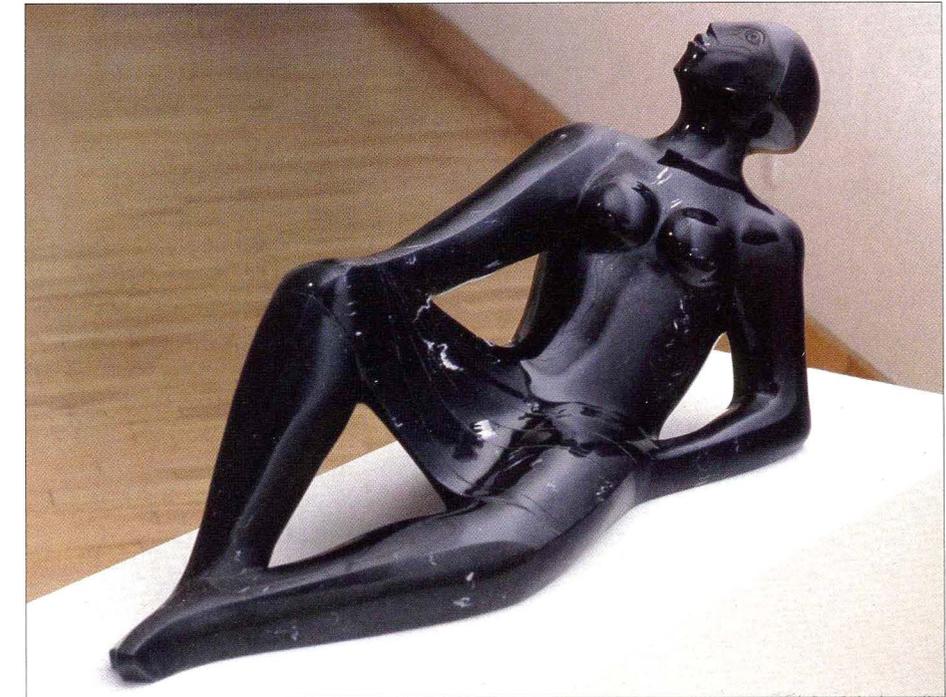


## From Onyx to Jazz

Sometime in the 1980s, **Rufus Reid** purchased a coffee-table book called *The Art of Elizabeth Catlett*, brought it home to Teaneck, New Jersey, and forgot about it for nearly 20 years. It wasn't until 2006 that the acclaimed jazz bassist and composer rediscovered the monograph on a shelf, after he'd received an e-mail about the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Prize in Composition. He decided to write four songs based on Catlett's sculptures and submit them to the competition. The proposal won the \$20,000 prize, which meant that his composition would be performed by a 22-piece jazz ensemble.

Those songs have become the foundation for Reid's latest album, *Quiet Pride: The Elizabeth Catlett Project* (Motema Music). When writing the arrangements, Reid looked to fellow jazz musicians for inspiration, recalling how soprano saxophonist **Jane Ira Bloom** crafted compositions based on the work of **Jackson Pollock** and of **Joan Miró**, and pianist **Jim McNeely** wrote a suite influenced by **Paul Klee's** paintings.

Each movement of Reid's suite is named for the Catlett piece that inspired it. For instance, *Recognition*—a 1970 onyx work of two figures linked in embrace—is a song with a brash, brass-filled introduction that transitions into a softer, mellower melody. A 1981 bronze bust of a self-assured woman, titled *Glory*, gave rise to a composition that starts quietly before stoic, confident rhythms take over to finish it. Reid's interpretation of *Singing Head*, a 1975 sculpture of a masklike face with a

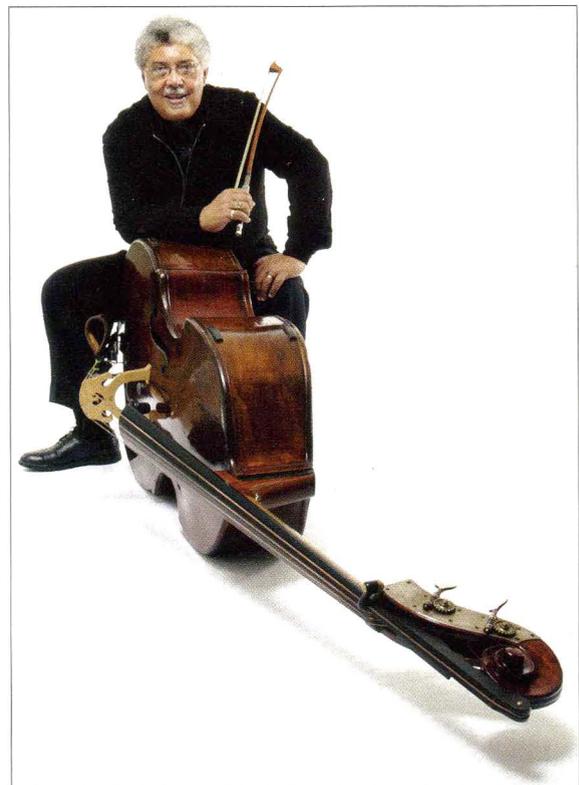


**RIGHT** Jazz bassist Rufus Reid, whose latest album is *Quiet Pride: The Elizabeth Catlett Project*. **ABOVE** Catlett's 1997 sculpture *Stargazer* inspired Reid's song "Tapestry in the Sky."

wide-open mouth, is carried by hypnotic vocals.

Reid explains how he came up with "Mother and Child," which is based on a 1971 cedar sculpture Catlett had made of a graceful mother holding her newborn. "It's got these sloping, very smooth lines that separate, and then they come together, and then they disappear," he says. "It's abstract, but it's still very clear. So to me, I can take two harmonic lines, and they could simultaneously parallel each other and eventually become one." A fifth movement, "Tapestry in the Sky," was written just for the album.

Soon after winning the Sackler Prize, Reid finally got to meet Catlett, and the two developed a friendship. The bassist and his wife even spent one



Thanksgiving with the artist at her home in Cuernavaca, Mexico. And Reid says that Catlett was able to hear a recording of what would become *Quiet Pride* before her death in 2012.

"It's not just a jazz record," Reid emphasizes. "It's more than that. To me, it has a much longer life because of art being involved."

—Ann Binlot