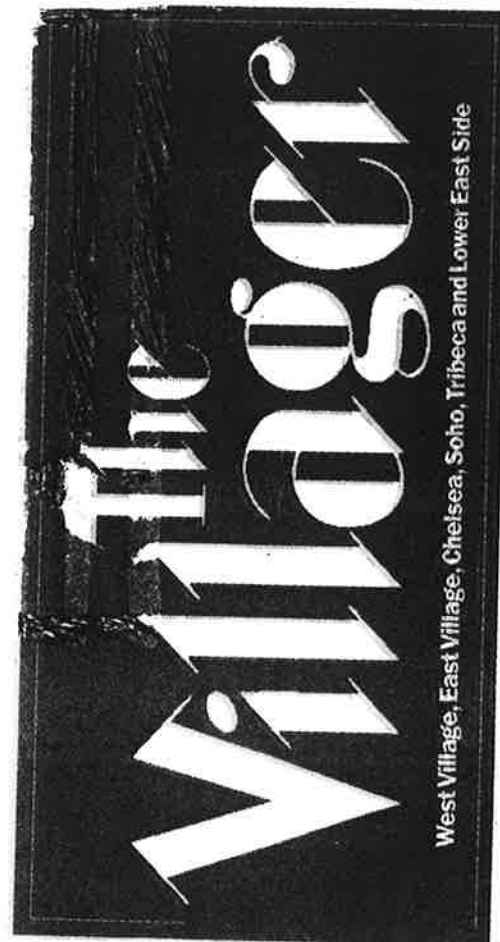


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## The synergy of poems and music

BY DAVIDA SINGER

What happens when you mix a poetry text with music and push off on a journey of abstract expression and improvised sound? That's the realm where performance poet Tracie Morris travels these days. Her latest piece, "Sonic Synthesis," designed specifically for The Kitchen, runs Thursday through Saturday and is a collaboration with director Arthur Jafa, Melvin Gibbs, Graham Haynes, Marvin Sewell and "special surprise guests."

"I always felt the synergy between poetry and music," says Brooklynite Morris, who has been writing since childhood but became "serious about poetry" in the early 1990s when she began to read in the East Village.



Why did she choose poetry as a form? "I decided to focus on it because I like words a lot, and felt the most possibility there," Morris answers. "There's freedom from a wide range of sounds, meanings, etc."

Things started popping for Morris about six years ago when she self-published her first book, "Chap-T-Her Won," and she combined her readings with the sounds of jazz.

"My friends were all musicians," she recalls. "Jazz is a real synthesis of sound and idea. But what they do with me is not at all background music. It's two different elements becoming one thing."

Musical influences?

"Jimmy Scott, Carmen McCrae, Sarah Vaughn, Prince, RatKim. In the way that they use sounds to work together, and in their concepts of space."

Faster than you can read a haiku, Morris was juggling touring (she's been all over the U.S. and throughout Europe), publishing (her second book, "Intermission," came out in 1998) and teaching performance art at Sarah Lawrence.

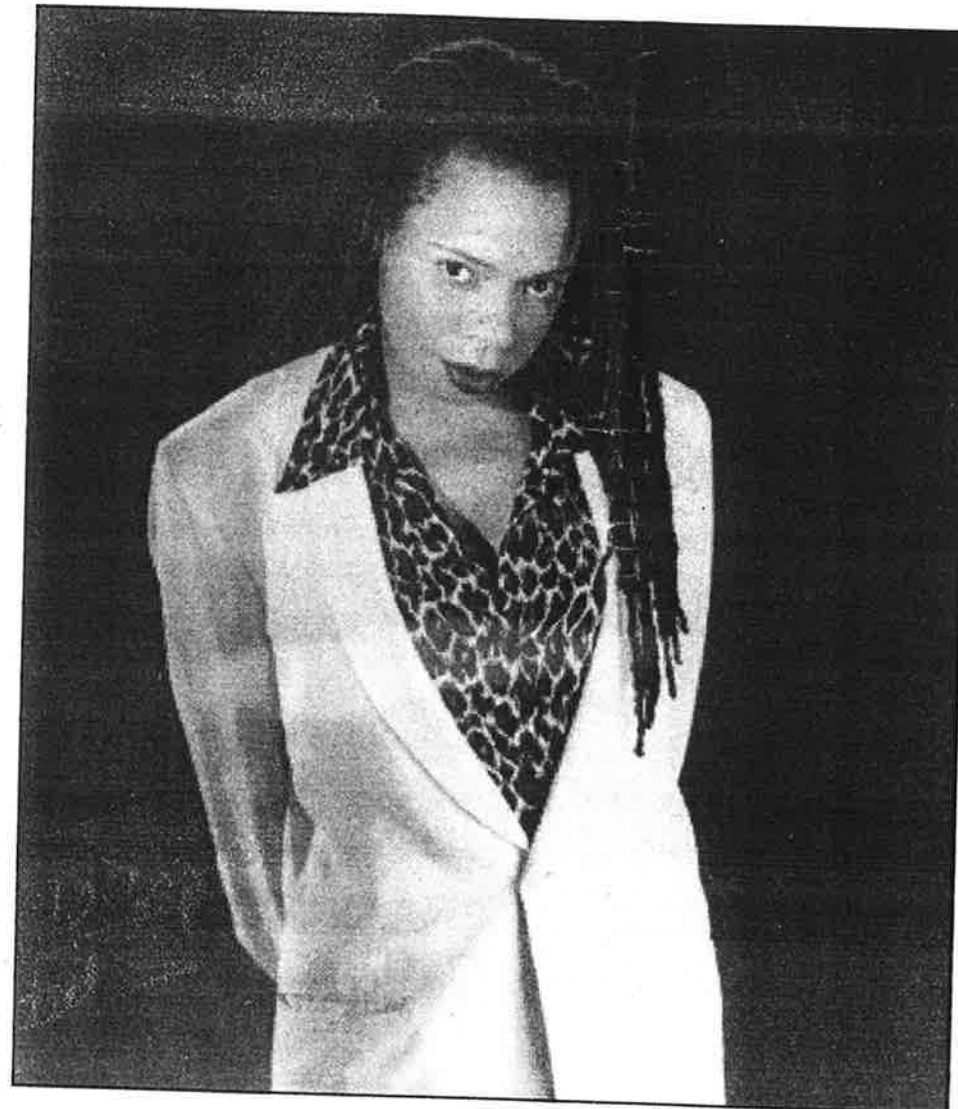
"Sometimes I work with someone because I like their sound, or they'll ask me," Morris explains about her art. "I work with blues people, avant-garde music, traditional, African American, Indian, anything that inspires a poem."

Morris had her first piece commissioned by Aaron Davis Hall in 1995, and tells me this piece for The Kitchen was actually connected to that "because it goes from traditional to experimental."

"Sonic Synthesis" runs 90 minutes and includes six musicians in all, including bass, guitar and percussion.

What does Morris write about?

"Everything. Trees, love, politics. People have called my poetry different things. In this work traditional to sound poetry will be used. This is a coming out party for me. A new direction based on experimental sound. The show is a complete synthesis. You won't know who's talking and who's playing sometimes. I like to blur the lines a lot. To make poetry and music work in a dramatic context, kind of deep. I think poetry can work anywhere, and the show is never the same. The poems make other things come out of the music. It's like



Tracie Morris hits The Kitchen this week with a "Sonic" boom

*Villager photo courtesy The Kitchen*

water in a glass bowl. If you dive in, the fluidity is always changing.

Morris says many of her presentations have to do with "what's happening in the house," and she likes to take advantage of

that energy.

"The Kitchen is right for that kind of play. I hope people will have a more open idea to poetry and music through this show,

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