

Adam Rudolph
Interview Page 104

Gon Bops Alex Acuña Congas
And Bongos Reviewed Page 112

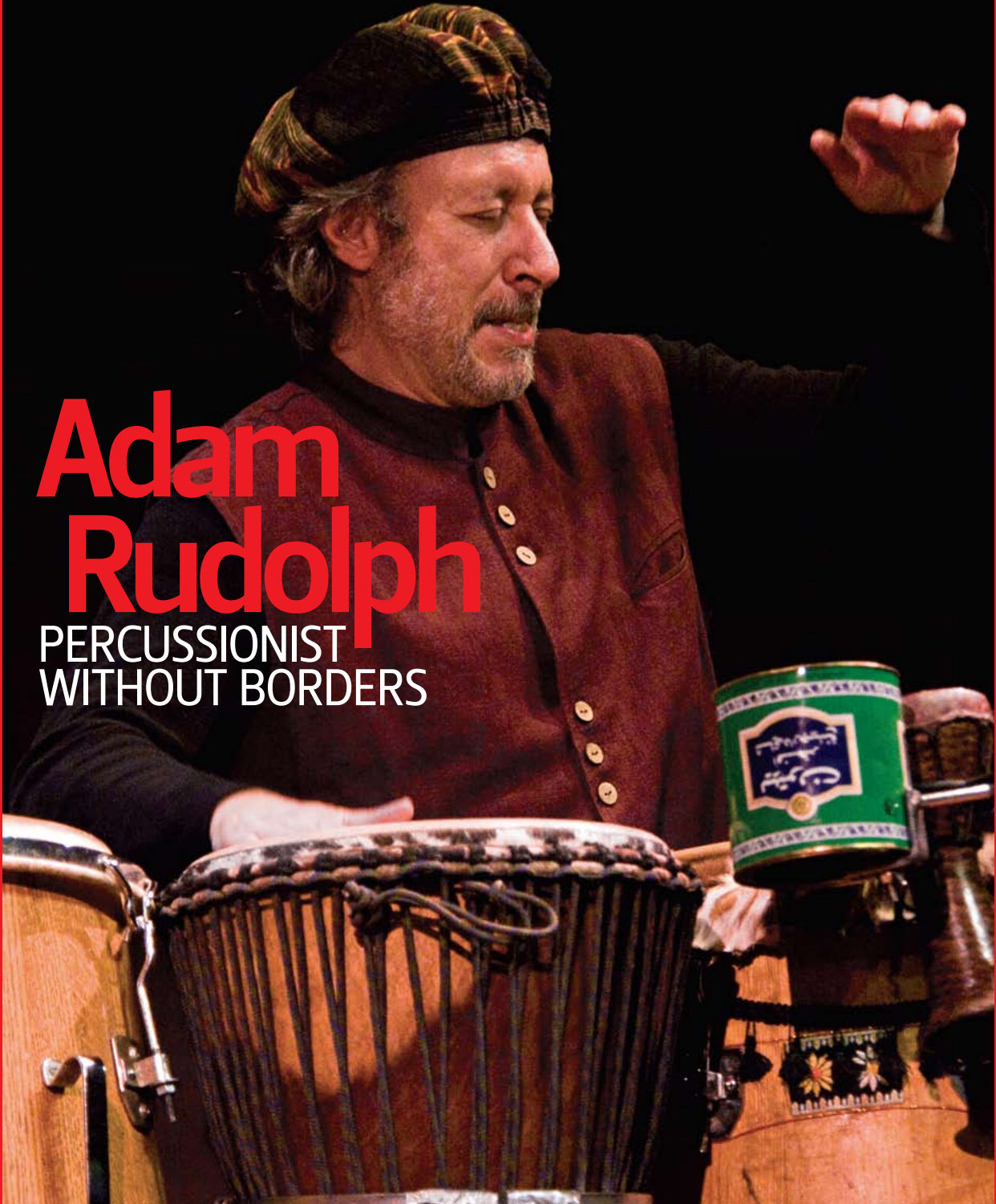


Lessons with Richie "Gajate" Garcia,
Glen Caruba, And Taku Hirano Page 114

hand drum

Adam Rudolph

PERCUSSIONIST
WITHOUT BORDERS



Percussion

In The Moment ... EVERY MOMENT

BY KRISTIN BARTUS

Adam Rudolph is one mellow dude. Even as the sounds of buzzing doorbells, honking

horns, and blaring car alarms blast through the windows of his sublet Brooklyn brownstone, the veteran hand drummer maintains a laidback vibe throughout a two-hour phone interview. In an unwaveringly chilled-out voice, he often describes things as “beautiful” – the feeling of striking a drum, the experience of children reciting poetry as he plays music, and the fact that we have the opportunity to have such a lengthy conversation today. It’s not surprising to learn that 52-year-old Rudolph has been practicing meditative Hatha yoga for more than 30 years. He finds yoga beautiful too. If you check out his videos on YouTube, Rudolph even looks mellow while he’s drumming – although he’s having such a good time, he can’t help breaking out into a big smile every once in a while.

Rudolph is so low-key that, in spite of having a 30-plus-year hand-drumming career and being hailed as a pioneer in fusing jazz and world music, he says he still feels very much like he did as a young drummer. “It’s a process,” Rudolph explains. “There’s always something more to learn. I intuited at a very young age that if I was going to continue to evolve

as a drummer, I should learn everything I possibly could about this phenomenon of rhythm. I’m very much in a

similar place, in a certain way, as I was then, in the sense that my ideas lead my technique. When I get an idea from the cosmos or wherever the source is, I have to figure out a way to play it.”

While he may feel like the same drummer he was way back when, his insanely

lengthy discography (he’s appeared on at least 100 albums) proves that he’s had plenty of accomplishments along the way. Rudolph’s latest release, *Dream Garden*, features his own compositions performed by his octet, Adam Rudolph’s Moving Pictures. *The Boston Globe* called the album “world jazz of the highest caliber.” Rudolph actually prefers not to use the word “jazz” when describing his music (“contemporary improvised music” is preferable), but he certainly doesn’t let semantic disputes raise his ire. He’s got more important things

RUDOLPH'S RIG

Infographic by Josh Sukov



DRUMS Valje (from mid-'60s)

- 1 18.5" x 9" Contemporanea zabumba (Brazil)
- 2 12.5" x 30" Tumba with thin cowhide
- 3 12" x 30" Tumba with thick goatskin
- 4 4-5" x 8.5" Tarijas (Morocco) with goatskin
- 5 7.5" x 10.5" Dumbek (Jordan) with goatskin
- 6 11.5" x 30" Conga with thin cowhide
- 7 12.5" x 24" Djembe (Ivory Coast) with antelopeskin

PERCUSSION

- A 15.5" Cymbal (Turkey)
- B Tea Tin (India)
- C Iron Bells (Nigeria)

Adam Rudolph also uses Tama hardware.

to devote his energy to, like where his musical intuition is going to lead him next.

Getting The Point. Rudolph was 14 years old when he first discovered hand drums. He and his family lived in Hyde Park on the south side of Chicago. His dad, though not a musician, loved music and went to concerts constantly. He took young Adam to hear giants like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Max Roach, and Mongo Santamaria. Rudolph's music studies began with classical piano, but piano didn't get him going like drums did. There was a place in his neighborhood called The Point, a grassy peninsula on Lake Michigan where hand drummers from the local black community used to hang out and play. Rudolph was drawn to their rhythms.

"It was intuitive, and the cultivation of intuition is so important. I was attracted to the drums. They called to me. And I can't even, now, to this day, explain to you why, but they did. And I always had a natural affinity. It came to me easily."

After he got hooked on drums at The Point, Rudolph connected with a teacher who taught him Afro Cuban and Afro Haitian drumming. But Rudolph never had a desire to be a hand drummer in any particular tradition. He wanted to play what people call jazz – and what he calls contemporary improvised music – on the hand drums, but he says there was no real precedent for what he wanted to do. The wide-open field excited him.

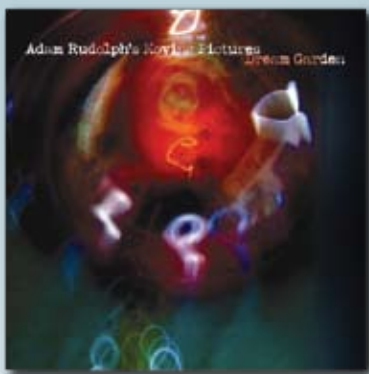
"I had to learn how [traditional hand drum] music was structured, what the underlying ideas were, and be able to adapt that and develop it to play my own ideas in music. In other words, in so-called jazz, the whole idea is to have your own voice, to develop your own voice. And that's always been my goal – in whatever I've studied, in different drum traditions – has always been with an eye toward developing and cultivating my own voice on the hand drums."



Rudolph started playing his Valje congas around Chicago at age 16 with a "great woodwind player" named Malawi Nurdurdin, and Fred Anderson, a tenor saxophonist. "Both of those musicians were really open to bringing young musicians into the tradition. You know, this music, this so-called jazz, is really an oral tradition. It's the elder musicians, when they open up their groups to younger musicians, it gives you an opportunity to learn not only about the music, but about creative approaches.

So I was really grateful that I've had these wonderful mentors at a very young age."

When he graduated from high school at 16, Rudolph mentally had his drums packed and ready to move to New York, but his parents insisted that he first go to college. Rudolph chose Oberlin College, a small school in Ohio. There he created his own degree program in ethnomusicology, based on everything he was interested in as an artist at the time. In addition to focusing on the music of



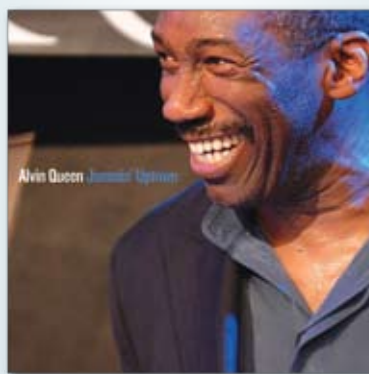
Adam Rudolph's Moving Pictures Dream Garden

"World jazz of the highest caliber."

-Boston Globe

"Adam Rudolph is percussion master; *Dream Garden* is a career achievement for Rudolph, one that should finally make the jazz world sit up and take notice."

-All Music Guide



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various cultures, he also studied mallets and jazz. His improvisation instructor, Charles Moore, a horn player who came down from Detroit twice a week, recognized Rudolph's dedication and began inviting him to play with his Contemporary Jazz Quintet on week-ends. Rudolph also spent a semester in New York City, where he explored djembe, Afro Haitian drumming, and tabla.

Going To The Source. Upon finishing his degree at Oberlin in 1976, Rudolph returned to Chicago. He continued to perform with his old pals in Chicago and Detroit while driving a taxi as his day job. His goal was to save up enough money to travel to Africa and learn more drumming traditions. He had heard about a school in Ghana where he could learn such traditions, and since they also spoke English there, Rudolph bought a one-way plane ticket.

"The amazing thing was, I spent a year there, and I never once even paid to sleep anywhere," Rudolph says. "People are so generous and hospitality is so central to the culture there, it was really an incredible experience."

His drumming experiences were just as incredible. "I studied drumming, but it wasn't even like learning the specific drumming [patterns] was the most important thing. The most important thing was experiencing the music and seeing the cultural context of the music and the meaning of the music — beyond music. I came to realize that music comes from something greater than music and can express something greater than music itself."

While in Ghana, Rudolph hit it off with a Gambian griot (hereditary musician), a kora player named Foday Musa Suso. They decided to start a band together, so they headed to Chicago and joined up with Rudolph's old friends

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



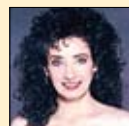
1975
Maulawi
MAULAWI



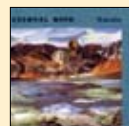
1977
Too Far To Whisper
SHADOWFAX



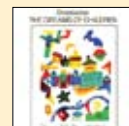
1979
Missing Link
FRED ANDERSON



1983
Lisa Popiel
LISA POPIEL



1984
Wasalu
ETERNAL WIND



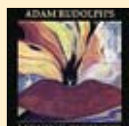
1985
Dreams Of Children
SHADOWFAX



1990
Notes Of A Native Son
LAQUAN



1991
Gift Of The Gnawa
HASSAN HAKMOUN WITH ADAM RUDOLPH



1992
Adam Rudolph's Moving Pictures
ADAM RUDOLPH'S MOVING PICTURES



1993
Indianism
THE INDIANS



1994
Skyway
ADAM RUDOLPH'S MOVING PICTURES



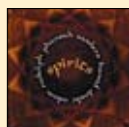
1997
World At Peace
YUSEF LATEEF/ADAM RUDOLPH



1998
Like The Dust
YUSEF LATEEF



1999
12 Arrows
ADAM RUDOLPH'S MOVING PICTURES



2000
Spirits
PHARDAH SANDERS



2003
Go: Organic Orchestra 1
ADAM RUDOLPH



2004
Beautiful
HU VIBRATIONAL



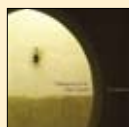
2004
Peace With Every Step
BUILD AN ARK



2004
Vista
SAM RIVERS



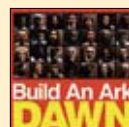
2005
Three
HANDS ON SEMBLE



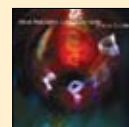
2006
Compassion
WADADA LEO SMITH/ADAM RUDOLPH



2007
Africa
LENI STERN



2007
Dawn
BUILD AN ARK



2008
Dream Garden
ADAM RUDOLPH'S MOVING PICTURES

Fred Anderson and jazz drummer Hamid Drake to form the Mandingo Griot Society. Rudolph invited jazz trumpeter Don Cherry to join the group as well because he had long been inspired by Cherry's world and jazz music explorations. The group recorded a self-titled first album for Flying Fish Records, which was considered a groundbreaking venture for its African-inspired fusion music. "We were one of the first groups to mix traditional music with our experiences in rhythm and blues and so-called jazz," Rudolph notes.

When asked if he felt like the Mandingo Griot Society recognized that they were creating something musically groundbreaking at the time, Rudolph responds, "As with all of these things, it was following my intuition and my heart and what inspired us."

Searching For Something. In 1979, following a touring stint with Cherry and an enlightening trip to Morocco, Rudolph made the move to California. His old

"MY PHILOSOPHY IS, YOU SHOOT THE ARROW AND YOU PAINT THE BULLSEYE AROUND IT"

friend Charles Moore from Detroit had moved to Los Angeles, and when Rudolph went out for a visit, he ended up never leaving. He and Moore decided to start a new group called the Eternal Wind, with which they put out three records of original compositions.

The '80s provided Rudolph with plenty of other playing opportunities as well. He continued to perform with Don Cherry and trumpeter Jon Hassell. Rudolph played with Moroccan gnawa musician Hassan Hakmoun as well, recording one of the first records that mixed gnawa music with contemporary "so-called jazz." He also met and began playing with his now close friend Yusef Lateef, a tenor and flute specialist with whom he has since recorded in the neighborhood of 20

albums. In addition, Rudolph did a little session work and a fair amount of touring with pals and collaborators.

In the mid '80s, Rudolph was invited to get his MFA at the California Institute Of The Arts, where his studies included composition and Balinese gamelan. After earning his degree, he stayed on to teach for a couple of years until his touring schedule prevailed. At the same time, Rudolph studied tabla very seriously with the master Taranath Rao and grew deeply involved in developing his own compositional and drumming languages. He continued to let his intuition guide his path.

"When I went to Africa, I didn't know quite where that was going to lead. Or when I got involved in these musi-

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cal situations, I didn't really know quite where it was going to go. My philosophy is, you shoot the arrow and you paint the bullseye around it. Your arrow is the intuition. It's being in tune with your own artistic muse and knowing what that is. It has to do with knowing the self, the greater self, and really acknowledging that and honoring that and letting that inspire and move you into what kind of choices you make."


Influence Of Big Black. In the early '90s Rudolph met one of the most important influences on his music – the master hand drummer Big Black. According to Rudolph, Big Black's drumming is completely based on the jazz tradition.

"That really blew my mind," he says. "Because I had been, as I said, developing my own language on hand drums and there was really no precedent for it. I had been listening to people like Don Alias with Miles and Mtume with Miles and Juma Santos and really appreciated what they were doing, but I was trying to reach beyond the Afro Cuban tradition to develop a real language in so-called jazz. When I heard Big Black, it was the first time I heard somebody who really had developed a uniquely American – or Afro American – approach to hand drumming.

"When I met him I saw that he had a lot of finger technique that he had developed," Rudolph explains. "I was able to adapt a lot of that – because I had been studying tabla, so I already had finger technique – and bring a lot of finger technique into the hand drumming. Also, his approach was such that you could really be free on the hand drums to play your own ideas in the moment. You weren't locked into playing patterns.

"His approach allowed me to go further toward developing my own voice. It wasn't like I was going to sound like him or play like him, but that approach, the fundamental hand positions and hand movements and the integration of finger technique into it, liberated me further toward developing my own voice on the instrument."

Big Black also inspired Rudolph to make some major changes in how he approached his whole setup. "First of all, he played standing, which I



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found out was a much more practical way to do things, so I started playing standing up,” Rudolph explains. “And he also had his low drums on the left, so he set his drums up like a piano – low to high – where Afro Cuban drummers usually put their low drums on the right. That opens up your right hand to do a lot of these things like from tablas and to develop more independence and equality in the functionality between your left and right hand.”

Moving Pictures. Around the same time as his mind-blowing introduction to Big Black, Rudolph burst forward with a number of new outlets for the compositional and drumming languages he had been working on developing since the 1970s. Rudolph created Adam Rudolph’s Moving Pictures as a medium-sized vehicle to express his compositional ideas. The group has varied in number over the years, but generally has involved up to eight wind players and percussionists (including Rudolph himself) in an

improvisational environment performing works informed by varied music traditions from around the world.

The Los Angeles Festival gave Rudolph another creative outlet when they commissioned him to bring together and lead a group of international percussionists. He continues to work with that group, called Vashti, annually. Rudolph began his own record label, Meta Records, during that time as well, giving him the freedom to release his music when he so desired.

The ’90s brought musical collaborations with his family too. In 1995 he and his artist wife, Nancy Jackson, created an opera called *The Dreamer*. As for his daughter, Hannah, she performed at Moving Pictures’ L.A. concerts for about five years.

“I gave her a selection of percussion instruments – little bird calls and small percussion and she would perform with us,” he says with obvious pride in his voice. “Just because I felt like ... musicians make professionalism a religion. I don’t really believe in that. I feel like

music is something for everybody to participate in. And kids, if they’re in a state of naturalness, they know what to do. She was always cool. She never overplayed and always played in the right moment. Finally, when she got older and more self-conscious, she said she wasn’t doing it anymore.”

Busier Than Ever. These days, Rudolph continues to keep himself busy with new and evolving creative outlets as a drummer, composer, and conductor. While he was still living in L.A. in 2001, he put together a large ensemble called Go: Organic Orchestra – ranging from 15–35 wind, string, percussion, and brass musicians – to perform more of his compositional explorations. Now that he’s moved to New York, he conducts a different group of musicians in the Orchestra and the membership has ballooned to 50.

He’s also working with a smaller hip-hop and world percussion group called Hu Vibrational. In his spare

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than free jazz, much more dynamic than fusion, and it brings the world back home. Through complex rhythmic patterns and brilliant instrumentation, *Dream Garden* is a vibrant collage that's soulful, edgy, and refreshingly spiritual."

On *Dream Garden* Rudolph culls a delightful variety of influences into a cohesive whole. Hot, old-school horn sounds combine with low and rollicking hand drums on one song. Later on, things get dusky and mysterious with strings and flavors of the Middle East. Rudolph's old pal Hamid Drake adds an air of cool on the traditional trap set. A funky downtown groove with some Indian flair closes the album out.

In addition to his everyday instruments in his self-proclaimed "hand-drumset," Rudolph plays an assortment of other percussion instruments from around the world on the album, like naqqara drums, qarqaba (metal castanets), and mbiras (thumb pianos). "I'm always looking for color and motion, what things have a certain kind of sound that elicit something, evoke something," he explains.

In The Moment. Rudolph still loves to look for new instruments when he travels, but only handmade ones. It's the handmade drums that truly have a unique sound. Plus, it's fun. "Your drums should be like a potato chip," he says. "When you eat a potato chip, you want one more. When I strike a drum, I want that one where I just want to play it more and more."

His goal is to *keep* playing. "Just to keep growing and keep creating as long as I'm breathing is really what it's all about," he says cheerfully. "They say each day dawns but once, so what I play on my drums is different every day.

"I feel like a lot of the traditional rhythms and the studies that I've done, it's sort of like you eat them and they become part of your cellular structure, so I don't really try and play particular rhythms with names on them anymore. But they come out. It's like food - it becomes part of your cellular structure. So they come out in my playing in ways that often-times surprise me. My whole idea is I want to be free when I play, so that any idea I have, I can express it to enhance the musical moment." ■

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