

# SAMBA SQUAD

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## **Rick Shadrach Lazar, Artistic Director**

Rick Shadrach Lazar has been voted Percussionist of the Year five times by Canada's Jazz Report magazine.

Raised in Thunder Bay, Ont., Lazar received his earliest musical instruction from his father, who gave him lessons on piano and woodwinds. In high school, he branched into drums and percussion, and soon led a popular local band with his close friend Paul Shaffer (Late Show with David Letterman).

After earning his BA from Lakehead University, Lazar studied percussion at Indiana University's school of music, and performed in its famed University Jazz Band, which featured Peter Erskine on drums. He went on to play with a number of funk and fusion groups in the U.S. Midwest, and toured with Barry White's Love Unlimited Orchestra.

When he returned to Canada, Lazar began performing with Toronto's popular jazz-fusion band Manteca, and founded Coconut Groove, a dance band whose blend of world beat and jazz rap would prove a pivotal influence on the Toronto music scene of the early 1980s.

In 1987, Lazar formed the Montuno Police, a six-piece instrumental band playing "global jazz from the cutting edge." Montuno Police has recorded several albums, including the 1995 Juno Award nominee Touch.

In 1990, Lazar began his musical association with Loreena McKennitt. He has collaborated with her on five CDs, including the Juno Award-winning album The Visit, and has been an integral part of her touring band. Lazar has also worked with a wide variety of other Canadian and international artists, including Bruce Cockburn, the Blues Brothers, Moe Koffman, Jesse Cook, Jane Bunnett, Jeff Healy and Great Big Sea.

Lazar became a musical educator in 1996, joining the faculty at Toronto's Humber College of Music as an instructor. In 2002 he began teaching at York University.

A uniquely versatile musician, Lazar continues to be involved in a wide variety of innovative projects. In addition to leading Montuno Police, he is the creator and artistic director of Samba Squad, an-award-winning percussion ensemble charting new directions in Brazilian "batucada." Lazar also performs alternative Arabic music with Mernie Orchestra, Medina and Levon Ichkhanian, and Afro-Cuban bata and rumba with Ire Omo and Sarita Leyva.