

# Shaffer's 'Divine' reunion with mentor Munoz

[Jim Bessman](#) June 28, 2003

**From:** [Billboard](#) (Vol. 115, Issue 26)

**Publisher:** Prometheus Global Media LLC

Versatile Late Show With David Letterman bandleader Paul Shaffer frequently sits in with all types of rock'n'rollers. Last week at New York's Village Underground, however, he manned keyboards behind an all-star jazz group headed by guitarist [Tisziji](#) (pronounced "tis-see-gee") Munoz and featuring saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Ravi Coltrane, drummer Rashied All, and bassist Don Pate.

Turns out that the underrecognized Munoz was Shaffer's mentor.

"I was studying sociology in Toronto--but I wasn't grooving on it," Shaffer says. He recalls happening upon Munoz one summer morning in 1969 after an all-nighter.

"This guy was sitting on a stoop playing acoustic guitar--and I had to stop," continues Shaffer, who was riveted by Munoz's soaring melodies. "It was modal playing--like [John] Coltrane. I introduced myself, and he immediately took me under his wing."

Forming a band with Shaffer, Munoz started him out on standards like "All the Things You Are," "and then Coltrane--who was like a guru to him," Shaffer says. "There was a spiritual element to Coltrane's music and that was also a great part of what [Tisziji](#) taught me--music as spiritual communication. Anything skewed about my musical personality is because of this man."

Both Shaffer and the Brooklyn, N.Y.-born Munoz have since moved to New York. "Over the years I've been on television, I've played with so many of the greats of all genres," he says. "But I could never have played with Miles Davis or Dizzy Gillespie or especially Coltrane's accompanist, McCoy Tyner, if I hadn't apprenticed with [Tisziji](#)."

Munoz, whose signature single-line guitar style stems from a childhood injury to his left wrist, has since "remained true to his spiritualistic musical expression," Shaffer says, recording prolifically and writing extensively about his philosophy. The pair have now produced Munoz's new Divine Radiance album for his Dreyfus Jazz-distributed Anami Music label.

As the title suggests, the album reflects Munoz's spiritualism. But the project, which commenced in spring 2001, inevitably reacted to the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It was a situation that required deft handling of conscious spontaneous expression," Munoz says, citing Coltrane's "evolution into that kind of freedom and intuitive domain." But Munoz also wanted to pass Coltrane's "spiritual torch" to his son Ravi--who was

only 2 when his father died--through Sanders, a member of Coltrane's mid-'60s free jazz combos.

"So I was ready to play with these cats in a free thing--but then 9/11 came, and I felt a catastrophic emotional need giving shape to my vision," Munoz explains. "The music became a force field for transcendence for every conceivable kind of pain."

The album's 24-minute title track, which Shaffer terms "a cathartic rage," best personifies his intent. "Without any thought or impulse from me, everyone went for radiance or primal expression," he says. "Afterward, we felt purged and clean and emotionally gratified. I don't mean to be too metaphysical, but this is coming out of my essential fibers of experience as a human being and a composer.

