

# Andy Milne and Dapp Theory



## Pianist/composer's group balances the topical and the musical

By Mel Minter

**Andy Milne** is of two minds. On the one hand, he's not particularly optimistic about the country's prospects these days, given our dependency on foreign oil, the ballooning debt and other unpromising conditions. On the other hand, he feels that he has something of an obligation to comment on the situation and, at the same time, inject a dose of positive energy.

An accomplished jazz pianist, he created the group Dapp Theory to do exactly that, blending jazz, rock, hip-hop and spoken word elements into an innovative, socially conscious mix that grooves.



Hal Horowitz

Andy Milne and Dapp Theory

With a compelling new CD, *Layers of Chance* (Contrology Records), under their belt, Andy Milne and Dapp Theory—with **Loren Stillman** (saxes, flute, clarinet; see “Sonic Reducer”), John Moon (percussive poetry), **Chris Tordini** (electric and acoustic bass) and Kenny Grohowski (drums)—will bring the mix to the Outpost on Thursday.

### Coming to Fruition

Arriving in New York in 1991 at the invitation of saxophonist/composer **Steve Coleman** (his teacher at the Banff Centre for Fine Arts), Milne played with Coleman for several years, hooking up with **Cassandra Wilson**, **Greg Osby**, **Ravi Coltrane** and **Geri Allen**, among others.

Working with Coleman brought a comfort level with intricate structures that, combined with Milne's native lyricism, created an instantly identifiable voice.

“The thing I kind of came away with is that if I want to create a structure, I just create a structure. I don't worry about what it is,” says Milne on the phone from his Pennsylvania home. “You can figure it out for the sake of annotating it, but ... the idea is to let your idea come to fruition and try to learn how to navigate it musically.”

### Groove, Poetry and Lyricism

“The idea behind Dapp Theory,” Milne says in the band bio, “is to create complete musical compositions that groove as hard as they express melodic and poetic lyricism.”

*Layers of Chance* certainly accomplishes that, reprising both the lyrical beauty and the social conscience of its predecessor, 2003's *Y'all Just Don't Know*, which featured a collaboration with singer-songwriter **Bruce Cockburn**.

This time around, Moon provides the poetry. His percussive word improves passionately communicate a sense of urgency, as on “Bodybag for Martin,” which, written one MLK Day, moves from a dark plangency—“wondering what could be,” Moon says—to a fresh optimism. On “SOS,” the CD's hardest-hitting tune, Moon sends out the signal: “SOS! Up to you. Up to me. Emergency on planet No. 3.”

“I’m a little dark on [the current social/political situation], but I have to use my music to try to comment on these things,” says Milne. “But also I use it as a sort of healing element for myself. To be able to create music gives me a certain amount of pleasure, to explore ideas—whether they be a profound social commentary message or whether they just be a texture or an interpersonal idea.”

Dapp Theory swings the pendulum to instrumental lyricism on tunes such as “Tracing the Page,” focused on orchestral textures, and “Bird Calls,” whose Americana feel is given sensitive expression in Milne’s fluid, understated piano solo.

“My thing is balance,” he says. “I’m always looking for that. I think it’s a certain architectural need.”

Milne balances Dapp Theory with other projects. On the CD *Scenarios* (ObliqSound), he collaborates with master harmonica player Grégoire Maret on duo improvisations about sonic textures. *Dreams and False Alarms* (SongLines) offers solo meditations on folk music that informed Milne’s childhood. On *Crystal Magnets* (SongLines), due in the fall, Milne and French pianist/composer Benoît Delbecq explore the surround-sound environment, with help from a Chamber Music America grant.

On Thursday, Milne and Dapp Theory will balance poetry, groove and lyricism with the intention of raising your spirits and your awareness.

Andy Milne and Dapp Theory appears at the Outpost Performance Space (210 Yale SE, 268-0044) on Thursday, April 3, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$17, \$12 members and students.