

Abbey Rader Generations Quartet at Audiotheque

BY GEORGE FISHMAN



On the band leader Abbey Rader's Website, the link to information about his Buddhist meditation and martial arts practices precedes that for his music. In a husky Bronx-accented voice, he laughed it off, saying that nothing is permanent, and that this ranking could change tomorrow. A veteran of decades on the jazz circuit, Rader is also a long time practitioner of Buddhist meditation and a Tai Chi teacher.

"In martial arts you have to empty yourself. In Buddhism the self doesn't exist. The self is in your way, so to have an empty mind you can defend yourself, or you can just be who you really are, which is nothing. And in music if you empty yourself you can interact and improvise and you can allow the spiritual energy to come through you. You're sort of a conduit for playing the music."

The most recent Audiotheque concert, hosted by South Florida Composer's Alliance (SFCA) and Subtropics Music Festival director Gustavo Matamoros — a sound artist himself — featured the Abbey Rader Generations Quartet, a locally based instrumental ensemble whose leader's origins are in the '70s bebop style of such notables as John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman. His two horn players, John McMinn and Noah Brandmark, go way back as well. Meanwhile, the youngest band member is genre-hopping composer/bassist Kyle Motl, a recent Florida International University music school grad, who's interested in both electronic sound and Tuvan throat singing. Do these puzzle pieces create a coherent picture?

In the Audiotheque's small, but acoustically balanced performance space overlooking Lincoln Road, the quartet members chatted with a congenial audience, then launched into an emotionally diverse set that began at a high key and rolled through moods of contemplation, periods of improvised call and response between the horns, gentle airiness and piercing, synchronized melodic lines. Rhythms — from Rader's extensive percussion "tool chest" and from Motl's bowed and plucked bass — are rarely discernible as a beat. Instead, pulses and waves, interspersed with staccato shots, flow among the arpeggios, growls and sweet melodic lines of McMinn and Brandmark's saxophones, bass clarinets and piccolo.

Besides the usual drum kit, Rader has an array of hand drums. He fondly invokes their roots connection. "You can hear that 'fa-kata-fa-kata,' that's the ride cymbal. Tang-a-dang-tang-a-dang. So, a lot of what we're playing has been influenced by these wonderful African hand drummers. They didn't have snare drums. That's a marching invention; that's an invention for going to war. Thrup-da-rup-da-rup; let's go kill each other!" But, in fact, he plays both.

Kyle Motl's role is certainly not limited to the walking bass supporting role. He's an experimenter who pulls all manner of sounds from his instrument, and he revels in his opportunity to join seasoned band mates. "I started playing with Abbey and playing this music at a really integral point, and it's really affected both the way that I play and the way that I think about

playing. In this situation we're playing without any preconceived notion about what we're going to do, and it's really a matter of getting out of your own way and not thinking about what you're doing. Just listen and play what's going on."

But when pressed about preconceptions and structure, Rader hedged a bit. Some of the band's "tunes" *have* names. Their loosely established structures provide reference points of tonal dynamics, pacing, instrumentation – all subject to change.

Preconceptions also underlie the musician's training and practice, allowing him to unthinkingly produce a desired sound. "I spent 20 years playing other people's songs in different ways, but that's not the level of the higher martial arts and that's not the level of the higher music."

That "higher music" doesn't necessarily bring higher popularity and bookings, but promoters like Matamoros and Steve Malagodi have tirelessly sought audiences and venues for Rader and others who populate the outer orbits of the musical solar system.

It's a tough road anywhere, but especially in Miami. "Real estate prices are high; the cost of keeping a venue open is very high; the audiences are very small and it's expensive to bring people in," said Malagodi, producer and retired public radio host.

In hosting experimental music performances, as with his own compositions, Matamoros assembles sound elements that are not often heard together, so that our listening evolves. But he sees Audiotheque as a different proposition from festivals like Subtropics, with their long lead times and complex planning. "Now what I am proposing to do here — it's open space that remains open for the thing that's happening tomorrow. It's a laboratory where things can get created, get presented, get tested. And then the audience becomes part of the process."

As friends gathered to carry his drum cases out to the car, Rader remarked, "As far as musical support, you're looking at it – in this room. Today it makes me feel good... I can disappear."

On June 8, the New York-based sound-centric performance duo On Structure, presented by the FETA Foundation and SFCA, takes the Audiotheque stage, 924 Lincoln Road, Studio 201, Miami Beach at 8:00 p.m.; go to [www. http://subtropics.org](http://subtropics.org) for more information.

Photo: The musicians from left: Kyle Motl, John McMinn, Abbey Rader, Noah Brandmark