Solos & Duos Series concludes with pianist Ran Blake

A collaborative project of the Augusta Savage Gallery, Residential Arts and the Fine Arts Center Jazz Coordinator, the Solos & Duos Series concludes its first season with a concert by pianist Ran Blake, on Wednesday, November 20 at 8:00 pm. The Solos & Duos Series will be held on the Fine Arts Center Concert Hall stage.

In a career that now spans five decades, pianist Ran Blake has created a unique niche in music as an artist and educator. His improvisations are not only informed by his vast knowledge of jazz, but also by Greek folk songs, movie soundtracks, American pop music and gospel. Mr. Blake’s singular sound has earned a dedicated following all over the world. His dual musical legacy includes more than 30 albums on some of the world’s finest jazz labels, as well nearly 30 years as a groundbreaking educator at Boston’s New England Conservatory.

Nearly half of Mr. Blake’s recordings are solo performances. “(They) are some of the most introspective and intensely private in modern jazz,” observed Ed Hazell in Jazziz Magazine. “He’s not a blindingly fast player, but few pianists can match his nuanced touch on the keyboard or the inventiveness, even perversity, with which he paraphrases and reconstructs familiar songs.”

“To say that Ran Blake alters the harmonies of ‘Black Coffee’ or brings interesting colors to ‘Stormy Weather’”, offers The Los Angeles Times, “would be like contending that Michelangelo did a nice touch-up job on the Sistine Chapel.”

Mr. Blake was born in 1935, in Springfield, Massachusetts and raised in Connecticut. His lifelong association with educator, theorist, label owner Gunther Schuller began in the late 1950s, when Mr. Schuller invited him to study along side John Lewis, Ornette Coleman, Bill Evans and other innovators at the legendary, short-lived Lenox School of Jazz in western Massachusetts. Mr. Blake’s first recording, The Newest Sound Around (RCA/Bluebird, 1961), soon followed. When Mr. Schuller assumed the presidency of the New England Conservatory in 1967, he called on Ran Blake. Together they created the Third Stream Department, (since renamed the Contemporary Improvisation Department), which seeks to fuse jazz with European and other “world” music. Mr. Blake’s latest recording, the critically acclaimed Sonic Temples, is produced by Mr. Schuller, released on his Mr. Schuller’s own GM label and features his sons Ed (bass) and George (drums) Schuller.

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 made possible by: Massachusetts Cultural Council, Student Affairs Cultural Enrichment Fund, UMass Arts Council, UMass Alumni Association, Residential Arts and Augusta Savage Gallery.