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Randy Weston performs with his African Rhythms Trio

Feb. 2, 2010 — Ann Arbor, Mich. — Combining a foundation in bebop with African roots, jazz master Randy Weston seamlessly blends the two categories as one of the seminal musicians of our time. Alex Blake (bass) and Neil Clarke (percussion) join Weston as the African Rhythms Trio at **Kerrytown Concert House** on **Saturday, March 20**, with sets at **7 and 9 p.m.** This concert is sponsored by the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies at the University of Michigan in celebration of their 40th anniversary.

A Brooklyn native, Weston grew up merely steps away from jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Miles Davis, as well as his cousin Wynton Kelly. Thelonius Monk was one of Weston's greatest influences, having studied with him informally for three years. "He was the most original I ever heard," Weston writes. "He played like they must have played in Egypt 5000 years ago." Weston progressed with his jazz career into the 1950s and 60s, performing with a number of jazz combos, including a sextet with saxophonist Booker Ervin. Several of Weston's originals that came out this group have become jazz standards, including "Little Niles" and "Hi-Fly" (in reference to his towering 6'8" height).

But while mastering the jazz idiom, Weston has been devoted to the music of his African ancestry. His dedication is due in large part to his father, Frank Edward Weston, who told his son that he was, "an African born in America." "He told me I had to learn about myself and about him and about my grandparents," Weston said in an interview, "and the only way to do it was I'd have to go back to the motherland one day." Weston spent a great deal of time performing in Africa while absorbing the style. He opened a nightclub in Morocco in the late 1960s, and also toured the continent. It was in Marrakech, Morocco that Weston collaborated with Gnawa people, whose spiritual music is often used in healing ceremonies. He continues his relationship with the Gnawa music masters, and has since recorded with them. He released "The Splendid Master Gnawa Musicians of Morocco" in 1994 on the Verve label, which was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best World Music Album the following year.

Alex Blake, bass

Born in Panama and raised Brooklyn, bassist Alex Blake was one of the major proponents of the fusion movement in the late 1970s. Most of the people who work with Blake consider him an entire rhythm section on his own: his playing evokes rhythmic guitar, steady drumming, and a lyrical bass line — all in the action of two hands. Blake currently enjoys the co-creative efforts of straight-ahead/fusion great Tommy Campbell. In addition to collaborating on each other's own projects, they perform together with The Manhattan Transfer.

Neil Clarke, percussion

Neil Clarke has been a student of percussion for more than 35 years. Having traveled extensively, Clarke has had the opportunity to study and collaborate with masters worldwide. He has had longstanding performing, touring and recording relationships with many notable artists, including Harry Belafonte, Onaje Allen Gumbs, Dianne Reeves, David Sanborn, Miriam Makeba, Letta Mbulu, Carlos Garnet and Paul Winter, to name a few. Clarke has also performed in the Broadway production of “Timbuktu” and in the feature film Beat Street.

About Kerrytown Concert House

The Kerrytown Concert House is an arts organization focused on community engagement and bringing fine artists and their audiences together. An intimate 110-seat venue, the Concert House is home to diverse offerings in a wide range of musical styles, while rotating art exhibits are displayed on the walls of the house. Located in the Kerrytown district of Ann Arbor, Mich., KCH is available to the community, including educators, students and organizations for recitals, meetings and events. In addition, it is home to the internationally acclaimed festival Edgefest, and is a presenter of artists of the highest artistic excellence. Kerrytown Concert House is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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