

## **Mjumbe: A Tribute**

Jazz Master Roy Mjumbe Brooks (1938–2005) was a phenomenal drummer I met in 1978 after I had married Harold McKinney, a Detroit-based pianist/composer, teacher and performer. On occasion, Harold hired Roy in several of his ensembles in the '80s and '90s. However, Mjumbe was much more than a sideman. Newly returned to Detroit from New York in the late '70s, he became a colleague in the Detroit jazz advocacy movement. He re-formed his ensemble The Artistic Truth in Detroit and became involved in the then-sprouting Advocacy For Jazz independent music labels' movement for Black musicians, of which the Tribe Records collective was an example. He formed Musicians United to Save Indigenous Culture (M.U.S.I.C.) and vibed with other godparents of independent Black music advocacy such as Harold, Phil Ranelin, Wendell Harrison, Pamela Wise Harrison, Marcus Belgrave, Kenny Cox and Barbara Cox.

Mjumbe was amazingly creative. As a performer, he would 'play the room' – literally. He'd roam the club's space, using his sticks on the different surfaces as he'd come across them. He blew into various tubes to change the intonation of his drum kit, playing African-inspired rhythms. He would meticulously bend his large saw between his knees, coaxing out beautiful resonant melodies improvised over a jazz standard or an original tune.

Mjumbe was also a mentor and teacher for me. By the early 1990s, I had formed a women's vocal and shakeré percussion society, Hakamma (Women of Wise Words), and also helped form Women's Percussion Ensemble (WPE). In those days, African-American drummers were quite adamant about not teaching women to play drums. Our champion was Mjumbe, the first jazz musician who took our group seriously. He incorporated us in his Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival appearance as a part of his Aboriginal Percussion Choir. His mentorship helped us become regarded as musicians, rather than female hobbyists. Afterwards, my own husband Harold acknowledged Hakamma and WPE, and recorded us as part of his *Discovering Jazz* series.

I love Mjumbe (Swahili for 'Statesman' or 'Messenger') as a musical father. He is one of my heroes.

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