



THE NEW RENAISSANCE MAN

PAUL RUCKER CREATES HIS OWN OPPORTUNITIES

BY JOHN GILBREATH

Paul Rucker will tell you that he's "waiting for the new renaissance." But "waiting" is not a passive verb for this busy Seattle artist. As an accomplished bassist, cellist, and composer whose performances around the city are known for their originality and heart, Rucker also teaches, owns and operates Jackson Street Records, trades in esoteric hardware for classic analog synthesizers, and creates visual art. With an eye on the future and projects brewing in various corners of the world, Rucker does not just sit around waiting for the phone to ring.

Rucker's musical expression is refreshingly free of cliché. While developing a classical technique serious enough to land him work with symphony orchestras around his native South Carolina, he has also played blues gigs, explored free jazz, and come into his own confident creativity. Along the way, he discovered that the creative process applies as much to getting gigs as it does to performing them. When performance opportunities proved slim in the South, Rucker learned to apply for grants and fellowships to further his career, and began researching American cities able to support vibrant art.

From everything he read, Paul Rucker perceived Seattle as "a land of innovation." His arrival here, nine years ago this month, resulted from the same intentional creativity that drives his art. After learning that Seattle had been home to heroes like Quincy Jones and Ray Charles, as well as Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain, Rucker decided that Seattle was a community he could embrace, and which, hopefully, could embrace him. It worked.

For his first release on his own label, Rucker assembled a stellar cast of

Seattle's inventive musicians to create *History of an Apology*, a compelling pastiche of sounds and feelings on which outstanding soloists like Bill Frisell, Julian Priester, and Michael White joined members of Seattle's improvisational jazz scene. Innovative guitarist Bill Horist provided the sonic underpinnings. *History* interprets the infamous Tuskegee Experiment, in which the US government conducted inhumane experiments on 600 African American men between 1932 and 1952.

The second release, *Oil*, with Rucker on cello and Hans Teuber on alto sax, soon followed. Both titles have now broken even financially, an anomaly in the jazz world and a near miracle in the improvised music world.

Rucker's artistic output and notoriety extend beyond Seattle. Artist residencies and workshops have allowed him to join creative communities around the world. Already conversant with the vibrant Berlin music scene, Rucker will return this fall after completing a Rockefeller Foundation residency in Bellagio, Northern Italy.

Rucker is very conscious of Seattle's significant place in the larger musical continuum. "Some guys think jazz ended already, like on September 29, 1958, or something," he says, shaking his head. With unlimited possibilities before him, Paul Rucker exemplifies the Renaissance man, and we're fortunate to have him among us as a part of the Seattle sound.

Paul Rucker and Hans Teuber will reunite for a live concert on July 13th at Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park.