



MUSE: Breaking Artistic Ground

Scott Burton and Glows in the Dark, along with Fight the Big Bull, will be hosting Matana Roberts for a performance on May 22, 2009, at MUSE Creative Workspace.

by Joey Ciucci

photos by Dean Christesen

Ashby Anderson is a piano player who performs concerts, not a keyboardist who plays shows. He is a composer concerned with the historical and structural intersections of mood, form, and rhythm. He is a theorist who relishes mathematical chordal relationships and harmonic connectedness. For Anderson, these are important distinctions, and his reverence for acoustic jazz played in traditional formats is palpable. Despite his preference for old style performance settings, his writing style is a taut, contemporary, rhythmic stew that encompasses Anderson's well delineated musical philosophy.

Anderson furthers his vision as the founder of Richmond's MUSE Creative Workspace, a converted Shockoe Bottom warehouse that serves as a performance space, music school, art gallery, and community gathering place. On May 22, MUSE will host Glows in the Dark with special guest saxophonist Matana Roberts. This is the type of event that Anderson envisioned when he created MUSE—presentations of high quality, performance-centered concerts, featuring distinctive Richmond groups in an intimate setting.

MUSE's uniquely organic vibe, a mix between a house show and a formal concert, is a testament to Anderson's passion as well as the myriad of activities that go on there. The lovingly restored building's functional and funky décor offers comfortable settings for individual and group lessons (many offered through the

Richmond Youth Jazz Guild) as well as acoustic concerts.

MUSE's strength lies in its diverse philosophy. Although Anderson notes that Muse was born out of frustration over a lack of performance-centered environments, the overwhelming feeling once you enter the studio is one of forward-thinking hope and inclusion. When I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Anderson for this article, I felt lucky and empowered to converse with him. Mr. Anderson was enlightening without being didactic, a characteristic which surely helps him reach his students, and his concept offered a holistic creative ethos, powered by surroundings, family, respect for the past, and a keen desire to break new artistic ground.



Anderson's fingerprints are all over MUSE, in its physical layout and its confident, optimistic backdrop. Look for Glows in the Dark, Fight the Big Bull, and Matana Roberts to incorporate MUSE's distinctive character into already formidable and inspiring music.