

## **Guggenheim Fellowship Acknowledges the Life Work of Body Musician Keith Terry:**

### **First-of-its-Kind International Body Music Festival Takes Underground Art Form into the Mainstream**

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What is “body music?” If you ask Keith Terry he is likely to answer, “clapping, slapping, snapping, stepping, and vocalizing.” The first a-ha! moment came while he was rehearsing with the renowned Jazz Tap Ensemble. Always intrigued by the gray area that blurs movement, music, and dance, Keith suddenly realized that he could transfer the music he was playing on the drum kit elsewhere. “I stood up and moved what I was playing on my drums to my body. That’s how I came to it,” remembers Keith. Encouraged by Charles “Honi” Coles and Charlie “Cookie” Cook — great jazz tap stylists who recognized both the ingenuity of Keith’s music and its similarity to the Hambone they’d performed in vaudeville—he launched into a little-explored career now known as body music.

Keith’s lifelong quest of music and dance has just been rewarded with a highly-coveted **Guggenheim Fellowship**, to pursue collaborative work with body musicians in Brazil, Turkey, and Indonesia. A highlight of this grant will be the inaugural **International Body Music Festival** held in the San Francisco Bay Area this December featuring Brazilian body music ensemble **Barbatuques** and Keith’s own **Slammin All-Body Band**.

Keith’s creations go far deeper than the occasional stamp or clap. Falling somewhere between danced music and audible choreography, he sees in body music the ability to tap into one of the oldest expressions of humankind. It leads to powerful moments, as he discovered recently while directing a body music workshop in Amsterdam. “I was teaching a rhythm that involved touching the chest and then snapping, stepping, and singing. I wasn’t looking at the class; I was just listening,” he says. “It was beautiful so I let it go on for a while and when I turned around I saw most of the room in tears. There was something about the act of touching the chest that moved everyone. It was about the heart. It made me think I had stumbled onto a rhythmic expression that was ancient and visceral.”

For Keith, body music is about synchronicity, finding that special, unique rhythm that allows for communication on a much deeper level; like the synchronicity of two people deep in conversation unconsciously walking in step with each other.

Synchronicity readily reveals itself through collaboration, though sometimes it’s more challenging than walking in step. Musical exchange helps unlock a whole range of cultural perspectives that Keith feels are often overlooked as irrelevant. “When working with Indonesians and Westerners,” he says, “I love that moment when we count off in four and start playing for the first time. The Indonesians start on *four*, and the Westerners start on the *one*. There’s a major difference in perception here. You realize that how you’re playing, and your reference to the music, is so different, so culturally ingrained.”

Though Keith has a diverse background—trained in jazz drumming, then working with tap dancers, physical comedians, and even circus performers in the ’70s and ’80s—it was hearing Javanese gamelan music performed live in the 1970s that forever changed the way he thought about music. “It was like my ears exploded. The gongs moved air in a way that you just don’t hear in a recording. There’s so much more to music than the notes and the rhythms.”

His collaborations with gamelan ensembles and Indonesian musicians—including combining body music with Balinese *kecak*, or monkey chant—led him to think more closely about the deeper implications of working across cultures and how music represents culturally embedded values that exist outside of music. Perhaps the Indonesian emphasis on the end of musical cycles, rather than the beginning, indicates a fundamental value of looking towards the past rather than the future. Another concept—referred to as “rubber time” (*jam karet* in Indonesian)—is a gamelan musical term that comes from the perception that time is being stretched by those listening to the “shimmering” harmonics and complex rhythmic cycles of Javanese gamelan. The expression has no parallel in Western music, but is used in everyday vernacular language in Indonesian society in non-musical settings as well.

The Guggenheim fellowship—the first awarded to a body musician—will allow Keith the opportunity to explore these kinds of music-meets-life concepts in greater depth. Focusing on collaboration with body musicians from three different cultures, Turkey, Indonesia, and Brazil, the grant provides funding for travel and research to explore some of the deeper cultural elements of body music performance. He is further leveraging this opportunity by producing the first-of-its-kind International Body Music Festival, for which his non-profit arts organization, Crosspulse ([www.crosspulse.com](http://www.crosspulse.com)), is raising funds through private and public foundations, corporations, and individual donations.

This ambitious festival will take place in San Francisco and Oakland in December 2008, and will include performances and workshops by Barbatuques, as well as performers of other body music traditions, such as Hambone or South African Gumboot. Though Keith has never met in person with **Fernando Barba**, the director of Brazil’s Barbatuques (and who also runs an institute of Body Music in his home country), the two have exchanged emails and recordings over the past three years. Keith and other body musicians are connecting for the first time thanks to planet-shrinking technology like YouTube and MySpace. An international festival is the next logical step for a music as kinetic as this.

Keith sees the festival concept as comprising a larger vision, using this first year as a springboard for later touring festivals. The festival will represent an annual cycle of rhythm, while various international collaborations pulsate throughout the year, bringing a new global synchronicity to the continually emerging field of body music.