

**Drummer/composer Dan Kurfirst finds a meditative balance between musical complexity and emotive simplicity on his rhythm-focused debut recording, *Arkinetics*.**



photo credit: Luke Marantz

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**RIYL:** Adam Rudolph, Miles Davis(electric era), J Dilla, QTip, Herbie Hancock

**Genre:** Jazz, World, Free Improvisation

There are many cultures that use repetitive, percussive music to induce meditative states. In cultures as diverse as those in Asia, the Middle East, and West Africa, the drum has been used to weave entrancing patterns that move the body and mind. Drummer/composer **Dan Kurfirst**

has been studying the drums, rhythms, and their combined effects on the body and mind. His new recording, *Arkinetics*, provides a fascinating encapsulation of his study of global rhythms, free improvisation, and engaging production.

The New York City-born and raised Kurfirst grew up playing drums, mainly interested in rock and hip-hop music. In his twenties, the young drummer discovered jazz and began his path through New York's Downtown improv community. Kurfirst's interests broadened into the study of world music, especially the percussive elements of Middle Eastern and West African music, including the adaptation of West African rhythms to the drum kit with master drummer Royal Hartigan.

It was the discovery of the music of percussionist/conceptualist Adam Rudolph that really changed the way Kurfirst looked at music. Rudolph has the ability to make complex rhythmic concepts easy to understand. This and his fresh and sincere approach to incorporating elements from several musical cultures made Rudolph a helpful tutor as Kurfirst began to participate in Rudolph's Go:Organic Orchestra performances and rehearsals.

Kurfirst practices daily meditation, clearing his mind and allowing a deeper focus on matters he finds most important. Meditation led to a focus on musical compositions, whether they stem from a drum pattern, a bassline, or piano melody that Kurfirst could flesh out into a full piece. This was how many of the pieces on *Arkinetics* were born. Looking back to his fascination with hip-hop's ability to draw listeners in with the most basic of rhythmic information, Kurfirst made the rhythm section the center of his attention.

Compositions began to flesh themselves out over periods of study and reflection. As a drummer first, Kurfirst began to approach the other instruments, especially the piano and bass, as other types of drums. He began to write parts for bass and piano to add other layers to his drum ensemble.

The name *Arkinetics* combines the words architecture and kinetics. This refers directly to kinetic architecture, where there are moving parts within a larger structure that do not compromise the integrity of the overall structure. Musically, this speaks to the individual parts played by the musicians coming together in effort to make a full composition.

To perform these functions in the music, Kurfirst brought in bassist Damon Banks and Alexis Marcelo on Fender Rhodes, both collaborators with Adam Rudolph. Drawn to the textures and colors of Indian classical music, Kurfirst invited tabla player Roshni Samlal to add another percussive dimension to the music. Finally, Kurfirst asked Downtown improv legend Daniel Carter to add his own highly thematic free improvisations into the mix. The overall sound of predetermined compositions with freely played improvisations bring the eclectically exploratory Miles Davis's electric bands to mind.

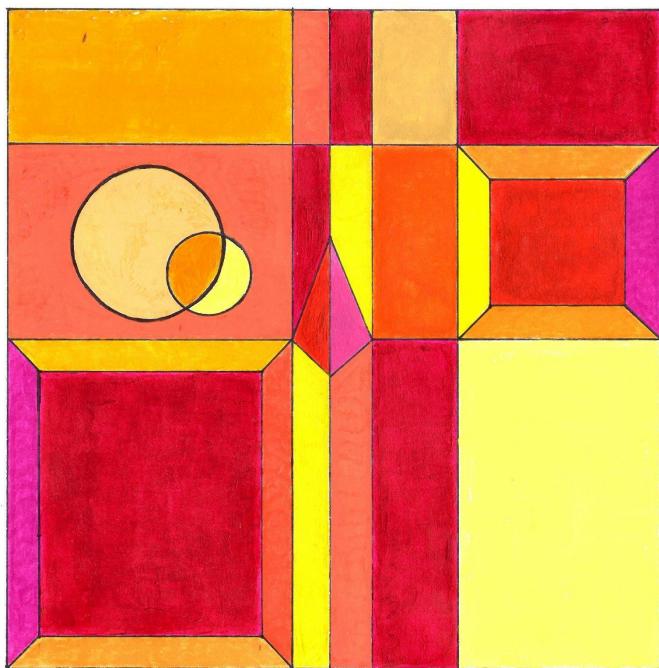
After the pieces came together during the Covid-19 pandemic, the group was able to rehearse them during the summer of 2021 and recorded them at Tedesco Studio at the beginning of August, bringing Kurfirst's meditations to life.

The recording begins with “Peace In,” a composition that utilizes quantized electronically programmed beats and a portion of an Alan Watts speech to set the tone for the listening experience. The nine-beat rhythmic cycle of “Birth Beats 2” is based on the human birth cycle of nine months, the hectic bass melody mirroring the final moments of labor followed by a more uplifting feel of the birthed child’s first moments. The music for “Meditation Groove” emerged directly from Kurfist’s meditation practice, first the rhythm, then the bassline and, finally, the mantra-like melody, which floats above the insistent rhythm section.

“Birth Beats 1” revisits the same rhythmic cycle of “Birth Beats 2” but with only the processed drum part and Watts’s words. In his book, *Effortless Mastery*, Kenny Werner speaks of ghosts that can get in the way of one’s potential, such as self-doubt stemming from past trauma. Kurfist uses a disciplined bassline and drums to defeat these ghosts in “Ghost Killers.” There is a floating quality to “Dreamscape” provided by a 39-beat cycle that is met with a counter rhythm from the tabla in a three-beat cycle. The bassline is locked in but not tied to these rhythms, creating an otherworldly sensation.

Kurfist sets out to prove that drums alone can provide music enough on his solo feature, “Two Chants,” which presents a freely played drum incantation that is then reinterpreted in metric time. The intoxicating “Not Yet” was an older piece that was reclaimed for the recording. It sets a repeating three-bar bassline along with a longer, strong melody. The ensemble then lets the tune simmer, holding back its climax as long as possible. The recording concludes with “Peace Out,” a full ensemble reading of the material presented on “Peace In,” highlighting the elasticity of the rhythmic material when performed by living musicians.

Much of the beauty found in stimulating music is in its ability to blend simplicity and complexity into unique aural experience. Dan Kurfist finds this balance on his brilliant new recording, *Arkinetics*.



Album art

**Tracklist:**

- 1)Peace In
- 2)Birth Beats 2
- 3)Meditation Groove
- 4)Birth Beats 1
- 5)Ghost Killers
- 6)Dreamscape
- 7)Two Chants
- 8)Not Yet
- 9)Peace Out

**Credits:**

Daniel Carter - Trumpet, Woodwinds  
Alexis Marcelo - Fender Rhodes, Piano  
Damon Banks - Electric Bass  
Roshni Samlal - Tabla  
Dan Kurfurst - Drumset, Sogo drum, Compositions

Fima Chupakhin - Piano, Keys, Production on "Peace In"

Recorded by Tom Tedesco on Aug 1, 2021 at Tedesco Studios  
Mixed and Mastered by Erdem Helvacioğlu  
Produced by Dan Kurfurst and Erdem Helvacioğlu

**Artist Links:**

[Website](#)

[Facebook](#)

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For more information, contact Taylor Haughton, [Taylor@clandestinepr.com](mailto:Taylor@clandestinepr.com)