



James Blake

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club circuit and had a good time, but after a while I decided it was time to move on. We had worked as a unit for about 14 years and it felt like time to do something else."

Sharpe had already developed an interest in African dance so he began to pursue dance and theatre projects. This in turn led to working with guitarist Bruce Cockburn. "He's another heavy, intense cat. Very strong and he can play his ass off. He's a real fine writer. The experience of playing with him was another first for me because I'd never done anything like it before. I grew up in clubs, I'd never done concerts. It was very exciting to play large venues, but I still love playing in the more intimate settings. After about three years, Bruce decided to go solo so I left and eventually made my way to New York."

During the past three years, Sharpe has played almost exclusively with Belafonte. "Last year we didn't work that much, but this year it's crazy and the year before was real crazy. Working with Harry is always good. You're on that level of playing concerts and theatres in a very professional situation."

Sharpe currently finds himself in the best of all worlds because along with his love of music there is nothing he likes more than playing for dance. "When I left Toronto and moved to New York I did a lot of work in the colleges with several dance companies. It was good because I love theatre. I specialize in music and dance from Guinea, West Africa, but there are various dances and dance troupes. Some specialize in Nigerian music and dance. Some do things from Senegal, and so on.

"Now, working with Belafonte, I get to play for another great

dancer. I love playing for him for the dance. When you play the congas he knows how to move to them, especially if you really play for him. That's the whole thing about drumming, to play for the dance, and he dances all night. He dances a Cuban style of dance. Deep stuff. Real hard-edged and full of energy. For me, to play for a dancer is what drumming is all about. The physical side. Being precise. Your interpretation of what you see and how it translates to the drum. The dance also inspires the drumming. It's just like a conversation, it goes back and forth."

Another important offshoot of working with Belafonte has been the people Sharpe gets to meet. One of the most important was drum master Alpha Camara who Sharpe met two years ago in Holland. "He's a long-time friend of Harry's. Alpha's from Guinea and played with The Ballet National. Some time ago Harry was there putting together a theatre-dance group — which remains in existence to this day — and the two met and have been friends ever since. Alpha is a master drummer. I already play Djembe, but when I met him he just turned a little key and put me right on track. I was close, but through him and Sylifou Sylla they opened a door. It's kind of hard to mention one without the other because they always play together. They've played together for years and are masters of Djembe. They've been drumming for years.

"Alpha has got to be in his sixties. I asked him how old he was, but he wouldn't tell me. He'll have two drums on his back, running to catch a bus and you've got one drum and you're struggling to keep up. I give praise to him for directing me. The drum, the music and a very supportive family have enabled me to travel around the world and meet others. I am very thankful for that."

**Greg Sutherland**