

## Gifrants: A Man in the Fore of His Time



By Marc Mathelier\*

In a career enduring more than 30 years with over 100 recordings, including 15 albums of his own, guitarist, composer Gifrants is now firmly established as a creative presence in Haitian music. He has collaborated with a wide collection of artists and distinguished musicians. But it is his work as a composer that has garnered increased attention and citations. It's hard to find a more productive contemplation on Haitian music than in the compositions of Gifrants.

Mixing Traditional Haitian rhythm and a twist of Bossa Nova, Jazz and Blues, he's found what connects them: improvisation and a sense of play and inspiration from his soul. Unlike other *mélanges* who tend to lack devotion, he plays up the infatuation in the music and also takes on another often avoided purpose, enthusiasm.

Born in Cap-Haitien, Haiti in 1957, Gifrants played the guitar throughout his childhood and adolescence. His interest in music began with his early exposure to different types of popular Haitian musical styles on the radio. Themes like *mizik ginen*, the unknown troubadours and the prostitutes of Lafossette in Cap-Haitien have seduced him by their music and their dance, serenade sitting and even Gilbert Becaud helped shape the roots of his initial ideas.

Soon, after he established his dexterousness as a guitarist, it became a passion through his contribution to the *Rasin mode* with Sakad in the early 80's. Also, his collaboration in bands like The Guesly Morrisseaux Orchestra covering and backing classics crooner like Jean Claude Eugene and many others also exploring other dance material. Gifrants studied under Nikol Levy and his analytical approach on music and with band leader Morrisseaux during his early years in his beloved Cap-Haitien circa 1978.

When Gerald Merceron who told him that "The logic of Haitian music defies the logic of western music" (Feb 1980) his musical perception was altered forever. The "sèvitè" who attended the voodoo ceremonies at Rollin Habucquenot's "humfò" in Cap-Haitien from whom Gifrants have learned the music, dance and the "daki" language

also shape the future vision of his ultimate direction. Determined to follow his family path on their belief about Voodoo and their "Ginen" ties and finally Robert Aaron by his methodical and profusely amazing concept on harmony and strongly taken by the inversion techniques used by Bach in his music, all of those concepts combine in the amalgams of the creative musical world of Gifrants.

With over thirty years, of composing and performing experience, Gifrants has reached a new plateau in his unique and sultry genre of fused jazz and traditional Haitian music. This seasoned artist has entertained with evocative rhythms and stories brought to life with an unrivaled passion.

It is a long road to forge a new genre of music. But this is exactly what Gifrants has done over the span of his career. Performing in the heart of academia at Harvard Square and in prestigious venues like New York's SOB's as well as Miami and beyond, this dynamic entertainer has sold over 20,000 CD's, all without major label backing.

Acting as his own publicist, Gifrants has released numerous projects on his label Gaëta Records writing and producing. He is often accompanied by a revolving cast of Boston based jazz personality who perform his songs in both live and studio settings.

A magnum opus refers to a creation that has been given much critical praise, especially one that is considered a work of outstanding ingenuity and skill. Gifrants' contributions are exceptional, a *tour de force* of good piece of innovative work.

When he will stand at the end of his life, what will his body of work look like? I am sure it's something that he will be confident of having written and composed. It's truly worthy of carrying the imprimatur of his name in the annals of the Haitian Cultural Patrimonies. Because the reality is, long after Gifrants moves and is gone, the sound of the rhythms of his creation will be heard beneath the winds of future Haitian generations.

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Gifrants' heavily researched style of folk music is an eccentric achievement in the course of a Haitian musician's development. It is a style he often refers to as Voodoo Jazz. It is an approach to Haitian music that he began to research as a member of the critically acclaimed Racine-Funk group "Sakad" whose success in the late 80's inspired the birth of a host of Racine or Roots groups like Boukman Eksperyans. By the early 1990's, he released the album "Serenade by Gifrants" in which he mixed the sounds of Haitian folklore with that of Brazilian music. The resulting product was an inventive and unparalleled musical hybrid. After the success of Mizik Mizik's "Haiti Twoubadou" series, Gifrants introduced the album "Twoubadou Sèk", a widely unknown but milestone achievement in the full band Haitian Twoubadou style. Gifrants' latest product is the album "Vwa e Gita, Volim I" or "Vocals and Guitar, Volim I". It is another radical departure from his previous releases and one that tests the boundaries and possibilities of traditional Haitian musical styles. True to its name, the album "Vwa e Gita" features Gifrants accompanied only by his guitar for its duration. Challenging and enjoyable listening! It chronicles the significant advancements this artist has made to this humble music first made famous by a brave 17 year old guitarist Achilles "Ti Paris" who left home against his parents' wishes to become Haiti's most famous and quoted Twoubadou."

**Steve Desrosiers, Boston Haitian Reporter**

#### **Twoubadou Sèk**

"This is like nothing you've ever heard before from any Haitian artist. No one can duplicate the style of Gifrants. The money spent on this CD is actually a spiritual investment. This is a CD that is laid out in the pure language of the Haitian people and still has the sophistication that caters to all people of all different classes. The music is highly educational. GREAT JOB!"

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