



Billy Martin

by Anders Griffen

Best known as the drummer for the successful, often genre-defying group Medeski Martin and Wood (MMW), as an artist Billy Martin came up during the '80s in New York City. Immersed in the downtown scene he intermingled with visual art, Brazilian music, jazz, punk and hip-hop and was inspired in creative interactions with Bob Moses, John Lurie, John Zorn, Bill Frisell, Calvin Weston and Ikue Mori, among others. He went on to work with John Scofield, Chuck Mangione, Dave Burrell, Iggy Pop, Chris Whitley, DJ Olive, Eyvind Kang, Marty Ehrlich, Maceo Parker and many others. After some 30 years as a performer, education plays an increasingly vivid role in his work.

The New York City Jazz Record: What's coming up? Who are you rehearsing with today?

Billy Martin: Medeski Martin and Wood and Bill Evans and Randy Brecker. We're going to Brazil with Bill, then Bill and Randy have a thing called "Soul Bop", where they collaborate with other musicians, so they asked us to join them this year for the Europe jazz festival tour in July. Bill's doing a couple gigs in Rio and São Paulo and then we'll go to Europe for two and a half weeks, so we're just getting together and playing a little bit to develop some material. Then when we get back, we get right into the Camp MMW, up in the Catskills, Little Indian, New York. This will be our fourth or fifth year. It's six days and we do a full schedule of workshops, ensembles and master classes.

TNYCJR: Working on music every day...

BM: Yeah! And then every Friday in August there's a Medeski Martin and Wood-related performance at the Whitney Museum, celebrating our 20th anniversary. Camp MMW is going to have Bob Moses and Vernon Reid, they're going to be our guests and they'll do master classes and workshops with us and then we have a really special surprise kind of thing happening: these two musicians from the Master Musicians of Joujouka, in Morocco - this is a long tradition, I mean thousands of years tradition, they live in the Atlas mountains - but, they've done a lot of stuff, with Ornette Coleman, the Rolling Stones and all these people and they wanted to do something with Medeski Martin and Wood! So, they're flying over to come to the camp and do a master class, but the first Friday in August [at the Whitney], we'll be performing with John Scofield and then the Master Musicians of Joujouka! And then, every other Friday we begin with a DJ, the second Friday is with Wicked Knee ...

TNYCJR: Your new group, it's a brass band concept?

BM: Yeah, small brass band, pocket brass concept: trumpet, trombone, tuba and drums. I'm contributing my own compositions. And then the third Friday, Chris Wood, Charlie Burnham the violinist and myself. The second week, with Wicked Knee, the DJ is going to be

DJ Val. She's really interesting. And then the last week of August is Medeski Martin and Wood again, celebrating our 20th Anniversary, at the Whitney music series.

TNYCJR: Speaking of the camp, I guess Bob Moses was a huge creative influence. You hooked-up with him pretty quick when you came to town after high school.

BM: I went to the Manhattan School of Music in the last year of high school, the program through the preparatory division and I studied with Paul Price. He's a celebrated percussion teacher that's not around anymore, but he was close to John Cage, so I had a little bit of that influence. I would take classes and studied privately with a lot of different teachers and I eventually discovered the Drummer's Collective had a Brazilian music program, samba classes and that's really where it all happened. That's where I met Bob Moses, he was in that class as well. He took me under his wing right away because he saw I was just really into it and he wasn't teaching me or anything but I was learning along the way. He would use me on projects in the recording studio, gigs and, you know, I was just this little kid.

TNYCJR: Soaking it up...

BM: My teacher at the time was Manuel Montero, who's back in Brazil now, we were partners at that point. I became his student but we both were part of Bob Moses' percussion section. I stayed on with Bob through all his projects for a decade or so and I think what rubbed off was that individual vision that inspired me. Bob Moses is where it all started for me, the creative aspect. The Brazilian music introduced me to percussion instruments, it wasn't just drumset anymore and that really got me into African music and Bob was this bandleader who was writing music, playing drums and being very creative, doing his own album covers and that all inspired me to keep going.

TNYCJR: I have this vague idea of the downtown scene in the early '80s and I sort of assume that you were around whatever was going on with John Lurie and, actually, that movie *Blue in the Face*...

BM: Yeah, we're in there.

TNYCJR: And you and Calvin Weston are playing, I feel like it's somehow representative, with Jim Jarmusch in there as well, of everybody interested in this sub-cultural thing in the '80s.

BM: Yeah, that was an incredible time and [the movie] definitely captured the feeling of what was happening in a certain sense. A neighborhood, whether it be the Village or Brooklyn, it really felt like that in the

community. There weren't a lot of musicians in that film, but if you could replace all those actors as characters with musicians that were... Marc Ribot and Arto Lindsay and like whoever we would see on the street, Cibo Matto and all these groups... such a variety that was in the East Village. That was a great time.

TNYCJR: Have you taught for a long time?

BM: I would say it's been about 10 years I've really gotten serious about it and since the book [*Riddim: Claves of African Origin*] came out it's really developed.

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TNYCJR: I've seen the original notation you use in your book, the Xs and dots. It seems very intuitive, but then I was wondering how you would take one of those patterns and apply it in terms of four-way independent coordination. The Xs and dots are one pattern, how do you then build around that?

BM: That is exactly what the book does. It starts with the single-line clave, so the beginning of each chapter - there are four chapters of the book, each to deal with a certain family of claves - you see the single-line claves, Xs and dots, you learn them and then you start adding a second part, a third part and a fourth part. The graphic notation changes because we're having more than one, so you have to look at the book and see that.

TNYCJR: And then there's your DVD, *Life on Drums*. Your original drum teacher, Allen Herman is a big part of that...

BM: He taught me how to hold the sticks and set up this foundation for technique. He was a really good teacher. He was a student of Joe Morello and so he's carrying on that lineage - Joe Morello is a student of George Lawrence Stone and there's that "Stick Control" lineage. The last couple of years Allen's been in touch, interested in what I was doing and it turned into this partnership where he became my executive producer and then I asked him to be in it and have conversations with me. ...I'm very proud of the DVD and the book and I feel like it's time now to get out there and try and push it a little further, go to schools if I can. I just did a percussion camp in Florida that was really great. And I'm writing, I have a column in this Japanese drum magazine called *Rhythm & Drums*; at the end of this year it will be three years [for it]. It's just published over there in Japanese; it's translated and it's enabled me to sort of really develop my writing, my philosophy and my concept. It's forcing me to...

TNYCJR: Focus and articulate ...

BM: Yeah and it's been a long time coming for me. The whole educational thing, it's something I really like to do, I'm learning from it and I see it as a creative outlet now. I've done some Percussion Arts Society master classes where all these different schools and students come around and sometimes you get to work with a percussion ensemble and that's really exciting to me because, as a composer, it's a good place to experiment and work with younger kids. So, I'm excited about that too and I feel like developing new material that way. I think it's healthy, not just go to school and open the book to [smack]. It's a creative process.

TNYCJR: What is that exchange, working on new material with students?

BM: Well, I'll come in with compositions or a basic idea and I always leave a good amount to improvisation. Certain players will bring out different things. That's the exchange. You're giving them a chance to interact and that's where the learning experience is and that's like being on a job. When we get together with these guys, or we get together with anybody to collaborate, you learn so much about, "What do we need to do here?" You need to listen and you need to know when to come in and out, how to play a melody, those are the things that come out with these students.

TNYCJR: It gives you direction, from the feedback you get you learn where to go next.

BM: Yeah, this one needs rhythm, this one needs to go outside of general harmony and we may discover

something together.

TNYCJR: So this band, MMW, is still going strong, always something to do?

BM: Yeah, for us, it's about kind of reinventing ourselves.

TNYCJR: Keeping it fresh.

BM: Keeping it fresh, trying to just find different ways of approaching what we do. This year we're releasing 20 singles in celebration of our 20-year anniversary. ❖

For more information, visit billymartin.net. Martin is at Whitney Museum Fridays. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Bob Moses/Billy Martin - *Drummingbirds* (Mozown/Amulet, 1986)
- Medeski Martin and Wood - *The Dropper* (Blue Note, 1999-2000)
- Billy Martin - *illyB Eats Vol. 1-3* (Amulet, 1999-2005)
- Billy Martin - *Solo Live Tonic 2002* (Amulet, 2002)
- Medeski Martin and Wood - *Radiolarians: The Evolutionary Set* (Indirecto, 2008-2009)
- Medeski Martin and Wood - *Zaebos (Book of Angels, Vol. 11)* (Tzadik, 2008)

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are young, play well and think for themselves," remembers Tarasov. "He told me about Alexey Kruglov, rented a studio and asked me to record two CDs [*Dialogos* and *In Tempo*] with him. Playing with Kruglov I realized what Gavrilov had said was true. The saxophonist doesn't play behind or ahead, he plays together with me and that's great."

Happenstance also accounted for SoLyd releasing CDs by non-Russians. Among the first was a CD of a Moscow concert by American pianist Joshua Pierce, followed by efforts like the Russian Second Approach trio's disc with Roswell Rudd. Other SoLyd releases include ROVA's *Planetary*, Anthony Braxton/Marel Yakshieva *Improvisations (duo) 2008*, Matthew Shipp/Sabir Mateen *Sama Live in Moscow* and Jones/Jones (Larry Ochs, Mark Dresser and Tarasov) *We All Feel The Same Way*. Some sessions were even recorded in the United States. "It doesn't really matter where the recording is made - you obtain the rights, you pay for them - what's the difference between Moscow and New York?" asks Gavrilov.

"I only met Gavrilov once in May 2010, but working with him as an artist is a breeze," says Ochs. An admirer of Tarasov's playing the SoLyd owner was so impressed with a mix Ochs had done of music from a Jones/Jones mini-tour, that "he accepted the master immediately and released it in September 2009 on the occasion of our performance during the Moscow Biennale." A Moscow recording the trio made is now set for release later this year. As for the ROVA connection, the saxophonist recalls: "Somewhere between the mixing of Jones/Jones CD 1 and the recording of CD 2 I suggested a ROVA recording for his label. I thought the connection ROVA had with Russia, because of its two tours there in the '80s, might interest him. Sure enough he decided that a ROVA CD, our first release on a Russian label, would be cool."

Besides the second Jones/Jones set, other future SoLyd improvised music releases include Tarasov playing with pianist Matthew Goodheart and ROVA saxophonist Jon Raskin. It's sessions like this that make jazz fans hope that distribution deals will soon make all SoLyd CDs easier to access. ❖

For more information visit solyd-records.ru



Mon Aug 1 **MONOLOGUES & MADNESS 6PM** Tulis McCall, host
JON IRABAGON, BARRY ALTSCHUL DUO 8:30PM
MOTPTDK 10PM
Peter Evans, Jon Irabagon, Moppa Elliot, Kevin Shea

Tue Aug 2 **SUMMER AND THE CITY 6PM**
David Baker, Carol Muske-Dukes, Kathleen Ossip, Page Hill Starzinger
RUSS LOSSING ORACLE TRIO CD RELEASE 8:30PM
Masa Kamaguchi, Billy Mintz

Wed Aug 3 **SIM FACULTY CONCERT 8:30PM**
Ralph Alessi, Tim Berne, Kris Davis, Michael Formanek, Gerald Cleaver

SAX FESTIVAL
Thu Aug 4: **FUGU 8:30PM**
Michael Attias, Ralph Alessi, Jacob Sacks, Thomas Morgan, Nasheet Waits
Fri Aug 5: **MARC MOMMAAS: LANDMARC, THE GUITAR PROJECT 9PM & 10:30PM**
Nate Radley, Vic Juris, Tony Moreno
Sat Aug 6: **ELLERY ESKELIN TRIO 9PM & 10:30PM** Gary Versace, Gerald Cleaver

Sun Aug 7 **OPERA OPEN-STAGE 6PM** Malesha, Jessie, Ellen Mandell
ALON NECHUHSTAN CD RELEASE: WORDS BEYOND 8:30PM
Donny McCaslin, Michael Bates, Owen Howard

Mon Aug 8 **CHRISTOPHER TORDINI'S "TIGER BLOOD" 8:30PM**
Jeremy Viner, Sasha Brown, Kris Davis, Jim Black
AIDAN CARROLL'S "CONCENTRIC TRIO" 10PM
Sam Harris, Bram Kincheloe

BRAZILIAN FESTIVAL
Tue Aug 9: **CLARICE ASSAD 8:30PM** Keita Ogawa, Billy Newman, Host, host.
Wed Aug 10: **ADRIANO SANTOS BRAZILIAN JAZZ QUARTET 8:30PM**
Hélio Alves, Alex Han, David Ambrosio, Adriano Santos, Billy Newman, Host
Thu Aug 11: **BROOKLYN BRAZIL BOP 8:30PM**
Billy Newman, Eric Schugren, Ben Holmes, Leco Reis, Conor Meehan

VOCAL FESTIVAL
Fri Aug 12: **SEUNG-HEE QUINTET 9PM** Adam Kolker, Ike Sturm, George Schuller, Toru Dodo
NINA MOFFITT QUARTET 10:30PM Chris Pattishall, Jackson Hill, Alex Ritz
Sat Aug 13: **OH THE SHARK HAS PRETTY TEETH DEAR,**
SONGS OF THE WEIMAR ERA 9PM Sinda Weigl, Anthony Coleman
TAMMY SCHEFFER SEXTET 10:30PM Andrew Urbina, Matt Silberman, Julian Shore, Ronen Itzik
Sun Aug 14: **STEPHANIE CARLIN 8:30PM** Josh Mease, Alan Hampton, Nate Wood, Guests
TALIA BILLIG 10PM Francois Rousseau, Dan Parra, Marc Beland

CARNATIC FESTIVAL: SANGEETH UTSAV
Mon Aug 15: **PRASANT RADHAKRISHNAN 8:30PM**
Arun Ramamurthy, Akshay Anantapadmanabhan
VIDYA 10PM Prasant Radhakrishnan, Sameer Gupta
Tue Aug 16: **ASHVIN BHOGENDRA 8:30PM** Arun Ramamurthy, Akshay Anantapadmanabhan
Wed Aug 17: **JAZZ + POETRY 6PM** Sean Singer, Lewis Porter
KARAVIKA 8:30PM Trina Basu, Anali Premawardhana, Perry Wortman, Sameer Gupta
ARUN RAMAMURTHY QUARTET 10PM
Perry Wortman, Akshay Anantapadmanabhan, Sameer Gupta

Sat Aug 20 **MIMI JONES BAND 6PM**
Camille Thurman, Luis Perdomo, Justin Faulkner

MANO-A-MANO PIANO FESTIVAL
Sun Aug 21: **JEROME KUDERNA 8:30PM** Jed Distler, Host, host.
Mon Aug 22: **WILLIAM KOMAIKO & DICK SARPOLA 8:30PM** Jed Distler, Host
Tue Aug 23: **JUNG LIN & JED DISTLER 8:30PM** Jed Distler, Host

MIKE + RUTHY'S FOLK CITY FESTIVAL
Wed Aug 24: **LAURA CORTESE + JEFFERSON HAMER 8:30PM**
Thu Aug 25: **ANAIS MITCHELL 8:30PM**
Fri Aug 26: **MICHAEL DAVES 9PM**

Sat Aug 27 **JEFF DAVIS TRIO 9PM & 10:30PM**
Russ Lossing, Eivind Opsvik

SUMMERTIME CLASSICAL MUSIC FESTIVAL
Sun Aug 28: **WASHINGTON SQUARE WINDS 8:30PM**
Caryn Freitag, Amy Yamashiro, Elyssa Plotkin, Anna Morris, Casey Cronan
Mon Aug 29: **MELODY FADER AND FRIENDS 8:30PM**
Emily Pogham Gillins, Hamilton Berry
Tue Aug 30: **NEOLIT ENSEMBLE 8:30PM**

Wed Aug 31 **DUANE EUBANKS QUINTET 8:30PM**
Abraham Burton, Orrin Evans, Eric McPherson, Corcoran Holt

For our full schedule check out our website
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