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Bernard Linnette at home with Art Blakey's legacy

**BY BRYAN POWELL**

Drummer Art Blakey was an icon of jazz. For more than four decades, Blakey led the Jazz Messengers, the definitive hard-bop ensemble whose alumni eventually would include Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter, Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Timmons, Cedar Walton, Wynton Marsalis and others. Blakey was known for his rhythmic drive and for his ability to bring out the most in his band members.

Late last year, when local drummer Bernard Linnette decided to form his own band, he found Blakey's Jazz Messengers to be an ideal archetype for his own objectives.

"It is as good as any other musical concept to take me to my own musical individuality, which is ultimately what I'm looking to get out of it," says Linnette, whose quartet performs Sat., June 30, at Cino Grille in Marietta. "By playing this music, wherever I land, I feel like I'm going to be OK, because the art of the Jazz Messengers is such a great thing. You can't lose by playing that music."

In his band -- which varies in size based on the nature of the gig -- Linnette melds the Jazz Messengers' use of articulate horn arrangements (sax/trumpet/trombone) and an intense drum style with his own experiences in performing with top vocalists. He's worked with Freddy Cole, Abbey Lincoln, Dakota Staton and Little Jimmy Scott.

The drummer's full band, the Bernard Linnette Interactive Sextet -- made up of pianist Gary Motley, vocalist Veronica Tate, bassist Rodney Jordan, saxophonist Dennis Springer, trumpeter James Sedar and trombonist Derrick White -- performs Fri.-Sat., July 6-7, at Churchill Grounds Jazz Café.

In his role as a bandleader, Linnette hopes to sustain the Blakey tradition of providing a

**Bernard Linnette**

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framework in which young musicians can be challenged to develop their skills.

"Blakey had the ability to make [his band members get] everything that they wanted to get out of their instruments, and take them to another musical place in the process," Linnette says. "I'm completely at home with that musical concept."

The drummer applies that approach to such classic material as Blakey's "A La Mode," Miles Davis' "So What" and John Coltrane's "Naima."

While this is his first venture as a bandleader, Linnette began working as a jazz drummer in the mid-'70s. He came to Atlanta from Norfolk, Va., in 1976 and got his first big break two years later when Freddy Cole hired him for his touring band. Linnette played with Cole off-and-on for the next six years, touring such far-flung locales as Brazil and the Philippines, in addition to the U.S.

Subsequently, Linnette attended Rutgers University, studying with pianist Kenny Barron, among others, and earning a performance degree in 1985. His classmates included trumpeter Terence Blanchard, drummer Ralph Peterson and trombonist Frank Lacy.

Rutgers, in New Brunswick, N.J., is a mere half-hour or so from New York City, and after graduating, Linnette found work on the Big Apple jazz scene and toured the Northeast.

After living for a time in Florida, a chance visit to Atlanta in 1998 (to help an in-law move furniture) brought Linnette to a jam at Churchill Grounds. He met guitarist Jacques Lesure, who convinced him to stay and drum for the Swing Association, which included Lesure, pianist Gary Motley and others. That band broke up a year or so later.

Linnette continued to work locally, but decided last year it was time for a change if he hoped to reach his goals as a musician.

"There are a lot of things that I learned as a sideman over the years, especially in working with Freddy Cole," Linnette explains. "I was introduced to such a high standard as far as presentation of the music, choosing songs, walking, talking and professional life as an artist."

It was a level of professionalism that Linnette apparently had been unable to recapture as a local

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drummer-for-hire.

"In order for me to have that, I needed to be in charge of my own situation," he says. "When I did that, it was like a whole other world. I didn't realize [until then] what I had learned and acquired over the years."

*The Bernard Linnette Quartet performs Sat., June 30, at Cino Grille, 4475 Roswell Road, Marietta. For information, call 770-509-5522 or visit [www.cinogrille.com](http://www.cinogrille.com). Bernard Linnette's Interactive Sextet performs Fri.-Sat., July 6-7, at Churchill Grounds Jazz Café. For information, call 404-876-3030 or visit [www.churchillgrounds.com](http://www.churchillgrounds.com).*

This column is a weekly feature

covering music outside the Perimeter.

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