

Cyro Baptista brings voodoo jazz to the Warhol

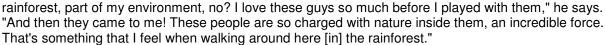
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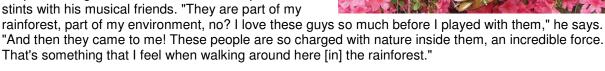
By Mike Shanley | 2.26.2014

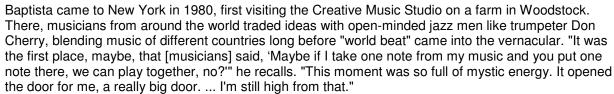
In terms of musical diversity, few musicians can top percussionist Cyro Baptista. Since he left his native Brazil for New York more than three decades ago, he has worked with acts ranging from legends like Yo-Yo Ma. Paul Simon and Herbie Hancock to musical iconoclast John Zorn. Today, he is speaking by phone from a place even more remote — a rainforest in Bahia, Brazil.

"My life here is very hard," he deadpans. "We don't know if we're going to drink coconut water or if we're gonna have juice of some tropical fruits." He punctuates the comment with a hearty laugh that will recur throughout the conversation.

The location of the call is significant because Baptista keeps referring to the rainforest as a metaphor for stints with his musical friends. "They are part of my







That eclecticism fuels his own projects, including Banquet of the Spirits, which he brings to Pittsburgh next week. On the band's 2008 album, released by Zorn's Tzadik imprint, Baptista describes the music with a term that originated with the 1930s Brazilian art movement: anthropofagia. "'Anthropo' is people and 'fagia' is eating," he explains. "We are in the business of eating people, no? Playing with Yo-Yo, playing with Zorn, I feel that I'm eating them. They start to live inside me.

"That's the way we explain how Brazil is the way it is. We ate all this culture — the American Constitution, the French Revolution, Miles Davis, Celine Dion, John Kennedy."

Musically, the four-piece group bears this out. In addition to Brazilian music, the members draw on Middle Eastern melodies. When Zorn's squalling alto saxophone guests on a track, the sound touches on the heavy free jazz of Zorn's band from the '90s, Naked City. More recently, the group released Caym, a set of Zorn's compositions from his second "Masada book," which also draws on diverse styles.

In Brazil, Baptista has been recently been playing candomblé, a style of Afro-Brazilian voodoo music which will inspire his March 5 show at The Andy Warhol Museum. "It's like a ceremonial thing. I'm gonna bring this energy to Pittsburgh. I hope we do some kind of voodoo there that makes everybody in Pittsburgh very ... happy," he drawls, adding that trademark laugh.

