

Scott Amendola:

drummer, percussionist, composer, bandleader, electronic sound mover

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“Amendola has complete mastery of every piece of his drumset and the ability to create a plethora of sounds using sticks, brushes, mallets, and even his hands.”

—Steven Raphael, *Modern Drummer* magazine.

"If Scott Amendola didn't exist, the San Francisco music scene would have to invent him." - Derk Richardson, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

“...drummer/signal-treater Scott Amendola is both a tyrant of heavy rhythm and an electric-haired antenna for outworldly messages (not a standard combination).” - Greg Burk, *LA Weekly*

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For Scott Amendola, the drum kit isn't so much an instrument as a musical portal. As an ambitious composer, savvy bandleader and capaciously creative foil for some of the world's most inventive musicians, Amendola applies his wide-ranging rhythmic virtuosity to a vast array of settings. His closest musical associates include guitarists Jeff Parker, Nels Cline and Charlie Hunter, Hammond B-3 organist Wil Blades, ROVA saxophonist Larry Ochs, and Tin Hat clarinetist Ben Goldberg, players who have each forged a singular path within and beyond the realm of jazz.

While rooted in the San Francisco Bay Area scene, Amendola has woven a dense and far-reaching web of bandstand relationships that tie him to influential artists in jazz, blues, rock and new music. A potent creative catalyst, the Berkeley-based drummer become the nexus for a disparate community of musicians stretching from Los Angeles and Seattle to Chicago and New York. Whatever the context, Amendola possesses a gift for twisting musical genres in unexpected directions. By employing custom designed electronics, including looping machines, pedals and ring modulators, he's continually expanding his sonic palette, exploring textures and rhythms with an improvisational sensibility.

“The electronics are an extension of my voice as a drummer and musician,” Amendola says. “People know me as a drummer, and as a growing musician it makes sense to do new things. It's all about capturing sound. The loops are all improvised, and I start each performance with a

blank slate.”

Electronics play an increasingly important role in his volatile trio featuring the protean Chicago guitarist Jeff Parker (Tortoise, Isotope 217, Chicago Underground Trio) and veteran South Bay bass master John Shifflett. The group released its critically acclaimed debut “Lift” on Amendola’s new label Sazi Records. Weaving together seductive melodies, transparent textures and mysterious buzzes and beeps, the album focuses on Amendola’s lyrically charged original tunes.

Renegade Los Angeles guitarist Nels Cline, who spends much of his time these days touring and recording with Wilco, has also encouraged Amendola’s electronic explorations in the Nels Cline Singers. The instrumental trio with has blazed a brilliant trail with a series of dense, invigorating recordings for Cryptogramophone, most recently 2010’s stunning double album “Initiate.”

“The first time I heard Scott I was really blown away,” Cline says. “There aren’t too many drummers on the West Coast who had his wide ranging ability. Scott’s got some funk in him, a looser, sexy thing going on, and the flexibility to play free and different styles. He plays behind singer/songwriters and he rocks too.”

Ben Goldberg, jazz’s most incisive clarinetist, unleashes Amendola’s earthy side in Go Home, a quartet featuring seven-string guitar ace Charlie Hunter and a succession of singular horn players, starting with trumpeter Ron Miles, then trombonist Curtis Fowlkes, and most recently tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin. Go Home also reignited Amendola’s musical partnership with Hunter, a relationship dating back to the heady days of the Bay Area acid jazz boom in the mid-1990s.

They played together briefly back in 2003 for a reunion of Grammy-nominated avant funk ‘n’ jazz combo T.J. Kirk (the guitar-centric quartet that also featured John Schott and Will Bernard). But Go Home led to a series of duo gigs around Europe and the US.

“It’s always s been amazing whenever we play, but it keeps growing, getting more intuitive,” Amendola says. “What Charlie does is so uncanny. He didn’t set out to create something out of some kind of marketing tool. Ultimately it’s what he heard. When you watch him play, it’s like a brain

tease. It's hard to understand what he's doing, but when you close your eyes, it's so beautiful and deep and compelling."

Amendola's stature as a composer has also been growing at a rapid rate. In April 2011, he premiered "Fade to Orange," a prestigious New Visions/New Vistas commission funded by the James Irvine Foundation. A collaboration with the Oakland East Bay Symphony, the extended work fully integrates the mercurial jazz trio with Nels Cline and muscular bassist Trevor Dunn into the orchestra. Amendola's writing pushed the symphony into unfamiliar territory, while the process of refining and detailing his ideas on sheet music has deepened his interest in writing for his various groups.

"Getting the commission propelled me into a new compositional realm, and working on it opened me up to new possibilities," he says. "Having to write such specific things for the orchestra made me want to incorporate more of through-composed work into smaller setting. It's also sparked a desire to work with larger ensembles. I wrote 'Fade to Orange' with the idea I could do it with a chamber orchestra, say 20-25 pieces."

Some of Amendola's most innovative work still takes place in a much more intimate contexts. His prodigious duo with Hammond B-3 organist Wil Blades, Amendola vs. Blades, centers on their thrilling investigation of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's "Far East Suite," an interpretation that has grown in grandeur over the past few years.

And his long-time relationship with ROVA Saxophone Quartet tenor player Larry Ochs, a galvanizing force in jazz and new music for the past four decades, continues in the spaciouly textured improvisational ensemble Kinhoua, featuring Korean vocalist Dohee Lee and former Kronos Quartet cellist Joan Jeanrenaud.

Mike Patton, the inventive singer/songwriter best known as the lead singer of Faith No More, recruited Amendola to tour his 2010 release "Mondo Cane," deliciously romantic album exploring emotionally sweeping Italian pop hits of the 1950s and 60s.

It might seem that Amendola is spreading himself thin in so many talent-laden bands, but he's carved out a separate identity as a composer with an expansive vision and a gift for memorable themes. He established his

reputation as a bandleader in 1999 with the release of the acclaimed album "Scott Amendola Band" featuring the unusual instrumentation of Eric Crystal on saxophones, Todd Sickafoose on acoustic bass, Jenny Scheinman on violin, Dave MacNab on electric guitar.

By the time the band returned to the studio in 2003, Cline had replaced MacNab, contributing to the quintet's combustible chemistry on the Cryptogramophone album "Cry." Cline was also a crucial contributor on Amendola's 2005 Cryptogramophone album "Believe," which also features Jeff Parker, Jenny Scheinman and John Shifflett.

As a sideman, Amendola has performed and recorded with a vast, stylistically varied roster of artists, including Bill Frisell, John Zorn, Mike Patton, Wadada Leo Smith, Madeleine Peyroux, Joan Osborne, Rodney Crowell, Jacky Terrasson, Shweta Jhaveri, Larry Goldings, Sex Mob, Kelly Joe Phelps, Larry Klein, Darryl Johnson, Dave Liebman, Carla Bozulich, Robin Holcomb, Wayne Horvitz, Johnny Griffin, Viktor Krauss, Julian Priester, Jessica Lurie, Sonny Simmons, ROVA Saxophone Quartet, Pat Martino, Peter Apfelbaum, Jim Campilongo, Will Bernard, Bobby Black, Paul McCandless, Noe Venable, Mark Turner, and the Joe Goode Dance Group.

Born and raised in the New Jersey suburb of Tenafly, just a stone's throw from New York City, Amendola displayed an aptitude for rhythm almost from the moment he could walk. His grandfather Tony Gottuso, was a highly respected guitarist who performed with jazz luminaries such as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, and Nat "King" Cole. A member of the original Tonight Show Band under Steve Allen, he offered plenty of support when Amendola began to get interested in jazz.

"We used to play together a lot when I was a teenager," Amendola says. "It had a huge impact on me to play with someone who was around when a lot of the standards that musicians like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Keith Jarrett play were written."

His passion for music only deepened during his four years at Boston's Berklee College of Music, where it wasn't unusual for him to practice for 12 hours a day. Drawing inspiration from fellow students such as Jorge Rossi, Jim Black, Danilo Perez, Chris Cheek, and Mark Turner, and studying with the likes of Joe Hunt and Tommy Campbell, Amendola decided he had to find his own voice rather than modeling himself after

established drummers.

After graduating in 1992, he decided to move to San Francisco, where he quickly hooked up with Charlie Hunter. They went on to play together in the three-guitar-and-drums combo T.J. Kirk, which earned a Grammy nomination for its eponymous 1996 debut album. Though intermittent, the musical relationship with Hunter is one of the strongest threads running through Amendola's career.

"Ever since I played with my grandfather I've just really loved the guitar and I wanted to meet a young guitar player who was doing something different," Amendola says. "And you can't get more different than what Charlie's doing."

While many of the Northern California players Amendola has forged deep ties with have moved to New York, the drummer feels he's found the perfect environment in the San Francisco Bay Area. With creative relationships spreading out across the country, and the world, he's never more than one degree away from a powerful musical hook-up.