



royal hartigan, Wes Brown, and David Bindman met at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT, in the early 1980s. royal was beginning his graduate studies in world music, David was an undergraduate, and Wes, a Wesleyan alumnus, was living in town and working as a freelance musician. Playing together first as a trio, they then formed *Juba* with trombonist Bill Lowe, and played in the *Talking Drums* African Jazz-Highlife ensemble.

In 1991, Wes, David, royal, and guitarist Kevin McNeal did their first performance as *blood drum spirit*, under royal's leadership. In 1997 royal released the group's debut double CD, *blood drum spirit*, re-released, with the video *eve*, in 2004 on Innova.

In 2001, performing again as a trio, royal, Wes, and David traveled to China for the first time. Two years later, pianist Art Hirahara joined the ensemble. Since that time, the quartet has performed across the US and in China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Ghana, and Trinidad, and released the double CDs *blood drum spirit live in china* (Innova, 2008) and *time changes*, (self-released, 2019). They have collaborated with artists across diverse media and artistic disciplines, including visual arts (painting, sculpture, video), dance, poetry, spoken word, and conceptual art. Their works advocate for cultural integrity, environmental preservation, and global justice.

In 2015 *blood drum spirit* traveled to Ghana for the first time to work with master artists in rural villages, and in the cities of Kumase and Accra. This project was the vehicle for the award-winning documentary movie *We Are One*, directed by Sara Pettinella, with footage in Ghana filmed under the direction of Martin Adi-Dako. The film follows the quartet's decades-long journey, beginning with royal, Wes, and David studying and working with seminal Ghanaian teachers Abraham Kobena Adzenyah and Freeman Kwadzo Donkor, continuing with royal's studies in Ghana over many years; and finally, the group traveling to the same villages where royal learned many rhythms and songs that he had brought back for the band to arrange and perform. The film shows the deep historical and aesthetic connections between West African music and Jazz.

The ensemble's repertoire includes original compositions by its members and works by Ellington, Parker, Monk, Coltrane, Debussy, and other contributors to the vast spectrum from jazz and contemporary music. Their music incorporates indigenous influences from West Africa, South India, Indonesia, China, the Philippines, Turkey, and Native America, as well as African American clapping plays, camp meeting shouts, and New Orleans rhythms.

In addition to performing, *blood drum spirit* conducts educational outreach/workshops. In these residencies they develop individual relationships and offerings for students and people who are interested in music and culture through classes, discussions, lecture/demonstrations, film/video screenings, lessons, open rehearsals, and concerts. The quartet has worked with students, faculty, and community members at institutions across the world, including St. Michael's College, UMass, Seton Hall, New School University, World Music Institute, Midi School (Beijing, China), China Conservatory (Beijing), Cultural Centre of the Philippines, University of Santo Tomas, University of the Philippines, University of Ghana, and the SALT Youth Camp, Trinidad.

The ensemble's work with people from different musical traditions around the world have been made possible in part by royal's performance/research grants, including Fulbright residencies (Philippines, 2006, Ghana 2014-15), Asian Cultural Council, Healey, and Whiting research grants (Philippines, 2009-10), and by the U.S. State Department (2015,2017). They have spent extended time in Asia and Africa, performing, sharing, and recording with people in villages and in clubs, concert halls, and festivals.

*The music is our life, a spirit and philosophy: the turn of time, the break of the world, a change of consciousness at every level and aspect of existence, revolution/resolution in the universe.*

