If one of your reasons for attending PASIC is to take in stunning, virtuosic performances of thrilling, ground-breaking music that will feed your soul and recharge your batteries—then don’t miss this concert! And if you can’t be at PASIC, I urge you to at least learn more about these guys and check out their recordings. (Information provided below.)

Joe Locke and Christos Rafalides’ desire to collaborate had been gestating for a few years. Early this year, Locke realized that his faculty recital at Zeltsman Marimba Festival 2005 would be the perfect opportunity to turn the idea into a reality. He and Christos composed and developed material through the spring and early summer. The results were met with a cheering, standing ovation and have already been captured on a CD called *Van Gogh By Numbers*, which will be released at PASIC.

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While the template for vibraphone/marimba duos was drawn by David Friedman and Dave Samuels’ landmark duo Double Image, Locke and Rafalides believe they’re forging their own path. Each musician brings his personal experiences and unique approach to composition, arranging, and improvisation.

“While I was writing the duo music,” Rafalides said, “I had Joe’s sound in my mind. He sounds great in any musical circumstance, but I know what would be his favorite and wrote music accordingly. For example, on ‘Danzon en Primavera,’ I keep a nice, Latin groove on the marimba while Joe solos on the vibes using a lot of lyricism and fluent, advanced language. Another idea was to bring an arrangement of a jazz standard [‘Love is a Many Splendored Thing’] into 9/8. That was really challenging in the duo context. Joe loved it.”

At 46, Joe Locke tours frequently, performing in a wide variety of settings with myriad artists. Over the years, he has worked with talents as diverse as Jeff “Tain” Watts, the Beastie Boys, Cecil Taylor, and Kenny Barron. At the same time, several settings remain central to his work including his piano-less quartet, 4 Walls of Freedom (tenor saxophone, vibes, bass, and drums); duo and quartet playing with the young, great jazz pianist Geoffrey Keezer; and quartet work with Milt Jackson’s former rhythm section. The latter group recently recorded a live CD at Ronnie Scott’s in London. The New Sound Quartet (with Keezer) just released the CD *Summertime* on Sony/Japan.

Joe has already recorded over 20 CDs as a leader (available through www.joelocke.com) and appeared as a sideman on more than 100 other CDs, yet he is still considered to be growing, as evidenced by being voted number-one vibist in the Rising Star category of the 2005 Downbeat Critics Poll. Warm praise has also come from vibraphone legend Bobby Hutcherson, who described Locke as “a wonderful young man who’s all about the music, all the time! You can hear it in every note he plays.” Mike Mainieri said, “Joe Locke’s playing and writing have been an absolute joy to this vibist’s ears, which have been starving to
hearing a player who challenges himself on every tune. Joe is constantly pushing the envelope musically.”

Locke has recorded much original music and is frequently involved in writing projects. He recently premiered new music for big band and voices with Jazz Band Classic in New York City, commissioned by the Commission Project, and was commissioned to write for the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra.

“The language Joe has developed is unique,” said Rafalides, “and the way he executes his ideas is just amazing. What makes him an innovator is the combination of his knowledge of all jazz styles, his absolute command of the instrument, and his creative spirit.”

Rafalides, who is now 33, completed his undergraduate degree at Berklee College of Music. From 1997 to 1999, he studied with Locke in the masters degree program at Manhattan School of Music. “Because of Christos’ in-depth study with the great vibist Ed Saindon, by the time he came to New York, he was already an accomplished player,” Locke said. “We delved further into the vocabulary of the jazz masters. He grew in leaps and bounds, devouring everything I gave him.”

“From day one,” said Christos, “Joe treated me as a fellow musician and not as a student. He introduced me to the real jazz world. Through his playing I saw what it takes to play jazz in New York and all over the world. We were very compatible and always had a lot of fun. But what made us really good friends was the mutual respect we had for one another. And I am honored to get to play with a musician of such a high caliber.”

At the same time, Christos worked closely with the great Latin jazz bassist John Benitez, who is now a member of Rafalides’ jazz trio Manhattan Vibes. (Learn more about Christos, the trio and their CD at: www.manhattanvibes.com.) “Christos was like a sponge, soaking up everything about the Latin jazz of Cuba and Puerto Rico,” Locke says, adding that he believes Christos is already one of the master mallet players of Latin jazz. “On top of this, because of Christos’ Greek heritage, he plays in meters such as seven, nine, and eleven with the ease that most Americans play 4/4,” said Joe. “People need to hear him! Personally, he’s my favorite young vibes player.

“What’s precious to me about my relationship with Christos,” Joe continued, “is that ‘the student’ has become ‘the peer.’ It’s gratifying to have an erstwhile student become such an invaluable colleague. I consider this to be one of the most deeply rewarding projects of my musical life thus far.”

That says a lot coming from an artist who’s already done so much.

Nancy Zeltsman is a marimba performer, recording artist, teacher, author, and festival director. Her new solo marimba CD, Sweet Song, is available through www.nancyzeltsman.com and will be available at PASIC 2005.