

Eric Nemeyer's Jazz Inside™

DRUM LOVERS' CELEBRATION

Willie Jones III

By Gary Heimbauer

JJ: Hi Willie, can you first tell us about some of the exciting things going on in your career? Any new CDs, tours, gigs?

WJ: I'm releasing *The Next Phase*, my fourth CD as a leader, on July 20 on my own label, WJ3 Records. The new date features Eric Reed, who has been on all my CDs; Steve Davis; Greg Tardy; Dezron Douglas; the

lot of the local musicians who were playing around Los Angeles at the time: George Bohannon, Donald Dean, Lawrence Marable, Henry Franklin, Teddy Edwards, Freddie Hill.

JJ: What was it like for you at Cal Arts in the early 90s, particularly, having the opportunity to study with Albert "Tootie" Heath.

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great vibraphonist, Warren Wolf and singers Claudia Acuna and Renee Neufville. The CD is a collection of original tunes - never before released - by myself and guys in the band, and a cover of a Roberta Flack tune. I just played the new music at Smoke this past weekend and it felt great. Over the summer I'll be on tour with Peter Bernstein and I have a two week stint with Cedar Walton at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola from August 3-8 and August 10-15. I've also been working on the next projects to be released on WJ3 Records. I'm constantly writing new tunes and preparing for my next CDs and my own tours as a leader.

JJ: Can you talk about what it was like growing up in LA with your father Willie Jones II? I'm curious about when you first became passionate about music, and had the desire to play drums.

WJ: I can't remember not being passionate about music - music is just something that's always been part of my life, a part of my upbringing and a part of my family. As my father is a pianist, I was constantly exposed to music. It was always playing in the house and I grew up in the church so I was exposed to gospel music and the popular music of the day. Drums were always the instrument I was most attracted to. As a kid, going to rehearsals with my father, I was always excited to sit next to the drums and watch the drummer play.

JJ: Did you get to meet a lot of the West Coast musi-

WJ: The culture at Cal Arts, at that time, was encouraging for me. I was studying and working with James Newton who was and still is a great musical influence and of course studying with Tootie was an invaluable, incredible experience. He really helped me with my sight reading on the drum set and he helped me get my drum technique together. Plus some of his stories about the jazz scene back in the day were priceless.

JJ: What are some of your goals for the future?

WJ: I want to continue to become a better jazz drummer, to spend more time developing WJ3 Records and producing jazz projects that I truly believe in. I'm also starting to play more as a leader.

JJ: What is it about this music that continues to capture your heart and drive you forward day after day and year after year?

WJ: As I mentioned, I grew up in this music and it's always been around me and at this point in my life, there's no other music that I enjoy playing more. I also enjoy checking out other musicians. It's important that real jazz is expressed and promoted from every level: from major companies to efforts by the musicians themselves. That's what drives me every day to go forward with the music.

JJ: In order to lose yourself in the moment, and tap into pure creativity, do you have to practice this the same way you would practice rudiments?



somewhere between the two methods, and if I do it enough, my creativity is going to come out.

JJ: Have you done other things in your life outside of music to make you better able to fully express your creative self?

WJ: I like to play basketball whenever I have free time and I think that is another type of creative activity.

JJ: Do you feel it gets easier or harder as you get older? Why so?

WJ: Music is easier to play as you get older. The older you get, you mature musically and conceptually and you also become more mature in how you express yourself technically - particularly as a drummer.

JJ: What do you think it takes for someone to achieve the level of success you have as a professional musician? What are the necessary ingredients?

WJ: Lots of practice, lots of listening. Being open to different ideas and criticism, staying humble, having a good attitude and putting yourself in an atmosphere where the music is happening, for example, in New York. ■