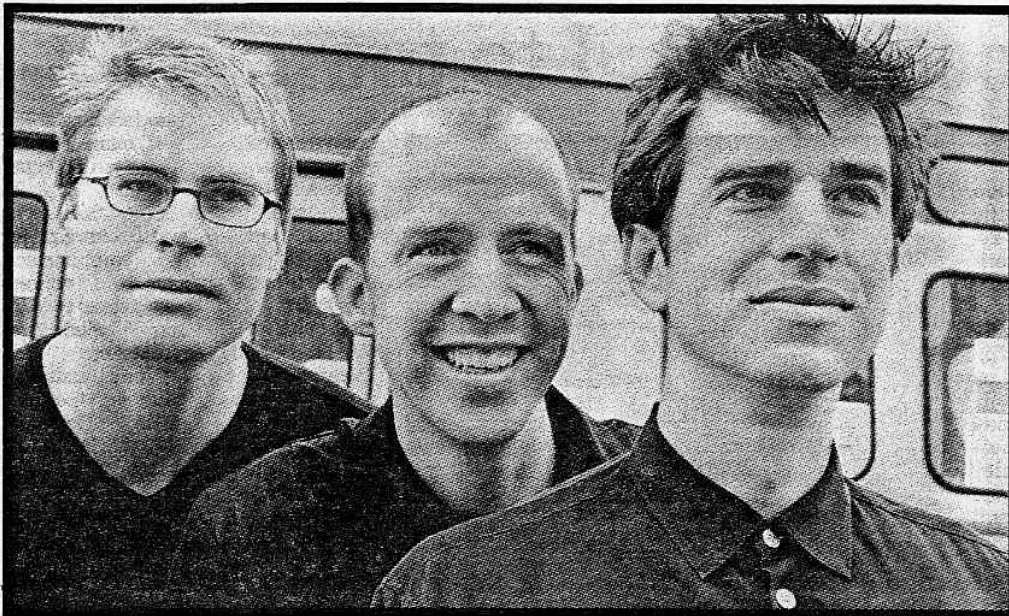


The Charlotte Observer

MUSIC

John Crooks (from left) plays bass, Nate Shaw is on piano and Mark Suter plays percussion. They are the New Power Trio, and they will be at The Vault on Valentine's Day.



A touch of rhythm

Substituting hand percussion for drum kit lends Afro-Cuban pulse to New Power Trio

By **TONYA JAMESON**
Pop Music Writer

New Power Trio adds a world flavor to the traditional jazz threesome of bass, piano and drums by using hand percussion instead of a drum kit.

The result is an intimate jazz creation with roots in Afro-Cuban and Brazilian music.

"We wanted to showcase Afro-Cuban rhythms and be able to hear it without the big band sound that usually accompanies it," said bassist John Crooks, calling from Connecticut where the group was conducting a high school workshop.

The group's performance at the Vault on Valentine's Day should be a good setting for the quiet sound. (Charles Hairston opens.)

Despite its innovative style, New Power is relatively unknown in jazz circles. The group books and promotes its own tours. It released its self-titled debut CD independently

in January.

The disc features original compositions such as "Bembe" as well as American jazz and salsa tunes.

The group hopes to gain a higher profile by hosting school workshops, releasing another disc in June and playing summer festivals next year.

Now is the perfect time to develop this sound because the Afro-Cuban All Stars and the Buena Vista Social Club have generated more interest in this type of music, Crooks said.

The bass, piano and hand percussion framework is an incredible way to hear world rhythms. Drum kit tends to drown out the bass, but this format makes the rhythms fit like a puzzle, he said.

"There's always something new to discover," Crooks said. "There's such depth in West African and Cuban music. It's great way to explore jazz."

The exploration includes weaving

HAND BEATS

WHAT: New Power Trio, Charles Hairston

WHEN: 6 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: The Vault, 1400 Elizabeth Ave.

TICKETS: \$60 per couple, includes dinner.

DETAILS: (704) 377-4661

the members' diverse backgrounds into the collective. Founder Nate Shaw is most recognized for his keyboard work with the Minneapolis-based sextet Motion Poets; Crooks fronts his own jazz quartet and performs regularly in New York and Los Angeles; and percussionist Mark Suter performs with the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra and in the Essential Music and the Music in Time Chamber series at Spoleto.

Suter's addition is invaluable; he's studied music in Brazil, Costa Rica and Cuba, Crooks said. Shaw and Crooks strive to match his sensitivity and nuance.

As the trio evolves, the members get more interested in developing a sound that is grooving and improvisational, Crooks said.