

RIISING STAR PERCUSSIONIST OF THE YEAR

# HAMID DRAKE

I could have done it a long time ago, but I didn't feel right about it," said drummer/percussionist Hamid Drake, a couple of weeks following the recording of his first album as a leader, *Bindu* (Rogue Art). Although he has already recorded as a duo and in communal projects, the Chicago-based musician had never led a session. "I've been waiting for the right time," Drake said. "Writing compositions or finding musicians was not the problem. I had to find that thing inside me that said, 'Yes.'"

Although Drake has been on the scene for about 30 years, recognition came late, signified by his win as Rising Star Percussionist in the Critics Poll. His career reached a turning point in the early '90s when he started touring Europe extensively with trumpeter Don Cherry and saxophonist Peter Brötzmann. Drake also credits the label Okka Disk for putting some bands on the map, including the DKV Trio, a combo featuring Drake, saxophonist Ken Vandermark and bassist Kent Kessler.

"I never understood why he'd never recorded as a leader," said Michel Dorbon, the French producer who's releasing the session.

Drake's friend Alexandre Pierrepoint, a French journalist and ethnomusicologist, intro-

duced the drummer to Dorbon. The three had talked several times over the years about ideas for a project before it finally materialized. "My confidence had reached the proper level," Drake said. The drummer also credits his studies with two Buddhist teachers as crucial to the development of his leadership skills, as he was certainly conscious of the risks and responsibilities that are associated with leadership.

On March 1, Drake and a quartet of reed players—Chicagoans Greg Ward and Ernest Dawkins, and New Yorkers Daniel Carter and Sabir Mateen—entered the Soma Electronic Music Studios for a two-day session. Judging by the people in attendance, it was not difficult to realize how respected Drake is in the musical community. Most notable were fellow percussionist Michael Zerang, who transcribed some of the music, and flautist Nicole Mitchell, who plays with Drake in a duet that opens the CD.

Despite this impromptu meeting, Drake arrived at the studio with some concrete ideas that lack of time prevented him rehearsing. This wasn't a problem. As a drummer, Drake has had curve balls thrown his way time and again. This time, he reversed the table.

"I wanted to take them out of their comfort

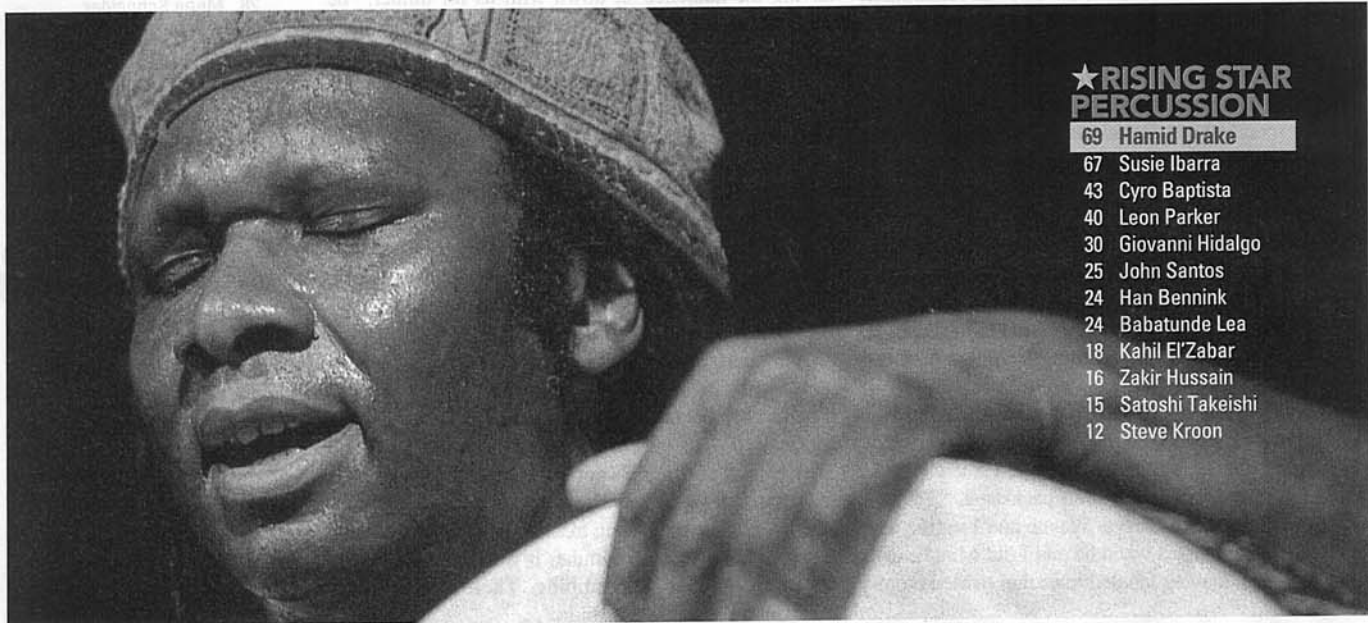
zone and present them with a challenge and friction that creates excitement and energy," Drake said. For Mateen and Carter, it was a surprise to have to play repeated motifs and melodies that can be found in Indian music, an idiom that imbues Drake's music.

Another well-thought decision was to mix Chicago and New York musicians to bridge the illusory gap between the two cities. Bringing these different styles together, Drake was hoping to create something that reflects the musicians' insights and backgrounds. However, alone with four saxophonists, comparisons are likely to point at the World Saxophone Quartet or ROVA. Drake claims that he didn't think about other saxophone quartets.

*Bindu* is a great introduction to Drake. His range as a percussionist is well-showcased: He not only commands the drum kit but also employs the bata drum and his frame drum "to show percussion or drums in another light."

Drake does have some regrets about this first session. "I wish I had had more time and more compositions," he said. He is, however, satisfied with the results and is planning ahead, considering another session that would be a logical follow-up to this debut.

—Alain Drouot



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