

Making music with their bodies

BAY AREA TO HOST FIRST INTERNATIONAL BODY MUSIC FESTIVAL

By Andrew Gilbert
for the Mercury News

Keith Terry doesn't just "sing the body electric"; he plays the instrument with which he was born like a drum, a bass, a multi-instrument percussion orchestra. With dexterous hands, resonant thighs, supple fingers, fluent feet and a surfeit of concave and convex surfaces, the human body is a wondrous apparatus, and Terry has spent much of his career honing an array of rhythmic sounds based upon his physical person.

Over the decades he has collaborated with artists from around the world, many of them steeped in their own body-music traditions. Now, the Oakland-based Terry has engineered the first International Body Music Festival, an unprecedented global gathering that brings together leading practitioners of various ancient but utterly contemporary art forms.

Running Tuesday through Dec. 7 at various venues in Oakland and San Francisco, the festival encompasses six days of educational events and concerts featuring artists from Canada, Brazil, Turkey, Bali and the United States, including many who never have performed in California.

"You've got a broad vision of what's encompassed by body music," says Terry, who was able to produce the festival through his educational and performance organization Crosspulse with the help of a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship.

"It's really a dream come true to have all these people in one place," he says. "Aside from the performances ... it's

the informal interchange I'm really anticipating."

The primary performances take place over the weekend at Theatre Artaud in San Francisco, with the Dec. 5 program featuring short sets by all the artists in the festival. The Dec. 6 program showcases the Near Eastern and Asian artists, while Dec. 7 features a family matinee and an evening roster focusing on artists of the Americas.

Many of the performers draw on practices that date back centuries to create new works that radically stretch the notion of folkloric art. For instance, Dewa Putu Berata, director of the Balinese ensemble Cudamani, presents the Kecak Project, a new piece composed for the festival in collaboration with the celebrated Bay Area groups Gamelan Sekar Jaya and Gamelan X. The piece is based on the high-energy, interlocking monkey chant associated with the epic "Ramayana" (best known in the West through the film "Baraka").

"In Bali there are many traditional artists very open to new ideas," Terry says. "We're seeing a lot of that in body music these days. You can think of the body as an old instrument, and there are many new interpretations of how to play it."

Some of the body-music art forms have rarely or never been seen before in the Bay Area. The Istanbul-based duo KeKeÇa, who perform at the Oakland Museum of California next Thursday and Artaud on Dec. 5 and 6, sets the odd-metered music of Turkey to gracefully flowing grooves. Rather than emphasizing speed and intricate technique, KeKeÇa's Tugay Basar and Timuçin

Gürer create music that's measured, funky "and very sensual," Terry says, "like running water over rocks."

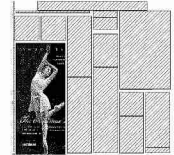
Celina Kalluk and Lucie Idlout, who hail from Canada's far north territory of Nunavut, also perform at the Oakland Museum next Thursday and Artaud on Dec. 5 and 6. The female form of Inuit throat singing is very different from the better-known throat singing of Tibet and Tuva. Standing inches apart, the women use each other's mouths as resonating chambers, producing overtones that almost sound like electronic music.

"This will really open people's eyes," Terry says. "I've only seen it performed twice before, at festivals around 30 years ago. They create these amazing futuristic sounds."

From the beginning, Terry's body-music career has been marked by a love of traditional forms and an insistent search for new sounds and combinations. Born and raised in West Texas, he started his musical journey as a jazz drummer.

A founder of the innovative Los Angeles-based Jazz Tap Ensemble, he eventually discovered that he could create complex rhythms without a drum set, and Terry began developing his hybrid approach to body percussion and dance with the encouragement of legendary tap dancers such as Charles "Honi" Coles.

Over the years he's collaborated with a mind-bending array of artists, from Bobby McFerrin, Robin Williams and choreographer Tandy Beal to San Jose Taiko and Gamelan Sekar Jaya, and he has created a series of fascinating groups. In recent



years, he's devoted himself mostly to the Slammin All-Body Band, an a cappella ensemble featuring four vocalists, a beat boxer and Terry's body percussion.

The festival's centerpiece features the premiere of a collaboration between Slammin and Barbatuques, an extraordinary 12-member group from São Paulo, Brazil, making its U.S. debut.

Founded in the mid-'90s by Fernando Barba, the group grew out of informal seminars he offered while teaching his own idiosyncratic body music and vocal techniques. Drawing on Brazil's rich rhythmic traditions of samba and *maracatu*, Barbatuques has forged a stunning sound full of sumptuous melodies and infectious grooves.

Terry discovered Barbatuques via the Internet. The timing of the Body Music Festival was largely determined by the availability of Barbatuques, whose travel expenses to the United States were covered by a three-day engagement at the Chicago Human Rhythm Project. After years of corresponding, Terry and Barba first had a chance to spend time together in October, when Terry spent two weeks in Brazil.

"It was like meeting a brother," Barba says from São Paulo. "Keith knows more than we do about things around the world. We know a lot, too, but he's on the road more. There are a lot of people doing inter-

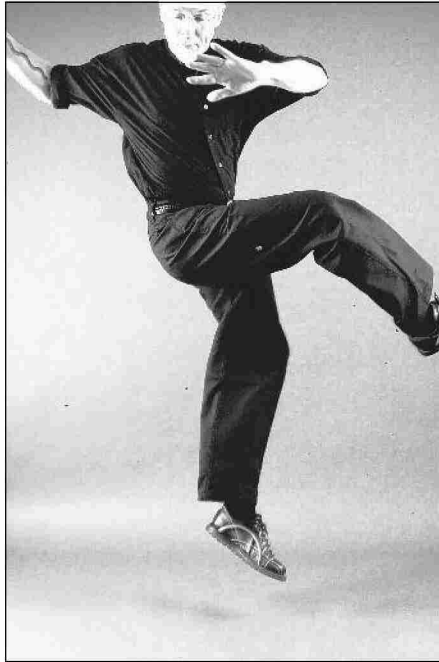
esting things. A lot of people are researching alone, and ... finding each other."

International Body Music Festival

When: Tuesday through Dec. 7

Where: Theatre Artaud (450 Florida St., San Francisco) and other venues

Tickets/information: (510) 601-9797, www.brownpapertickets.com/event/47932



Keith Terry organized the body music festival, which starts Tuesday.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF CROSSPULSE



Fernando Barba, left, and Andre Hosoi of Barbatuques, a 12-member São Paulo body music group making its U.S. debut.