

Born to

DRUM

With a focus on
teaching and
entertaining,
artist-in-residence

Adonis Rose jazzes up
the local music scene



Watching Adonis Rose drum is an interactive experience. He transfers his energy to the audience with an inexhaustible spirit.

“Being a jazz musician gives me the freedom of expression in a way most people would not understand,” the soft-spoken New Orleans native says. “I can be whatever I want to be when I’m performing. I feel joy when I’m doing what I love to do and making people happy in the process.”

The third-generation drummer has been spreading musical joy almost as long as he’s been walking. His father gave him his first drum set when Adonis was 2, and he was touring by age 17.

Over the next dozen years, he played with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, three-time Grammy Award-winning entertainer Harry Connick Jr., Ellis Marsalis, Aaron Neville and Dr. John, to name a

few. He has four solo recordings and has performed on more than 50 recordings with saxophonist Donald Harrison, pianist Peter Martin, trumpeter Nicholas Payton, vocalist Phillip Manuel and trumpeter/keyboardist Irvin Mayfield.

Hailed by *New Orleans* magazine as a “Contemporary Jazz All-Star,” Rose has played with some of the world’s most esteemed jazz artists, including nine-time Grammy-winning trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

But these days he has a new passion: teaching. As jazz artist-in-residence for the Music Department, he’s in his fourth semester of instructing young musicians and working with the jazz ensembles.

“I’m having a great time,” he said. “My kids are working real hard, and I really love teaching.”

Earlier in his career, he occasionally taught at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, where he studied as a teenager under Ellis

BY SUE STEVENS

Marsalis and Clyde Kerr Jr. But he had no idea that teaching would one day take priority over touring.

When Rose graduated from New Orleans' Warren Easton High School in 1992, he received a four-year scholarship to the Berklee College of Music in Boston. But his heart told him to accept an invitation to tour with internationally renowned jazz trumpeter, bandleader, composer, arranger and Golden Globe-nominated film score composer Terence Blanchard.

For a while, he did both.

"Terence thought it would be a good idea for me to go to school," Rose said. "So I went two years to Berklee while touring."

The school accommodated him, but scheduling was a nightmare. Ultimately, touring won out. New Orleans, where jazz greats surrounded him, became home base again. And so it likely would have remained had fate not intervened in the form of Hurricane Katrina.

Rose came to the Metroplex in 2005 as a displaced Katrina victim. He and his wife found an apartment within a month, but he was set to go on tour again with Connick and needed a place to practice. A friend in New Orleans knew UT Arlington Jazz Studies Director Tim Ishii and suggested Rose ask him about practicing in the Music Building.

"In our initial conversation, Adonis mentioned he liked to teach, so I invited him to come hear a rehearsal of the Jazz Orchestra," Ishii said. "After he made some encouraging comments to the band, I knew that his presence could make a real difference in the jazz program."

Ishii immediately invited Rose to be the guest artist for the UT Arlington Jazz Festival and perform in a faculty jazz recital.

"I saw it as a fantastic opportunity for our students and faculty to perform with and learn from a world-class talent," Ishii said.

Rose, who created and played the drum arrangements for Spike Lee's 2007 HBO documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, says his Katrina-driven exodus from New Orleans changed his outlook on life.

"The experience taught me to appreciate what I have and to set higher goals for myself. Things can be fine one day and gone the next. I felt the need to contribute to the music I love by being a bandleader. Most musicians are comfortable being sidemen, therefore missing out on the potential of raising the bar creatively."

After spending almost his entire life in New Orleans, Rose took on the challenge of strengthening Tarrant County's dormant jazz scene. He bolstered the voice of jazz in the area, infusing it with a culture that promotes young musicians.

Within months of his arrival, he founded the Fort Worth Jazz Orchestra, Inc. for the preservation, teaching and performance of America's own art form—jazz—and he serves as its artistic director. The orchestra plays the music of great composers and arrangers like Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Lionel Hampton, along with original pieces written in the Big Band tradition.

"Fort Worth is extremely proud of Adonis Rose and the Fort Worth Jazz Orchestra," said David DuBois, president and CEO of the Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Adonis' extraordinary talent and unique jazz stylings have enhanced the level of

cultural and arts experiences available for local citizens and visitors alike. Fort Worth will continue to benefit from his relocation to our city."

The FWJO started a "Jazz in the Schools" program with the Fort Worth Independent School District to help students improve performance skills. It also sponsors Jazz@FortWorth, a two-week summer camp for young, aspiring jazz artists, bringing accomplished professionals to teach and perform with the students in public recitals.

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The orchestra just hired its first education director, Jeff Walter, formerly with Texas Wesleyan University.

The FWJO is building a sense of community, along with a new appreciation for jazz, in smaller towns throughout the area as well, with events like Jazz on the Lawn, a public art showcase in front of Keller's Town Hall in November.

"It was a great event. The music was fabulous and very well received," said Assistant City Manager Steve Polasek ('93 MPA), who arranged the concert.

Keller Mayor Pat McGrail met Rose at a business luncheon in Fort Worth sponsored by Mayor Mike Moncrief. "I was introduced to Adonis and found out he lived in the Keller community. The idea of having the orchestra do an event for the town grew from that meeting," McGrail recalled.

Rose also is working with David Stevens, director of fine arts for the Keller ISD, on a program similar to the one in the FWISD.

"We are all excited about what Adonis can do to bring jazz to Northeast Tarrant County," Polasek said.

Rose serves as the creative director for Jazz by the Boulevard in Fort Worth, an annual festival nestled in the tree-lined parks of the Will Rogers Memorial Center and featuring two stages of continuous jazz music and performances.

"Adonis, coming from New Orleans, has a background with that city's huge jazz festivals," said Donna Van Ness, Jazz by the Boulevard's producer. "He is guiding us toward a bigger vision of what the festival can be."

Rose also has started a record label, House of Swing, and he wrote a composition for the 2007 Arlington Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. He doesn't have time to miss New Orleans.

"I get back a few times a year to see family," he said, "but this is home now."

Local jazz lovers are rejoicing.



Accomplished drummer Adonis Rose, right, shares his world-class skills with UT Arlington jazz students.

