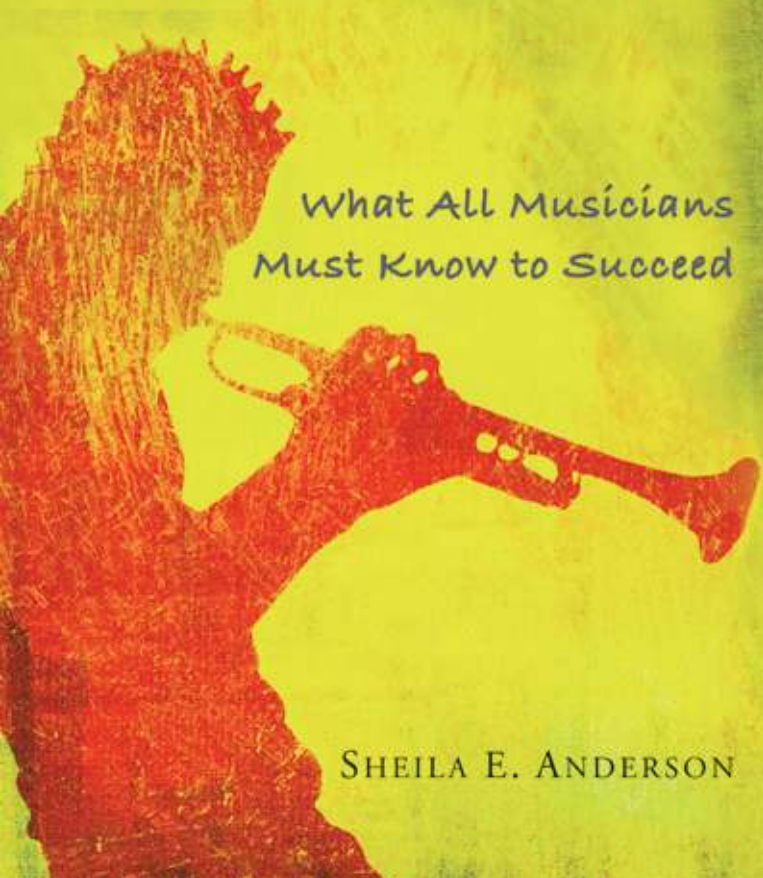


How to Grow as a Musician

*What All Musicians
Must Know to Succeed*

SHEILA E. ANDERSON



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Dedication

In loving memory of my friend, Harvey S. Wise, who passed away on November 15, 2003, one year to the day that I turned in my manuscript.

Contents

Acknowledgments *vii*

Introduction *ix*

Who's Who *xvii*

Part One On Development as an Artist

Chapter 1	Getting Started	3
Chapter 2	Learning One's Craft	19
Chapter 3	Formal Education Versus Learning on the Bandstand	29
Chapter 4	Is There Such a Thing as Too Much Practice?	39
Chapter 5	Survival 101: From Sideman to Leader	43

Part Two On Composing and Recording

Chapter 6	When and How to Record	53
Chapter 7	The Art of Writing a Song	65
Chapter 8	The Empty-Vessel Theory	73

Part Three On Personal Growth

Chapter 9	Overcoming Success and Failure	79
Chapter 10	Ego Check	91
Chapter 11	Self-Assessment	99
Chapter 12	What Are You <i>Sure</i> You <i>Don't</i> Know?	105

Part Four On Putting on a Performance

Chapter 13	Preparation for a Performance	111
Chapter 14	The Dos and Don'ts of Performing	115
Chapter 15	Learning from Elders	131

Part Five On the Business

Chapter 16	Contracts: Watch Your Money	135
Chapter 17	How to Promote and Present Yourself	149
Chapter 18	The Importance of a Manager	157
Chapter 19	Getting a Job and Keeping It	167

Part Six Self-Evaluation: Do You Have What It Takes?

Index *187*

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Introduction

This is a book about growth, success, and personal discovery. It is designed for musicians who want more out of their careers—although you do not have to be a musician to benefit from the wisdom of the people interviewed. Most of the interviews are from musicians, but I have included non-musicians in the music industry in Part Five, “On the Business.”

In my ten years working in the jazz community as a radio announcer and as a TV talk-show host/producer, I have met many musicians. Often our conversations turn to musicianship. I have discovered that, for the most part, musicians are divided into two groups: the A-team and the B-team. I once asked Jeff Clayton his definition of these teams, and he said, “The A-team is made up of those who are always working, and the B-team is made up of those who are barely working.” Upon further investigation, I found the team concept to be much more complex than that, although the A-team does tend to work more often and get the best work. Throughout this book, I use actual examples of the situations, behavior, and characteristics of musicians in each group to help you to understand the differences. At the end of the book a self-evaluation has been provided for you to determine which team you are on and where you fit.

Success is defined in many ways, and it is subjective. You might judge your success by your monetary status, your social standing, your celebrity—or all three. Chick Corea wrote an article entitled “The Function of an Artist” in the October 28, 1971 issue of *downbeat* magazine in which he restated what saxophonist Jeff Clayton once told me about what an artist needs to have in order to succeed. Jeff said that each musician/artist must have 100 percent of three things to be successful: ability, business acumen, and drive. It did not matter what percent of each was present, but together, the three parts had to equal 100 percent:

* * * *

A composer who has developed his artform very far (technology) and has the best intentions with it (ethics) but who makes no attempt to have

his music performed (administration) will not be successful. Or, a painter who has good intentions (ethics) and promotes his work a lot (admin) but whose paintings are lacking in quality (tech) won't be successful. Or a filmmaker who has a quality product (tech) and promotes it well (admin) but whose intentions are to enslave others for personal gain (ethics) will, in the long run, fail. So an artist is and does all these things well when he is functioning successfully.



The musicians interviewed in this book are from varied genres, but all have integrated those elements that have led to their success. Many of the musicians I interviewed are people I have listened to over the years: Edwin Hawkins, Al Jarreau, Ron Carter, Oscar Brown Jr., and Ruth Brown. When I watched *The Arsenio Hall Show* years ago, it never occurred to me that I would one day meet Arsenio's musical director, Michael Wolff. Michael was extremely candid about everything, especially when I asked him about some of his pet peeves:

"Most people are mediocre, librarians, doctors, musicians . . . They don't listen; they don't play great. I hate when you go to a gig and some musician onstage says, 'Thanks for supporting live music' . . . I feel [like saying] F-you! I say if you are not getting much out of the music, don't come support this shit. If it needs to die, let it die. That's bullshit! What is this, a charity? When I'm giving new music, I am giving you a gift! If you don't want it, don't take it; if you want it, I'm going to open up my heart and give it everything I have to give . . . that's my approach to the music. I want you to love it! If you don't feel it, you don't feel it. It's not intellectual."

Though I had known Dorothy Lawson for many years, we had never had an extensive conversation about music. We had met when my friend Nancy Cristy introduced me to the late Florence Joffe, who, at the age of eighty, had been quite taken with the young Dorothy. I had attended several of her performances, and so I was shocked to see Dorothy as part of Ron Carter's "Nonet." Not so surprising was her insight into who she is and how she keeps the different parts of her life together.

I found the musicians to be generous, introspective, and, most of all, humorous. The oldest person was John Levy, who at the age of ninety-two continues to look to the future. Though he has not been a working musician for many years, he has evolved into a manager. He had much to share about the business of music

and the success of those whom he has managed. He has no plans to retire; he says he has “half-eimer’s not Alzheimer’s.”

Ruth Brown has been able to keep a positive spin on life, too; her life seems to be about perspective. She told many amusing stories but each taught a lesson. On her experience in the movie *Hairspray*: “I was doing a play called *Stagolee* with Adam Wade. An agent came in and asked if I would read for a movie. The woman was to have been a disc jockey. When I went to try out, I had no idea who Jon Waters was. I did not meet him until I went to Allentown, Pennsylvania, to film. When they brought in that white wig, I said, ‘*No way!*’ It was the first day of shooting, and I met Divine, too. He said, ‘Put that wig on your head, child, and let’s make some money.’ I think about him every time I get a check for *Hairspray*.”

Ms. Brown was sheer inspiration. At the age of seventy-six, after losing everything in an earthquake, as well as enduring colon cancer and a stroke, she has come back with a vengeance and continues to thrill audiences with her singing. Her life has had its challenges, yet she holds no bitterness.

The youngest person interviewed is pianist Eric Reed, who, at thirty-four, is mature beyond his years. I have always been impressed with his ability to grow and adapt to the world around him. Oscar Brown Jr. had me in stitches, not only when I interviewed him, but also when I transcribed the interview. I was curious to hear his reaction to hip hop. Although it has done little to further his career (which spans over fifty years in the business), “it helps my morale,” said Oscar. If there is anyone who can turn lemons into lemonade, it is Oscar Brown.

At the time of our interview, David Randolph was ninety years old and showed no sign of slowing down. Our two hours together were fascinating. When I asked David if music is mathematical, his answer surprised me:

“Emphatic . . . no! It is an absolute canard, a falsehood. The idea has gotten so much currency. When a chef does cooking, it’s a matter of how much ingredients, that’s mathematics. The man who made your chair, which you are sitting on, knows more about mathematics than a musician, an artist, or a painter. You can quote me on this . . . *Remove it from your lexicon.* Music and math are no more related. You count one, two, three, four; that is simple arithmetic.”

Then there is Bobby Sanabria, one of the most enthusiastic people I know. He is a man high on life and music. He is kinetic and mercurial, perhaps because he is a Gemini. Our interview took place at 2:00 A.M. in “his office”—which is his car. What was supposed to be one hour turned into more than two. Bobby has had a colorful life; he “grew up in the glory days of radio and in what was

to become the hot bed of new music, hip hop. It was an amazing time period that will never be duplicated. In 1973 hip hop was beginning. I knew about it but did not really listen. That was happening in the North Bronx; I grew up in Fort Apache—the South Bronx, the example of urban decay. The only thing that kept us alive was the music. It gave us joy and hope, and salsa was born, and Fania Records was born. They signed up groups and got the music heard. Lou Donaldson, George Benson, Cannonball Adderley, Nancy Wilson, and others lived in the Bronx. By 1977 that was it. The blackout did it.”

I enjoyed interviewing musicians who were eager to talk about their connections to other musicians. Edwin Hawkins had a great influence on Gospel music, and one person touched by Edwin was Richard Smallwood.

“Edwin Hawkins was a great influence on me. He set the foundation, taking Gospel music to the masses as opposed to just being in church. He and those after him, like Kirk Franklin, got flak from traditional church folks. Now it seems tame, but in 1969, it was very new and different. He set the precedence in spite of the church’s narrow-minded, self-righteous opinions. Jesus Christ was out talking to the masses, and that is what we are supposed to do. Before ‘Oh, Happy Day,’ there were no [Gospel] artists playing on secular stations. The only exception was, maybe, Mahalia Jackson.”

I was curious to find out how my interviewees defined Gospel music, given how much of what I hear sounds like any other popular music, including hip hop. Both Richard Smallwood and Edwin Hawkins agree that it is about the message, the lyrics. Says Richard: “Gospel means ‘the Good News of Jesus Christ,’ so the message is what makes Gospel music. It is not a particular style that can say this is Gospel music; it does not have to have certain chord changes. I believe that Gospel can have any kind of playing. It’s black music, and in terms of feel, you can’t escape what black music is. All black music is related, and all [of it] comes from the same roots. Now God is using a lot of young artists to reach a crowd that ‘Amazing Grace’ will not reach. When they hear the sound, the message will go forth.”

Edwin elaborated, “The first part, my definition of music, the root of music is Gospel, the Gospel is Jesus Christ. I had a serious encounter with secular musicians. It is strange how when it is time for them to do something that they think is spiritual or Gospel, their mentality changes. They think that the music itself has to change, but that is not the case necessarily. It’s easier for one who has lived the life of Gospel music to write Gospel than it is for those in secular [life]. You can’t just all of a sudden give a proper delivery of music if you have not lived in that.”

As you will see, my quest to find out how a musician grows lead me down all sorts of spiritual and secular byways.

Like Corea and Clayton said, to succeed as a musician, you have to have a handle on all aspects of the business, not just the artist part. That is the reason I interviewed a lawyer, a club owner, a radio person, a manager, and a record-label executive. Carl Griffin has had an extensive career as a producer, an A&R (artist-and-repertoire) guy, and as the head of a label. He expressed dismay concerning what has become of some of his peers:

“Myself, who signed Diana Krall and Jane Monheit; Brian Bacchas, who, while at Blue Note Records signed Norah Jones; and Jerry Griffith, who, when at Arista Records, signed Whitney Houston. Three black guys who got no credit for this, three of the main talents, signed by black men, who never got the recognition they deserved. All are out of the business except for me. We should be at the height of our careers for what we’ve done, especially Brian. Norah is selling *beaucoup* records! My idols were George Butler, Tim Tyrell at Epic; those are the black men in the business that I looked up to. From the rap side, you have Russell Simmons and P. Diddy, but on the jazz side, where are the black guys? On the business side of it, this needs to be addressed; executives should be hired.”

The importance of radio is a frequent topic of discussion. Carl said, “Radio has always been a partner to the record label. Even in the old days of payola, it was the program director or a jock who knew what the market called for; no consultant in Arizona can determine that. You need a record being played to effect sales. In jazz radio, like public radio, the audience wants to hear classics, but you have to assign special programs for new artists so that they can be heard, tour, and sell CDs.”

Several jazz musicians, especially members of the younger generation, believe that it is the responsibility of the radio stations to create “hits.” Gary Walker, music director and weekday morning host on WBGO, Jazz 88.3FM, stated, “the possibility of a hit being made always exists. I don’t think that we need to take one tune of, let’s say, Stefon Harris, and just play that and eliminate all other tunes of his catalog. I think that if musicians understood that making a hit would mean that only one song of theirs would be played, they wouldn’t like it. That would defeat any purpose that they have in mind.”

This book is not a book of back-to-back interviews, but a book of themes. There are six sections: on development as an artist; on composing; on personal growth; on putting on a performance; on the business; and self-evaluation,

in which you, the reader, get to determine your own place in the music world, whether on the A-team or the B-team.

You may ask what gives *me* the authority, or the nerve, to address this subject of success, as Al Jarreau said to me when I called him for the interview: “*You’ve got balls!*” He pointed out that the topics of this book are actually a lot like semesters in college. I have a bachelor of arts degree from Bernard M. Baruch College, but I say that I got my advanced degrees by immersing myself in the music community and from my quest to succeed. Michael Bourne, on-air announcer on WBGO, Jazz 88.3FM, gave me the moniker “The Queen of Hang.” When I decided to get involved in the jazz community, I went to every jam session, club, and jazz festival that I could attend. I made a point to meet everyone, and I was happy to be accepted so quickly.

I observed a vast difference in conversation, mindset, and approach to career as I moved up the musical food chain. One of the differences between the groups of musicians was how they saw themselves and their art. The more successful the musician, the more interesting the conversation became. They spent time telling funny stories, talking about ideas. Most times, members of the A-team were constantly working, and they never complained about anyone taking their gigs, or *not* getting gigs.

The path that led me to write this book is really a part of my life path, which has been a journey of self-discovery. As far back as I can remember, I asked the question, “What was I born to do?” In my search for the perfect career path, my road has taken many twists and turns. As a child, I read several self-help books (and I continue to do so), such as *The Magic of Believing*, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and *In Search of the Meaning of Life*. In addition, I have been consumed with biographies, autobiographies, and books of interviews. My interests have always been in music, art, literature, and especially in the people who created it. My siblings and I had to take music lessons. Of the many instruments I studied, I played the piano, the recorder, and lastly the flute. I abandoned my aspirations to be a jazz flutist when I got involved in civil rights and I realized that I did not want to do the necessary work to be a full-time musician.

As I looked for the perfect arena in which to work, I delved deep inside myself to understand and learn what I am good at. It was and still is my belief that if I found the right field, I would find a way to be successful. I worked in publishing, considered getting a degree in social work, went to bartending school, attended modeling school (on the suggestion of my mother), but nothing came out of any of these things. What did happen, however, was that I got hired, temporarily, to host

Sunday Morning Harmony on WBGO, Jazz 88.3FM. My temporary job turned into nine years as the show host, and I now host *Late Night Jazz* on Saturday nights on the same station.

I used to wish that I had been alive during the Harlem Renaissance, living as a wealthy patron of the arts who hosted Sunday brunches for the intelligentsia of the day. Reading and hearing about those who lived at that time gave me goose bumps. In a way, I have been able to create for myself a life that resembles the experience I imagined. I am surrounded by artists who continue to have a positive effect on me.

I have learned so much from all of the people that I interviewed. All have taken different roads to reach their goals and to continue in the game. I am forever enriched from hearing their knowledge and experiencing their wisdom. The interviews were their gift to me; this book is my gift to you.

Who's Who

David Alexander

David Alexander is a previous National Black Music marketing director at PolyGram/Universal Distributors and a previous regional vice president of sales at Motown Records. He is currently in special markets with Viacom.

Kenny Barron

Kenny Barron moved to New York in 1961 where he worked briefly with James Moody, Lee Morgan, Roy Haynes, and Lou Donaldson. Most significant were his four years playing and recording with Dizzy Gillespie (1962–66). Barron followed that important association with periods in the groups of Freddie Hubbard (1966–70), Yusef Lateef (1970–75), and Ron Carter's two-bass quartet (1976–80). Barron was a co-leader of the group Sphere in the 1980s, and went on to be the leader of his own trios. He was the pianist on Stan Getz's final session (a series of brilliant duets) and has recorded many dates as a leader. In the 1990s, Barron received long overdue recognition. Since 1992, he has received nine Grammy nominations for only a few of his recordings, including *People Time*, *Freefall* (2002), and *Wanton Spirit*. His latest recording is *Canta Brasil*. His Web site is www.kennybarron.com.

D. Channsin Berry

A native of Maplewood, New Jersey, "Chann," as his friends refer to him, is a graduate of Rutgers University with a bachelor of arts in journalism/film. He moved to the Bay Area in 1984 to work as a disc jockey, and then he moved to Los Angeles in 1993 to work for Disney Studios in the area of development finance for feature films. Currently he is working on his documentary; directing/producing *The New York Turntable* and the video documentary, *The Black-Line*, a profile of the African-American male over sixty-five. His third project in the works is the much-anticipated film, *Hand over Heart*, directed and produced by Berry, starring Richard Roundtree, Beverly Todd, and Clifton Powell. Berry directed the Chaka Khan music video for "Never Miss the Water,"

which received a Grammy Award nomination in 1997 for Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal.

Andy Bey

One of the great unsung heroes of jazz singing, Andy Bey is a commanding interpreter of lyrics who has a wide vocal range and a rich, full voice. *Ballads, Blues, & Bey*, released in 1996, was considered his “comeback” album. Subsequent releases, *Shades of Bey*, *Tuesdays in Chinatown*, and *American Song* (2004) have met with great acclaim. *American Song* received a Grammy Award nomination for Best Jazz Vocal.

Oscar Brown Jr.

At the age of seventy-eight, Oscar Brown Jr. lives like a man with not much time, yet also like a man with all of the time in the world. The Chicago-born composer, singer, actor, playwright, and director, who spent more than half a century in the entertainment industry, earned a reputation for being a major artist, both as writer and a performer. At age fifteen, Oscar made his professional debut acting in a national network radio series, *Secret City*. At twenty-one, he was the first to broadcast news about America’s largest minority with his *Negro Newsfront* radio program. Brown’s album *Sin and Soul*, the first of four on Columbia Records, was produced early in 1960. Oscar Brown Jr. has composed several hundred songs and over a dozen full-length theater pieces, including *Journey Through Forever*, which deals with aging, and *Great Nitty Gritty*, which depicts the plight of youth in Chicago’s low-income housing developments (from which its 1983 cast was largely recruited). Oscar put words to songs like “Dat Dere,” “Afro Blue,” and “Work Song,” and he also penned songs such as “The Snake,” “Rags and Old Iron,” and “Somebody Buy Me a Drink.” Hailed as a genius and the high priest of hip, he continues to record and perform. His Web site is www.oscarbrownjr.com.

Ruth Brown

Ruth Brown’s autobiography, *Miss Rhythm: The Autobiography of Ruth Brown, Rhythm & Blues Legend*—written by Ruth Brown and Andrew Yule and published by Donald I. Fine Books—reads like a novel. Brown’s well-known moniker is “Miss Rhythm.” As the first rhythm-and-blues singer, she remains a living legend. Brown starred in Allen Toussaint’s Off-Broadway musical

Staggerlee, made a spectacular splash in the film *Hairspray* as Motormouth Mabel, hosted the *Harlem Hit Parade* series on national public radio, and won a Tony Award for her role in the Broadway play *Black and Blue* after appearing in the original Paris production. In 1989, she received her first Grammy Award for the album *Blues on Broadway*.

James Browne

James Browne, a twenty-five-year veteran of the music industry, is a former radio announcer, artist manager, and festival producer. He was manager of Sweet Basil—the legendary jazz club located in the heart of Greenwich Village in New York City—from 1994 until 2000, when it was reopened in as Sweet Rhythm. He now owns and operates the club with Martha Baratz.

Gerald Cannon

Gerald Cannon came to my attention not just as a solid-grooving, hard-driving powerhouse on the bass, but also as a songwriter. I had heard his composition “Peri” on a Ralph Peterson recording and then again on a Roy Hargrove recording, and I thought it was just beautiful. A native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he came to New York City to test his metal. After five years with Roy Hargrove, he went to play with Elvin Jones’s “Jazzmachine” until Mr. Jones’s death in 2004. Gerald has produced his self-titled CD on his own Woodneck label and continues to make waves. His Web site is www.geraldcannon.com.

Ron Carter

Ron Carter has been a world-class bassist and cellist since the 1960s. He’s among the greatest accompanists of all time, but he has also done many albums exhibiting his prodigious technique. Carter is nearly as accomplished in classical music as he is in jazz, and he has performed with symphony orchestras all over the world. He played in the Eastman School’s Philharmonic Orchestra, and gained his degree in 1959. He joined Art Farmer’s group for a short time in 1963, before he was tapped to become a member of Miles Davis’s band. Carter remained with Davis until 1968. He is possibly the most recorded bassist in jazz history. He has led his own bands at various intervals since 1972. As a leader, he has recorded over fifty albums. Carter also contributed many arrangements and compositions to both his own groups and to other bands. He even invented his own instrument,

a piccolo bass. His recordings have encompassed an unusually imaginative range of ideas—from cello ensembles to reexaminations of Bach. His Web site is www.roncarter.net.

Jeff Clayton

Born in Venice, California, Clayton's musical education began at a local Baptist church, where his mother was the pianist and conductor of the choir. He began playing various reed instruments, including the clarinet, but he concentrated on alto saxophone. He later added the soprano saxophone and the flute, extending his studies during his high school and university education, in which his principal instrument was the oboe. He dropped out of the university before graduating in order to go on the road with Stevie Wonder. Later, he mixed studio work with touring, playing with artists as diverse as Gladys Knight, Kenny Rogers, Patti Labelle, and Michael Jackson. He gradually shifted toward a more jazz-oriented repertoire, and although he continued to work in orchestras backing popular singers such as Frank Sinatra, Mel Tormé, Lena Horne, and Sammy Davis Jr., it was in the jazz world that he established his reputation during the 1980s. He played in the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra under the direction of Murray McEachern; with Count Basie, the continuing Basie band under Thad Jones, and with Alphonse Mouzon, Juggernaut, Woody Herman, Lionel Hampton, Ella Fitzgerald, the Phillip Morris Superband led by Gene Harris, Monty Alexander, Ray Brown, and many others. Clayton continued to work with pop stars, playing saxophone solos on the *Dick Tracy* (1990) soundtrack album and on *I'm Breathless*, Madonna's companion album to the film. Clayton has worked extensively in partnership with his brother, John Clayton; and the Claytons are also active in the big band they co-lead, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, with drummer Jeff Hamilton, as well as The Clayton Brothers Quintet. His Web site is www.jeffclaytonjazz.com.

Olu Dara

Although he didn't record under his own name until 1998, Olu Dara enjoyed a reputation as one of the jazz avant-garde's leading trumpeters from the mid-1970s on. Early-1980s' records and performances with the David Murray Octet and the Henry Threadgill Sextet revealed Dara to be a daring, roots-bound soloist, with a modern imagination and a big, burnished tone in the style of Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge.

Dara was born Charles Jones. He moved to New York in 1963, but he did not perform publicly until the early 1970s, when he became a part of the city's loft jazz culture. By that time, he had changed his name to Yoruba Olu Dara. Besides his work with Murray and Threadgill, Dara also played with Hamiet Bluiett, James "Blood" Ulmer, and Don Pullen, among others. Dara was an intermittent presence on the jazz scene in the 1980s and 1990s occasionally leading his Okra Orchestra and Natchezsippi Dance Band. In 1985, he recorded with Pullen and in 1987, with saxophonist Charles Brackeen. In the 1990s, he worked with vocalist Cassandra Wilson, playing on her Blue Note album, *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*. Not much else was heard from him—from a jazz perspective, anyway—until 1998, when Atlantic released *In the World: From Natchez to New York*, the first album released under Dara's name. The record was only tangentially related to his free jazz work. The music drew upon country-blues and African-American folk traditions. In addition to playing trumpet and cornet, Dara composed all of the tunes, sung, and accompanied himself on guitar. Atlantic released Dara's follow-up, entitled *Neighborhoods*, in early 2001.

Brenda Feliciano

Brenda Feliciano is widely known as a leading bilingual performer of both popular, jazz and classical music, and also as an actress. Born in Puerto Rico and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Feliciano has performed as a soloist with many important symphony orchestras, including the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center under the baton of Maestro Leonard Slatkin, the Milwaukee Symphony, the Simon Bolivar Orchestra in Venezuela, the Costa Rica Symphony, and the America Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. Most recently, Feliciano premiered a chamber piece for eight instruments and soprano for the New Jersey Chamber Music Society's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Concert, composed by Paquito D'Rivera, and another premiere at Alice Tully Hall for the Jazz @ Lincoln "As of Now" series. She has also performed "El Amor Brujo," by Manuel DeFalla, with the New Philharmonic of New Jersey and with the New York Virtuosi Orchestra at the Kay Playhouse under the baton of Maestro Kenneth Klein. A regular soloist with the Bronx Arts Ensemble Orchestra, she has performed *Bachianas*. Feliciano received a Grammy Award nomination in 2000 for Best Classical Album for her recording *Music of Two Worlds* on the Acqua Records label. She is married to Paquito D'Rivera.

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