Solos & Duos Series begins with Milford Graves

The UMass Fine Arts Center’s Solos & Duos Series begins its 2nd season with a solo concert by percussionist Milford Graves on Thursday, September 25, 2003 at 8:00 pm. in Bezanson Recital Hall, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

A drummer of unparalleled power and creativity, Milford Graves is a living legend. Professor, herbalist, healer, Milford Graves is first and foremost one of the world’s great geniuses of the drum. Rarely heard live, a concert by Milford Graves is a special event.

“Alone he puts enough concentrated energy into his drumming to take on an army single-handed,” said writer and photographer Valerie Wilmer. “In addition to being a compelling percussionist with a staggering technique and inexhaustible fund of ideas, Graves is quite a spectacular showman.”

Born August 20, 1941, in Jamaica, New York, Milford Graves was playing drums at the age of three, though he had no formal teaching until he was 17. He took up congas when he was eight years old and later learned tabla techniques from Washantha Singh. Between 1959 and 1962 he played with dance and Latin bands around New York (including Montego Joe), but after hearing John Coltrane (with Elvin Jones) in 1961 decided to concentrate on his own conception. His first recordings were all on the ESP label and include appearances with the New York Art Quartet (with John Tchicai, Archie Shepp and Lewis Worrell), pianists Lowell Davidson and Paul Bley, saxophonist Giuseppi Logan and his own percussion duo with Sunny Morgan.

Graves was a founding member of the Jazz Composer's Orchestra and has subsequently worked and recorded with a wide variety of creative musicians including Albert Ayler, Sonny Sharrock, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Don Pullen and Andrew Cyrille.

Graves received a Guggenheim grant in 2000 for his proposal entitled "Biological Music" which details his recent, computer-based experimentation on the interplay of human heartbeats and healing properties of syncopated music. An avid student of various alternative methods of healing for the better part of forty years, he has been especially interested in herbal healing, acupuncture and music therapy. Graves has taught at Bennington College for over 25 years and runs the International Center for Medicinal and Scientific Research.

The Solos & Duos Series continues October 9 with a concert by the Sunny Murray Duo with Sabir Mateen, and concludes November 20, with a performance by the Sonny Fortune/Rashied Ali Duo. Tickets are $10 and $5 (students), and are available through the Fine Arts Center box office, 545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS.

The Solos & Duos Series is produced by Residential Arts and made possible by the: Massachusetts Cultural Council, Student Affairs Cultural Enrichment Fund, UMass Arts Council and UMass Alumni Association.