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Concert: Ithaca College Percussion Ensembles and Steel Bands

Ithaca College Percussion Ensemble

Ithaca College Steel Band

Conrad Alexander

Gordon Stout

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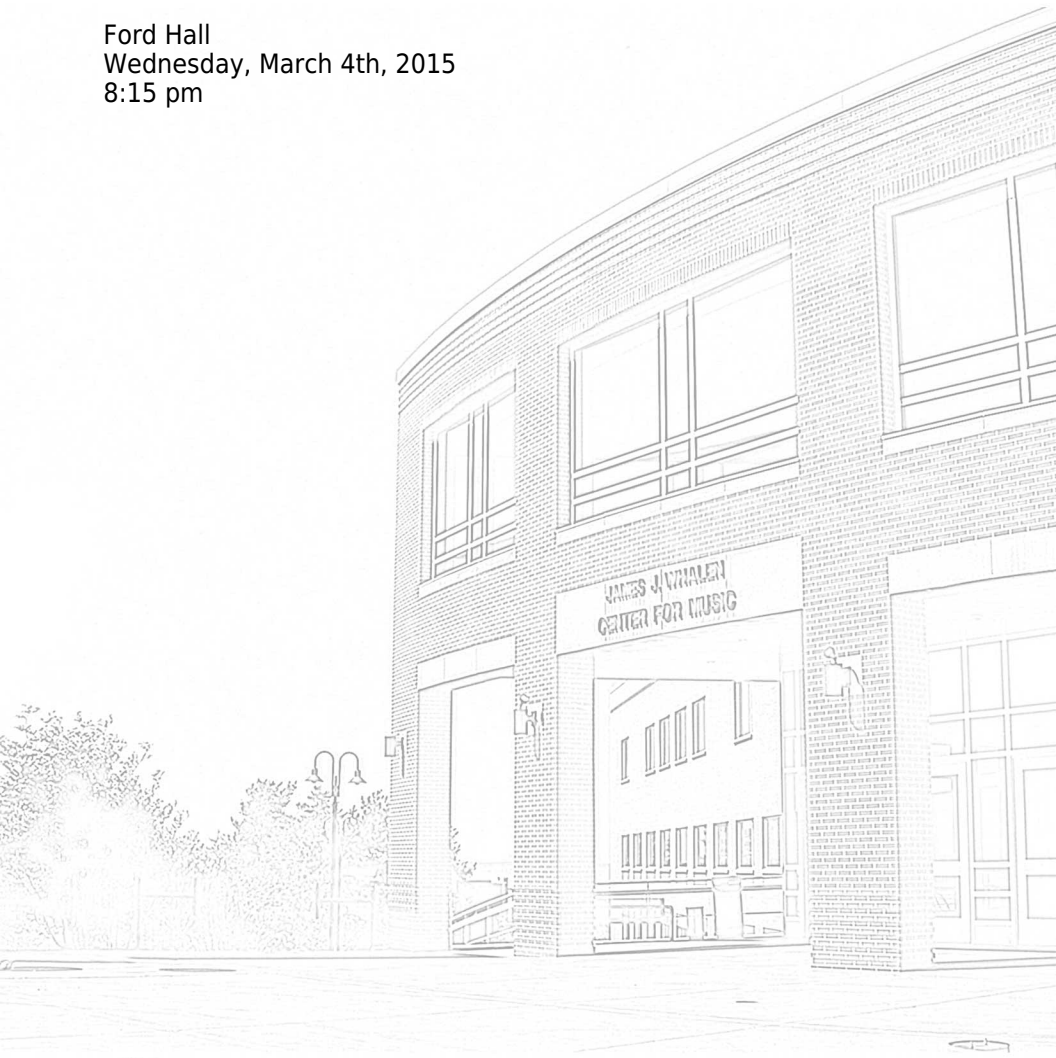
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Ithaca College Percussion Ensembles and Steel Bands
Conrad Alexander, Gordon Stout, Directors

With Special Guest: James Armstrong

Ford Hall
Wednesday, March 4th, 2015
8:15 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

Cantos para Elegua	Traditional Afro Haitian Arr. Armstrong
Yanvalou with songs to Legba	Traditional Afro Haitian Arr. Armstrong
Dancin' Down Green Street	James Armstrong
Bata with songs to Yemaya	Traditional Afro Cuban
Night in Old San Juan	James Armstrong
Vodou Suite for Solo Tambor	Traditional Afro Haitian Arr. Armstrong
Kongo Music	Traditional Afro Haitian
Bata with songs to Obatala	Traditional Afro Cuban
Merengue Se Atreve	Jorge Cuevas Arr. Armstrong

James Armstrong

JAMES ARMSTRONG is a specialist in Haitian, Cuban, and West African folkloric drumming with over 20 years experience performing throughout the United States, Canada and abroad. He has done extensive study, teaching, and performing in Ghana, Senegal and Togo, West Africa and many regions throughout the Caribbean and Brazil. James is currently Master Tambor for the Sosyete du Marche, an American Vodou house in Philadelphia, PA and remains a sought after performer, lecturer and historian on West African based musics. Apart from his world music background he is an accomplished jazz vibraphonist, steel pan player, symphonic percussionist, and drumset player. James has toured and recorded with DMP artist Robert Hohner Percussion Ensemble, MARASSA DUO, Lili Añel, Tinkle-Tone recording artist CANTINERO, I-Town artist PASO FINO, Five Horse Johnson, Naked Eye Ensemble, Amaryllis Santiago, to name a select few and currently leads his own latin jazz quartet PANacea. James is the author of "Vodou Drumset: Applying Traditional Afro-Haitian Rhythms to the Drumset" and has published several articles on the subjects of Afro-Caribbean folkloric music. His percussion compositions are available through Drop6 Media, House Panther Press, and Academy Music Publications.

James Armstrong earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Central Michigan University and a Master of Music Performance (emphasis in jazz studies and ethnomusicology) from Bowling Green State University. He is currently Instructor of Percussion at Millersville University where he teaches applied percussion, West African Music and Dance, and is Artistic Director of Summer Music Camps. James has previously held positions at Cornell University, University of Toledo, and Central Michigan University. Mr. Armstrong is a Latin Percussion, Yamaha, Sabian, and Vic Firth artist and appears worldwide as a clinician and performer representing those companies.

Program Notes

Cantos para Elegua

Batá drums are the most sacred and complex ritual music of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. Salute rhythms are performed for each the gods (*orichas*) and act as unique, musical prayers. The origins of batá drumming come from the Yoruba peoples of West Africa. Usually played in a trio setting, batá drumming is one of the cornerstones of Afro-Cuban drumming. Eleguá, associated with the catholic Saint Anthony or Saint Roque, is the guardian of the crossroads and the first oricha to be saluted by rhythm and song in a ceremony.

Yanvalou with songs to Legba

Yanvalou is one of the primary *rada* rhythms found in the music of Haitian Vodou. A deeply rooted tradition, Vodou means “great spirit” and comes from the *Fon* speaking people of West Africa. Much like Eleguá in Afro-Cuban Santería, the *Iwa* (deity in vodou) Legba is the opener of doors.

Dancin’ Down Green Street

The composer writes: “Dancin’ Down Green Street” takes its name from a one-way street leading into downtown Ithaca. Once upon a time there was a local establishment located on Green Street that many of the Cornell University Steel Band members used to frequent after rehearsals. One evening as I returned from a gig I happened to pass this establishment, and much to my surprise, saw one of the SB members dancing down the side of the road. At the very next rehearsal I consulted this person about their activities, only to learn that he had recently passed his ‘A’ exams (needed for completion of graduate work) and thought that dancing down Green St. was an appropriate celebration for the moment. The following week I passed out a piece I had been working on for the band to read, which was yet to be titled. It was a unanimous decision by the band to title the piece “Dancin’ Down Green Street.”

Batá with songs to Yemayá

The Afro-Cuban oricha Yemayá is the symbol of motherhood and fertility. Often seen as a water goddess, she encompasses all powers of the sea. The toques (batá rhythms) Yakotá and Sokutá Nibo will accompany songs in her honor.

A Night In Old San Juan

Imagine a beautiful mid-December evening, gazing out over the ocean, and walking along an uncrowded beach with only the stars and the moonlight to guide your path. "A Night In Old San Juan" was inspired by this very scenario. San Juan is a beautiful old Spanish city with plenty of activity any time of day and has since become one of the composers favorite places to visit.

Vodou Suite for Solo Tambor

The battery found in Haitian Vodou drumming is most commonly comprised of three drums: maman (lead drum), seconde (mid-support drum), boula (high support drum), ogan (bell) and sometimes bass (low pitched drum). All three of these play an integral role in melodic and harmonic context of the music. Here, all three parts will be played by one drummer (solo tambor) providing accompaniment for a variety of songs honoring the lwa.

Kongo Music

Kongo music is very stylistically and structurally prevalent in Haitian Vodou drumming. Both the drumming and dance is highly energetic and retains the identity of the nation it represents. Songs are sung to the Kongo Queen honoring her many manifestations.

Batá with songs to Obatalá

The general toques of Wardo and Ijesa are commonly used to accompany songs in honor of the king of orichas, Obatalá. Obatalá is said to have created the world and be responsible for human existence. With white as his colors representing purity and justice, he is associated with Our Lady of Mercy, and is very popular in the New York area.

Merengue Se Atreve

Jorge Cuevas was born in New York City and grew up in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. "Merengue Se Atreve" was influenced by his time spent in Puerto Rico and in the Dominican Republic. The tune was originally written for a salsa band and later adapted for steel band. The chorus (letter B) can be translated as: "Merengue se atreve (Merengue dares), Merengue se mueve (Merengue moves), Merengue si puede moverte con ritmo (Merengue can move you with rhythm)." The composer writes this about the piece:

"I was in Upstate N.Y. on my way to a gig in my old Ford band van on a very cold night. I stopped at a traffic light wishing that I were dancing at a beach in Puerto Rico or in The Dominican Republic. Right away I started to hear the possibilities of "Merengue Se Atreve."

Personnel

Spenser Forwood
Shannon Frier
Lillian Fu
Andrew Garay
Kengo Ito
Taylor Katanick
Jamie Kelly
Kellen King
William Marinelli
Julia McAvinue
Nick Merillat
Daniel Monte
Taylor Newman
Dennis O'Keefe
Ken O'Rourke
Brandi Shepart
Tom Smith
Corinne Steffens
Rose Steenstra
Kate Vorel
Derek Wohl