



## E T I E N N E C H A R L E S

Born on the island of Trinidad in 1983, Etienne Charles defies easy musical categorization. Etienne's musical lineage runs at least four generations deep: His great-grandfather, Clement Monlouis, emigrated to Trinidad from the overseas French *department* of Martinique bringing his folk music to the village of Mayaro; The young trumpeter's grandfather, Ralph Charles' distinct cuatro style can be heard on the classic folk and calypso recordings of the Growling Tiger; and, Etienne's father, Francis, was a member of Phase II Pan Groove, one of Trinidad's most progressive steel bands and one that Etienne himself would later join. Immersed in his father's vast record collection, and suffused with the sounds of calypso, steel pan, and African Shango drumming, Etienne imbibed many of the influences that presently constitute the diverse colors of his harmonic palette. An alumnus of the prestigious Juilliard School, Charles has received critical acclaim for his exciting performances, thrilling compositions and a knack for connecting with audiences worldwide.

In 2009 Etienne releases *Folklore*, an enticing album of original music. The music employs jazz improvisation and harmony with folk rhythms and chants inspired by the African experience of Trinidad & Tobago. At album's core is a suite of compositions based on characters of the Afro-Caribbean folkloric tradition: *La Diablesse*, *Douens*, *Soucouyant*, *Mama D'lo*, *Mama Malade* and *Papa Bois*. These mythical creatures have been a part of the Caribbean folk heritage for centuries as they were brought over by West African slaves and passed down from generation to generation through stories, chants and dances. The album explores these stories, interpreting images and tales and opening up a true rhythmic and harmonic dialogue between history, tradition and multiple music genres. To be sure, these characters have been referenced in the folk music of the Caribbean. However, it is a rare musical imagination that can breathe new rhythmic life into characters that have resided largely in oral narrative. Etienne Charles comes fully prepared with a unique concept and a plethora of musical resources for this watershed effort. Etienne shares the spotlight with two of the most acclaimed artistes of Trinidadian origin, steel pannist extraordinaire Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, and Grammy award winning percussionist Ralph MacDonald. In this connection, Etienne's employment of the four-stringed *cuatro*, together with the *La Vrai* and *extempo* motifs, call attention to his thorough immersion and deep study of the calypso and Trinidadian folk music genres. This landmark recording also features Guadeloupean saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, Milan Milanovic on piano, Luques Curtis on bass, drummer Obed Calvaire, percussionists D'Achee & Ray Charles as well as vocalists Keith 'Designer' Prescott, Wendell Manwarren and Roger Roberts. Etienne Charles stands at the vanguard of a new generation of musicians who are *from* the Caribbean but are not totally *of* it, in terms of a fresh and broad-ranging artistic vision, and myriad influences encompassed in their soundscape.

## Q U O T E S

"..Etienne Charles exhibits both an authentic preservation of the music of his native culture of Trinidad as a composer and bandleader, while broadening our scope of understanding through the collaborative sound of American jazz as it meets new colors, new textures, and new motifs across the world. It will certainly bring more of our public into the jazz audience" **Marcus Roberts**

"An amazing Trumpet player, and Steel Drum player, and Cuatro player...young Trinidadian who has held onto his heritage" **Monty Alexander**

"...had strength and a clear, almost classical sense of thematic organization." **New York Times**

"A daring improviser, Charles also delivers with heart-wrenching lyricism" **Jazz Times**

"With *Folklore*, an offering of both compositional and instrumental brilliance, trumpeter/composer Etienne Charles admirably solidifies his place as an explorer, a true *griot* and visionary." **All About Jazz, New York**

"Etienne aims at the blues feelings, as well as ballads full of dynamism and sharp, precious inflections." "He rather prefers working on vibrations, like a whispered, aired sound according to Ben Webster's style." **All about Jazz Italia**

"The music was not simply reworked....Charles seemed to dissect the music studying every note and then proceeded to weave elements of Dixieland, Francesca, modal, bebop and modern styles into his arrangements, all while maintaining the integrity of the original compositions." **Trinidad Express**

[www.etiennecharles.com](http://www.etiennecharles.com)