

Dion Parson Biography

“... a soloistic drummer with a pianist's propensity toward making music..”

---- Lazaro Vega, *The Grand Rapid Press* ----

Dion Parson is one of New York's finest, Grammy Award Winning, drummers. Born June 11, 1967, St. Thomas USVI, Dion's musical foundation ranges from classical, reggae, calypso, jazz, African, and pop music.

Dion's first musical instrument was the trombone, but at the age of 15 he began playing drums and was awarded a grant from Virgin Islands Council on the Arts to study at Interlochen Music Academy in Michigan. Upon returning home, he was selected to be the VI representative in the McDonald's All-American High School Band to play Drums. Dion later attended Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1985, where he studied percussion with Keith Copeland and William Moersch, receiving his B.M. in Music Education in 1990. In 1994, Dion began studying with master drummer Michael Carvin. A relationship he maintained for 18 years.

After graduation Dion moved to New York where he quickly became part of the jazz scene playing with such greats as the late Milt Jackson, Monty Alexander, Jon Faddis, Steve Grossman, Gary Bartz, Terence Blanchard, Geri Allen, Donald Harrison, Don Byron, David Sanchez, Ray Anderson, Stephen Scott, Marc Cary, Lee Konitz, Ernest Ranglin, Ron Blake, Terell Stafford, Cyrus Chestnut, Wycliffe Gordon, Babatunde Olatunji, Baaba Maal, Joanne Brackeen, Dianne Reeves, Freda Payne, Allan Harris, Victor Goines, Bill Salter, Bill Saxton, Steve Turre and many more. His association with these musicians has taken him well beyond US borders on tours to such places as Asia, Europe, Canada, the West Indies, Africa, and the Middle East.

Being exposed to these great musicians enabled Dion to record for several major labels, including Columbia, Sony, Gramavision, Arabesque, Blue Note, High Note, Verve, Enja, Koch Records and Concord Records. His recording experience and close association with fellow St. Thomas native Ron Blake led to the birth of Tahmun Records, which housed his first recordings as a leader, *21st Century* (co-led with Ron Blake), and his first solo effort, *People Music*, released in 2001.

In 1998 Dion and Ron Blake Co-Founded *21st Century Band*, which Dion leads. This band features the music and talent of their Heritage: *The United States Virgin Islands*. The music of *Dion Parson & 21st Century Band* is a true mixture of traditional Jazz Harmonies fused with Caribbean Rhythms all on a high intellectual level.

It is truly a New Sound of the Caribbean!

Because of this 'New Caribbean Sound', in 2009 Dion got the unique opportunity to record his latest CD live at one of the most important Jazz Venues in world, the Jazz

Venue of Jazz At Lincoln Center (JALC): Dizzy's Club *Coca-Cola*, New York City.
In co-production with Branford Marsalis, Dion proudly finalized this musical journey with the release of this CD in 2010: "*Dion Parson and 21st Century Band featuring Ron Blake and Terell Stafford, Live at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola - Vol. 1*".

In January of 2006, Dion started playing with the Broadway show, *The Color Purple*. Although a newcomer to the theater world, his extensive experience with various styles of music made him an instant fit in the musically comprehensive show that "blends and blurs the lines of gospel, pop, ragtime and blues."

Always interested in giving back, coupled with his desire to ensure a continuous crop of talented musicians, Dion began his teaching career at Rutgers University in 1992 as an adjunct professor. He enjoyed teaching, and this experience opened other doors of opportunity as an educator, including classes and workshops at Cheyney University (PA), VI Council on the Arts Jazz Exchange Workshops (as part of the St. Croix Jazz Festival), Artists in Residence Program - the Arts High School (NJ), Harlem School of the Arts (NY), North Carolina University, and Manna House Workshops (Harlem, NY). Since February of 2005 Dion has been the drum/percussion instructor at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) Jazz for Teens program, Stevens Institute of Technology: Hoboken, New Jersey, USA, and the Conservatory of Amsterdam, where he conducts clinics, workshops, teach private lessons and theory classes, directs student ensembles and performs. In addition, he continues to give private instruction in New York City and around the world while touring.

In 2009 Dion partnered with the Virgin Islands Lottery to develop and implement the education program: "*Mentoring Through The Arts of Music*". The essence of this program is recruiting, mentoring and developing US Virgins Island musical talent.

In 2007 Dion started as the creative director of the new international music organization 'United Jazz International, LLC' (UJI), of which Branford Marsalis and Steve Coleman are the founding fathers. UJI develops musical residencies and projects around the world.

Dion always will continue to make music and surely will be persistent in his efforts to master his instrument. Dion's vast experience as a performer and his dedication as an educator allows him to further broaden his knowledge and embrace opportunities to bring his music to the world.

Dion Parson endorses: Taye Drums, Dream Cymbals, Evens Drum Heads and Vater drumsticks.

"Parson's style and sound owe much to Roy Haynes and Max Roach. Skittering open rolls, high-pitched toms, and bright cymbals; dance unconsciously in the background, always on top of the beat."