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SHIRAZETTE TINNIN TAKES THE LEAD

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Shirazette Tinnin

by Ken Micallef

This drummer has put no small amount of her rich life experiences into her scalding solo debut.

Shirazette Tinnin's *Humility: Purity of My Soul* is that rare album that arrives with no warning but announces a fresh drumming talent and an equally gifted composer and arranger. Released concurrently (and sharing some personnel) with bassist Mimi Jones' *Balance* and saxophonist Camille Thurman's *Origins*, *Humility* is a complete statement, an album that expresses styles as diverse as Brazilian and Afro-Peruvian music, jazz-funk à la Herbie Hancock's *Headhunters*, and classic straight-ahead. Tinnin has studied orchestral percussion academically and Afro-Peruvian music with a cajon master; her svelte Tony Williams-meets-David Garibaldi style is as compelling as it is fiery.

"My goal for the album was to bring all my influences to bear," Tinnin says from her home base of Brooklyn, New York. "But you're influenced by so many genres as a drummer. I wanted to create a blend and to express the Peruvian rhythms—which are important because of their connection to African rhythms and the blues—and how Peruvian jazz came to be part of

my playing. I love the history of all the drummers like Buddy Rich and Terri Lyne Carrington and Tony Williams and Cindy Blackman. A lot of people are surprised that my album is so melodic; they expect more percussion and for it to be drum heavy. But I'm a very melodic player. If I don't know the melody, I don't feel comfortable playing the song."

Using matched, traditional, and French grip as needed, the ever-versatile Tinnin has developed an interesting series of warm-up and stretching routines, subjects she's explored in *Modern Drummer* Health & Science columns. "I've been focusing on relaxing and breathing," she reports. "I was feeling discomfort in my left hand because I'd been playing so much. One relaxation exercise I've learned is the drop-grab, where you let the stick drop, then you grab it, then repeat. I also do fist squeezes to help my fingers and palms and forearms warm up before I play. I'll squeeze the sticks really hard, then release them. I do that slowly at first, then increase the speed. Then I have another exercise where I crawl up the stick with my fingers in both directions, which strengthens the forearms and the thumb muscles. And I do a lot of bouncing, letting the stick bounce in each hand. I do that while going from alternating singles to doubles to three strokes to quadruples in each hand. Eventually you're playing a buzz roll."

A North Carolina native, Tinnin earned her BA in music industry studies at Appalachian State University, then received her master's in music at Northern Illinois University. Working at a jazz festival in Peru in 2009, she met trumpeter Gabriel Alegría, who invited her to New York to join his Afro-Peruvian Sextet. Shirazette subsequently recorded Alegría's 2013 album, *Ciudad de los Reyes*, and has toured regularly with the group in the U.S. and Peru. Since moving to New York, she has also worked with Alicia Keys, Tia Fuller, Orrin Evans, and Hugh Masekela, as well as playing regular gigs with Camille Thurman and Mimi Jones. The drummer also leads the Shirazette Tinnin Experiment, featuring Thurman on sax, pianists Willerm Delisfort and Rachel Eckroth, guitarist Seth Johnson, and bassist Tom DiCarlo, and she holds down a steady burlesque house gig on New York's Bowery.

"Chicago has a different kind of swing from New York," Tinnin observes. "It's more laid-back, whereas New York is more intense and on fire. I got into free jazz in



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Tinnin plays Canopus Neo-Vintage series drums, including a maple natural oil 6.5x14 snare drum, an 18x20 or 14x18 bass drum, and 8x12 and 14x14 toms. Her collection of Sabian cymbals includes a 21" Will Calhoun Signature Ambient ride, a 22" AAX Omni ride, 13" and 15" AAX X-Celerator hi-hats, 13" Manhattan Jazz hi-hats, a 22" AAX Metal ride, and a 24" AA Bash ride. Her LP gear includes an Udongo II udu drum, Aspire Accents cajon, Aspire tunable djembe, Concert series bar chimes (thirty-six bars), Aspire Trap Table, Hi-Hat Shekere, Vibra-Tone, Multi-Stem Gajate Bracket, Percussion Table Triangle Hook Set, and 5" Pro triangle. Shirazette uses Vic Firth 7A sticks, timpani mallets, and brushes, and Evans EC2 heads.

Chicago, and that really opened me up a lot. But New York is more progressive; jazz is always going somewhere different."

Tinnin's sound, though steeped in the classic jazz-funk drummers—think Ndugu Chancler, Lenny White, Billy Cobham, or Harvey Mason—displays a biting leading edge, her drum strikes especially potent and snappy. Perhaps it's that Afro-Peruvian style coming through, a genre she has worked hard to master.

"When I joined Gabriel Alegría's sextet," Tinnin says, "I studied cajon with the top Peruvian percussionist Freddy 'Huevito' Lobatón. I had to learn all the rhythms on the cajon, then transfer them to the trap set. The band's previous drummer had transcribed all the cajon parts for drumset, but I still had to understand what I was playing. I had to change my drumming from a wet, jazzy approach to a drier one. It made me get drier cymbals. I had to learn the ins and outs of the cajon player, because in Afro-Peruvian music he actually is the lead player and the drums play the supporting role. Then, when the previous drummer left, I became the cajon

and drumset player."

Tinnin cites her *Humility* version of Eddie Harris's "Freedom Jazz Dance" as an example of her Afro-Peruvian-style drumming. (The track also features her cajon work.) Another cover, McCoy Tyner's "Passion Dance," finds her taking a potent drum solo—one of many on the album. But the bulk of *Humility* features the drummer's own compositions, including "Her Powerful Locs," which is one of her favorite pieces on the recording.

"Her Powerful Locs' has that funk-jazz thing happening," Shirazette says. "Perhaps that comes from my love of the Headhunters records. I'm also into Dave Garibaldi. I recorded with Peruvian percussion player Jhair Sala on that track as well, and hearing what he did with my ideas was beautiful. I felt the song really conveyed what I was trying to say. When I moved to Chicago I started growing my 'locs'—people call them dreadlocks, but they're really locs. It's been nine years, and now they're all the way down my back. They're *connected* to me."

