

Tom Teasley: Biography

Almost from the outset, Tom Teasley has brought percussion up from the background, profoundly demonstrating its strength in solo performance. He is “a percussionist in the widest and most exuberant sense” says the Washington Post, calling his contribution to D.C.’s Contemporary Music Forum “the evening’s dazzler”. He’s a “creative bonanza,” claims Bruce Wittet in Modern Drummer Magazine; “... give Tom a bass drum, a snare drum and a djembé and he’ll give you part Stravinsky, part Art Blakey.”

He started with jazz, blues, funk, pop and European classical music. Early in his career he toured with the United States Navy Band. He recorded and performed nationally with blues artist Catfish Hodge and jazz legend Professor Longhair. A focus on ethnic percussion led to studies with Glen Velez, Trichy Sankaran, Yacub Addy, Frank Malabe, and jazz study with celebrated drummer Joe Morello. Emerging with virtuoso skill over a wide range of instruments and musical styles, the Kennedy Center selected him as artist-in-residence, and he recorded nine performances there. He has also served as artist-in-residence at the Kreeger Museum of Art, collaborating in multi-media presentations with visual artists. He collaborated with the National Symphony Orchestra as both a composer and soloist in Robert Kapalow’s “Citypiece” which was aired on NPR and was the subject of a documentary for public television. He has developed several highly regarded workshops and clinics. Young Audiences of Virginia named him Artist of the Year for his in-school programs across the state.

His lightening-speed agility and fluency with regional musical ideas, from tribal traditions to electronics, give him the creative means to go just about anywhere. His signature approach is to isolate a few key musical components and recombine them in new ways. He may spontaneously take an instrument or a rhythm pattern in its original style -- like blues or jazz -- and play it alongside traditional sounds from Brazil, the Middle East, ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, Africa, or India. Another approach is to use a technique original to an indigenous instrument (such as a doumbek), and perform it on an instrument from another place and time (such as on a hand drum synthesizer). Suddenly, limitless possibilities for new music and cultural interaction emerge.

Tom continues to explore instruments and playing techniques, and sharing them in workshops and clinics. PASIC (the Percussion Arts Society International Convention), broke with tradition to feature Tom’s presentations at the world’s largest gathering of percussionists three times. His innovative fusion of jazz, world and western classical music has earned him endorsements deals with Cooperman Drum, L.P. Music, Vic Firth sticks, Remo, Sabian Cymbals and Yamaha Concert Percussion.

As percussionist/composer for Word-Beat (www.word-beat.com), Tom collaborates with singer/actor Charles Williams in a critically acclaimed and inspiring presentation of original music and spoken word. They combine history’s greatest words about justice, peace, and life with music inspired by the writer’s culture of origin. Poetry and prose from Harlem, the Civil Rights Movement, ancient Africa, India, and the Middle East converge with the energy of jazz, folk, and modern music. Word-Beat’s two CDs have

garnered national airplay on radio, high praise among music critics. Word-Beat's first recording, *Poetry, Prose, Percussion and Song* was hailed as one of the most important of its kind at the 2007 International Association for Jazz Education conference. IAJE singled out Word-Beat as a leading collaboration in the integration of poetry and music, calling Word-Beat's recordings "must-haves." The duo's second CD, *The Soul Dances*, was nominated for the Washington Area Music Association's Best World Music Release award.

Currently Tom Teasley performs in the U.S. and Europe, teaches in a private studio, presents master classes and school programs, and holds a number of residencies. As artist-in-residence at the Levine School of Music in Washington, D.C., he presents concerts and master classes. A prolific composer and ensemble leader, he continues developing new pieces and recordings, with a ninth just released. He enjoys airplay on TV, film, and National Public Radio.