

Ann Arbor Observer



Andy Adamson

In his element

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Over the years, longtime residents of Ann Arbor have probably heard Andy Adamson performing in some capacity as soloist, sideman, or bandleader. He was a member of the Caribbean jazz troupe Melodioso in the 1970s and 1980s, Dick Siegel's Ministers of Melody in the 1980s, and the funk unit that backed Norma Jean Bell in the 1990s. At one point, Adamson acted as the fulcrum of an extravagantly costumed disco group, generating up to 75 percent of the mix armed only with a couple of keyboard synthesizers.

As things turned out, Adamson's burgeoning electronic ingenuity would transform his professional profile in ways that he could never have predicted. In 1986, determined to provide economic stability for his family, he cut back on gigging with bar bands to pursue a degree in computer science at U-M. That led to a series of influential positions as an information technology specialist and ultimately established him as a highly specialized security software code writer. Having paid those dues, he is now refocusing on a lifelong passion for modern jazz.

Setting up his electric piano near the back of the RUSH martini lounge, Adamson glows with contentment earned through decades of self-motivation and hard work. He's clearly in his element, collaborating with creative young musicians in music that is constantly being reinvented. Fats Waller once told an interviewer: "We rehearse on the job, at the public's expense." Hearing the quote, Andy nods vigorously, indicating that Waller hit the nail on the head. "Yup! Tonight we're working on dynamics."

Adamson's quartet plays no covers. Everything they perform is drawn from his enormous catalogue of original compositions that teem with exciting polyrhythms and richly contrasted harmonies. People who drift in from Main St. and gravitate towards the music seem pleasantly surprised by its freewheeling precision. It's not necessary to go to New York to hear jazz like this. We've got it right here at home.

Adamson's current band, featured on his latest album, *A Cry for Peace*, includes bassist Brennan Andes, known for his work with the Macpodz, the Ragbirds, George Bedard, and Vincent York. Drummer Jonathan Taylor, who has studied with pianist Geri Allen and performed with trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, is guided by what he calls a "cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary approach to improvisation." And saxophonist Dan Bennett, regularly heard at RUSH with the creative improv group Legendary Wings, has an arrestingly powerful tone and displays an astonishing command of his instrument. Told during a set break that he seemed to pull in vibrations from the spirit of Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Bennett

paused and his eyes widened. "I love Rahsaan," he confirmed, "especially when he plays ecstatically."

The Andy Adamson Quartet plays happy hour at RUSH on Friday, December 11. 