortage of virtuosity here, yet the love and respect between musicians is never abandoned. The 15-minute masterpiece "Isis" (in 13.5 beats no less!) begins with a whisper and builds to two staggering percussion solos. It is the singular reason why I started to play Indian percussion.

5. Karim Ziad – ***Ifrikya***



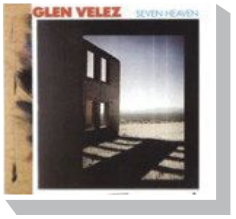
Karim Ziad is a contemporary Moroccan musician who plays lute, guitar and various Moroccan drums and percussion. With deep roots in traditional Berber music Karim performs and records with an eclectic group of jazz musicians in Paris, including Nguyên Lê. On this excellent debut he is joined by 16 other musicians who play piano, horns, banjo, flute, synthesizer, electric bass, and vocals. The opening track begins with a signature lilting groove on sentir (lute-like bass) and percolating metal castanets called karakab. The compositions are built around call and response male vocals as the band locks into tight formation, with subtle and organic elasticity to the time. Inspired by traditional trance-dance forms and modern jazz improvisations, the music swings and grabs you.

6. Oumou Sangare – ***Ko Sira***



Oumou Sangare is a popular female vocalist from Mali who launched into the Afro-pop scene with this impressive debut CD in 1989. Sangare's sweet yet strong vocal style expresses a kind of seductive love and toughness, supported by two female backup singers. Her catchy compositions emulate the mood of a lullaby and feature folksy violin melodies with more subdued percussion, while her lyrics address issues that affect women in Mali to bring about social change. The music is never pretentious or self-serving and has something that every listener will enjoy. *Ko Sira* is a great example of traditional music presented with contemporary instrumentation that always inspires and delights.

7. Glen Velez – ***Seven Heaven***



Multi-percussionist Glen Velez is considered the founding father of the modern frame drum movement, and has influenced my own approach to performing and teaching. *Seven Heaven* is a 1987 release that features a dear colleague Steve Gorn on bansuri bamboo flute, with Layne Redmond on percussion. The opening track in 11 (3+3+5) sets a unique stage as mbira thumb piano blends with devil chaser buzz sticks. Frame drum and bansuri enter in a playful and intricate partnership of melody and interlocking improvisation. Much of the CD follows this simple formula that never grows tired. Pure emotion and dynamism never sounded so subtle and so good!

8. Tabla Beat Science – ***Tala Matrix***



Founded in 1999 by tabla genius Zakir Hussain and pioneering bassist/producer Bill Laswell the concept for the project blends aspects of Hindustani music, Asian Underground, ambient music, drum and bass, and electronica. Three other innovative tabla players including Karsh Kale, Trilok Gurtu, and Talvin Singh complete the matrix that redefines fusion music, science and art. In two tracks cooking tabla grooves are electronically processed into unrecognizable sparks of light and energy. The result is an adventurous, at times daunting but always a fresh adventure into contemporary possibilities. Of particular note is the final track "Alla." Zakir's 11-minute tabla solo builds gradually without any technology and is a fitting tribute to his father – the great Ustad Alla Rakha.

9. Jason Yeager Trio – ***Affirmation***



I have known Jason for many years as a past member of my NEC African drumming ensemble and in private lessons. I have seen this young innovate talent evolve into an important composer and performer who creatively stretches the boundaries of jazz and contemporary music. *Affirmation* is a piano led trio that features former NEC students Danny Weller (bass), Matt Rousseau (drums) and Aubrey Johnson (guest vocals). The compositions display a mature level of musicianship that spans many genres without sounding imitative or incomplete. Jason's music incorporates blues, swing, 20th century classical music, pop, rock, and Afro-Cuban styles in an honest project that speaks to all types of listeners. I am eager to see what is next, especially an upcoming release that I had the pleasure to play on.

10. Lake Street Dive – ***Side Pony***



I caught Lake Street Dive's performance of "Call Off Your Dogs" on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert and was an instant fan! Of course I may be biased – they are all graduates of NEC's jazz program, and Bridget and Mike are former students of mine. This quartet of skilled jazz musicians, with vocalist Rachel Price and Mike Olson on guitar and trumpet, redefines the definition of singer-songwriter. Several tracks relate to their own life experiences, filling the CD with both cheerful and sad break-up songs, as well as feelings of love and longing. LSD is not just a tight band with a fresh approach, they are close friends who are having the time of their lives and living the dream!

Jerry Leake's new album, Crafty Hands*, will be released September, 2016. www.facebook.com/jerry.leake.7*