

## SAKÉSHO

Much more than a modern jazz quartet, Sakésho (pronounced *sah kay show*), with its roots deep in the *biguine* — the intensely syncopated, polyrhythmic music of the French Caribbean — is inventing a completely new world groove.

Sakésho's second release, *We Want You to Say*, represents a critical locus in the group's development. "It really reflects our experiences playing live over the last few years," notes steelpan master Andy Narell. "This is a blowing record. It's got more of the feel of a live concert than before, and we're taking more chances."

So is Narell, who has long been acclaimed for adding a special jazz perspective to his explorations of "world beat" music. But as jazz writer Mike Joyce recently noted in the *Washington Post*, "he seems especially inspired in this setting, playing alongside two virtuoso musicians from Martinique — pianist Mario Canonge and bass guitarist Michel Alibo — and Jean Philippe Fanfant, a drummer from Guadeloupe. The band uses the *biguine*'s infectious allure as a touchstone, but the group also embraces calypso beats, two-bar vamplike Afro-Cuban montunos, sophisticated jazz harmonies and extended improvisations."

"The last four or five years have been an intense growth period for me," Narell confirms. "Playing with these guys has been an on-going education. I'm constantly being challenged to play up to their level."

Andy Narell is well known to audiences around the world. He's a steelpan virtuoso who has pioneered the role of the pan in contemporary music. He's also a star performer with legions of fans scattered from New York City to Soweto and all points in between. Narell has made fourteen albums; he's recorded and/or performed with Marcus Miller, Chucho Valdes, Bela Fleck, Hugh Masekela and many, many others.

Piano ace Mario Canonge was born in Martinique and currently resides in Paris, where he's a bandleader and a top session player. With a catalogue of his own records as leader, he's a key figure in French Caribbean music, one of the leading interpreters of *biguine*, and a formidable jazz pianist and composer.

Like Canonge, bass wizard Michel Alibo was born in Martinique, and lives in Paris. The Paris music scene is known for extraordinary electric bassists, and Michel has been at the forefront of that group for many years, recording and performing all over the world with artists like Salif Keita, Yousou N'Dour, Cheb Mami, Karim Ziad and Nguyen Le. A gifted composer as well, he was a founding member of the popular jazz fusion band Sixun.

Jean Philippe Fanfant is a genius drummer from Guadeloupe, and another long-time Parisian studio ace. He's played with Canonge since 1991 and has appeared on numerous albums with musicians like Kassav, Toure Kunda, and Angelique Kidjo. His mastery of the complex polyrhythms of the *biguine* is almost beyond belief. In live performance, his hands and feet move so fast they blur - and the sounds emerging from his drum set would make anyone think there were at least two drummers at work.

"These are the heaviest musicians coming out of the Caribbean," Narell declares with justifiable pride in the band. "People in the United States don't know much about this music yet, but we believe it'll happen. Every time we play we connect with the audience in a powerful way, and people can feel the excitement of a band that's trying to push the limits."

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Narell met his three musical associates in 1993, in Martinique, and they began playing in various combinations whenever opportunities presented themselves. Narell wrote three tunes for them that appeared on his 2000 Heads Up album *Fire in the Engine Room*. After a number of gigs in Europe and the French Caribbean, all four musicians felt it was time to reinvent themselves as a band. Heads Up International released Sakésho's self-titled debut in 2002.

Now the group has captured the special excitement of their live performances on a new studio recording, *We Want You to Say...* And audiences are getting the message! According to jazz critic Franz A. Matzner, who caught a show at Blues Alley in Washington, DC, Sakésho is "a musical force best witnessed live. Full of energy, highly expressive, and possessed of a unique sound...by the end of the evening Sakésho had successfully transformed the usually-sedate supper club crowd into cheering participants in a festival of sound."

Trinidadian writer Terry Joseph, who was on-scene at a recent performance in Tobago, reports, "[There] was a tremendous ovation at the final cymbal, distinguishable from several such responses during Sakésho's hour-long performance only by intensity and topping out an evening of pure musical delight."

No surprise. The same thing has been happening in Boston, Martinique, Nice and everywhere else these guys play. In fact, if Sakésho isn't yet a household word, it's only because bands that invent a new groove are always harder to market than the ones that fit into convenient categories.

So forget categories. Sakésho is a group of world class musicians blowing together at the top of their game, and creating a uniquely thrilling blend of Caribbean music and hard-ass modern jazz. End of story.