

Essiet Okon Essiet Biography

Essiet Okon Essiet first received critical acclaim more than a decade ago as a member of saxophonist Bobby Watson's post hard bop group Horizon He has long since established himself as one of New York's premier bassist. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, his parents having moved there from Nigeria, West Africa, the family later moved to Wisconsin where Essiet began his musical studies at age 10 on the violin. Four years, later he switched to the bass. As a child, and into his teens, his family moved often. His father worked for the US, as well as the Nigerian government, and his job took the family to many places including Europe, Africa and various cities in the US. His family finally settled in Portland, Oregon where he began studying jazz at the age of 14. Having traveled widely as a youngster with his family, he had an easy time adjusting to life on the road once he turned professional. More importantly, his early exposure to many cultures, languages, folkways and religions, fostered his world view of strength through diversity. "Some musicians are purist" says Essiet, "but I like to mix styles. I like many different types of cultures".

His first big break came in 1982 when he met Chicago based percussionist Famoudou Don Moye, a founding member of such important collectives as the Art Ensemble of Chicago and The Leaders. Moye asked Essiet to join his quartet and during that same year the bassist met Abdullah Ibrahim, the famed South African pianist. Working with Ibrahim, Essiet toured the globe splitting his time between Europe and the US during the period from 1982 to 1986. Eventually Essiet settled in NYC. Two years later, he joined Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and remained in the group until the famed drummer/teacher's passing in 1990. During the next decade, the bassist began what has proven to be a significant freelance career.

He has performed and recorded with such notables as Benny Golson, Johnny Griffin, James Moody, Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Hutcherson, Cedar Walton, Sam Rivers, George Adams, Pat Martino, Kenny Burrell, Jackie McLean, Frank Morgan, Kenny Barron, Louis Hayes, Ben Riley, Jimmy Cobb, Billy Higgins, Billy Hart, Art Farmer, Abby Lincoln, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Billy Cobham, Bennie Maupin, Al Foster, Eddie Henderson, Steve Turre, Jon Faddis, Bobby Watson, Victor Lewis, Kenny Garrett, Kenny Kirkland, Mulgrew Miller, Jeff "Tain " Watts, Mike Stern, Kevin Mahogany, Kurt Elling, Fort Apache Band, Danilo Perez, Claudia Acuna, Geri Allen, and Ralph Peterson to highlight only a partial list.

In 1997, he was asked to join an incarnation of the Blue Note Allstars which included Greg Osby, Javon Jackson, Tim Hagens, Kevin Hays, and Bill Stewart. The Blue Note Allstars embarked on a number of tours including Canadian Festivals, US tours, Europe and Japan. In 2000 he joined Danilo Perez's Motherland project for 2 years touring the US, Europe and Central America.

Currently, Essiet leads his own group called "IBO" named after a Nigerian tribe. It is a Nigerian jazz project which mixes jazz harmonies with West African rhythms.

Endorsements

