



David Murray

# On the Occasion of the Publication of *Basics* A Celebration of Revolution and the Vision of a New World

## An Evening of Music, Visual Art, Poetry and Readings



Maggie Brown



Matthew Shipp and William Parker

April 11, 2011: The day finally arrived. Nearly 400 people came out to an amazing program of visual arts, dance, poetry, music of many different genres—all celebrating revolution and the vision of a new world on the occasion of the publication of a powerful and potentially very popular new book, *Basics*—a collection of quotes and short essays from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian.

People came in not knowing exactly what to expect—but wanting something different. As they walked through a visual arts exhibit that was vibrant... defiant... diverse... angry... hopeful... and joyous—there was an air of expectancy...

Then the doors opened, people took their seats.

People experienced an evening of art that went at the themes of revolution and a new world in all kinds of different ways, with the words of Bob Avakian framing the four acts, and weaving in and out of the evening. Singers sent notes into the stratosphere and deep into your body. Powerful dance pieces pulsed with impatient energy. Soaring jazz solos took you way out of—and then sometimes way into—the everyday. A whole range of musicians let you move and feel to the rhythms (and words) of punk, funk, Latin, Indian, and '60s-'70s soul...

Short theatrical pieces and poems movingly evoked the different life experiences of people in this system. Hard truths about the history and present day of this system—along with penetrating questions to the audience—were put into stark imagery and poetic cadences. A collection of very powerful dramatic pieces and readings and speeches illustrated the span of Avakian's work and his connections to the '60s, to prisoners, to revolutionaries all over the world. Video clips of Avakian himself, from the '60s to today, introduced many to this leader and thinker, evoking a wide range of responses.

One person put it well: "I don't like to use the word inspirational, because it's so overused. But there is no other word to describe this."

This was art that would stay with you long past the applause—art that spanned a tremendous amount of expressive diversity, both in form and

content. It was indeed a joyous celebration—and at the same time a serious, sometimes humorous, sometimes angry, often visionary and above all revolutionary delving into the theme of the evening that tied together each performance and shared electricity and emotion with the audience.

Afterward the lobby was a place of hugs, grins, high-fives and most of all excited conversation and just plain trying to take in with others what people had just been through. The artistic performances and everyone who took the stage this night, had together, shown not just that another world is possible... but also the outlines of a future where humanity could emancipate itself and flourish. And for an evening—and, potentially, for much longer—a new kind of community was formed.

A woman walked up to one of our reporters and said, "I want to introduce you to my new friends." It turned out she had met these new friends when she was trying to figure out how to get to Harlem Stage. Walking up the street, she noticed many others walking down the block holding the palm cards for the event. And so she went up to this one group of women, they all figured out where to go, then, once inside, sat and shared the evening together.

In the weeks to come, *Revolution* will be giving you more sights, sounds and reflections from this evening, from different angles. But right now, perhaps the most fitting thing we can leave you with is by echoing the thank you at the end of the program:

*THANK YOU to the April 11 Host Committee, including Revolution Books, who made this event possible; to the artists and performers who made it provocative and joyful; to the Harlem Stage staff for all their assistance; to the numerous volunteers whose hard work and creativity brightened our present by making this program happen and provided a vision of the future world that could be; and most of all thank you to Bob Avakian, the author of Basics, whose words provided the occasion for this night and whose compassion, commitment to humanity, and critical spirit has never wavered in the course of 45 years.*

### What People Are Saying...

A team from *Revolution* interviewed people in the audience at the April 11 program, to find out what brought them to the event and what they thought about the performances and the whole amazing evening. The following are brief excerpts from some of the people the team talked to. Thanks to all those interviewed and everyone who volunteered to conduct and transcribe the interviews.

#### Young Black man, artist/police brutality activist/educator

*Revolution:* What did you think of tonight?

It was great; it was beautiful. I really liked the eclectic mix of different types of art, different types of artists, different types of expression; I especially liked the saxophonist [David Murray] going crazy, almost blew my brains out. It was amazing, it was a beautiful show of revolutionary artists and revolutionary expression out here, definitely a motivating night. Keep moving forward in the struggle.

*Revolution:* Were you expecting something like this?

I didn't know what to expect, but I always know that the Party brings out the hot shit, excuse me [laughs]. But it's always gonna be a good event and there's always gonna be good people, and you know I think revolution really brings out the most exciting art because revolutionary-minded artists are the ones who really bring it to that next level of breaking the status quo, and society-wise they are breaking with it, and artistically, and in all types of ways. So it's always a good time. I knew it was going to be good.

#### Latino man (translated from Spanish)

They began and they ended with a sound that encapsulated everything. The totality encapsulated in the sound, the saxophone and the mega-saxophone [referring to the baritone sax player Moist Paula Henderson]. Awesome. It was a show which really showed the unity of the people, the unity of the artists, a very well-done message, a very well-consolidated and very well-focused message about the need to make revolution, the desire to make revolution, and the possibility to make revolution, and it was also a very emotional thing—not only emotional, but also intellectual which provoked us intellectually and moves emotionally everyone that is here. And I hope that this book *Basics* by Bob Avakian becomes the new Red Book of the revolutionary youth all over the world.

Continued on page 10



Richard Brown



Ted Rall



Excerpt from Tapsplotation

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Continued from page 9

## Black college student

*Revolution:* Particular artist or poet or performance that struck you?

I was interested in the letters from the prisoners. That was really interesting, because that's a serious thing, serious subject and topic that we should address. And the young man too, Alejandro del Fuego [whose message to the event was part of the program]. It's very interesting to see young people, teenage, early 20s, taking interest in that, because in my opinion, I think that a lot of people, they're too focused on materialism, and status and this, so it's good to see somebody who's thinking in a conscious aware state that's that young.

## Young white man

*Revolution:* Part of the title of this event is "the vision of a new world." Do you get a sense of that, with all these different people coming together?

Absolutely. I would describe myself as a liberal. As to my thoughts on revolution as a concept, I am a practical man. I would have to think about the prospects of workability, and furthermore, what the new world would look like in of itself, which is one of the things I'm hoping these guys will explain to me at greater length, what exactly... what their utopia would be.

*Revolution:* It's a glimpse of a future—it's not the new world itself, we have to make revolution to get to that, but there are people here coming together, enjoying the night together...

I'm all for coming together and enjoying the night together regardless of social class. With this performance itself providing a glimpse, I would be inclined to like it.

## Asian-American philosophy student

*Revolution:* What interested you about the event, that you decided to come?

I've been interested in this philosophy, actually. But I've never really been involved in a political movement. So, it was pretty interesting, I thought. I wanted to see what it would be like to be with like-minded people.

*Revolution:* What did you think about the event tonight?

It was interesting. It was a lot of fun. It was more like a cultural entertainment type event. And I wasn't sure what I was really getting myself into. But man, the four acts, it really went by quickly. So, it was good... I'm going to check out the [Revolution] bookstore, come to events.



Maluca (center) with Sabel Boo and Oscar Wild

## Young woman

*Revolution:* Can you describe a little bit more of how you felt about the event?

It feels like hope. That's honestly what it feels like. Growing up I've always had these sort of ideals and then in high school I was really trying to push them forward and everyone would always try to shut me up or ignore me because everyone either dismissed it completely and said the system that we lived in was fine or just didn't want to get in trouble. But just being around everyone, and hearing and seeing, I just felt immense hope. This is just a small room and a small group of people, but in the wider America and the wider world there's people just like us. And the point is to connect and unite and to bring the word forward.

## Student, NYC

*Revolution:* Can you expand on this thing of "You encounter things that you never encountered before"?

...I didn't know very much about Bob Avakian's life until today so this gave me an opportunity really to learn about him and find out who he was... And I am thoroughly impressed, and thoroughly involved with the way that sort of charisma that makes him readable. We don't



Nitya Vidyasagar

want someone who seems tired. We want a leader that might be able to remind you of but...you want a leader that you can reach...and Bob Avakian has that charismatic personality where he can tell you this is what I believe on the world today and he makes it available and he makes it funny which is really difficult because it is really painful realities that rule, and he explains it in a way that helps you better understand the need for revolution and if anything makes you hungrier for it.

## White woman, about 60, from New York suburb

I hope this begins something because I think that for the first time of all my life that I've been on this earth, I've never felt the helplessness I feel, because you can see hundreds of thousands of people marching and these politicians aren't doing anything—they're just doing what they want to do where people power was always at least a motivating factor to move people from A to B, even if they didn't agree, and that doesn't seem to be important anymore. They get into office, and that's it. And that's a scary thought. Because it's people power that did the civil rights, it did all those things. So where are we left... what are we left with now?

## A compañero who is unemployed (translated from Spanish)

*Revolution:* And now you've started with Avakian, right? You have read...

Look, first, I read the autobiography. And then... I have a lot of questions about white people, but I read it... I was into the part where he hooks up with Black people, with the Black Panthers. I met those people, I met Bobby Seale here at the time of the Young Lords. When I was 21, in the Bronx I heard him. Then, this kid, Avakian... OK, this guy, Avakian [laugh]...Avakian is my contemporary. But "he sounds right here." This is very important, he's very honest. And there's this thing that he has, he has a sense of humor. Yes, inside of his seriousness. The guy has a sense of humor. This is for real, a lot of older people don't. There's no hypocrisy. And then I was saying to myself, and this is coming from a white person. That's real hard to do. I was looking at him, analyzing him. OK, you know. I saw him in the "videotapes." What I see is this Avakian is "real," very "real."

## Young Black man

*Revolution:* So I see you got a copy of *Basics*.

Yeah, I got the *Basics* book. Thinking about getting another, or maybe getting a different book.

*Revolution:* Getting another copy of *Basics* for...

Yeah, possibly for a prisoner. I heard that you can buy another for a prisoner for the same price.

## A young Latina who volunteered to build for the event (translated from Spanish)

*Revolution:* Have you read Avakian before?

Yes. This book [*Basics*] and other books, and also I have seen a lot of quotes in videos. On the web pages that are aimed at videos. He has more than 20 videos, the Revolution Books page, there is a particular video where he talks about how women are treated in this society. It's hard hearing him talk about this because it's true.

*Revolution:* Do you remember what he said in the video?

The different ways in which on a daily basis women are abused in society, whether due to crimes against them or the simple choice of living in a world controlled by men. There are so many ways to act and the world is not so free. And for me it was really a shock to hear it, but it's a necessary shock so I can be able to change what we are seeing.

## Black woman

*Revolution:* What do you think about Carl Dix's message

## An Evening of Music, Visual Art, Poetry and Readings

### Artists and Presenters

Derrick Adams • Aladdin • Wafaa Bilal • Herb Boyd • Guillermo E. Brown • Maggie Brown • Richard Brown • Raul Castillo • Carl Dix • Emory Douglas • Richard Duardo • Brian Dykstra • Bridgit Antoinette Evans • Skylar Fein • Alejandro del Fuego • reg e. gaines • Shelly Gaines • Kyle Goen • Guerrilla Girls Broadband • Steve Lambert • Moist Paula Henderson • Maluca (with backup dancers Oscar Wild and Sabel Boo) • David Murray • Wangechi Mutu • Abiodun Oyewole • Outernational (and special guest musicians) • William Parker • Ted Rall • Bryon Rogers • Dread Scott • SEN ONE UZN • Matthew Shipp • Tapsplotation (Jamaal Kendall, Brinae Ali, and Maurice Malcom) • Sunsara Taylor • Hank Willis Thomas • Nitya Vidyasagar • Cornel West

### Production

Eddie Alsina • Leah Bonvissuto • Joan H. Cappello • Annie Day • Jeremiah Dickey • Sandy K • Tony Lepore



Carl Dix

from the stage about getting into *Basics*, and getting it out there in society...

Yes, I think it's important. And I think that, my generation, unfortunately, has become quite passive, and not involved and not active. I grew up in a very active, aggressive, progressive household. So it's difficult to be part of a generation that's not, that's lacking care and concern. But I guess it's gonna take someone like Bob Avakian to get the light under them, you know?

## Black woman, college student

*Revolution:* What did you think about the event?

I was blown away. Blown away! I feel really excited about getting involved with the Party. Getting involved with the revolution. I came here already feeling that I wanted to be involved. But now I feel really, really motivated.

*Revolution:* Were there things in the event that were outside your expectations?

Absolutely. When I heard the gentleman from the Last Poets, I was blown away by his analysis of America. I was blown away by Richard Brown. I think it was Richard Brown that got me to realize the importance of taking action, taking constructive action, not just waiting around for some other person or some other group to get active, but to take responsibility myself to get active.

*Revolution:* Have you been able to get into *Basics* yet? What do you think of the book?

Yes. I think that Bob Avakian has an incredible knack for taking complex ideas and breaking them down in a way so that they are accessible to regular everyday people. That being said, I read several quotes to students at my school. And as soon as they heard them, they started buying the book. It's hot. □

More interviews and photos online soon at revcom.us.

All photos on this page special to *Revolution*.