



NY Press Music Blog

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William Parker at Symphony Space Tonight

Beginning tonight, the Vision Collaboration Festival offers a feast on forward-thinking jazz in a three-concert series at Symphony Space headlined respectively by luminaries William Parker, Roy Campbell and Charles Gayle. Besides featuring the headliners in don't-miss group configurations that include musicians of comparable stature—Billy Bang, Eri Yamamoto, Hamid Drake—each night is rich with various other hot collaborations as well as dance.

As the name implies, this event works as a scaled-down wintertime extension of the multi-venue Vision Festival, an annual summer ritual that in its 10-plus years has come to serve as a beacon for the worldwide avant-garde/experimental jazz community. As expected, several of the appearing musicians are Vision Fest alums and have creative ties to each other that, in some cases, go back decades.

Bassist/multi-instrumentalist William Parker plays with his band, Raining On The Moon, a sextet which earlier this year released *Corn Meal Dance*, a thrilling album that hugs the precipices between flaming swing grooves, zero-gravity free jazz, gospel and heady, panoramic atmospheres. Like his fellow headliners, the extent of Parker's vision and accomplishment is too much to encapsulate quickly without selling him short. Born in the Bronx, Parker has been a fixture of NYC's avant-garde community since the 1970s, studied under Jimmy Garrison, played with Cecil Taylor, played in the now-defunct David S. Ware Quartet, and leads his own groups, not to mention helps facilitate the Vision Festival along with the festival's founder, dancer-choreographer Patricia Nicholson, his wife.

Parker has enjoyed higher visibility over the past 15 years or so thanks to a string of releases on a number of labels—most notably his new home, Brooklyn-based label AUM Fidelity—that have coincided with surging interest in modern jazz among younger listeners. It's no surprise that this run of albums challenges the ear, but there's also a palpable hunger for exploration—musically and otherwise—that brings the music within reach of the non-aficionado. (Aficionados, casual fans and listeners willing to go on an adventure: skip the rest of this text and just high-tail it down to the performance.) Parker can go from paradigm-shattering abstraction to heavy swing and back and stop in myriad other worlds along the way, which is part of what makes him a good bet for anyone looking to expand their boundaries but still come away feeling grounded. With his bow-scraping technique, Parker sometimes evokes the excruciating ecstasy of rapture. Other times, he pinpoints beauty and melody in abrasion. Others, he just sounds badass.

Additionally, he doesn't just talk about a full-on global consciousness shift but seeks to actually bring it on via his work. Two of his albums, for example, explore the historical, psychic, and quantum connections between the Olmec (pre-Mayan/Aztec) and West African Manding civilizations and the living intelligence of DNA. So it's not a knock by any means to sum up his work and intentions in the immortal words of Tommy Chong: "Heavy, man."

Vision Collaboration Festival feat. William Parker, Roy Campbell & Charles Gayle, Jan. 10–12, Symphony Space 2537 Broadway (at 95th St.), 212-864-5400, www.visionfestival.org; 7:30, \$20/\$25 (each day).