

## **Yosvany Terry: Ye-dé-bgé & the Afro-Caribbean Legacy**

“Ye-dé-bgé” is a phrase in the West African language Fon, originally spoken in Dahomey. It means “with the approval of the spirits.” Musician and composer Yosvany Terry seeks through his music to unify the legacy of traditions, musical and spiritual, practiced throughout the Pan-African regions stretching from the African continent to the islands of the Caribbean and parts of North and South America.

In early September 2007 Yosvany Terry traveled from New York City to Matanzas, Cuba, to trace the roots of the Arará musical tradition. This tradition was originally brought to the island by slaves taken from Dahomey, now called Benin, in West Africa. While in Matanzas, famous for its dedication to folkloric music and dance traditions, Terry also commissioned a set of Arará drums. These rare and massive drums were crafted specifically for the composition he calls Ye-dé-bgé & the Afro-Caribbean Legacy that will premiere on September 15, 2007, in Central Park.

On the same trip, Terry studied with Mario Rodriguez Pedroso, or Mano, a great master of the Arará tradition and in fact one of the last living drummers initiated in the tradition. He serves as the director of the "Sabaluno Cabildo" in Matanzas. Cabildos are associations that were organized centuries ago by African slaves as a means of retaining and expressing their cultural heritage through ceremonies and rituals including music and dance, pilgrimages, and celebrations of their deities. "Sabaluno Cabildo" was named after Savalú, a city in Dahomey, present day Benin, where the Arará tradition originated.

In the Ye-dé-bgé Project, Terry consciously communicates his African and Cuban lineage through sounds that originated in Africa and inspired new music in the Caribbean, Brazil, and in the American South. It is a unique opportunity for Terry to express hundreds of years of tradition by re-integrating the obscure rhythms of the Arará into the jazz tradition. Although now a New York resident and a frequent performer in clubs and concert halls, Terry left his native Cuba only eight years ago. Terry grew up in the Camagüey province with his parents who are of both Haitian and Cuban descent and whose ancestors came from Africa and Europe.

During Terry’s recent pilgrimage to study the Arará tradition, he discovered that he was already familiar with many of the melodies and rhythms. Growing up Terry learned and practiced Vodou rituals with his family. His grandmother, Basilia Leon Charles from Haiti, traces her ancestors to Dahomey. She is a devoted practitioner of the religion and raised her children and grandchildren with the songs and fetishes representing the pantheon of deities shared among numerous African traditions. Eladio Terry, Yosvany’s father, is a world-renowned musician and also a devout practitioner. It was within this rich cultural and musical family that Yosvany Terry became a bearer of the ancient traditions.