

I REMEMBER....

We would love stories from you! Please share a memory and paste it onto one of the boards. Have a photo? Print it out and bring it in to post up. Thank you for being part of the past twenty years.

elasticarts.org



## UPCOMING

**FRIDAY JUNE 1 | 7:00PM**

Elastic Arts 1st Annual Benefit!

Jeff Parker Trio ft. Ra and Abrams, Honoree Avreeayl Ra, Spectralina, Uncle El, RoboGrrl, "Confetti Ritual", DJ John Simmons

**SATURDAY JUNE 2 | 9:00 PM**

Caleb Willitz Ensemble

**MONDAY JUNE 4 | 9:00PM**

Anagram Series

Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten

**WEDNESDAY JUNE 6 | 8:00 PM**

Chicago Underground Film Festival opening

**FRIDAY JUNE 8 | 9:00PM**

Christopher Dammann's Restroy, Carlos Chavarria

**SATURDAY JUNE 9 | 8:00 PM**

Homerroom's 10 Year Reunion

**MONDAY JUNE 11 | 9:00PM**

Anagram Series

Gregory Dudzienski Trio, Breadwinners

**THURSDAY JUNE 14 | 9:00PM**

Improv Series

Krausbauer/Suzuki & Friends

**FRIDAY JUNE 15 | 9:00 PM**

Elastro

Ryan Ingebritsen/Ahmed Saleh, Jenna Lyle

**SATURDAY JUNE 16 | 9:00 PM**

Dark Matter Series

**MONDAY JUNE 18 | 9:00 PM**

Anagram Series

Unknown New, Thomas Helton Trio

**THURSDAY JUNE 21 | 9:00 PM**

Improv Series

Paal Nilssen-Love's Large Unit

**FRIDAY JUNE 22 | 9 PM**

Improv Series

Paal Nilssen-Love's Large Unit

**SATURDAY JUNE 23 | 7:00 PM**

Voic(ed) Project

New music by African American composers from their upcoming album OOO

**SUNDAY JUNE 24 | 9:00 PM**

John Wiese, Joe & Joe

**MONDAY JUNE 25 | 9:00 PM**

Anagram Series

Rempis/Maunu/Sudderberg, Mike Salter Quartet

**TUESDAY JUNE 26 | 8:00 PM**

WE Series

Megalaverne and Shirley ft. Mabel Kwan and Andrew Tham

**FRIDAY JUNE 29 | 9:00 PM**

Elastro

Bearl, Angel Bat Dawid, Column Duo

**SATURDAY, JUNE 30 | 9:00 PM**

Bill Brickey presents Kevin Newhall

**THURSDAY JULY 5 | 9:00 PM**

Improv Series

Keefe Jackson's Likely So

**FRIDAY JULY 6 | 9 PM**

Ken Vandermark's Marker

**THURSDAY JULY 12 | 9 PM**

Improv Series

Chicago Edge Ensemble

**FRIDAY JULY 13 | 9:00 PM**

Elastro and Dark Matter Series

Social Music

**SATURDAY JULY 14 | 7:00 PM**

Myra Su

**TUESDAY JULY 17 | 9:00 PM**

Rob Collier/Ben Aguilar

**TUESDAY JULY 24 | 9:00 PM**

Buxton's Kingdom

Matt Endahl's Doomsday Philharmonic

**JULY 27 & 28 | 9:00 PM**

Beyond Form: A partnership of spiritual vision and brutalist flesh ft. FRGMENTS by Julien Bayle and Scan Lines by Kim Alpert

**JULY 29 | 3PM**

Beyond Form: A partnership of spiritual vision and brutalist flesh Installation presentation and artist talk

**TUESDAY JULY 31 | 8:00 PM**

WE Series

Travis Travis

**FRIDAY AUGUST 3 | 9:00 PM**

John Simmons

**SATURDAY AUGUST 4 | 9:00 PM**

Shawn Blonde

**WEDNESDAY AUGUST 8 | 7:30PM**

J e l l o Performance Series

**SATURDAY AUGUST 11 | 9:00 PM**

Dark Matter Series

Angel Bat Dawid & Gira Dahnee

**SUNDAY AUGUST 12 | 8:00 PM**

Dave Miller solo,

Jonah Parzen-Johnson solo

**FRIDAY AUGUST 17 | 9:00 PM**

Elastro Series

**SATURDAY AUGUST 18 | 8:00 PM**

Sea Beast Puppet Company

Puppet Meitdown

**THURSDAY AUGUST 23 | 9:00 PM**

Improv Series

Paul Giallorenzo's GitGO Large Group

**SUNDAY AUGUST 26 | 8:00 PM**

Muyassar Kurdi

**TUESDAY AUGUST 28 | 8:00 PM**

WE Series

Lee Blalock



# ELASTIC

## ARTS



Avreeayl Ra at the Jazz Showcase in Chicago, April, 2018; Photograph by Michael Jackson

# AVREEAYL RA: Master of Beginning

BY ADAM ZANOLINI

For the Benefit of our Elastic community, and to commemorate conferring Elastic's first annual Elastic Achievement Award upon Avreeayl Ra, it seemed fitting to include some piece of writing about him. The privilege fell to me as Executive Director of the organization to do this writing, and Avreeayl was very gracious to grant me quite a lengthy interview in his home.

More than an understanding of his career as a list of accomplishments, what he revealed to me was a continual process of becoming and a position from which the practice of music is undertaken in order to cultivate spiritual development, both within himself and ultimately among the souls that gather 'round to experience the fruit of his inexhaustible efforts. Closer to his own words,

he says that rather than a master drummer, he feels happily like a perpetual beginner, always discovering his instrument anew, always deliberately forgetting what has become comfortable in order to start cultivating something else, so that he has become "a master of beginning." Avreeayl is inspirational and integral to the creative arts community in Chicago because of his unique approach to the drums (flute, kalimba, voice...) which despite his innovations, is deeply rooted in the most originary of Chicago improvised music traditions. But even more than that, he embodies the spirit of mentorship and community that characterizes a lineage of improvising musicians unique to Chicago that has been reverberating around the globe for decades.

While I may not be quite able to fully expound the intricate and subtle points our discussion touched upon, I can at least report some of the fascinating personal history he shared with me. Avreeayl Ra was born and raised in Chicago. His father, Arthur "Swinglee" O'Neil, was a prominent tenor player in town, working in the mid-'50s with the early Chicago groups of Le Sonyr Ra (who later became Sun Ra) and was an important mentor to saxophonist John Gilmore. Some of Avreeayl's earliest formative experiences were familial. His older brother was a musician and would take him to hear the drummers at 63rd Street Beach.

Avreeayl describes the drum circles at the lakefront as possibly the origin of the improvised music tradition in Chicago, going

▶ CONTINUED

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► CONTINUED even further back to when 31st street beach was its locus—when the Black community was still juridically contained in Bronzeville. After being introduced to the scene there by his elder brother, Avreeayl would go to the beach to practice and to learn from the drummers there, who would often play all night long until after sunrise.

When he was 21, Avreeayl took a job as a cab driver to earn enough to buy a set of drums. Fortuitously, one evening he happened to pick up Ari Brown (who coincidentally had been performing with Avreeayl's father) and years later, they would form a groundbreaking partnership that would become a fixture in Chicago's jazz landscape. But the first group he played with, around 1969, was Phil Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble, in which Avreeayl played not trap drums, but congas and soprano saxophone. Cohran's approach to music was part of a wider philosophy that integrated nutrition, herbalism and holistic healing, astronomy, history and culture, and this was profoundly influential to Avreeayl among many other Chicago musicians, instilling a spiritual foundation to the practice of music. Teaching drums with Bro. Phil was "Atu" Harold Murray (A.K.A. "Black Harold") a seminal figure in Black Arts music in Chicago, founder of the legendary Sun Drummer group which also nurtured percussionist Sir Kahil El Zabar. Avreeayl speaks of the importance of other mentors during this period as well, such as Eugene Easton, who taught him soprano saxophone, and guitarist Pete Cosey. Avreeayl moved to New Orleans in 1973 until about 1975, where he received important mentorship by pianist Professor Longhair.

After his return to Chicago, he and his wife opened a performance space in a former bowling

alley on 75th St. called Higher Ground for the Arts. A 10,000 sq.ft. venue with two stages, Higher Ground featured a variety of performances from jazz to African dance to reggae, and it served as a rehearsal space for creative musicians like Art Ensemble of Chicago bassist Malachi Favors. Avreeayl and his wife operated the space for several years until a brazen theft of the sound equipment forced its closure.

From 1984 until 1988, Avreeayl toured regularly with Sun Ra and his Arkestra, splitting his time between New York and Chicago, although the Arkestra was then based out of Philadelphia. For another drummer, this would have been a particularly difficult assignment because the rest of the Arkestra except for Avreeayl and Chicago bassist Rollo Radford were living and rehearsing together constantly, while Avreeayl never had a chance to rehearse with them at all. But Avreeayl's many years of experience and study with the many spiritually oriented musicians in Chicago, who themselves were carrying on a legacy of Sun Ra's teachings, gave him a similar orientation and approach to music that enabled him to slide right in.

Of all his illustrious mentors, perhaps Avreeayl's most vivid memories are of Sun Ra, whose influence was not only musical, but also philosophical (as it had been in Sun Ra's early days of public debate and self-published pamphlets in Washington Park in the 1950s). Around the same time in the '80s, Avreeayl was also performing frequently with Light Henry Huff in his group Breath, as well as with Malachi Favors. It was Favors, he said, that convinced Avreeayl to join the AACM. And he continued working with Ari Brown, whom Avreeayl calls "in many ways my most important mentor," largely because of their professional relationship that went back to 1975 and continues to this day.

"I'll skip forward a bit because space is limited (plus here's where I come in). In 1998, Ari Brown and Avreeayl began playing every Thursday as a duo at Fred Anderson's Velvet Lounge at 2128 1/2 S. Indiana Ave. The Velvet Lounge had until then only offered music on weekends, but Ari Brown's set began an expansion which would lead to music 5 nights each week. Avreeayl describes these sessions, and the scene at the Velvet Lounge in general, as a crucial place where experienced musicians, which he by then had become, could carry on the tradition of mentoring of younger musicians. There, he was able to meet and interact with younger players who would go on to make names for themselves, such as Nicole Mitchell, David Boykin, Darius Savage, Tomeka Reid, Isaiah Spencer, Cecile Savage and so many others.

This is also about the same time that a 1st-year undergraduate at the University of Chicago named Adam Zanolini, just a little too young to be in the Velvet, notwithstanding had his eyelids

peeled back by the very same Ari and Avreeayl session, which by this time had added Fred Hopkins, bassist from Henry Threadgill's group Air. The Velvet Lounge was a place that was fairly close to the middle of Chicago, where folks from all sides could come and hear the music, and Elastic was greatly inspired by Fred Anderson's Velvet Lounge and the space it created for free improvised music. Around the same time as Ari Brown and Avreeayl were expanding horizons on Thursdays in 1998, the founders of Elastic were coalescing to present their own performances in a space not terribly far from the Velvet Lounge in Pilsen.

After I grew up a little and came back to Chicago, I returned to the Velvet to hear Avreeayl play with Billy Brimfield, William Perry, and Darius Savage, then Nicole Mitchell and David Boykin, then Bob Moses, then Douglas Ewart. I became permanently fascinated by music I realized was more than entertainment but was, rather as Avreeayl says, about "inner attainment." Eventually I could not help but dedicate myself to this kind of spiritually rooted, extraordinarily creative, free improvised music. I studied, got degrees, got some experience, and now I'm the Executive Director of Elastic. Avreeayl Ra has inspired me to cultivate my highest qualities and to use the best of my abilities to push forward the vision of freedom, creativity, healing, and purpose through music that is our inheritance from visionaries like Sun Ra, Phil Cohran, Fred Anderson, Malachi Favors, Light Henry Huff, and Atu Harold

Murray.

Now beginning his eighth decade (he'll be 71 when he accepts our award) Avreeayl continues working with many younger musicians from many backgrounds, mentoring emerging artists with a focus not only on music, but on lessons of life he has accumulated on his fascinating journey. Avreeayl Ra is a driving force of the music—relentless, powerful, and generous. His practice transforms rhythm and melody into an eternal meditation, a circular motion with a purpose of healing. His catalytic spirit is a bridge between secular creations that we can all simply enjoy for their inventive beauty and an ancient-future matrix of spiritual investigations into the possibilities of human experience. Besides stimulating and mesmerizing, his music is a manifestation of uncommonly passionate devotion to creative freedom that not only underlies his music, but also forms the substrate of our artistic community, without which Elastic could not have been sustained for two decades. We are honored, we are humbled, we are enormously fortunate to have him so frequently in our midst. With gratitude, we honor him! 🙏

### The Elastic Achievement Award

will be presented each year to an artist who embodies the qualities that the organization stands for—artistic excellence, innovation, the defiance of boundaries, contributions to the broader creative community—and whose achievements represent the best of what we hope to make possible by creating this space to present creative, adventurous music, art and performance. Elastic is thrilled to confer the first Elastic Achievement Award upon Avreeayl Ra, whose commitment to the creative arts community has endured for nearly five decades, and who has inspired and mentored countless younger musicians and artists.



## Sessions from the Archive:

LIVE at Elastic:  
Avreeayl Ra & Guests  
8-1-2013

Harrison Bankhead/Elbio Barilari/  
Alex Duvel/Rob Mazurek/Julia  
Miller/Avreeayl Ra/Ed Wilkerson

Or listen here:  
[http://elasticarts.org/  
graphic-notes-v14-june-2018-aug-2018/](http://elasticarts.org/graphic-notes-v14-june-2018-aug-2018/)  
<http://elasticarts.org/category/blog/>

[elasticarts.org](http://elasticarts.org)

Elastic Arts welcome Kim Alpert as our visual arts curator for 2018/2019. She would like to thank Jordan Martins for his dedicated work putting up so many great shows and the organization for their trust in her as the first new curator in their expanding curatorial residency program.

# CONNECTED: An Interactive Timeline

BY KIM ALPERT

"All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."

— S u s a n S o n t a g

With 20 years to celebrate, I found myself considering many rich visual concepts to present for this moment. The last two decades were filled with so many milestones for Elastic. The organization has truly embodied its name, stretching, growing, and bouncing back from name changes and location moves. Elastic has evolved with the community it serves.

One thing has always resonated, however: Elastic has been a true connective conduit for the arts community. Reminiscent of salons and coffee houses, it provides a space for the established to experiment and grow as well as foster generations of new artists.

Anyone who has been in Chicago for even a short while has seen neighborhoods go through transition. Reflecting on this brought to mind how media has become more temporary and disposable when compared to creations from two decades ago. The ability to capture a

moment, share information, and connect instantly with audiences has transformed dramatically. The concept of passing out show flyers, and framing and matting photos, are things of the past - the instant photo and disappearing story are here.

This installation brings together a physical creation of the timeline of Elastic Arts through photos, memories, and material from the community. With ongoing conversations about how we document and preserve in our modern age. This is my presentation of a moment in time, made through our shared media and memories together.

This is the moment we as a community turn twenty. I encourage all to add something as your presence is a vital part of Elastic's growth and story. Write your thoughts, memories, or captions, and build onto this living memento of Elastic Arts. 🙏

Kim Alpert believes in human-centric design and integrating technology with strategy in her time-based work. 🙏 Kim's background in fine art, music, and carpentry infuses her video installation, live performance, and commercial work with attention to detail and diverse styles. Kim's art focuses on humanism, media, and change incorporating historical and found media with analog and digital processing. 🙏 Kim holds a degree in Digital Art & Design from Full Sail University and was inducted into their Hall of Fame in 2013. Her original work has been displayed at SOFA Expo, The Modern Wing at the Art Institute of Chicago, Facets Cinematheque and is on display in the permanent collection in The National Music Centre of Canada. Kim was the film and video curator for Around the Coyote over nine festivals and has a deep passion for the Chicago art community. 🙏 Kim is an outspoken advocate for social change through technology, meditation, and bananas.

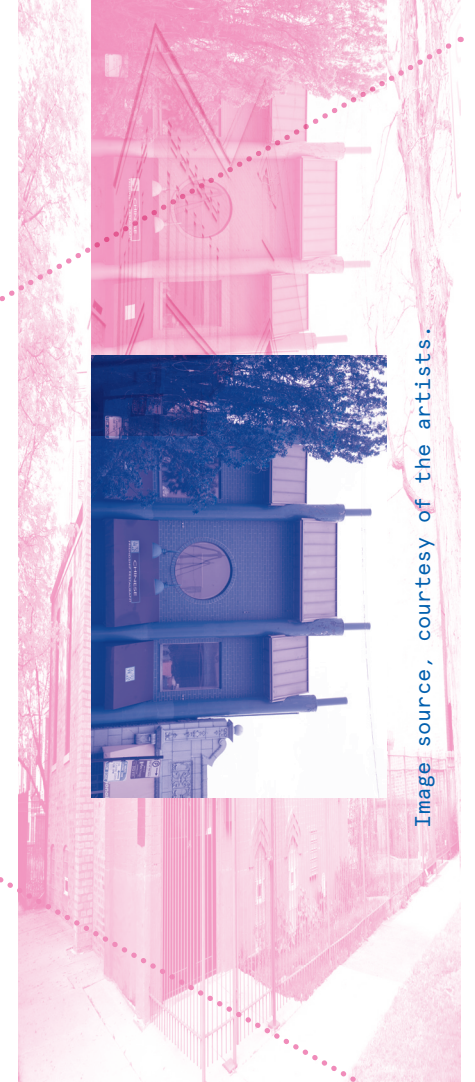


Image source, courtesy of the artists.