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Bio information: **TOMEKA REID QUARTET**

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FILE UNDER: **JAZZ**

**Cellist, Composer and MacArthur Fellow
TOMEKA REID
Explores New Improvisational Math with 3+3
The Third Release by Her All-Star Quartet and
Her Most Adventurous Project as a Leader yet
Featuring Jason Roebke on bass, Tomas Fujiwara on drums,
and fellow MacArthur Fellow, Mary Halvorson, on guitar**

No artist over the past decade has done more to bring the cello from the margins to the center of the contemporary jazz scene than Tomeka Reid. Nurtured by the creative hothouse of Chicago's AACM, she's recorded prolifically since making her debut on flutist Nicole Mitchell's 2002 Black Earth Ensemble album *Afrika Rising*. But with *3+3*, Reid takes a major step as a composer with a bold and protean approach to designing settings for group improvisation.

Building on the deeply intuitive language explored by the quartet on her acclaimed Cuneiform debut, 2019's *Old New*, Reid set out to explore extended themes with bassist Jason Roebke, drummer Tomas Fujiwara and guitarist Mary Halvorson. Over the course of three pieces that flow together much like a set the group plays in concert, the album captures the state-of-the-art ensemble moving with unhurried grace, constantly calibrating the evolving conversation.

"I see the whole album as a suite," says Reid, who moved back to Chicago in 2020 after about four years in New York. "Previously I'd written shorter pieces and felt like I had to write 'jazz pieces', and for this album I wanted to write longer forms. I do a lot of free improvisation and wanted to reflect that more on my records. There are tunes on this too, but it's more open."

Reid wrote the *3+3* music with the support of a Chamber Music America New Jazz Works Commission and she ended up writing the pieces while an artist in residence for the Moers Jazz Festival in 2022. The quartet premiered it during her residency at the Stone in August 2023, an apt setting to navigate the ebb and flow of a freely improvised and tunes-based program. The music gathers momentum over the course of several movements, not so much tracing a narrative arc as circling through a series of loose and limber themes and tempo shifts.

Part of what's new for Reid is her expanded sonic palette, which can make it difficult to tell where her bow work and Halvorson's electronics diverge. "As a string player, I used to be anti-electronics," she says. "I love the acoustic cello sound. But playing with Mary, I really love how it's part of her voice, not something extra. So, previously, I strived to make electronic sounds acoustically using different preparations as that was something I was earnestly exploring and now I feel ok incorporating electronics."

The opening "Turning Inward/Sometimes You Just Have to Run with It" builds to a simmering, cymbal-propelled groove with extended statements by Reid and Halvorson that eventually converge in a gorgeously rough-and-tumble pas de deux. Opening with Reid's muscular pizzicato solo, "Sauntering with Mr. Brown"

captures the quartet's well-honed practice of eliding the usual delineation of foreground and background. "I think about not having people in specific roles," Reid says. "There are places where I'm doing an arpeggiated part that normally a guitar would do. I'm always thinking about how to loosen conventions that might limit us."

Set up by Halvorson and Tomas "Exploring Outward / Funambulist Fever" features some of Reid's most exquisite playing. The quartet's arresting use of space, with quiet, abstract passages bleeding into denser group improv and brisk call and response themes, maintain dramatic tension until the dramatically abrupt conclusion. It's liberatory music that takes these well-traveled musicians into places and spaces where unheard facets of their sounds are revealed.

If Reid's music seems to draw on a multiplicity of sources, that's because she's absorbed a mind-boggling array of influences over the past 15 years via collaborations with veteran visionaries connected to Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Since the mid-aughts she's performed and recorded with Anthony Braxton, Nicole Mitchell, Roscoe Mitchell (no relation), and the collective he co-founded, the Art Ensemble of Chicago. She's also worked closely with contemporaries such as drummer Mike Reed, cornetist Taylor Ho Bynum, and Angelika Niescier.

In recent years she's toured with and recorded two acclaimed albums as part of pianist Myra Melford's Fire and Water Quintet (which also features Halvorson). Reid is a member of the Julius Hemphill Stringtet, a string quartet dedicated to the work of Julius Hemphill, and is also laying plans for presenting her own Stringtet, a 16-piece ensemble made up of string improvisors.

Embracing her role as a champion of creative string players on and off the bandstand, she founded and runs the Chicago Jazz String Summit. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. Among the many honors and awards she's garnered are being voted 2022 string player of the year by the Jazz Journalists Association and named a 2022 MacArthur "Genius" Fellow.

Currently, an artist in residence at Dartmouth College, Reid grew up outside of Washington D.C., and came to the cello relatively late. Concentrating on classical music in her teens and early 20s, she started investigating jazz her senior year at the University of Maryland, College Park when her undergrad mentor encouraged her to start exploring the tradition. "He came up with this book of Rufus Reid bass lines and I would read them and do these little gigs around DC," she recalls. Moving to Chicago in 2000 to attend a graduate music program at DePaul University she reconnected with flutist/composer Nicole Mitchell, whom she had met in a classical orchestra in the summer of 1998 and a relationship that recalibrated her entire aesthetic orientation. While she was embraced by the improv music scene, Reid learned to make her own way, which was both liberating and extremely challenging.

"After I met Nicole she introduced me to the Velvet Lounge where I encountered members of the AACM and learned about their work and various aesthetics. While attending the Velvet Lounge, I was often the only string player," Reid says, referring to the South Loop jazz spot that was then owned and run by tenor sax great Fred Anderson.