

MUSICIAN



At Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York City

TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

Musician, composer, professor—for this busy drummer, the beat never stops

By Jeff Tamarkin

HEARING TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON RATTLE OFF THE list of artists she's drummed with is jaw-dropping: Herbie Hancock, Joni Mitchell, Wayne Shorter, Stan Getz, Al Jarreau, Dianne Reeves, Carlos Santana, for starters. These giants and scores more of their stature seek her out for her airtight timekeeping, creative impulses and sensitivity as a player.

Increasingly though, Carrington is gaining greater recognition for her skills as a composer and bandleader. She assembled an all-star, all-female cast for her *Mosaic Project*, which won last year's Grammy for best jazz vocal album. Her latest, *Money Jungle: Provocative in Blue*, is equally ambitious. Working primarily with pianist Gerald Clayton and bassist Christian McBride, Carrington takes as the project's basis pieces from Duke Ellington's 1963 *Money Jungle* with Charles Mingus and Max Roach, embellishing on its concepts with spoken-word

snippets and three new original compositions: two by her, the other by Clayton.

Carrington's determination and assuredness has been a hallmark since childhood. The prodigy received a full scholarship from Boston's Berklee College of Music at age 11—after she'd already performed at her first jazz festival. Carrington moved to New York in her late teens and became the house drummer for *The Arsenio Hall Show*. Since then she's worked virtually nonstop, recording her debut album under her own name in 1989.

In addition to her prolific studio and live work, Carrington, 47, is also a valued Berklee faculty member. Although she'll soon be taking a break from that gig, it doesn't mean she's slowing down. "I'm producing Dianne Reeves' next CD," she says. "Then I'm going to do a *Mosaic Project* part two." Carrington brought us up to date on her many projects during a recent commute to Berklee.



'There was something mystical about *Money Jungle* that made me want to rearrange pieces.'

Why reimagine *Money Jungle*?

As soon as I heard that album, I felt there was something mystical about it that made me want to rearrange some of the pieces. I was always drawn to it, and I don't even know why, because it isn't the type of album I normally listen to. But I liked the way Mingus kept things rolling—Duke kind of lays back and lets Max and Mingus be the stars. It's not a typical trio album where the pianist starts to solo all the time and the bass and drums are accompanying the piano. This felt like the piano was accompanying the bassist and drummer.

How did you approach the music?

The arrangements just came to me. I hear a melody, I start to hear other harmonies, and I hear the time signatures. Then I started thinking about who would be great players. Christian is to me a modern-day Mingus. I

'The more I thought I understood Ellington, the more I felt I would have his blessing.'

had a couple of piano players in mind but it became clear that Gerald Clayton would be the best person. He has the rare quality of having the tradition deep inside of him, as well as playing modern.

Tell us about the original songs.

"No Boxes (No Words)" I wrote for the project, thinking specifically about Ellington. The title refers to him, because someone asked him what jazz meant and he said, "No boxes." My other song, "Grass Roots," which I had previously started writing but finished for this project. Gerald Clayton's song, "Cut Off," was written specifically for the project.

How does *Money Jungle* compare to *The Mosaic Project*?

They're similar in terms of preparation. My process is the same even if the music is different. But for this one I spent a lot of time studying Ellington. I was rearranging his music and wanted to feel comfortable about it, so I read a lot of books about him. The more I thought I understood him, the more I felt I would have his blessing.

What was the genesis of *Mosaic*?

I did a show in Israel with Esperanza Spalding, Geri Allen and Tineke Postma, and I thought about using them as the foundation for my next record. I called on all of these incredible women—I've had personal relationships with most of them, and they're all people I've played with for years and who I respected, so I thought it would be very cool to do that.

You played sax before drums.

Yeah, when I was 5—but by the time I was 7 I switched to drums. I don't really have a memory of playing saxophone. I started playing my grandfather's drum kit—he passed away before I was born—because they were in the house. My dad would set them up—he also played when he felt like it. One day I started playing and he said, "Wow, I think she has something." He noticed I was able to keep time, so he showed me what he could. Then he took me to a beginners' instructor, and I went on from there.

Were there any female drummers you looked to as role models?

There really weren't many. The only one I knew of—and I met her at a festival—was Dottie Dodgion. There were other female players by the time I got to high school, and Cindy Blackman was at Berklee.

Did you always play jazz?

I also played blues shuffles. My dad would put on a record and I would play along with them, mostly to organ trios and things like that. Then I graduated to more swing-oriented stuff and the shuffle backbeat.

How is playing jazz different?

You're holding the groove together, but you're able to improvise as you go, so you're not just a timekeeper. You have to have more of a natural instinct for the balance of keeping time and making other colors come about. You're improvising the whole time.

Who taught you valuable lessons?

Jack DeJohnette was my mentor and friend, and also Wayne Shorter—I played with Wayne when I was 21. But all along the way I was learning things. I played with the New York Jazz Quartet, with Roland Hanna and Frank Wess. I learned from Pharoah Sanders, Lester Bowie, Stan Getz, Joe Sample, Herbie Hancock. And I learned a lot about how to play with singers from Al Jarreau.

Why did you join the Berklee faculty?

I was always thinking of coming back because my parents were here in Boston

Like many drummers, Terri Lyne Carrington loves playing her instrument, but when it comes to setting them up she's perfectly content to leave it to the techs. "I don't travel with drums. I don't like to carry them. I had enough of that when I was in my 20s!" she says. "If I'm going on a big tour, there'll be a tech. If I'm not, I have drums provided by the venue—part of my rider is for Yamaha drums to be there."

When Carrington is performing with her ACS trio (with bassist Esperanza Spalding and pianist Geri Allen), she requests an 18-inch Yamaha bass drum, 10-, 12- and 14-inch toms and a 5- or 5 1/2-inch snare drum. "With that setting I would have Remo Ambassador heads on all the drums, including the bass drum," she says. "If I'm playing more groove-oriented stuff, something more powerful, I would play a 22-inch bass drum, and I would have a Powerstroke head on that. I would still have the 10-, 12- and 14-inch toms and use coated Ambassador or Remo Emperor heads."



Her cymbals are all Zildjian. "I designed a high-definition ride cymbal for Zildjian, she says, "so I play that mostly in more groove-oriented settings. In a jazz setting I play Constantinople rides."

Carrington largely avoids electronics, preferring the natural sound of a standard drum kit. Although, "When I was with Herbie Hancock's band, I played a few pads to trigger sounds or a Roland SPD-11," she says.

MUSICIAN



Reuters/Hero Kalis/Landov

Onstage at the XVI Jazz Festival in Valencia, Spain, 2012

'In jazz, you're holding the groove together but you're able to improvise, so you're not just a timekeeper?'

and my grandmother was getting older—she passed at 99. When Roger Brown became president of Berklee, he came to L.A. to meet with alumni and invited me back. I teach private lessons and ensemble and group classes, which we call labs, and I work with the Berklee Global Jazz Institute. I'm also the artistic director of Berklee's BeanTown Jazz Festival and Summer Jazz Workshop, a 12-week program that recruits kids from all over the world—they audition and I hand-pick 16 kids, eight per band.

Any favorite studio stories?

One great memory was recording the *Gershwin's World* album with Herbie. Herbie was very late, so I was with Stevie

Wonder and Joni Mitchell, who were also on the session. Just watching her in the studio, playing piano and learning "The Man I Love"—that was a nice experience. I knew her because she was tight with Wayne Shorter, but just watching her work was very cool. Another time I was doing something for Bill Cosby with [pianist] Danilo Perez, and Bill wanted a certain sound. He was thinking about Monk, and he was trying to explain it to Danilo, and he started playing. He wasn't playing the right notes at all. He was just trying to explain what he wanted, but he did it in a way that Danilo understood exactly what he wanted. It gives you a feeling for the musicality that people can have without actually being musicians.

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

Female drummers have always been relatively scarce, but Terri Lyne Carrington insists that she's rarely encountered sexist comments regarding her choice of instrument. "I didn't really deal with a lot of that," she says. "At first I was too young to notice if that was going on, and by the time I was able to notice I was playing OK enough that people wouldn't say anything."

If anything, Carrington was encouraged to pursue the drums. "I was very fortunate because my dad was a musician and he knew a lot of musicians," she continues. "They would let me sit in and play with them. Maybe I'm oblivious to it, but even when people write articles about me I don't often see myself referred to as a 'female drummer.' Besides, if they have a big picture of me in an article, it's pretty obvious. Honestly, I think people's consciousness has risen, in general. I see it in all areas of life."

GOO GOO DOLLS | FILTER | MEGADETH | NATALIE MAINES



ROD STEWART
Comeback Time

STEVE EARLE
Gets Low

INDIA ARIE
My way

JOE SATRIANI
Can't stop

+ WIN \$25,000 RECORDING SESSION