

arts  
education  
njpac



dion

parson

the david g. berger  
master class series



## about dion parson

Born in the United States Virgin Islands on June 11, 1967, **Dion Parson** is an American jazz drummer, bandleader, composer and educator from St. Thomas. Given the strong presence of jazz and music festivals where he grew up, an interest in fusing jazz with Caribbean music was unavoidable for him. Originally playing the trombone, Parson picked up drums when he was 15. He studied music at Interlochen and Rutgers, obtaining a bachelor's degree in music education and a master's in jazz performance. As a developing artist, Parson developed foundations in classical, jazz, pop, reggae, calypso and African music. His graduation from Rutgers helped him get started in New York City, where he worked with Monty Alexander, Ray Anderson, Dwayne Burno, Don Byron, Marc Cary, Laurent de Wilde, Donald Harrison, Ernest Ranglin, Justin Robinson, David Sanchez, Ron Blake and Reuben Rogers. Parson worked with the Broadway production of *The Color Purple* starting in 2006 and co-founded the organization United Jazz Foundation (UJF) with Steve Coleman and Branford Marsalis in 2007. In 2021, he officially joined International Jazz Day as a partner.

In addition to live performance, he has also had a successful studio career, recording his first album as a bandleader in 2000 entitled *21st Century*. Dion co-founded the 21st Century Band in 1998 and has been featured on dozens of albums since.

His music is a true fusion of all the various Caribbean styles, serving as a diary of all the cultures present in USVI (United States Virgin Island).

Using his music education degree, Dion devotes his time to educating aspiring young musicians in the Virgin Islands and throughout the Caribbean to learn more about their cultural heritage and become competent artists and creators in the process. Founded in 2012, Parson's nonprofit United Jazz Foundation seeks to identify, educate and mentor USVI students interested in pursuing a career in music. UJF offers an interdisciplinary music curriculum for students, using culture to boost self-confidence and academic achievement. As Chair of the Communication and Performing Arts Department of the University of the Virgin Islands, Parson is shaping the studies and careers of a new generation of USVI arts professionals at the university level. He has also taught at Rutgers University, Cheyney University, North Carolina University and Harlem School of the Arts. In addition to UJF, Dion was integral to the inception of CJI (the Caribbean Jazz Institute), a 10-day intensive covering jazz repertoire, ear training and music theory. He also built Mentoring through the Art of Music, which is a program built around free masterclasses and instrument donations from Parson to Caribbean schools. Parson makes sure to visit each island five times a year to see the program through.

## seed questions to consider

1. How can you capture authenticity when playing a genre you didn't grow up hearing?
2. What elements of culture can be expressed in music?
3. What might motivate someone to invest this much time, money and resources into their home community?

“Immediately, I was always connecting back to home — every chance I had to go back home I would, and play with the local guys. There was a void — something missing, that I always felt needed to be addressed.”

— Dion Parson



## vocabulary

### Batter Head

Also called a drum skin or resonant head, the batter head is the membrane of an acoustic drum that a drummer strikes to make sounds. For millennia, batter heads were made from animal skins, but most of today's drum skins are made from a plastic composite

### Buleador

One of the most recognizable Caribbean instruments, specifically when playing Bomba. The Buleador is a large wooden drum responsible for keeping rhythm

### Cabasa

A type of African shaker made by wrapping metal chains around a wooden cylinder

### Drum fill

An intentional break from a drum groove that provides a transition into a new measure or section. Drum fills often showcase a player's ability on the instrument

### Fusion

A genre of music that blends elements of two or more styles together to create a new sound

### Guiro

An idiophone made from a dried gourd and typically played by rubbing wooden sticks or wire brushes against it

### Polyrhythm

A passage of music that combines two time signatures. For example, a drummer may play a 4/4 pattern on their kick drum but a 3/8 pattern on their closed hi-hat

### Steelpan

A Trinidadian percussive drum with chiseled concave grooves that produce different pitches

### Tambourine

A percussion instrument that consists of a solid, round frame inset with metal disks, sometimes with a drum head stretched across the frame

## resources

### Websites

[unitedjazz.org](http://unitedjazz.org) | Dion G. Parson  
[unitedjazz.org/ujf-board/dion-g.-parson/dion-g.-parson/chairman](http://unitedjazz.org/ujf-board/dion-g.-parson/dion-g.-parson/chairman)

International Jazz Day  
[jazzday.com/interview/dion-parson](http://jazzday.com/interview/dion-parson)

Wikipedia | Dion Parson  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dion\\_Parson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dion_Parson)

[caribjournal.com](http://caribjournal.com) | How GRAMMY® Winner Dion Parson is Bridging Jazz and the Caribbean  
[caribjournal.com/2011/09/21/how-grammy-winner-dion-parson-is-bridging-jazz-and-the-caribbean](http://caribjournal.com/2011/09/21/how-grammy-winner-dion-parson-is-bridging-jazz-and-the-caribbean)

Dion Parson & The 21st Century Band Musician - All About Jazz  
[allaboutjazz.com/musicians/dion-parson-the-21st-century-band](http://allaboutjazz.com/musicians/dion-parson-the-21st-century-band)

St. Thomas Source ([stthomassource.com](http://stthomassource.com))  
Dion Parson USVI Musical Heritage Showcase Will Honor the Memory of Netfa Romain  
[stthomassource.com/content/2021/11/02/dion-parson-usvi-musical-heritage-showcase-will-honor-the-memory-of-netfa-romain](http://stthomassource.com/content/2021/11/02/dion-parson-usvi-musical-heritage-showcase-will-honor-the-memory-of-netfa-romain)

WIC News | Dion Parson to host Barbados saxophonist Arturo Tappin in his Talkshow  
[wicnews.com/caribbean/dion-parson-to-host-barbados-saxophonist-arturo-tappin-in-his-talkshow-223766007](http://wicnews.com/caribbean/dion-parson-to-host-barbados-saxophonist-arturo-tappin-in-his-talkshow-223766007)

### Videos

Dion Parsons: Sounds of the Diaspora  
[youtube.com/watch?v=48zbZTAWIKA&t=181s](http://youtube.com/watch?v=48zbZTAWIKA&t=181s)

Dion Parson & 21st Century Band Celebrate International Jazz Day from the USVI ([youtube.com](http://youtube.com))  
[youtube.com/watch?v=osABMT6-K9w](http://youtube.com/watch?v=osABMT6-K9w)

## njpac staff

**Charles F. Lowrey & Carmen S. Villar**  
Co-Chairs, NJPAC Board of Directors

**John Schreiber**  
President & CEO

**Jennifer Tsukayama**  
Vice President, Arts Education

Shannon Pulusan  
Special Assistant to Vice President,  
Arts Education

Mark Gross  
Director, Jazz Instruction

Rosa Hyde  
Senior Director, Performances &  
Special Events Operations

Victoria Revesz  
Senior Director, Arts Education Operations

Natalie Dreyer  
Director of Curriculum &  
Collaborative Learning

Roe Bell  
Director of Program Operations  
& Advancement

Kristine Marrone  
Director, CRM & Business Operations

Ashley Mandaglio  
Assoc. Director,  
Professional Learning & Programs

Treasure Borde  
Senior Manager,  
Programming & Performances

Daniel Silverstein  
Senior Manager, Onsite Programs

Randal Croudy  
Manager, Youth & Emerging  
Artist Development

Steven Hayet  
Manager, CRM & Business Operations

Alonzo Blalock  
Manager, In-School Programs

Angela Peletier  
Manager,  
Professional Learning & Training

Justin DePaul  
Office and Facilities Manager

April Jeffries  
Outreach & Sales Manager

Antonella Sanchez  
Senior Coordinator, Program Operations

Demetria Hart  
Coordinator of Faculty Relations

Kendall Lipham  
Coordinator,  
Programming & Performances

Lucas Jeron  
Coordinator, Youth & Emerging  
Artist Development

Josef Woodson  
Creative Lead, On-Site Programs

## the arts in your school

**In-School Residencies:** NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

**Professional Development:** Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at [artseducation@njpac.org](mailto:artseducation@njpac.org). Or visit [njpac.org/education](http://njpac.org/education)

Major support for the David G. Berger Master Class Series is provided by the Berger Family Foundation

Additional support provided by:



Major support for NJPAC Arts Education programs is provided by Judy and Stewart Colton, Toby and Leon Cooperman, Steven and Beverly Rubenstein Charitable Foundation, and The John Strangfeld and Mary Kay Strangfeld Foundation

NJPAC Arts Education programs are made possible by the generosity of our endowment donors: The Arts Education Endowment Fund in honor of Raymond C. Chambers, The Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund, Toby and Leon Cooperman, Albert+ and Katharine Merck+, The Sagner Companies/The Sagner Family Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation

Generous annual support for NJPAC Arts Education programs is provided by Judith Bernhaut, Broadridge Financial Solutions, Inc., The Office of U.S. Senator Cory Booker, Jennifer A. Chalsty, Mimi and Edwin Feliciano, Don Katz & Leslie Larson, Devils Youth Foundation, M&T Bank, McCrane Foundation, Inc., care of Margrit McCrane, The MCJ Amelior Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, NJ Advance Media, NJM Insurance Group, Panasonic Foundation, PNC, Richmond County Savings Foundation, David & Marian Rocker, Turrell Fund, and an anonymous donor