



Solos and Duos Series
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THE 2015 SOLOS & DUOS SERIES PRESENTS:

Quasar: Douglas R. Ewart, Matthew Shipp and Ni'ja Whitson

The Solos & Duos Series, produced by the Fine Arts Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, continues its 14th season with a concert by **Quasar: Douglas R. Ewart, Matthew Shipp and Ni'ja Whitson, Thursday, October 29, 8:00 pm, Bezanson Recital Hall.**

Best known as a composer, improviser, sculptor and maker of instruments, reed player **Douglas R. Ewart** is also an educator, arts organization consultant and visionary. In projects done in diverse media throughout his 40-year career, Mr. Ewart has woven his remarkably broad gifts into a single sensibility that encourages and celebrates--as an antidote to the divisions and compartmentalization afflicting modern life--the wholeness of individuals in culturally active communities.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1946, Douglas R. Ewart immigrated to Chicago, Illinois in 1963. Over the years his collaborators have included Muhal Richard Abrams, Amina Myers, Anthony Braxton, Alvin Curran, Anthony Davis, Von Freeman, Fred Anderson, Joseph Jarman, Yusef Lateef, Roscoe Mitchell, Dee Alexander, Robert Dick, George E. Lewis, James Newton, Cecil Taylor and Henry Threadgill.

Ewart's music finds natural extensions in the instruments he makes, which run the gamut from unique wind instruments to percussion instruments. Beyond these are sculptures, sound sculptures, and individually handcrafted masks that have been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Art Institute of Chicago, among others.

Ewart has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1990, and has served on advisory boards for The National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer (New York City) and Arts Midwest. Mr. Ewart is past chairman of the internationally renowned Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), celebrating their 50th anniversary this year.

Pianist **Matthew Shipp** was born in 1960 in Wilmington, Delaware. He started piano at 5 years old and fell in love with jazz at 12 years. After moving to New York in 1984, he quickly made an impact on the music. He was a sideman in the David S. Ware Quartet beginning in the early 1990s and also for Roscoe Mitchell's Note Factory, before concentrating on his own music.

Shipp has reached the holy grail of jazz: he possesses a unique style on his instrument that is all his own. He has recorded dozens of albums as a leader for Hatology, Rogue Arts and Thirsty Ear records, and has contributed to major recordings by William Parker, Joe Morris, Jemeel Moondoc and others. Since the turn of the century, Shipp has been curator and director of Thirsty Ear's "Blue Series", a collection of recordings that is visionary, far reaching and many faceted.

Writing about Shipp's 2013 solo piano CD, *Piano Sutras*, Will Layman in PopMatters described it as, "the kind of record we talk about and play for each other decades later... This is music that frames up a whole history: of an artist, of listeners, of the artists who formed the history of the art form, of the culture and time that allowed this art to flourish."

Ni'Ja Whitson is an interdisciplinary artist, choreographer, and writer who uses postmodern and African diasporic performance practices. A 2013-2014 Movement Research Artist in Residence, she created a live interdisciplinary adaptation of 1980s black gay films. Choreographic works include collaborating with theater and dance artists such as Dianne McIntyre, Regina Taylor, April Berry, and Darrell Jones; while creating her own touring solo and group

projects. Her work-in-progress "Babanla Ayaba" was marked as a 2013 Creative Capital "On Our Radar" project to watch.

Whitson is a noted innovating practitioner of the Theatrical Jazz Aesthetic and enjoys ongoing collaboration with award-winning artist Sharon Bridgforth, including co-facilitation of Bridgforth's Theatrical Jazz Institute. Her solo, *root shock*, developed in the aesthetic, toured internationally with invitations in New York, Chicago, Brazil, and Canada. As a dance soloist and percussionist Whitson has also recorded a live album under direction of Douglas Ewart at the legendary Velvet Lounge, and is an ongoing dance soloist of Ewarts' Nyabinghi Choir and Inventions ensembles.

Tickets are still only \$10 and \$5 (students), and are available through the FAC box office, 413-545-2511 or www.fineartscenter.com.

The Solos & Duos Series is produced by the UMass Fine Arts Center. Thanks to Hotel UMASS.