

JEROME JENNINGS

Everyone has a favorite band, singer or piece of music. Many recognize the power of music to evoke memory, to remind you where you were, or what you were doing, when you hear a certain song. But for Jerome Jennings – drummer and percussionist extraordinaire – music is an actual way of life.

A Cleveland, Ohio, native, Jennings is the product of a lively musical legacy. Albert Ayler, drummer Greg Bandy and pianist/composers Tadd Dameron and Neal Creque, Joe Lavano, Bobby Womack, The O’Jays, Levert, Bone Thugs N Harmony, are just a few powerhouses of the music world that have come out of Cleveland.

Jennings is most definitely taking that musical legacy forward. He has appeared on national television several times, including three appearances on Conan O’Brien’s late-night show (NBC), Craig Ferguson (CBS), The Today Show (NBC), and the infamous, globally televised Hurricane Katrina benefit.

He also performed with jazz great Wynton Marsalis at a high-profile concert prior to the renovation of the venerable Alice Tully Hall.

Jennings has also appeared in a commercial for Heineken beer, and had a small part in the film “Cadillac Records,” starring Beyonce Knowles, Jeffrey Wright and Adrian Brody.

His talent was evident from an early age, leading to a full music scholarship to Ohio State University.

He completed his Bachelor’s Degree in Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, and went on to receive a Masters Degree from the prestigious Juilliard School of Music in New York City. At Juilliard, Jennings became the first Jazz Studies recipient of the Morse Fellowship, a program that brings the performing arts to New York City school students and their classroom teachers in annual artist residencies. Morse Fellows prepare their own curriculum and teach two classes per week throughout the academic year in area schools. This pioneering program brings much-needed music instruction to schools that are underserved in the arts, while providing select Juilliard students the opportunity to mature as teaching artists.

It was during this time that Jennings fell in love with teaching.

“During that time, I really discovered a love for teaching,” he says. “It’s really one of the best ways to give back to young people and inspire them to go for their goals.”

Jennings’s interest in music started as a child, after noticing his older brother, A.J., playing trumpet in the school band. “Growing up, we always had a lot of different music in the house,” he explains. “Jazz, r&b, rock, you name it.” His father and uncles all had very extensive record collections, including, but not limited to, Chick Corea, Billy

Cobham, Wes Montgomery, Carlos Santana, Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa and Wynton Marsalis, among many others.

Watching television as a child – he was only allowed to stay up past his bedtime to watch “Sanford and Son” and “The Arsenio Hall Show” (Hall is also a Cleveland native) – he noticed that most of the bands he saw had drummers, and that the drummer not only kept the rhythm and time for the band, but was. One night, veteran percussionist Sheila E appeared on Arsenio Hall’s late-night show, and Jennings was taken. “She was so skillful and so in command of her instrument,” Jennings remembers. “She blew me away!” At the age of 11 Jerome’s mom brought home *Art Blakey on Impulse* and his lifelong love affair with Jazz and Swing music began.

His love of music has taken him around the world: he has performed in Switzerland at the world renowned Montreaux Jazz Festival, toured Japan and Toronto with Rolling Stones tenor man, Tim Reis and his Rolling Stones Project, and has toured Moscow with legendary trumpeter and former Jazz Messenger Valery Ponomarev, performing at the famous Tchiakovsky Hall. He also toured Japan three times with jazz piano legend Hank Jones, a career highlight. Add saxophonist Benny Golson to the list of jazz legends Jennings has toured with. He still tours with the incomparable Sonny Rollins, the Grammy Award-winning tenor sax legend, with whom he has toured Europe several times.

Currently, Jennings – who names Art Blakey as perhaps his main drumming influence – remains an in-demand session musician and teacher in New York, the Tri-State area and abroad. He performs with the San Francisco-based singer Paula West. He is also a member of the Canadian group The Outer Bridge. In conjunction with the Saskatoon Jazz Fest, the OB holds an annual summer teaching residency at Canada’s Saskatchewan University.

He is also an endorser for Vic Firth drumsticks – as are Sheila E, Marvin ‘Smitty’ Smith (The Tonight Show with Jay Leno) and Amir “Questlove” Thompson (The Roots, Late Night with Jimmy Fallon).

With all the amazing artists he has worked with and all the world capitals he has traveled to, what would be an additional goal for Jennings? “I just want to be true to any musical situation, and represent excellence, no matter what type of music,” he says humbly.

To date, Jennings has toured, recorded and/or performed with such notables as Sonny Rollins, Hank Jones, Ernestine Anderson, Christian McBride, Benny Golson, Wynton Marsalis, Paula West, The Count Basie Orchestra, Ray Charles, and The Charles Mingus Band, among many, many others.

For more information on Jerome Jennings’s upcoming tour/performance schedule, please visit

www.JeromeJennings.com.