

## **Alex Blake: Bio**

### ORIGINS

Alex Blake was born in Panama where cultural diversity is celebrated and explored – a worldly awareness and openness has long been a force behind his artistic expression. His father was supportive and as a musician himself, an inspiration for the young Alex by introducing the trumpet to him as his first instrument. Noting his son's immediate talent, his father cemented his future by dreaming that Alex would become a world renowned artist–on the bass. Alex had a strong desire for playing the guitar, since rock n roll was the hot rage, but he quickly adapted to the upright bass with his own expressive form, technique, and imagination. Beginning with the Latin style Ampeg Bass, a slimmer version of the classical upright, Alex began learning Latin, salsa, bossa nova and other styles of music while developing a signature technique of playing the instrument

### THE YOUNG PROFESSIONAL MUSICIAN

A move to New York City brought the family closer to the global community of music and Alex was introduced to some of the masters of Latin, Puerto Rican, and Afro-Cuban jazz. By age twelve, Alex was performing with recognized musical icons such as Mongo Santamaria, Machito (Maria Bauza), Carlos "Patato" Valdes, and Celia Cruz. Alex also advanced on his signature technique of play-ing the bass, based more on the cello-sitting down and embracing the entire bass in his arms, leading to stronger slapping and an increased range of tones. By the time Alex was sixteen, he caught the attention of major players in music and first began touring and recording with Sun Ra establishing his reputation as an emerging yet formidable star bassist. He joined legendary jazz artist Dizzy Gillespie and his band, catapulting the demand for his presence and playing on an international level as they toured Europe. Alex soon began working with Freddie Hubbard, Art Blakey, McCoy Tyner, Stan Getz, Randy Weston, Pharoah Sanders and many other artists who desired his inventive interpretations on the bass and his reputation for innovation solidified. This rapid ability to absorb new material and remain open to new styles would recur throughout his career. His work was ideal for the Manhattan Transfer, where Alex became known to new fans among contemporary music and he remained with them for over sixteen years and multiple Grammys for the band.

## EDUCATION AND INFLUENCES

Alex actively continued his bass studies with some of the great teachers of stringed instruments on performance but also music composition and theory as well as arrangement. Reggie Workman and Harry Constant at The New Muse in Brooklyn, Melonie Punter and Akua Dixon at the String Reunion and composer/recording artist Richard Davis - all helped to hone Alex's already accomplished and individual style. A reflection of his time, Alex was heavily influenced by Jimi Hendrix, particularly as he mastered the electric bass and plunged into the relatively new style of rock n roll. From his world travels, Alex was exposed to other musical traditions from Japan, England, Europe, Africa and these influences appear his own original work. He was maturing into a contemporary artist beyond the jazz genre, now playing with top drummers, Lenny White, Max Roach, and Billy Cobham and recognized as a master of post-bop and fusion. As his work received critical acclaim, Alex worked with Pharoah Sanders and Randy Weston and his Afrikan Rhythms. His virtuosity was perfect for the complex polyrhythm and cultural blend of Afro-centric jazz but he also added flamenco riffs and other styles into the music.

## ORIGINAL WORK

After performing alongside music luminaries, Alex moved into the role of band-leader, forming the Alex Blake Quartet-Ted Cruz on piano, Chris Hunter on saxophone, and Buddy Williams on drums-releasing a CD, "*In Motion*," in 1990 and recorded at the Jazz Standard in New York City. A second Alex Blake Quartet CD was recorded at the Knitting Factory and released in 2000, "*Now is the Time*," now featuring Pharoah Sanders on sax, John Hicks on piano, Victor Jones on drums, and percussionist, Neil Clarke. The album included Alex's own compositions ("*The Chief*" as a homage to his father) and a tribute to rock n roll as the "*Little Help*" by the Beatles bass solo. There seem to be no stylistic barriers in his art as he continued to add and absorb musical styles to his work.

## ALEX BLAKE TODAY

Alex continues to perform in some of the most reputed festivals and venues in the world and has received accolades, awards, and recognition from fans and musicians alike. He has recently received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Central Brooklyn Jazz Consortium in 2011 and has begun recording a new CD in New York. His band currently includes Chris Hunter on sax, Victor Jones on drums, and Chacho Ramirez for percussion. The new album will include original compositions and reach across musical genres along with an accompanying tour. We have yet to hear all of the dynamic possibilities of Alex Blake's creative individuality and artistry.