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## JUNE 2026

VOLUME 93 / NUMBER 6

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# JUNE 2026

# Inside

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### 20 Jason Moran, Blank For.ms, Marcus Gilmore

BY GARY FUKUSHIMA

*Shards* (Red Hook) is the second collaborative album from Blank For.ms with pianist Jason Moran and drummer Marcus Gilmore. The back story tying these three artists together is a remarkable tale spun over many years from some seemingly disparate threads.

With her Blue Note Records debut, *Diavola*, Gabrielle Cavassa embraces her inner "contrarian impulse," and it works.



ROEG COHEN

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Cover photo by Anna Yatskevich

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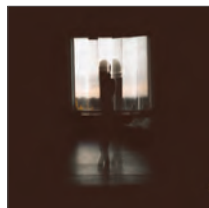
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## First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



# Jazz Day's Chicago Serenade

**FOR THOSE AROUND THE GLOBE WHO CELEBRATED** International Jazz Day on April 30, the occasion, as usual, seemed like a very cool “Hallmark” holiday, an annual ritual to embrace this music’s traditions of freedom, experimentation and community. But for those of us living in Chicago, IJD this year was extra special. That’s because Chicago served as the host city for the 15th annual celebration, a collaboration of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz.

The event has been hosted in a new city around the globe each year — Paris, Istanbul, Osaka, Havana and last year in Abu Dhabi, to name a few. But this year it was Chicago’s turn, in part because of Chicago’s deep jazz tradition, but in larger part because Herbie Hancock — one of IJD’s key founders — was raised here.

Celebrated in 196 countries around the globe and in all 50 states, International Jazz Day truly turned out in Chicago in a way that made even the crustiest of old jazz professionals (yes, including this writer) smile and beam with pride about the music this city delivers.

A week’s worth of panels, meetings and performances sparkled across the city and into the surrounding suburbs. Hancock went back to Hyde Park Academy, his old high school, to meet with students and receive a key to the city. Orbert Davis’ Chicago Jazz Philharmonic performed Miles Davis’ *Sketches Of Spain* at the Logan Center for the Arts. Later, at that same venue, Antonio Sánchez performed his Birdman Live set featuring music he created for that movie. Just to name a few events.

But on April 30, the organizers offered an amazing capstone, the International Jazz Day Global Concert that pulled together scores of

today’s biggest jazz stars.

Dee Dee Bridgewater and Gregory Porter dug into Ramsey Lewis’ “The In Crowd” to kick off the proceedings. Herbie Hancock told the audience that to understand jazz, you need to know the blues, bringing out Chicago’s own Buddy Guy with Cristone “Kingfish” Ingram and Béla Fleck to play Guy’s “Damn Right I’ve Got The Blues.” Lizz Wright and pianist Helen Sung were joined by the Uniting Voices Chicago choir to take us to church with “Seems Like I’m Never Tired Lovin’ You.” Dianne Reeves just charmed with “In A Sentimental Mood.” Members of Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) welcomed the audience to Chicago with Dee Alexander on vocals and Dr. Ernest Dawkins leading a crowd-pleasing group.

That’s just scratching the surface. The show also included a calvalcade of Chicago and international stars — Bobby Broom, Kurt Elling (who helped bring IJD to Chicago), Marquis Hill, Ed Wilkerson, Ben Lamar Gay, Robert Glasper, Christian McBride, Terri Lyne Carrington, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Marcus Miller, James Carter, Til Brönnner, Mino Cinélu, Emmet Cohen, Kris Bowers, Justin Tyson, Burniss “Boom Bishop” Travis II, James Morrison, Tiger Okoshi, Joel Ross, Jahari Stampley Francisco Torres, Bobby Watson, Jacob Collier and on and on. Whew.

When Elling began singing the show’s finale, an upbeat take on John Lennon’s “Imagine,” it seemed tangential, but as the evening’s stars amassed on stage, seeing one after another, it made sense. Imagine a community of jazz gathering yearly to shout out our love for this music, the people who make it and fans who live by it.

It happened. And it was beautiful.

Catch the entire show at [jazzday.com](http://jazzday.com)

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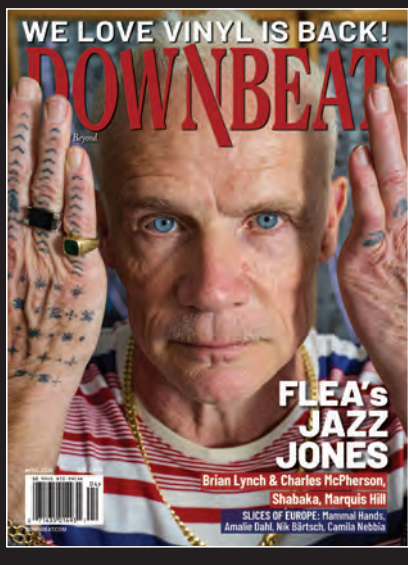


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### From Argentina with Love!

I enjoyed reading the article about Camila Nebbia's Berlin adventures, but journalist Martin Longley omits an important detail. Camila was born, raised and studied jazz in Buenos Aires. Her adventures may be in Berlin, but she is Argentinian. Thank you.

FERNANDO RÍOS  
BUENOS AIRES

**Editor's Note:** There was a brief mention of Buenos Aires, the Argentinian capital, but we can always give a little more love to home!



have spent much of my life promoting and recording his music.

MICHAEL BENEDICT  
GREENVILLE, NEW YORK

**Editor's Note:** Michael! Absolutely love the insight and detail. Thank you!

### Further Praise for Jazz Education

We love the monthly DownBeats! Thanks for publishing the "Praise for Education" letter by Suyeon Yang.

Teaching music in public school can be pretty exhausting. We are constantly advocating for our own worth. There is a surprising lack of thanks from administrators at the highest levels. We have to fund raise with the help of a very small percentage of tireless parent music boosters in an effort to maintain quality programs. I think Suyeon put it very well that our programs are much more important to the students' lives and to our community than many people realize. It's not just a school activity. Letters like this are truly appreciated!

Thanks for all your great [sections] like Where to Study Jazz, where are the best festivals and also the celebrating the DownBeat Student Music Awards. As a recipient of one of these prizes at age 17, I can say it was a real boost to help me keep keeping on.

JAKE BERGEVIN (HE/HIM)  
DIRECTOR OF BANDS, GUITAR/PIANO TEACHER  
& MUSIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON  
EDMONDS-WOODWAY HIGH SCHOOL  
EDMONDS, WASHINGTON

**Editor's Note:** Thank you, Jake, and all of our educators for everything you do! Edmonds-Woodway High School is part of DownBeat's Future of Jazz program where we put free copies of the magazine into the hands of high school jazz students.

### Halvorson Blindfolded?

Love the magazine — been subscribing for four to five years and always a pleasure to be exposed to new artists as well as hearing about the seasoned veterans.

Anyway, I wanted to toss out an idea for a Blindfold Test. It seems everywhere I turn, Mary Halvorson is on yet another album! I'd like to suggest her as a candidate for that segment.

Among the many that could be played for her, a curveball that might not be expected would be George Freeman's solo work on "Till There Was You" off his album *Man & Woman*. "Squeeze Me" is another option off of that album.

MATT FEAREY  
DENVER, COLORADO

**Editor's Note:** Matt! We love the idea. Mary, if you read this, do you take requests? We might even start you off with Matt's gimme!

### The Inside Story

I was interested to see that a Jimmy Smith/Wes Montgomery recording, "13 (Death March)," was included in the recent Blindfold Test given to guitarist Anthony Wilson (May 2026 issue). I thought I might be able to shed some light on the composition.

Although the piece was arranged by Oliver Nelson for this recording, it was actually composed by Gary McFarland, a prominent composer, arranger and vibraphonist of the 1960s. Gary had a relatively short musical career — he didn't begin working professionally until his late 20s and died at the age of 38 in 1971.

The composition was originally written for a film that was first titled *13* but was later released as *Eye of the Devil*. The movie has since become something of a cult classic and starred Sharon Tate, Deborah Kerr and David Niven. Adding to the confusion, the piece was also titled "One I Could Have Loved" and was recorded by Gary along with pianist Steve Kuhn on their Impulse! LP *The October Suite*.

I was married to Gary's widow, Gail, and

### Correction

■ *Miles Mixup:* In our May tribute to the Miles Davis Centennial, the following quote should have been attributed to Terence Blanchard: "I've been asked that question, 'How can you listen to this guy's music?' We want to make these people perfect. One of the things I think we have to remember is back then in our community, therapy was not something we dealt with. I look at it now as being a godsend for a lot of us to help us push through a lot of these issues. We talk about it. We have words for it. When I listen to Lauren talk about him supporting women it lets us know how complex a person he was." The record has been corrected in the digital edition.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com) or find us on Facebook & Twitter.

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"I will always believe that all humans have the capacity to love unconditionally," says bassist and activist David Ambrosio. "It's our divine nature. We've just lost our way."

## David Ambrosio's Act of Civil Disobedience

Bassist David Ambrosio begs a few questions by calling his ambitious project *Civil Disobedience*. His group's new album is, after all, an instrumental jazz recording, with skilled and sensitive players (he's joined by Donny McCaslin, Ingrid Jenson, Bruce Barth and veteran drummer Victor Lewis, who plays boldly despite health limitations) taking on lesser-known tunes from the 1960s Blue Note Records

canon, many of which were released years after their recording.

Overt aspects of protest come through on such tunes as James Spaulding's "A Time To Go," considered an MLK tribute, and Harold Land's "Poor People's March," touching on the late-'60s "Poor's People's Campaign" to gain economic justice for poverty-stricken families in the United States. But no words or slogans of revolt are to be found, or any emphatic agenda as is put forth on such classic jazz albums as *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* or in the m.o. of Charlie Haden/Carla Bley's Liberation Music Orchestra project.

Rather, the message is in the underscoring spirit of the music, having to do with protest, in some sense, but also an inherently progressive inclination: civil disobedience and a questioning spirit as an approach to life and music-making.

As Ambrosio explains in his articulate liner note, "This uniquely modern music unintentionally flew under the radar at a powerful time in the history of this country, and the message contained within could not be heard at their most influential time. It was at that moment I understood that the idea of initiating a project to play this music would hold significant value. I chose to name the project *Civil Disobedience* to honor this method of nonviolent action for social change."

In a recent interview, Ambrosio suggested that the rebel spirit may have seeped into his being by osmosis. "I was born in April of 1968," he says, "so maybe somehow that energy got me when I came into the world, who knows?"

Ambrosio is sensitive to intersections of history, and he points out that "when I debuted this band in 2018 at the Jazz Standard in New York, it was the 50th year anniversary of the poignant moments in U.S. history that some of these compositions connect to, as well as my 50th-year anniversary. In my mind, it was a project for a special moment of historical parallels and personal discovery.

"As the political and social situation in America continued to reflect and even amplify issues of the past, the project seemed like a calling for me. I have about a 15-year history of community activism in New York, and it became more than just a project of great music. It was my opportunity to find the intersection of those two paths in my life, and to

share it as joyfully as I can with others.

"I'm not sure where exactly I'm going to draw from for the next stage of this project, but it seems clear the need for protest music is not waning in our society."

Apart from such curated material as Bobby Hutcherson's "For Duke P." and the Land and Spaulding tracks, the album places special focus on drummer-composer Joe Chambers, whose music supplies two of the five tracks: "Irina" and "Ankara." Ambrosio says, "To me, Joe Chambers is one of the great drummers in jazz history, and one who is not often considered when talking about the great

drummers in jazz. And that is true about him as a composer as well. There are likely a number of reasons why that is, but I mostly picked this material based on what I was drawn to musically in the compositions of this period.

"Certainly, there are many examples of avant-garde jazz in the late '60s when the music was becoming more free. But these compositions really struck me, as they were still adhering to traditional structures, harmony and that swing feel and sound of Blue Note at that time, but really expanding them without abandoning them."

Ambrosio, who studied both classical and

jazz, has been a busy sideman in New York for years, being involved with George Schuller's Circle Wide, Jazz at Lincoln Center's BMI/New York Jazz Orchestra, Kenny Werner and Joe Lovano, to name a few. One of Ambrosio's most intriguing projects was a "chordless" trio with saxophonist Loren Stillman and drummer Russ Meisner, two of the many musicians who have been central in the bassist's diverse orbit. Among their recordings is the fine 2018 album *Four For The Road*.

"These musical relationships go back decades," says Ambrosio. "I think all these musicians and projects have the same aesthetic as this current project, where we're just trying to find the expansion and freedom in the tradition that we all love so much. It's all an even playing field that's not dictated by a particular boundary of style or language. The thread is what feels good, what flows and what is conveyed emotionally, but the roots are always present. I believe there is the connection between this project and my more original projects, as this music spoke to that playing approach that I love so much."

Through all of this, Ambrosio admits to having had "a period where I felt very out of the scene and my creative life. Some of it had to do with personal challenges I was facing, and I consequently felt more invested in activism and volunteer work at that time." He acknowledged a tendency to go on "deep dives," such as a decade-long "immersion into Afro-Cuban *bata* drumming and spiritual practice," and earning his second bachelor's degree in biology.

"But somehow," he says, "no matter how far I go out, I always land back at being a jazz musician and performer. I guess it's my home base — no pun intended. In the last two years, the creative projects have just become more and more abundant, and it doesn't seem like it's slowing down any time soon, which I'm really happy about. It feels like the right time for it. Perhaps the next intersection for discovery is with science and improvisation. I've been thinking about that one for a while."

With *Civil Disobedience*, Ambrosio is back in the deep end of musical dedication — to his ideals and to a historical and social consciousness. As he asserts, "I hope this project inspires conversation and connection between people and the vision for a society centered in love, peace and freedom. Whether our record or the original recordings, I hope that 50 years from now people can listen to these compositions and enjoy them as a reflection of a past era in society that no longer exists.

"I'm probably the worst idealist anyone will ever meet, but I will always believe that all humans have the capacity to love unconditionally. It's our divine nature. We've just lost our way."

—Josef Woodard



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**CASIO**



"Forty years into this career, I have come back to myself, and I feel the same joy I did the first time I opened that sax case every time I play," says Jesse Davis.

## Jesse Davis Rediscovered Joy

"I'M AT A STAGE IN LIFE NOW WHERE I'M not concerned with what people think of me or my music — those days are long gone," Jesse Davis says. "The older I've gotten, the more I understand it's about making a connection with people. The most important thing is having an interaction and exchange of energy with the audience. I'm always looking for that interplay in the moment."

Over the past 40 years, the New Orleans-raised alto saxophonist has released 10 albums as a bandleader and has traveled the world with the likes of Clark Terry, Ray Brown, Milt Jackson and Benny Golson. Coming to prominence in 1980s New York as part of the "young lions" movement spearheaded by Wynton Marsalis, Davis has made his signature a hard-blowing, buoyant sound that channels the melodic fluidity of alto greats like Charlie Parker as much as the soulful emotion of fusion artists like Grover Washington Jr. Following his recent 60th birthday, Davis has been on a new journey of introspection, reflecting on his career to date and the lessons he has learned from a life on the road.

"I've been on the road since I was 19. Wherever the call comes, that's where I'm at, since that's how we were brought up: to be players first and foremost," Davis says over a video call from New York. "Over the past decade, though, I've slowed down, and I'm much more selective with where I play since traveling is more of a chore at my age. Once I turned 60, I started to think about

the second half of my life. I thought a lot about my childhood in New Orleans and my time in New York, and I felt I had come full circle. We all have a journey in life, and I feel I'm at the stage where I'm journeying back to myself to understand the truth of what I have been seeking."

The result of this self-examination is Davis' latest album, *Reflections* (Cellar Music). Featuring long-time collaborators including pianist Spike Wilner, bassist John Webber and guest drummer Lewis Nash, Davis and his quartet produce seven storied tracks, each drawing on his life experiences. The sprightly, Latin-influenced opening number "Blue Autumn" features Davis' searing alto soloing in an exploration of grief at the tragic loss of a loved one, while the blues-inflected "Choctaw Alley" aims to evoke the spirit of the New Orleans road where Davis first learned to improvise and fell in love with jazz. The standards "Reflections" and "Evidence," both by Thelonious Monk, express his deep admiration for the pianist's uniquely jaunty compositions.

"When it came to this album, I thought about tunes and standards that meant something to me that I've never recorded before," Davis says. "'Blue Autumn' was written after a tragic death I was destroyed over, and the whole vibe of the song is the process of grieving. It's not a sad tune. It's upbeat and represents the journey to peace. I told the band when we went into the studio, it doesn't have to be super polished, I just want it to sound how it is in the

moment. The entire concept should be to create a space of reflection."

Growing up in New Orleans, Davis' childhood ambitions were to become a professional NFL player until a collarbone injury at age 10 laid him up. During his recovery, Davis' older brother, who was a local musician, suggested he try and learn an instrument instead. After attempting to learn the drum kit, Davis soon lost interest and set his sights on the trumpet.

"When you're growing up in New Orleans, the atmosphere is filled with music," he said. "It's music that has many influences and different foundations. But from the time you're born you know how to dance to Mardi Gras, and in those marching bands trumpet is king — it's the first thing you hear. Except, the trumpet didn't agree with me, I just couldn't enjoy playing it, so finally my brother traded it in for an alto saxophone. I can still remember the smell of opening the case of the saxophone. I immediately fell in love. From there things happened quickly."

Initially studying under his brother before moving on to improvise with local hero and Choctaw Alley resident Roy Johnson, Davis honed his chops and was granted entry to Ellis Marsalis' program at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts at 12. After graduating alongside a cohort that included singer Harry Connick Jr. and trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis, Davis moved to New Jersey's William Paterson University before transferring to the New School in Manhattan. Studying and playing there with the likes of pianist Larry Goldings and drummer Leon Parker, Davis immersed himself in a vibrant 1980s New York jazz scene.

"We had a ball exploring, playing and hopping around to hear great masters every night. The music was 24/7," Davis says. "It's like being thrown into the fire trying to live and survive when you're in New York. It's the best way to find out if you really want to do this because you're tested on all levels every day. The level of intensity and focus and competition is so high that you either find ways to get better or you fall by the wayside. It's no different now."

Thankfully, Davis thrived in the city until he relocated to Verona, Italy, where he has spent the past two decades with his wife and daughter. Making a new home in the European city and touring the continent regularly, alongside annual dates in New York, Davis ultimately feels he has found the perfect balance between home and road life and between experience and instinctive creativity.

"I'm still searching for me, but this record signifies that I understand what all of this music is for," he says. "We are messengers, conduits for a higher spirit that touches people in a way that's unique. Forty years into this career, I have come back to myself, and I feel the same joy I did the first time I opened that sax case every time I play. I hope that never fades." —Ammar Kalia

"I want to leave something for people to hear what the music is about and you can vibe with it in the car or wherever you're at, which is awesome," says Noah Jackson.



## Noah Jackson's Full Circle Journey to Connection

IT WAS VALENTINE'S DAY 2023 WHEN bassist Noah Jackson found the distinctive sound for his band Full Circle. Three years before that epiphany, Jackson performed sets during his weekly residency at the Detroit jazz club Cliff Bells called Full Circle Wednesdays, often revisiting the same material he had composed while refining arrangements and deepening group chemistry.

There were a number of musicians from Detroit's tight-knit jazz community who floated on and off his bandstand, but that night was when his ideal ensemble was born. Jackson's quintet — featuring trumpeter Allen Dennard, saxophonist Stephen Grady Jr., pianist Brendon Davis and drummer Louis Jones III, all just happened to be playing together. The addition of Dennard and Grady proved especially transformative.

Rather than functioning as separate horn voices, they operated as a unified frontline, interacting, harmonizing and shaping the music collectively. The emphasis on interplay extended throughout the band, where each musician contributed to a shared sonic identity.

That laboratory approach at Cliff Bells was unconventional for the times, and it paid off. When the band entered the studio later that year, the music had already lived and breathed. What resulted was Jackson's second album, *Full Circle*, a jazzy mesh of swing, Afrobeat and feel-good music designed for the masses.

"One of the things I like about this particular album and this group is the overall band sound and the frontline," says Jackson. "Not all the time do you get musicians who are selfless enough to understand how important it is to have that cohe-

sion. It's not a horn player and a tenor player. It's a frontline. There are two horns. And it's not just unison melodies. There are harmonies, but there's interaction. There's a dialogue that happens especially because of the economics of the music; it's becoming nearly impossible to push a quintet. And I think part of it is because people say it's like, what's the use of having two extra bodies when you're going to put unison and horn lines together and the function of them is very limited? But I feel like if it's not that, then it's a completely different concept altogether just by the way that the music is constructed."

After years of touring with Abdullah Ibrahim, Branford Marsalis, Christian Sands and Jazzmeia Horn, Jackson's new project marks a decisive shift. *Full Circle* is less about showcasing virtuosity and more about defining him as a composer, a bandleader and a musician rooted in Detroit's lineage and global experience. Though Jackson's career has taken him worldwide, Detroit remains central to his identity.

Mentors like trumpeter Marcus Belgrave and bassist Rodney Whitaker provided not just technical guidance but a deep understanding of swing, melody and tradition. Jackson grew up in Southfield, Michigan, a small suburb outside Detroit, and was immersed in jazz early on through programs like the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Civic Jazz Orchestra. He studied with Whitaker at Michigan State University and moved to New York, where he earned a graduate degree at the Manhattan School of Music. With that experience under his belt, offers for work with various jazz bands surfaced.

At the heart of Jackson's music is a simple

goal: connection. The mission of his band is to create lasting connections among all people through improvised music. He strives to showcase the genius of creation in the moment with his music. Essentially, he wants people to remember what they heard.

That philosophy shapes every aspect of the album. The music leans into strong melodic hooks, groove-based structures and a sense of repetition that invites listeners in rather than shutting them out. Jackson takes pride in audiences humming his tunes after hearing them once. It's a subtle but significant shift from a strain of modern jazz that can sometimes prioritize complexity over accessibility. But Jackson isn't rejecting sophistication, he's reframing it.

"We get a little too intellectual sometimes," he admits. "I want to leave something for people to hear what the music is about and you can vibe with it in the car or wherever you're at, which is awesome. And I want to have something that can really make my shows special."

Many of the album's pieces began as fragments such as bass lines, melodies or ideas Jackson developed years earlier and evolved through rehearsal and performance. Tracks like the punchy lead single "Be Bout It" took shape over time, formed as much by the band's input as Jackson's initial concept. The result is music that feels organic and flexible, capable of shifting in real time.

The sound that audiences identify with certain artists' music is exactly what Jackson wants his music to be known for, including that Detroit edginess and grind that he grew up listening to.

Jackson returned to Detroit during the pandemic after years navigating the relentless pace of New York's jazz scene. "In New York, you're just going gig to gig," he says. "It's easy for bass players to get caught in a sideman trap." The slowdown offered Jackson the opportunity to reflect and think about his next move professionally.

The answer wasn't another standards-heavy debut or a technical bass showcase. Instead, Jackson set out to build something more holistic: a band, a sound and a concept that could evolve over time.

Jackson is already thinking beyond this new album. With a second project completed and more in development, he envisions a body of work that evolves cohesively over time.

"It's not just one album after another," he says. Instead, each release builds on the last, forming an interconnected artistic statement.

At the same time, his definition of success has shifted. Whereas it once meant constant work and a ringing phone, it now centers on something deeper.

"Having this project allows the kind of opportunity where you're treated more like an artist than a musician," he says. "I am an artist being appreciated for my artistic contribution."

—Veronica Johnson



A changing of the guard, from left: Ellen Price, Darrian Douglas, Clara Winder, and Mark Morganelli transition to keep Jazz Forum Arts on track.

COURTESY JAZZ FORUM ARTS

# A New Generation at Jazz Forum Arts

**MARK MORGANELLI AND ELLEN PRIOR**, the executive director and chief operating officer of Jazz Forum Arts, respectively, were on Zoom during their second day in Ferrara and third week in Italy to discuss their impending July 1 retirement from the eminent Westchester County-based not-for-profit organization that has been presenting jazz since it was inaugurated on July 28, 1985, a week after their marriage.

Morganelli announced they would begin a second 2026 Italian sojourn in July, with a third to follow in the fall, reinforcing the impression that he and Prior, both 1955 babies, are sanguine about transferring leadership to a new generation.

Morganelli's successor, Darrian Douglas, 41, a superb drummer who founded the New Orleans-based, education-oriented nonprofit Second Line Arts Collective in 2017, assumes responsibility for guiding JFA's artistic and educational mission and booking its Tarrytown club. Clara Winder, 31, a long-time employee who has been in charge of social media, blends general manager duties with fundraising and marketing.

They take the reins at Jazz Forum, which Morganelli opened in June 1979 in his Noho loft in New York City, launching with a weekend by the Dizzy Reece-Clifford Jordan Quintet. When his landlord emptied the premises a year later, he was presenting seven nights a week, as he did after transplanting to another loft at Broadway and Bleecker. Operating both venues on a residential lease, Morganelli established the Jazz Forum as a prominent contributor to New York's jazz community, hosting Barry Harris' Monday workshops for three years of Monday nights and reserving weekends for high-profile acts like the

Marsalis-era Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Kenny Barron, Roy Haynes and Cedar Walton. In early 1983, his landlord enforced the commercial-use clause, forcing Morganelli to rent a second apartment. Short of cash, he missed a rent deadline. The landlord evicted him, refusing his offer of three months' rent loaned by Marsalis and Blakey, both domiciled across the street at the time. Morganelli produced concerts at the Village Gate for two years afterward but was broke and could not reopen.

In November 1983, he met Prior, his third grade classmate in Glen Head, Long Island, at their 10-year high school reunion. Soon they were cohabiting at Prior's Upper West Side co-op, a few blocks from the site of the Riverside Park Arts Festival, which became Morganelli's predicate for forming Jazz Forum Arts (which ran it until 1997). For JFA's first eight years he drew no salary; Prior served as "the health insurance and the job," keeping the ship afloat with her salary as a management consultant along with occasional remortgages of the house they bought upon moving to Dobbs Ferry, New York, in 1991, when their first son was 2.

From fall 1992, when he presented Ahmad Jamal, Sonny Rollins and Dizzy Gillespie in his last public appearance, through mid-2013, Morganelli produced 150 Jazz at the Music Hall concerts at the Tarrytown Music Hall, an acoustically pristine 843-seat, 1885 Queen Anne Theater, obtaining corporate and government funding to launch 12 other theater series and festivals, and, since 2000, as many as 53 free outdoor concerts in 13 Westchester, Rockland and Fairfield communities. By 2015, JFA's operating

budget had expanded to roughly \$300,000.

Upon becoming empty-nesters, the couple decided "to open a club and have a place together." They bought 1 Dixon Lane, built in 1910 as a barn, giving Morganelli his first permanent location. They moved into the apartment upstairs while developing the ground floor space for two years, investing \$600,000 of personal funds and drawing on the goodwill accrued from Morganelli's past activities to raise \$160,000 from 60 charter donors. Before opening, they sought advice from Wynton Marsalis, whose answer — "make it like home" — became a guiding principle.


Seeking to expand JFA's digital outreach, Prior hired Winder, who'd recent graduated from University of Michigan. After taking "baby steps forward in the right direction" for a year, Winder hired a digital marketing expert and "started contacting all the artists, some with huge followings, to share JFA's social media content: If 2018 Clara saw what 2026 Jazz Forum Arts' digital presence would be, she would be astonished."

Morganelli met Douglas in 2009 when he hired him to play a quartet show in New Orleans. By then, Douglas had been Ellis Marsalis' regular drummer since early 2006. In 2013, he joined Bria Skonberg, who kept him busy for the next 12 years, including the May 2025 weekend gig when Douglas reconnected with Morganelli and met Prior. Douglas told Morganelli about his own experiences with SLCA and his educational philosophy, and his desire to come off the road and spend quality time with his wife and young daughter. Both elders were impressed, and in July 2025 they brought Douglas on board part-time. By January, having fulfilled all his gig commitments, he was appointed director of programs, in charge of JFA's educational and artistic mission, and its outdoor summer concert series.

At the time of interviewing for this article, Douglas had booked 31 of JFA's 33 summer concerts and the last six months of the club's 2026 calendar. "Almost everyone is 40 and under, so our audience can experience a brand-new crop of musicians," he said. "Clara and her team will push hard on them."

In addition to several additions to JFA's existing educational programs, Douglas has joined Winder in raising \$45,000 of a prospective \$250,000 endowment for the Mark and Ellen Legacy Fund. "Many of the charter donors have continued to donate consistently," Winder said. "They trust Mark and Ellen's perspective on trusting us to carry their vision forward."

"It's important to me to make this a place that's not home or work, where folks can gather and find community. I want to reach people who say they don't like jazz or are intimidated by jazz, and show them how amazing it is to sit next to a stranger at a live jazz performance and see the improvisation: You're both experiencing something you'll never experience again." —Ted Panken



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# THE LOOPS THAT BIND

BLANK FOR.MS, MARCUS  
GILMORE & JASON MORAN

By Gary Fukushima Photo by Anna Yatskevich

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the concept of a loop is that it is a line that connects to itself.

**W**hat once had a beginning and an end now has neither; a cycle of consecutive events that swirls inexorably to infinity, each rotation another opportunity to relive, reflect or relearn, doomed to repeat forever yet propelled by the hope or myth of progress. Or maybe one loop eventually intersects with another, a consequential intertwining generating a transcendental disruption that diverts the preordained path, breaking the unyielding chain, releasing its captives onto the next strain.



"These things [I do] I believe in, and I feel like I had examples of people who believed in their ability to move freely, which is what liberation is supposed to show to people," says Jason Moran.

Tyler Gilmore has been fascinated by loops for the better part of the last decade. Specifically, he works with tape loops. When asked to describe how one makes a tape loop, he holds up a cassette, the same kind people carried around by the dozens loaded with music they could play in their car or on their Sony Walkmans way back when.

"You do a little surgery," Gilmore says, detailing how to remove the tape from the cassette, cutting just a small strip of it and threading it back into the cassette, taping the ends together with Scotch tape.

No longer anchored to the spool, the loop of tape could run indefinitely. Gilmore continues, "I think of each [tape loop] like a canvas that brings its own flavor. The length of the loop is gonna be dictated by how long the tape is and how fast you play it. ... And maybe you left some stuff on the tape, or you folded it accidentally a little bit, or intentionally. And they all sound a little bit different and imperfect in different ways."

Gilmore's preferred musical medium has ushered him to the forefront of a well-established subculture of experimental electronic music as the artist Blank For.ms. He has nearly 100,000 followers on his Instagram page: an endless scroll of unique sounds played on unique devices and analog tape run through modern digital effects. Six posts down there is a flyer for the May 1 album release show of *Shards* (Red Hook), the second collaborative album from Blank For.ms with pianist Jason Moran and drummer Marcus Gilmore (no relation). The back story tying these three artists together is a remarkable tale spun over many years from

some seemingly disparate threads.

Jason Moran is on his morning walk, traversing a circuit through the overcast streets of Harlem. It's been over three decades since he moved there from his hometown of Houston. He recently paid homage to another bandleader who once lived there with 2023's *From The Dancehall To The Battlefield* (Yes), Moran's reimagining of the music of James Reese Europe and his military band regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters. Moran's recordings and performances are often thematic, theatrical and/or historical, which, à la chicken-and-egg loop, could be either the reason for or the result of his succession of the good doctor and pianist Billy Taylor in 2014 as artistic director for Jazz at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Moran left that position last year, part of the tragic undoing of that austere and beloved arts organization under the current federal administration.

Has Moran reallocated the many hours he once spent in his curatorial role at the Kennedy Center to other pursuits?

"Always. Come on," he chides, grinning into his phone as he strolls. "It's a zillion things people know and there's even more that people don't know about." Moran for most of his career has maintained a wide diversity of projects that could be misconstrued as a random sampling of everything between the orbits of the sun, moon and Earth.

Moran categorically rejects that thought. "It's definitely not random. Once I had kids, nothing could be random. These things [I do] I believe in, and I feel like I had examples of people who believed in their ability to move

freely, which is what liberation is supposed to show to people. Muhal Richard Abrams painted every day just as much as he composed. Henry Threadgill has a total visual practice, you know? Ornette Coleman had a tattoo artist on stage with him during a concert. Sorry, these people have been out here doing crazy shit for a while. Maybe the further I got in my career, [the more] I wanted to find intersection moments rather than just 'this is the pathway that I want to be on.' That increasingly becomes more important to me."

What is most important for him when considering a new project?

"Do I like you," he answers simply. "Personal, for real. I'm not dealing with people that ... sitting across the table in front of you, we can't just have a normal conversation. I don't think I attract those kinds of people anymore, anyway. Where I am now, it's just: I like you, do I want to make some music with you? And if I have the time. It really starts right there."

One of those people Moran has liked and had time for is Tyler Gilmore, who was once a student of Moran at the New England Conservatory, where Moran has been on faculty since 2010. Gilmore came to Boston from a small town in Wyoming after his undergraduate studies at the University of Northern Colorado. Back then, he was a trumpeter and budding jazz composer and arranger who wrote for big band. He studied with Maria Schneider and was also influenced by Vince Mendoza and John Hollenbeck. "And since then," he qualifies, "I've kind of gone back in history. It's like I skipped the historical understanding, and now I mostly listen to Duke Ellington and Thad Jones."

But by the time Gilmore met Moran at NEC, he was in a bit of an identity crisis. He had taken a keen interest in electronic music and was searching for ways to make his big band writing reflect that. He muses, "With traditional big band music, it's sort of a challenge to get away from the archetypes of melody, chordal structure and rhythm. I was fumbling my way towards that, but I never quite got there until I was able to explore with electronic tools."

In their lessons, Gilmore presented his dilemma to Moran, and they discussed that along with many other things.

"A lot of times," he remembers, "we would talk about music a lot. And I would get to the end of the lessons and feel like he had learned more than I had. But it's not because I hadn't learned much, but because he tends to enter every situation very open to receiving. He does not walk into things with a hardened ego at all, [even] with as much as he's done at this point."

Those talks ultimately helped Gilmore to fully embrace his passion and interest in electronic music. But he also began working as a

jazz arranger for Moran, orchestrating some music for larger ensembles for a number of Moran's live performances. Then, a different opportunity presented itself when Sun Chung, a former producer for ECM and founder of the forward-leaning Red Hook Records, discovered Blank For.ms through trumpeter John Raymond and reached out to Gilmore about doing an album for his label.

"Sun reached out when the label was just a baby," Gilmore remembers. "He had one record out at [that] point. And he seemed like a good guy doing the right stuff for the right reasons and making quality work. So, we started cooking up ideas."

Chung's first recorded endeavor for Red Hook was a trio with trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, drummer Andrew Cyrille and drummer and synthesizer artist Qasim Naqvi, pairing the two avant-creative veterans with a younger artist who had a grasp on modern electronic technology.

"Maybe since my fourth or fifth year working at ECM, I started to develop this interest in putting master improvisers in sonic situations that they might not necessarily be familiar with and see how they would react to the sound," Chung explains. "And what I realized is they're not just master musicians, they're master listeners, master reactors to sound, and they just complement in the best imaginable way whatever sound comes at them." Chung is referring to Moran, Tyler and Marcus as much as he is Wadada, Cyrille and Naqvi.

Gilmore and Chung agreed upon a collaboration with Moran, along with Marcus, who had messaged Tyler after discovering Blank For.ms on Instagram. Marcus still has the DMs.

"He would post a lot of videos of things that he was working on, which I always thought were really cool in terms of sound design and with what he was doing with tapes," the drummer says over video from his home in Queens while scrolling through those messages on his phone. "Looking at the dates, I can see it now. We were talking about working together, and then a year or so later, he messaged that he had a recording project coming up and wanted to see if I'd be into it. And I was like, 'Yeah, let's do it.'"

It was a strong endorsement of Tyler Gilmore, his tape-loop namesake, because Marcus Gilmore can afford to be selective as one of the greatest drummers of his generation. An ordinary day, for instance, has the drummer playing later that night at the Village Vanguard with guitarist Jakob Bro, pianist Gerald Clayton, saxophonist Mark Turner and a second drummer named Brian Blade, and he'd be back there again later that month with guitarist Gilad Hekselman and pianist Brad Mehldau.

In addition to the two Gilmores getting a chance to work together, it was also an oppor-



COURTESY RED HOOK

"He would post a lot of videos of things that he was working on, which I always thought were really cool in terms of sound design and with what he was doing with tapes," says Marcus Gilmore on why he first reached out to Tyler Gilmore.

## 'You have to have people with you who improve on the possibility of believing in improvisation.' —Jason Moran

tunity for Marcus Gilmore to reconnect with Moran. They had first worked together 23 years ago ("almost to the day," Gilmore realizes) when they recorded with Steve Coleman in a trio — saxophone, piano and drums, no bass. Gilmore was a junior in high school. Since then, they have shared the bandstand a handful of times but hadn't worked closely on a collaborative project until now.

Even so, the pianist and drummer share a deeper connection through Milford Graves, the late drummer and avant-garde pioneer who is credited with liberating the drums from its traditional role as timekeeper, and he was also an explorer of many other disciplines including visual arts, martial arts, gardening and biology. Graves also lived in Queens, becoming Marcus' boyhood mentor.

"The time that I spent with Milford Graves was very special and dear to me," says Marcus.

"The way he was able to connect dots through different mediums was really incredible. And the creative spirit that he approached in the music, it seemed like he used that same creative spirit to approach the sciences."

Moran, who played duo concerts with Graves towards the end of his life, recalls going to Graves' house and being hooked up to a device to record his heartbeat.

"He would then take the heartbeat, and he would feed it to his computer, which would then make a melody from it." Moran says, "Milford was very highly attuned to the possibility of the body creating melodies and finding out what they were. And he was trying to make — not trying, he was making the technology to support these findings ... and the electronic music he made was crazy shit."

When Tyler, Marcus and Moran got together to record their first album for Red Hook,



"I would get to the end of the lessons and feel like he had learned more than I had," says Tyler Gilmore of Moran, his former teacher. "But it's not because I hadn't learned much, but because he tends to enter every situation very open to receiving."

2023's *Refract*, Tyler brought some actual compositions along with a bunch of tape loops he had made beforehand, which became the basis for many of the tracks that made it onto the album. "But a lot of the improvised stuff had a lot of magic to it, so we used a lot of that," he explains. "And on this second record, we started a little more in that direction, and again, things kind of blossomed when it was fully improvised. So that's basically what we ended up using."

Take the first track on *Shards*, appropriately titled "Shard 1." It fades in as the band is realizing something interesting they happened to fall into.

"Yeah, we sure did," affirms Tyler Gilmore. "Sometimes we'll sort of search for a while and find [such] a place. I'm looking for interesting bits to take and refract, for lack of a better term. Marcus and Jason will kind of recede and end whatever they were doing, and I'll be able to bring what I've created forward. And then it's the improvisations from that point forward, where they're reacting to their own sound, but rebuilt by me, that sort of leads us into the most interesting aspect of what this band can do."

Moran also appreciates this process of initiation, reaction and counterreaction.

"The piano is a tricky instrument because so much of it demands control, you know? I've been saying to people who I work with, like DJs: I want to lose [control]. I don't want control. I need something to get in my way. Get in the way of the ideas. And I just thought [Tyler] was like the perfect entryway ... that once I press the key, I don't know what it's gonna sound like anymore. Now I'm responding to how all the processing was taking control, to a degree."

Moran continues, "You have to have people with you who improve on the possibility of believing in improvisation. I don't want to spread it out too far because I always want to do that, but to just pull back off of music for a moment: There's just something that happens when improvisers get together, and the best thing that they display to each other maybe isn't even the sound. It's the trust. And I'd say in a lot of society, right now especially, what's getting promoted is distrust."

Gilmore recalls something Moran said to an audience member after they had performed in the fall of 2024 at the Monterey Jazz Festival. "Somebody asked Jason backstage about what this music is, and he described it as a broken mirror and sometimes the pieces are falling, or something like that. And that's actually the inspiration for the name of the album and all the songs: shards of the broken mirror, falling."

Four months after they played Monterey, the band performed at the Kennedy Center. It was one of the last jazz events to happen at that historic theater in Moran's final season there. "And this show was incredible," says Moran, his voice tinged with a mixture of pride and prejudice. "I think [it's] because we knew that the place was falling apart, as we literally were playing this show. All this tension was in the air around what was the future of this place going to be. And I've got to say, that set we put on display is just like going through their life cycle ... but we kind of condensed that time lapse in a show."

Tyler affirms, "Yeah, people were shell shocked. It was a vibe."

"The people that came and played that final season, it was mostly based on free improvisa-

tion," adds Moran. "And I trusted everybody to do the right decision for whatever they felt their impulse would be. And so, believe me, we showed up at a moment where, whew, it was very heavy — and we don't even have to [talk] about what it is now. I also think that's an important thing to be on display. It's kind of like why you want to go see a really good comedian when the world is all fucked up, because you want to hear, how are [they] processing this? I felt like our show, during that time, February of 2025, the writing was on the walls. And the music definitely represented that. [Those of us in] the arts, often because we're so close to the ground, we end up being that warning signal of what else is to come."

To Moran, this moment loops back to another tumultuous time.

"As an educator, I started having to recontextualize why was John Coltrane making the kind of work he was making throughout his very fast career? How did he get from God to interstellar space in a span of three to four years? What was happening in the world that he was living in, in the '60s, that was pushing all these ideas that he couldn't contain and had to put them on record? And maybe that's why you go see live performances. How is that music hitting the day? How is it hitting your day? That's where the reveal is."

Revealed also within countless loops — of music, relationships, circumstance, history. How Tyler Gilmore moved away from jazz and circled back to it via an old friendship with Jason Moran and new ones with Marcus Gilmore and Sun Chung. How Moran and Marcus Gilmore connected directly years ago but circuitously through Milford Graves, who tied technology to music decades before Blank For.ms. How analog tape technology has found new life in the digital music age. How younger artists can disrupt the rituals of older ones to ultimately make modern ancient music. How the political upheaval symbolized by the final stage of the life cycle of a once and recently glorious venue harkens back to the Civil Rights Era. How artists then and now continue to struggle to make sense of it all. The innumerable refractions of our imperfect world through the falling shards of a broken mirror.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the concept of a loop is that it is a line that connects to itself. What once had a beginning and an end now has neither; a cycle of consecutive events that swirl inexorably to infinity, each rotation another opportunity to relive, reflect or relearn, doomed to repeat forever yet propelled by the hope or myth of progress. Or maybe one loop eventually intersects with another, a consequential intertwining generating a transcendental disruption that diverts the preordained path, breaking the unyielding chain, releasing its captives onto the next strain. **DB**



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# Gabrielle Cavassa's BRUSH WITH THE DEVIL

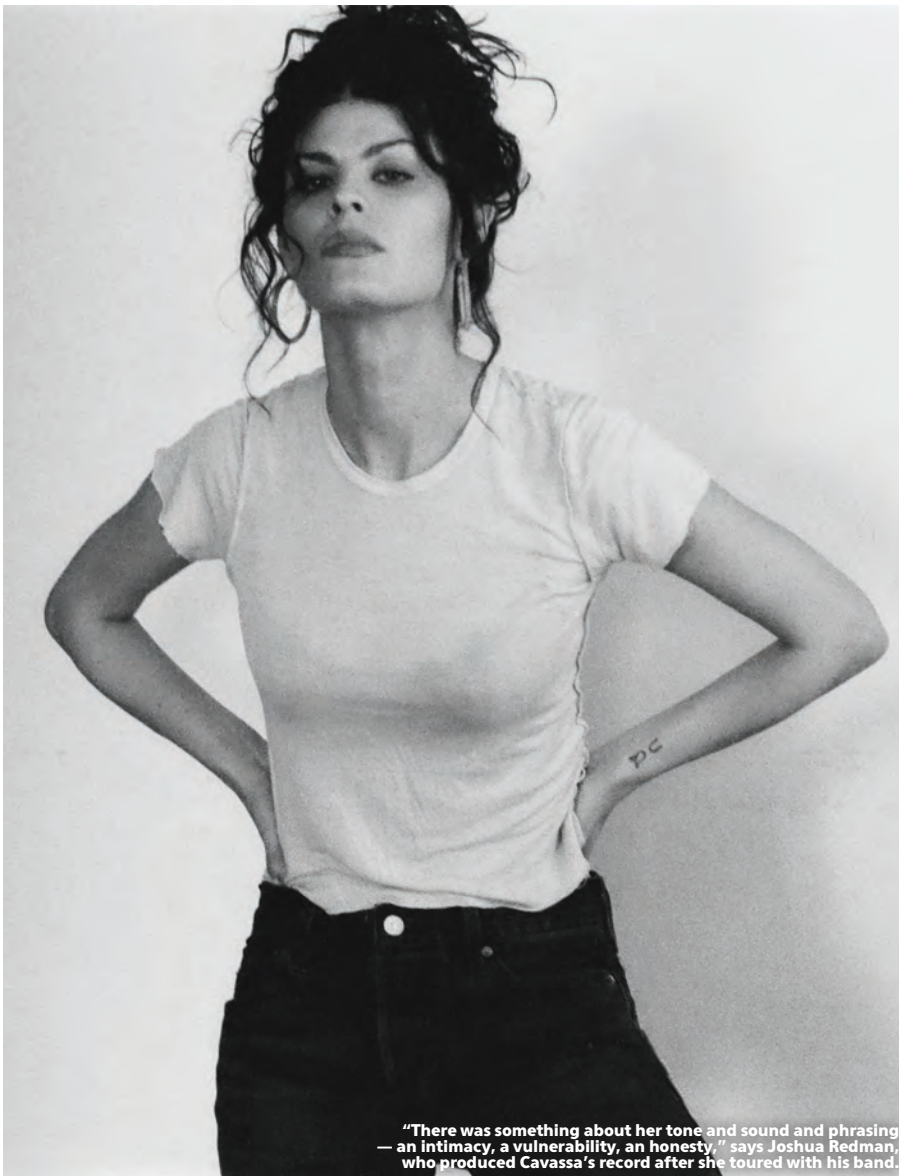
BY PHILLIP LUTZ PHOTOS BY ROEG COHEN

**Gabrielle Cavassa is an avowed perfectionist. So when she failed to place despite becoming a finalist in the 2018 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, she deemed it a defeat.**

But Cavassa is also a woman of resource and resolve, and in the perceived setback she found the inspiration to make a long-contemplated change — abandoning the singular pursuit of life as a singer of standards.

“Having lost the competition,” she said, “I was like, ‘You know what? They don’t want me. I’m going to do my own thing.’” Turning down a producer’s offer of a safe but unsatisfying recording contract, she allied with drummer Jamison Ross to co-produce a self-titled album packed with provocative originals and novel covers. The move, though risky, set her on a new path and led to growing recognition in the jazz world, on her own terms. She has never looked back.





“There was something about her tone and sound and phrasing — an intimacy, a vulnerability, an honesty,” says Joshua Redman, who produced Cavassa’s record after she toured with his band.

“The record for me was really a rejection of jazz as a convention,” she said, “a rejection of what I felt I was supposed to be doing. It was an embracing of self. And it was very ironic to me that I feel I was really embraced by the jazz community following the record, which was intended to reject it.”

Ironic or not, the community’s embrace has been wholehearted. When she took another shot at the Vaughan competition, in the 2020 edition, she emerged as a co-winner: only the second person in the contest’s 13-year history to notch a victory in a return effort, according to its founder, John Schreiber. (Samara Joy was the other.)

Cavassa’s strategy of self-discovery had apparently paid dividends. A video of the competition’s finals — an event postponed until June 2021 because of COVID — reveals that Cavassa, at age 26, already possessed the quality of personal expression that Schreiber felt promised a long career.

“Some singers who participate in the competition are still finding their voice,” said Schreiber, president and CEO of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, where the competition is held. “She came with a voice. She did not perform in a way that was reminiscent of Sarah [Vaughan] or any of the other iconic vocalists. Her voice is unique, authentic. She’ll be around.”

With the victory and the record, her name made its way into the jazz ecosphere. As it did, saxophonist Joshua Redman got wind of her. “She came to my attention in a way no other musician with whom I’ve had a profound and lasting musical relationship has,” he said, explaining that his manager, who hardly ever offered musical recommendations, did so after hearing her perform. Redman checked out her record and was hooked.

“Stylistically, aesthetically, it was not necessarily the kind of record that would normally draw my attention,” Redman said.

“But there was something about her tone and sound and phrasing — an intimacy, a vulnerability, an honesty. We started talking about making a record together.”

Though they communicated electronically, he didn’t hear her sing live until they met to record tracks for his album, the 2023 Blue Note release *Where Are We*. Extensive touring followed, as did his follow-up recording *Words Fall Short*, on which Cavassa also makes an appearance. All of which has led to the current moment and the release of her Blue Note debut, *Diavola*.

True to her ethos, the album eschews conventional jazz-singer fare. Co-produced by Redman, who also appears on the album, it is driven by what he admiringly described as a “contrarian impulse.” Its writing maintains, even sharpens, the edge she brought to her first album; likewise, the interpretations she brings to the covers, a disparate list that includes tunes associated with figures like Barry Manilow and Mario Lanza as well as 1960s-vintage material from Brazil and Italy. The choices reflect, at the very least, a wide-ranging sensibility.

At the same time, the musical environments in which she operates tend toward the spare, all the better to highlight the nuances in which she traffics to dramatic effect. And no better example of that dynamic exists than the title track’s opening gambit — a sharply executed intervallic leap and chorus, released without accompaniment. With nothing standing between the listener and Cavassa’s voice, the urgency of her delivery has maximum impact.

“Diavola,” she sings, attacking each syllable with a clarity worthy of the opera singer she chose not to be. “I told you I love you I lied/ He calls me his angel but I’m/ Diavola.”

The track, she said, “was probably the greatest challenge for me of the whole record.” As the thematic center of creation for her diabolical alter ego [diavola means devil in Italian], “it was so hard for me to conceptualize.” She was crafting lyrics in the studio between takes. “I’m such a perfectionist, which is what I’m battling in the narrative of this record and the narrative of this song. It was hard for me to let her be.”

Part of the challenge was her extramusical ambition for the tune. It was not just an artistic creation; she assigned to it an almost therapeutic function: “I invented this character to try to explore some emotions it was hard for me, Gabby, to deal with but Diavola could deal with, like rage and jealousy and things I feel are negative. Diavola can be all these things.”

With its multiple layers of function and meaning, “Diavola” required more editing than the album’s other tunes. Instrumental

backing was excised from the opening, creating the illusion of a capella performance. Overdubs were requested of pianist Paul Cornish, yielding harmonic ambiguity that added narrative dimension. Ultimately, Cavassa said, the tune “was produced as much after the fact as in the studio” — marking it as an outlier.

The album’s other outlier — it was the only track not laid down in the February 2026 session at Dreamland Recording Studios near Woodstock, New York — was “Be My Love.”

I’ve ever met.”

Those qualities, he said, were obvious from the first stop on tour for *Where Are We*. The concept was a simple one: perform a tune appropriate to the city in which they were appearing. The first stop was Warsaw, Poland, and the chosen tune was the Manilow hit “Could It Be Magic,” which was built on the chord changes of “Prelude in C Minor” by Frederic Chopin, a Polish native.

The tune made it onto her album. And unlike many of the arrangements on it, this

San Francisco, where she attended college and toiled as a bartender. Having lived now in New Orleans the better part of a decade, she continues her research.

She has delved into the sound worlds of many singers. “First and foremost,” she said, “will always be Billie Holiday. That was a really important discovery for me because she was a gateway into the rest of music. I loved her so much. Every person on her records I would look up and read the back of the record and do my research from there.”

Holiday’s albums introduced Cavassa to non-singers who influenced her lyrical approach, notably saxophonists like Lester Young and Ben Webster. Later, Stan Getz entered her consciousness, not least for his forays into bossa nova. Cavassa’s explorations in that idiom, represented on two tunes on her album, demonstrate an innate ability to dive deeply into the music of another culture and surface with something valuable of her own.

The tunes contrast in mood. “Bossy Nova,” a Cavassa original written as an affirmation in a moment of self-doubt, communicates in uncharacteristically bright terms: “Sunshine on my behind/ I wouldn’t care if they missed me.” “To Say Goodbye,” by the bossa nova master Edu Lobo, proffers a darker message: “Goodbye/ It’s all over now.” What they share is an authentic feel for the gentle samba, rare for one not steeped in Brazilian from birth.

Even more authentic, perhaps, is the touch she brings to Italianate material. Addressing it, in fact, was a kind of creative, if not psychological, imperative. The album’s title character personified, she said, an aspect of her personality who shared her ethnic heritage and was thus a “distinctly Italian” creation: “I needed her to be Italian. She’s a part of me.”

The two songs performed in the Italian language, both ’60s relics, inevitably dwell in that emotional realm. “Angelo” — its somber tone established by Larry Grenadier’s arco bass, punctuated by small ensemble peaks and some very deep valleys — finds expression in, yes, a distinctly Italian sort of justice Diavola dispenses to “Angelo, Angelo, angelo mio” (“Angelo, Angelo, my angel”).

Less demonstrative in tone but similarly unforgiving in tenor, “La Notte Dell’Addio” (“The Night Of Goodbye”) deftly conveys the pain of a protagonist left in the lurch to roam her brutally sunlit “casa vuota” (“empty home”). Set against a wisp of piano accompaniment, Cavassa’s crystalline voice compels and, suddenly, cracks ever so slightly — an understated flourish that wraps up the album and this act in her theater of self-discovery.

DB

# ‘First and foremost will always be Billie Holiday.’

## —Cavassa on her musical heroes

Takes with the full band hadn’t panned out, Cavassa said, so Redman suggested a reimagining, radical even for Cavassa, in which the sole accompaniment would be a harmonically static drone-like bed fashioned by guitarist Jeff Parker. A demo was recorded in coproducer Don Was’ home studio. It worked and became the final take.

“It was a really magical moment,” she said. “Jeff tapped into something that’s so beyond, that requires so much restraint and so much trust. In that moment I was so moved by the soundscape, and we weren’t able to recreate it. So we just went with the demo.”

Cavassa described the track as the album’s “pinnacle,” a kind of thematic tipping point. “In the story of the Diavola, it’s her moment, not of desperation but of motive. She really wants to be loved, and I think that’s not working for her. And you can hear that in the song.”

The subtlety of Cavassa’s treatment alone qualifies as a high point. Backed only by Parker’s drone and free to roam wherever her improvisatory instincts might take her, she does not opt for the heroic gesture. Instead, she builds her story through the accretion of small turns: a shift in phrasing, a tweak in texture, the caressing of a lyric or the wrinkling rather than wholesale warping of time. These moments, rendered with abundant self-possession, tell a tale as grand as any the melodramatic Lanza ever told.

“For an ability to hear the finest, almost microscopic details and differences,” Redman said, “she’s as great as any musician

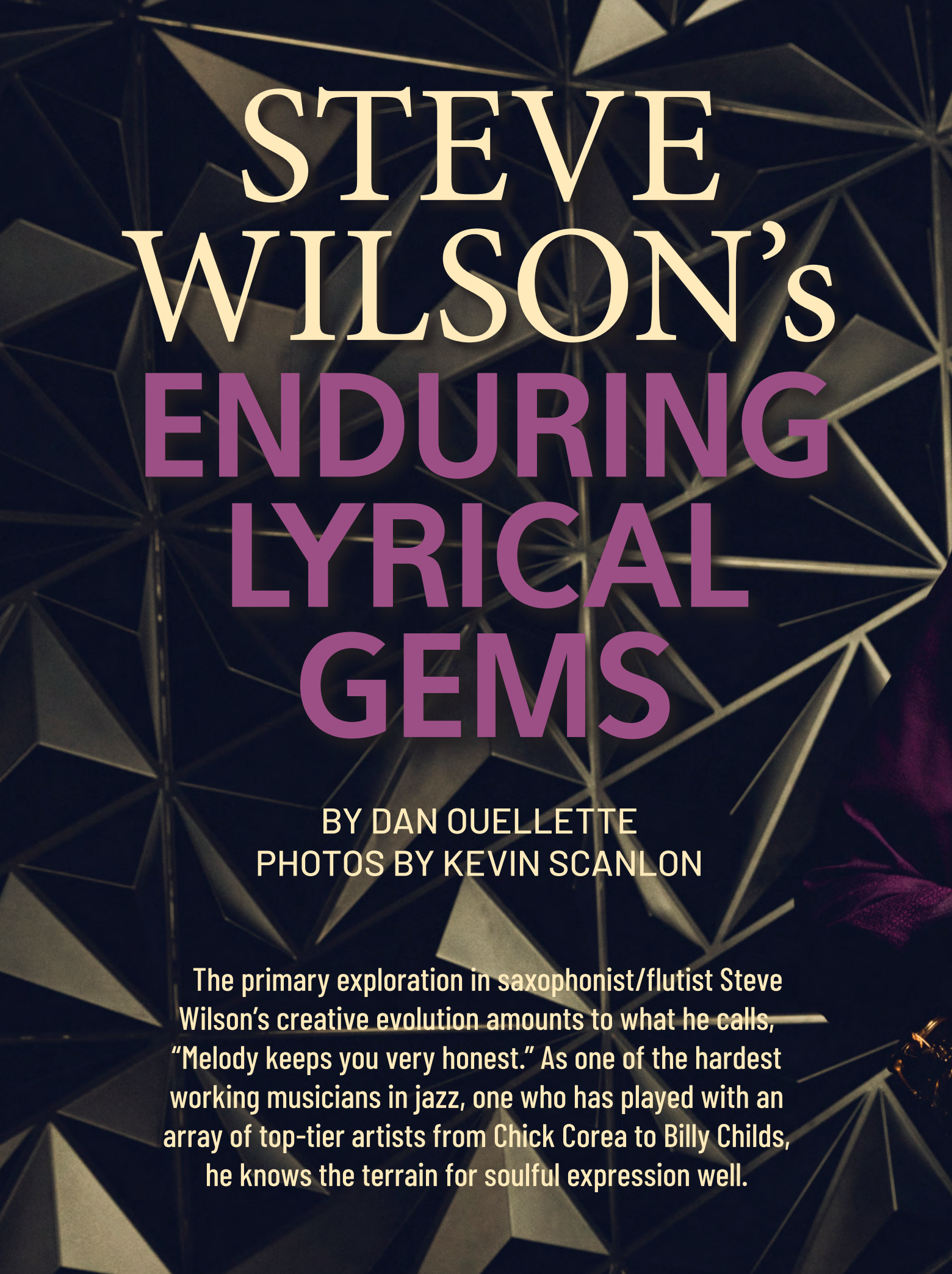
one, hatched on the Redman tour, affords Cavassa an opportunity to integrate with a jazz unit operating at full tilt. She responds with a keenly attuned, delicately shaded reading that seamlessly connects Cornish’s arpeggiated flights and Redman’s contrapuntal musings while advancing the plot.

“Blending with other instruments is one of her superpowers,” Redman said. “Night after night, one of the things I honestly learned from her is the balance between delivering the song the way it should be delivered and adding to the essence with some intention and creating something new.”

The unit functioned so well that the tune became a staple in cities outside Poland, he said, adding that her contribution was so strong that the tune effectively became hers, though she was hesitant to accept proprietorship.

“More than any other tune on the tour, that one stuck,” Redman said. “It had this thing. It was great for the band, great for her. For a long time, she didn’t want to use it on her record. She felt it belonged to the project with our band. But I was relentless. I just felt like she owned that song in a very particular way.”

The resistance Redman encountered — a deceptively potent mix of humility and what he termed “incredibly strong opinions” — mirrors a quiet determination she has evinced since her earliest days. “Obsessive” is how she described her self-education, whether as the scrappy schoolkid in the Southern California town of Escondido or the ardent clubgoer in



# STEVE WILSON'S ENDURING LYRICAL GEMS

BY DAN OUELLETTE  
PHOTOS BY KEVIN SCANLON

The primary exploration in saxophonist/flutist Steve Wilson's creative evolution amounts to what he calls, "Melody keeps you very honest." As one of the hardest working musicians in jazz, one who has played with an array of top-tier artists from Chick Corea to Billy Childs, he knows the terrain for soulful expression well.





Seeking out simplicity in lieu of complexity represents the core of his musicality, and that mindset is in full flourish on his gem *Enduring Sonance* (Smoke Sessions). An eight-song collection of indelible melodies that have influenced Wilson over the years, the recording radiates a flavor reminiscent of the tradition with passionate staying power to the future.

"Seeking out the great melodies like George Cables' 'Helen's Song' is the thread that runs through this album," says the soft-spoken Wilson, who has been the director of jazz studies and professor at New York's City College for the last 13 years. "That song is so beautiful and has so much meaning since he wrote it for his wife. Hearing it stops you. I played a special duo show with George last year, and of course we played that."

*Enduring Sonance* arranger Renee Rosnes, who contributes piano and Fender Rhodes to the recording, says, "This piece has so much optimism and joy in it, and feels like a much-needed antidote to what's going on in our world today."

"I didn't want to make *Enduring Sonance* too complex, but simply played with a lot of depth," Wilson says. "I feel a little lost in our pop music world today where the art of melody has been lost. Hopefully we can get that back. There's an innovative evolution among young musicians, especially with rhythm and harmony. Some are so brilliant that it's scary. But not so much melody. *Enduring Sonance* reflects where I am in this arc of my life. I understand that it's harder to pare down a tune to a simple melody than to make it more complex."

Originally conceived as a ballads album, Wilson shifted gears when the concept of a lyrical soundscape came into vision. "The program goes as far back as 50 years," says the resident of Kew Gardens, a neighborhood in Queens, New York. "And then there are more modern tunes by supreme composers like Billy Childs and Eliane Elias that have had a lasting impression.

I always like to go off the beaten path in choosing deeply felt jazz material. There's a reservoir of music out there, but I wanted to do tunes that are not done that often."

Born and raised in Hampton, Virginia, Wilson grew up with a wealth of listening opportunities, tuning in to his father's eclectic record collection (Miles Davis, Sly and the Family Stone, Mario Lanza, Gino Vanelli, the Beatles, James Brown, Motown). "Growing up in the '60s and '70s, I was hearing everything that was out there," he says. "I was a radio head in those days. The FM station at the Hampton Institute played jazz, r&b, '70s Blue Note recordings, the CTI catalog. In junior high and high school, I was a huge George Duke fan. I was a Dukey, catching his music on the German label MPS, and then I was totally into him playing with [Frank] Zappa."

Wilson's father, a member of an all-gospel spiritual choir, took his son out to see live jazz, most notably in 1968 when George Wein set up a jazz touring circuit that included Hampton Institute. He was awed by artists such as Cannonball Adderley and Rashaan Roland Kirk. He was hooked. At home, he fell in love with two of his dad's new albums: 1969's *Swiss Movement* by Eddie Harris and Les McCann, which jettisoned the soul-jazz tune "Compared To What" onto the radio waves; and Quincy Jones' 1969 album *Walking In Space*, which featured Benny Golson's classic "Killer Joe."

At one stretch, Wilson dreamed of becoming a drummer. He started his formal music studies in junior high when he was 12. Even though his jazz saxophone studies were his passion, he was also focusing on mastering the oboe and playing drums in various r&b and funk bands. In high school, a friend of the family suggested he listen to Charlie Parker records, which led him to embrace the alto. At the time, he had to decide whether he wanted to play in the classical symphony or as a part of the symphonic wind band. It was a train-

ing ground for college when Wilson focused on alto saxophone even though he was majoring in oboe and later gravitated to English horn. One teacher in college introduced him to Duke Ellington's music, where he discovered another hero, Johnny Hodges.

In the '80s, a jazz program with artists in residence started in Richmond. That's where Wilson met the Heath Brothers and Benny Carter, among others, which planted the seed for going to New York. In 1984, he was a member of the band for the local run of the Ellington music revue *Sophisticated Ladies*, which is where he met and became friends with Kenny Garrett. Not long after, Garrett called him and offered him the alto saxophone chair in *Out of the Blue*, formed in 1984 by Blue Note Records to introduce the label's burgeoning jazz stars. Garrett was leaving to join Art Blakey and later Miles Davis. "That facilitated my move to New York," Wilson says. "I was hearing different people who were sharing the taste and love of the same music."

Not only did the rookie New Yorker get deserved attention, but with *Out of the Blue*, Wilson met Rosnes, which grew into a close friendship and musical collaboration.

"Steve and I have been dear friends and musical colleagues since the late '80s," says the recent Juno Award winner for *Crossing Paths* (Solo Jazz Album of the Year). "After OTB, we worked together in numerous contexts, especially on my albums *For The Moment* on Blue Note along with Joe Henderson, Ira Coleman and Billy Drummond, and *Written In The Rocks* on Smoke Sessions with Steve, Peter Washington and Bill Stewart. Steve has one of those instantly recognizable sounds, whether he's playing alto saxophone, soprano or flute. After a few notes, you know it's him. He's grounded in the tradition but plays with the spirit of an explorer: always searching for new ways to approach the music."

Wilson became the go-to sideman early in his New York days, teaming up with musicians looking to solidify their bands with saxophone power and beauty. In addition to session work, he played a role in the Mingus Big Band and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and supported such all-stars as Lionel Hampton and Dave Holland. He was featured in a 1996 New York Times story, "A Sideman's Life." And, from 1998 to 2001, he became a member of Chick Corea's Origin band. "Chick gave me so much encouragement to explore," Wilson says. "He'd say to not be afraid to explore and find something new each night. He had the uncanny sense of knowing how to take you out of your comfort zone into the place of discovery."

Even while his prowess as a support player became firmly established, he had also started stretching out as leader with his 1991 debut, *New York Summit* (Criss Cross), followed by

1993's *Blues For Marcus*, which included two of his future duo collaborators, pianist Bruce Barth and drummer Lewis Nash. This led to Wilson becoming a noteworthy jazz leader. It was recognized by the Wall Street Journal in the 2010 profile "The Sideman Becomes the Star." And fuller recognition came that year when Wilson celebrated his 50th birthday with a six-night showcase at the Jazz Standard featuring a range of collaborators. With a new band each night, he welcomed pianists Mulgrew Miller and Bruce Barth, bassists Christian McBride and Linda May Han Oh, drummers Lewis Nash and Jeff "Tain" Watts and singers Karrin Allyson and Carla Cook, among others.

Since then he formed his adventurous swinging, post-bop quartet Wilsonian's Grain, consisting of Orrin Evans, Ugonna Okegwo and Bill Stewart. At the same time, he continued touring with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, the Buster Williams Quartet and two of Christian McBride's groups — Inside Straight and the Big Band — in addition to recording as a special guest soloist with Miho Hazama on *Journey To Journey* (Verve). He also co-led a chamber jazz trio with Rosnes and bassist Peter Washington.

It was this longtime chemistry with Rosnes that brought her aboard for *Enduring Sonance* as arranger. "When I started thinking about the album, I immediately thought of Renee and

her ability to arrange," Wilson says. "I knew she could do it better than I could. I told her about the program, and she was very gracious and excited by it. I told her there are no limits, to make use of the different combinations of instruments and textures. I told her that these songs weren't meant to be used to blow over. I wanted this album to be for everyone with our personalities coming through."

"When Steve told me about the concept for this recording and the repertoire he was considering, and asked if I'd be interested in arranging the music, I was thrilled," says Rosnes. "Not only did the repertoire resonate with me, but Steve's choice of sidemen immediately sparked my imagination. I could hear the possibilities of bringing that particular material and group of players together. His only direction was to allow the beauty of the melodies to come through, which felt intuitive to me. From the very beginning, this felt like a project where everything lined up musically and spiritually."

As for band members, Wilson says, "The program is dictated by the personnel. As the tunes came into focus, I was intuitively hearing different people." Vibraphonist Joe Locke was an early choice. They had known each other for a long time and shared a taste and love for the same kinds of music. "I knew his love for lyricism, so I knew he would love this program," Wilson says. "I was hearing his sound. He plays

beautiful textures in his four-mallet playing."

Wilson knew Jay Anderson from their association in Schneider's orchestra. "Jay is an amazing contrapuntal melody player as an accompanist," he says. "There's a lot of motion in his playing. I like to think of him as bringing the secret sauce to Maria's music to keep the orchestra moving."

As for the drums, Wilson was very particular. "I'm a drummer at heart," he says. "So I needed someone who went beyond playing great time and groove. I was thinking of a drummer who could orchestrate his music. That's when I thought of Kendrick Scott. The way he paints in the scope of the work with his own groups, I knew he's the guy."

"This recording has been an exploration for me," says Scott, who drums with an inventive, textural imagination. "It's been incredible playing with Steve, who has been there with all my heroes, from Chick to Joe Henderson. Every musical giant has his own language. His music is beautifully complex in its simplicity. We don't have to play a million notes to get you to feel. Everyone in the band has that same kind of energy to go deep. From start to finish, the music has Steve's signature."

On two tracks, the virtuoso French horn player Kevin Newton from Imani Winds contributes. "Renee's and my only regret was that we didn't use him on more of the music,"

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## THE VOCALISTS

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LISANNE LYONS  
NICOLE YARLING  
SHEILA JORDAN  
ROSEANNA VITRO  
DEBORAH SILVER



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Wilson says. "He came in on the second day of our recording, and he was so great. I told him, we'll work together again." One of the tracks Newton played on was Milton Nascimento's soaring "Francisco," a tune Rosnes had recommended for the session. (Wilson had another Nascimento tune in mind, too.)

With all systems ready to go, Wilson and company began their journey of sonance (the obsolete word meaning the aliveness of resonant sound that harkens back to Jackie McLean's 1962 album *A Fickle Sonance*). Composed by Michel Legrand, "Pieces Of Dreams" shines. Wilson may have been familiar with Stanley Turrentine's version of the tune, but he was stunned by Johnny Mathis singing it on Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show*. "Steve shapes the melody with a singer's sensibility, and it carries real emotional weight," says Rosnes.

Wilson also found melodic favor in Eliane Elias' song "A Volta" from her 2002 album *Kissed By Nature*. "That tune just stuck in my head," he says. "But I could never find any sheet music for it. I was surprised no one else had recorded it." He mentioned this to Rosnes, who got in communication with Elias' husband, bassist Marc Johnson. He sent her the music, and she went to work on the arrangement. She gave the tune a sophisticated harmonic progression and then adapted some background vocal lines from the original recording for the vibes.

Another song that with special meaning for

Wilson is Canadian pop singer Gino Vanelli's "The Surest Things Can Change." It's a tune that Freddie Hubbard recorded instrumentally on his 1978 album *Super Blue*. "We do a slightly different version that is closer to Gino's song," says Wilson.

Wilson embraces the melody almost magically on the Bill Lee tune "How Long," which appeared in his son Spike's film *Do The Right Thing*. Another tune that comes from a cinematic view is "The Eyes Of Love" from Quincy Jones' 1973 album *You Got It Bad Girl*, a recording that also included the theme song from the TV comedy *Sanford And Son*. "I watched *Sanford And Son* every Friday night with my family," Wilson says. "So I bought the album with the theme song on it. I was just starting formal lessons, so I studied this album attentively. I learned it by ear. It's the melody of Quincy's ballad 'The Eyes Of Love' that I still hear. I knew that had to be on this album."

The highlight of the album is the leadoff lyrical gem "Quiet Girl," composed by Wilson's close friend and collaborator Billy Childs. They've played several duo concerts, and for the last 10 years, Wilson has been in Childs' quartet. "It's a haunting melody," says Wilson. "I liked the tune so much that I always wanted to do a version of my own. The song harmonically is very deep, the melody is lush. I always played soprano on it, but I started to hear the English horn, and then when we had

Kevin's French horn and Joe's vibes, it worked. Everyone in the studio said that's the track that introduces the rest of the album. It speaks to the enduring concept."

It's certainly a triumphant soundtrack-of-my-life moment for Wilson, but he's already moving on to his next endeavor: building a library of symphonic wind orchestra music. "It's been an idea I've had for several years that comes from my symphonic wind band experience in high school," he says. "A few years ago I commissioned Billy to compose a 15-minute-long classical/jazz hybrid piece that had room for improvisation. We premiered it last April at West Chester University just outside of Philly. And to come full circle, we've recently performed it at my alma mater, now called Virginia Commonwealth."

Wilson started a 15-school consortium to feature this kind of music by commissioning composers to write new pieces. "The conductors have loved this because there's enough room for players' personal sounds," he says. "We're exploring new vistas to build new audiences. There are new composers in the wind band world who are chomping at the bit to get their music heard and played. There's no shortage to that, so I believe the future for this kind of jazz-informed music is bright."

And if that's not enough, he also has hope for future genre-defying collaborations with Imani Winds and also the Sirius Quartet. He's unstoppable in his creative pursuits. **DB**



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# Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



JIMMY KATZ

Pat Metheny premieres a new version of his band on *Side-Eye III+*.

## Pat Metheny *Side-Eye III+*

UNIQUITY  
★★★★½

Regardless of the frequency of Pat Metheny's album releases, each one feels like a seminal event. This one arrives on the 40th anniversary of his debut, *Bright Size Life*, while also introducing a new edition of his band Side-Eye with eight new originals. Metheny offers yet another master class in delivering music that fascinates the mind while also being digestible enough to be engaged in various settings and by both jazz connoisseurs and novices. It's like a well-mixed martini: hearty, sophisticated and smooth with just the right amount of acidic bite.

The album blasts off with "In On It," which boasts Metheny's patented sweeping melodicism and fluid guitar improvisational passages atop a quicksilver momentum, powered by

drummer Joe Dyson and bassist Daryl Johns, while Chris Fishman thickens the groove with graceful piano accompaniments that sometimes run parallel to Metheny's knotty lines and other times offer punchy counter-suspense, especially during the squiggly synth solo and sci-fi voicing. Without trying to reinvent the wheel, the song captures a sense of youthful discovery that's essential to most of Metheny's compositions.

That airborne sensation continues on the soulful waltz "Don't Look Down," a tune so picturesque, bucolic and propulsive that it deserves its own dazzling Broadway dance routine. The most thrilling moments of the album occur on the episodic "Urban And Western," which morphs from gentle country-porch blues lullaby to a gospel-laden, vocal- and organ-powered climax; the sashaying "SE-O," which fluctuates from Brazilian-inflected fusion to high-speed postmodern bop; and the entrancing "Risk And

Reward," on which Metheny unleashes his most joyous melodic invention on the album.

With the new edition of Side-Eye, Metheny finds himself in optimum company with younger musicians capable of matching his improvisational firepower and nuanced sensitivity, resulting in a sonic envelope that sounds both reverential and revelatory. Time will tell how this album will rank inside Metheny's towering discography. But make no mistake: This album is quintessential Metheny in all of his ingenious glory. —John Murph

**Side-Eye III+:** In On It, Don't Look Down, Make A New World, Urban and Western, SE-O, Our Old Street, Risk and Reward, So Far So Good. (64:37)

**Personnel:** Pat Metheny, guitars, sounds, synths; Joe Dyson, drums; Chris Fishman, piano, keyboards and organ; Daryl Johns, bass; Brandee Younger, harp; Luis Conte, percussion; Vincent Peirani, accordion; James Francis, organ (4); Mark Kibble, Natalie Litza, Kim Flemming, Kim Mont, San Franklin, Stephanie Hall, Joel Kibble, Terry White, Armand Hutton, Leonard Patton (5), vocals.

**Ordering info:** [patmetheny.com](http://patmetheny.com)



**Mark Turner/Jason Palmer/Joe Martin/Jonathan Pinson**  
*Patternmaster*

ECM  
★★★★½

Returning for his second quartet outing on ECM, tenor saxophonist Mark Turner is in fine form across the six tracks of *Patternmaster*, interlocking beautifully with bassist Joe Martin, trumpeter Jason Palmer and drummer Jonathan Pinson to produce original compositions anchored in impressionistic melody and deep swing.

**Miho Hazama**  
*Frame*

EDITION  
★★★★★

Pity the poor composer/arranger/conductors, who — if not as recognized as a Maria Schneider or Darcy James Argue — must depend on securing work with established big bands. Since relocating to the U.S. in 2010, Tokyo native Miho Hazama has found better outlets than most. In addition to her potent m\_unit, she has been chief conductor of the Danish Radio Big Band since 2019 and permanent guest conductor of Metropole Orkest since 2020.

For her third recording at the helm of the venerable Danish orchestra, she chose to reflect on the legacies of past conductors, notably Palle Mikkelborg, Thad Jones, Bob Brookmeyer and Jim McNeely. This suite reflects their ideas along with the evolving voice of the orchestra itself.

As proof, listen no further than “LuLu,” where Hazama layers brass over a deceptively spare introduction of kalimba, trumpet and piano before leading the listener through a series of gorgeously expressed movements. It’s highlighted by exceptional playing by bassist Kasper Vadsholt.

Elsewhere, she delights in creating supportive backgrounds: sometimes as simple as a smear of Per Gade’s guitar; others a full-throated call-and-response between brass and reeds. The voic-

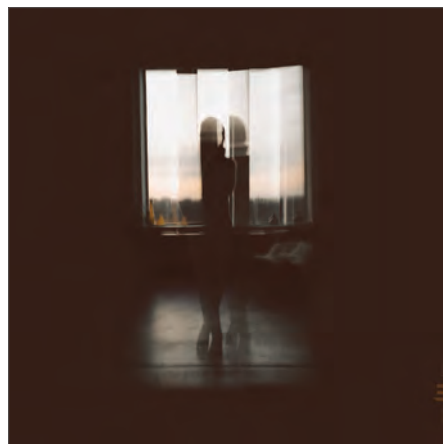
On their previous record, 2022’s *Return From The Stars*, Turner’s quartet displayed a cool sense of slow-burning openness, allowing their compositions to undulate and build without ever breaking into explosive displays of virtuosity. On *Patternmaster*, the group enters more dynamic territory. It’s complex work that remains accessible thanks to its rooted consistency: No matter where Turner’s compositions might go, there is always the shuffling cymbals and his breathy saxophone tone to return to. A sprightliness accompanies the horn fanfare melody of “Trece Ocho,” while “Lehman’s Lair” showcases Turner’s muscular phrasing, playing an intricate rhythm over Pinson’s energetic groove. Slower numbers like the waltzing “The Happiest Man On Earth” teeter on the edge of collapse as the group’s swinging feel is stretched almost beyond recognition, but Turner still manages to fly through a keening solo.

Unmistakably individual, *Patternmaster* is a testament to Turner’s languid tone and capacity for layering depth and sophistication into each composition. While the record might cry out for even greater moments of experimental intensity to break out of its consistency, it is nonetheless an engaging and artful display of cool, deep-swinging improvisation. —Ammar Kalia

**Patternmaster:** Patternmaster, Trece Ocho, It Very Well May Be, Lehman’s Lair, The Happiest Man On Earth, Supersister (48:23).

**Personnel:** Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Jason Palmer, trumpet; Joe Martin, bass; Jonathan Pinson, drums.

**Ordering info:** [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com)



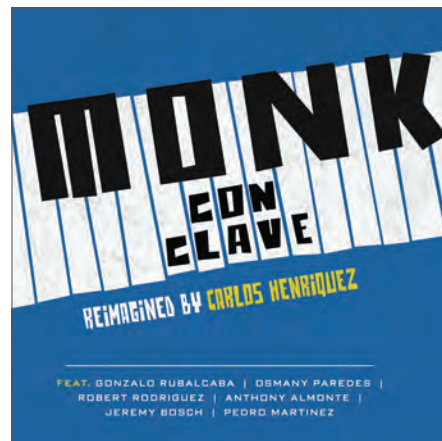
ings she chooses are seldom less than enthralling, occasionally as unexpected as those she employs toward the conclusion of “The First Notes.”

Her shifting, variegated lines combine with those unique harmonic flourishes to create music that seldom leads into expected territory. While her inspirations may have been on her mind, the creativity is all her own. —James Hale

**Frame:** And The Door Unsealed; Rondo; LuLu; The Prisoner’s Quest; Aura II; The First Notes. (52:46)

**Personnel:** Miho Hazama, conductor; Danish Radio Big Band; Peter Fuglsang, Nicolai Schultz, Hans Ulrik, Karl-Martin Almqvist, Frederick Menzies, woodwinds; Dave Vreuls, Ari Bragi Karason, Thomas Kjærgaard, Mads la Cour, Gidon Nunes Vaz, Peter Dahlgren, Petter Hångsel, Annette Saxe, Gustaf Wiklund, Jakob Munk Mortensen, brass; Per Gade, guitar; Artur Tuznik, piano; Kasper Vadsholt, bass; Søren Frost, drums.

**Ordering info:** [editionrecords.com](http://editionrecords.com)



**Carlos Henriquez**  
*Monk Con Clave*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE  
★★★★★

All performance is local; only the music is eternal. A great song is a citizen of the world, rolling easily through space and time; a performance is shaped in the culture of its moment.

Thelonious Monk’s songs are endlessly unexpected and malleable. On *Monk Con Clave*, Carlos Henriquez frames the Monk songbook in a web of swaying Cubop rhythms, much the way he did with Gillespie in 2018 on *Dizzy Con Clave*: in three-beat-versus-two-beat clave patterns. Henriquez, who holds the bass chair in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, surrounds himself with much of the cream of the creamy JLCO crew along with handpicked guests.

The music, and especially the six instrumentals, radiate an energy and abandon not often linked with the turns of Monk texts. “Who Knows” swings with a passion that surmounts the occasional lurch of Latin rhythms and has by far the best equilibrium between brass and reeds. The voicings of “Round Midnight” provide a light camouflage over the tune certainly the dark mood in which it’s usually performed. “Plena Azul/Blue Monk” is one of three pieces credited to Henriquez, though it’s clearly a stylish variation on “Blue Monk.” Ted Nash visits the edges of tonality on “Raise Four” and Gonzalo Rubalcaba sprinkles his percussive flurries on “I Mean You.”

The only excess baggage aboard this showboat of virtuosity are its four vocal interludes. Otherwise, Henriquez hands Monk a passport welcome into any Caribbean port of call. And beyond. —John McDonough

**Monk Con Clave:** Round Midnight; I Mean You; El Son De Teo; San Juan Hill; Ugly Beauty; Evidence of Four and One; Raise Four; Green Chimney. (49:38)

**Personnel:** Jesus Ricardo (1-6, 8), Michael Rodriguez, Kali Rodriguez, Nathaniel Williford (1-6, 8), trumpet; Marshall Gilkes, Elliot Mason, Dion Tucker, trombone; Sherman Irby, Ted Nash, Chris Lewis, Abdias Armentero, Paul Nedzela, reeds; Jeremy Bosch (3-4, 10), flute; Gonzalo Rubalcaba (1, 3, 6), Osmany Paredes (2, 4, 9), Robert Rodriguez (7), piano; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums; Bobby Allende, bongos; Pedrito Martinez (4, 6-7, 10), Anthony Almonte (4, 10), vocals.

**Ordering info:** [carloshenriquezmusic.com](http://carloshenriquezmusic.com)

# The Hot Box

|  | Critics | John Murph | Ammar Kalia | James Hale | John McDonough |
|--|---------|------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| <b>Pat Metheny</b><br><i>Side-Eye III+</i>                 |         | ★★★★½      | ★★★★        | ★★★        | ★★★★           |
| <b>Turner/Palmer/Martin/Pinson</b><br><i>Patternmaster</i> |         | ★★★        | ★★★★½       | ★★★★       | ★★★★           |
| <b>Miho Hazama</b><br><i>Frame</i>                         |         | ★★★        | ★★★★½       | ★★★★       | ★★★★           |
| <b>Carlos Henriquez</b><br><i>Monk Con Clave</i>           |         | ★★★        | ★★★★½       | ★★★        | ★★★★           |

## Critics' Comments

### Pat Metheny, *Side-Eye III+*

At 71, Pat Metheny is still journeying and making the complex compositions of his guitar music accessible. —Ammar Kalia

Much beautiful work; too much, in fact. To stretch the “eye” metaphor, it’s like a long day at an art gallery: circuits on overload. Metheny stands out, but the rest is a blur. —James Hale

Metheny treads with an appealing tranquility in easy-listening waters, but meets frequent crescendos of heavy weather when synth and choral accompaniment blow in. Commerce and art accommodate in a program gearing up for a global tour. —John McDonough

### Mark Turner/Jason Palmer/Joe Martin/Jonathan Pinson, *Patternmaster*

As its namesake suggests, this is a heady affair marked by spiky lines that zoom across rhythmic beds like electricity running through a schematic diagram. Far more captivating than catchy. —John Murph

Drummer Jonathan Pinson’s creative drive grabs your attention throughout this adventurous neo-bop album, which also serves as a great showcase for trumpeter Jason Palmer. —James Hale

Memories of Mulligan. No piano policing the harmonies; plus intellectual rigor, emotional restraint and a touch of whimsy make this a modern chamber jazz gem. Intricate compositions demand focus as Turner and Martin execute gleeful fly-bys in tight and twisty formations. —John McDonough

### Miho Hazama, *Frame*

A commendable date documenting Hazama’s increasing prowess in crafting sumptuous big band arrangements. It’s steeped in history yet firmly sounds like early 21st century jazz. —John Murph

Hazama’s command of the Danish Radio Big Band is masterfully self-assured on this energetic and experimentally textured new record. It’s on quieter numbers “Aura II” and “Rondo” where Hazama excels, drawing eerie, individual tones from her ensemble. —Ammar Kalia

Savvy orchestration brings texture and a façade of form to a collection of discursive moods and colors, creating a kind of Potemkin suite. Soloists get little to work except for “First Notes,” a tongue-twisting fugue full of mischief and buzz for band and trombone. —John McDonough

### Carlos Henriquez, *Monk Con Clave*

Another superlative example of the adaptability of Thelonious Monk’s music as well as a demonstration of why Latin jazz musicians of various generations keep returning to his venerable catalog. —John Murph

An infectiously joyous concept, Carlos Henriquez’s tribute to the work of Thelonious Monk with his big band sees the pianist’s infamous compositions refracted through the Afro-Cuban tradition, displaying boundless capacity for reinterpretation. —Ammar Kalia

Monk’s canon is flexible: Solo piano? Naturally. Big band? Bring it! Adding the clave? The memorable melodies survive, but I miss the composer’s intentional harmonic tangles, to say nothing of his signature swing. —James Hale

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## Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis

### *We The People*

BLUE ENGINE  
★★★★½

There is nothing unique about musicians tasked with framing a composition inspired by a painting; in fact, the SFJAZZ Collective recently did it effectively, and now Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra have replicated it, equally resplendent in concept and performance.

An obvious political theme distinguishes *We The People*. The opening track, composed

and arranged by Marsalis, is a grand orchestral piece akin to an overture that establishes that theme. Inspired by Nari Ward's painting of the same name, Marsalis applies a soundscape to the stylized rendering of the anthropomorphic words, touching on his New Orleans heritage, elements of martial music and swing, before closing with a dollop of bebop. He is aided primarily by pianist Dan Nimmer, though the fanfare of trumpets is ever-present.

Each succeeding track follows this motif, offering a tapestry of lush interplay between brass and woodwinds, with pleasant flute interludes by Ted Nash, especially on "Summer Day." Except for Romare Bearden's "Sacrifice," the other paintings may be known only by connoisseurs. The orchestra evokes a tableau differing in tonality, keeping with Walter Blanding's tune "For Never And Forever." Even without the collaboration with the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, *We The People* is a musical cornucopia of Americana. —Herb Boyd

**We The People:** We The People, One Understands, Summer Day, Black Balloon, The Cycle Of Life, Mitakuye Oyasin (All Are Related), A Hot Jam On Grand, Au Café (Synchrony), For Never And Forever, The Tree, Salvation, Serenity, Reflection, The Sound Of Colors. (74:01)  
**Personnel:** Wynton Marsalis, Ryan Kisor, Kenny Rampton, Mike Rodriguez, Marcus Printup, trumpet; Victor Goines, tenor sax, soprano sax, clarinet, bass clarinet; Ted Nash, alto sax, soprano sax, clarinet, flute, piccolo; Sherman Irby, alto sax, soprano sax, clarinet, flute; Vincent Gardner, Chris Crenshaw, Elliot Mason, trombone; Dan Nimmer, piano; Carlos Henriquez, bass; Camille Thurman, tenor sax, soprano sax, flute; Carl Maraghi, baritone sax; Jason Marsalis, drums.

Ordering info: [blueenginerecords.org](http://blueenginerecords.org)

## Knats

### *A Great Day In Newcastle*

GEARBOX  
★★

Knats came together when bassist Stan Woodward and drummer King David-Ike Elechi were attending Trinity College. Named after the co-leaders (the K is from King; "nats" is Stan backwards), the unit was soon joined by the young trumpeter Ferg Kilsby. *A Great Day In Newcastle* is their second recording.

Several pieces begin with spoken word by Cooper Robson, meant to describe the dark experiences of the British working class. However, these verbal interludes are sometimes difficult to understand and will mean more to the participants than the audience. They certainly add to the eccentric nature of some of the pieces, with "Carpet Doctor" featuring angry talking and "Farewell Johnny Miner" including some "sort-of" singing.

Instrumentally, many of the nine originals are groove music including the rockish "Gainsborough Grove," the menacing strut "Never Gonna Be A Boxer" and the infectious double-time "Azure Blues." Most notable are Ike-Elechi's colorful and consistently powerful drumming and close interplay with bassist Woodward. Trumpeter Kilsby isn't featured much (mostly on "Messy-In," "Azure Blues" and "Farewell Johnny Miner"), although



he shows potential as a distinctive voice. Most of the performances emphasize dense and electric ensembles with some ("Gainsborough Grove" and "Big Market") being too brief to go anywhere.

Perhaps next time, the co-leaders and Kilsby should record a trio album so they can show listeners what they can really do. —Scott Yanow

**A Great Day In Newcastle:** 7 Bridges To Burn; Gainsborough Grove; Wor Jackie; Messy-In; Azure Blues; Big Market; Carpet Doctor; Never Gonna Be A Boxer; Farewell Johnny Miner. (40:36)  
**Personnel:** Stanley Elvis Woodward, bass, talking; King David Ike-Elechi, drums, percussion; Ferg Kilsby, trumpet, flugelhorn; Tobias Amadio, trumpet; Bertie Beaman, Dillon Pinder, trombone; Sebastian Barley, French horn; George Johnson, tenor; Otto Kampa, alto; Frank Barr, clarinet; Viviane Ghigliino, flute; Lucy Rowan, alto flute; Geordie Greep, Tom Ford, guitar; Sandro Shargorodsky, keyboards; Josh Mitchell-Rayner, piano; Erya Barber, Congling Wu, violin; Natalia Solis Paredes, viola; Morgan Key, cello; Cooper Robson, vocals.

Ordering info: [gearboxrecords.com](http://gearboxrecords.com)



## James Fernando

### *Philly 3*

SPRING GARDEN  
★★★★½

There are certainly myriad reasons that the piano trio is one of the most well-worn band configurations in jazz. One of those reasons is that such a trio generally creates a sound that is heartening (albeit not necessarily challenging).

*Philly 3* only includes one cover (of pianist Erroll Garner's "Like It Is") but features no shortage of the sort of energy and interplay that the very best piano trios have to offer.

However, pianist and composer James Fernando is clearly well aware of the tropes of the mode, and works with his trio to circumvent such tropes with a few wonders, noting, "I wanted this record to feel like a conversation; fun, surprising, sometimes dark, always human."

Standout cuts include "The Parisian," which begins by stylistically hearkening to melodies written to accompany Chaplinesque silent films (complete with requisite amounts of stride piano), ultimately unfolding into a hip cool-bop sound, "Neon Keon," an electric vehicle for drummer Kyon Williams's way with tonality and dynamics couched in an homage to New Orleans Second Line, and the aforementioned cover of "Like It Is" that shows clear reverence Garner's legacy by swinging within an inch of its ever-loving life.

Another notable cut is "Singularity," which employs classical (yet somehow mechanical) cadences and razor sharp "Rhythm" changes to great (sometimes surprising) effect, eventually morphing into a shimmering salsa, accomplishing Fernando's goal to create music that surprises and was "certainly not [made] by an algorithm." —Ayana Contreras

**Philly 3:** Persistence; Unlikely Animal Friendships; The Parisian; Singularity; Neon Kyon; Beings On Toast; Potions; What's the Password?; Like It Is. (54:56)

**Personnel:** James Fernando, piano; Dan McCain, bass (1-2, 4-8); Sam Harris, bass (3, 9); Kyon Williams, drums.

Ordering info: [springgardenrecords.com](http://springgardenrecords.com)



## Kazemde George *Ocean Passage*

LA RESERVE

★★★★½

Tenor saxophonist Kazemde George, Berkeley born-and-raised by Caribbean parents, proves throughout his second record to have a lot of ideas and the chops to express them warmly. Aptly followed, occasionally led by but invariably connected with bassist Tyrone Allen III and drummer Kayvon Gordon, he bounds along with an inquisitive, unassuming, generous post-Coltrane/Rollins/Coleman air.

If the music wanders or, say, “roams” or

veers off exploring, it’s never less than companionable, and is so naturally muscular it needn’t force itself. George was educated at Harvard and New England Conservatory, operates out of Brooklyn, doesn’t grandstand, although at moments like in the middle of his title track plays so freely as to be breathtaking. His rhythm team provides an ever-shifting, never shaky foundation, and all three players are attentive to dynamics, adding depth and drama to the gentler pieces among the all-original repertoire.

Allen, for instance, solos into and out of a treacherous no-rhythm/near-silence passage on his introduction to “Moonbeam,” a gently swinging lullaby. Gordon propels delicious grooves on “Jungle Gym” and “Las Manos.” George seems to disdain virtuosic bluster in favor of forthright, conversational phrasing that may get urgent but also allows for nuanced, lyrical sighs and touches, as on “Reflection,” although “Epiphany” flirts with lugubriousness.

So the compositions are not all memorable. George, Allen and Gordon make a strong impression, anyway. There is no dearth of up-and-coming talent in today’s jazz. —Howard Mandel

**Ocean Passage:** Ocean Passage; Tyrone’s Moonbeam; Moonbeam; Fleeting Epiphany; Jungle Gym; Caliginous Reflection; Kazemde’s Waltz; The Professor; Las Manos de Kayvon; Escape; Kazemde’s Waltz (Reprise). (58:00)

**Personnel:** Kazemde George, tenor saxophone; Tyrone Allen III, bass; Kayvon Gordon, drums.

**Ordering info:** [kazemdegeorge.com](http://kazemdegeorge.com)

## Caleb Wheeler Curtis *Ritual*

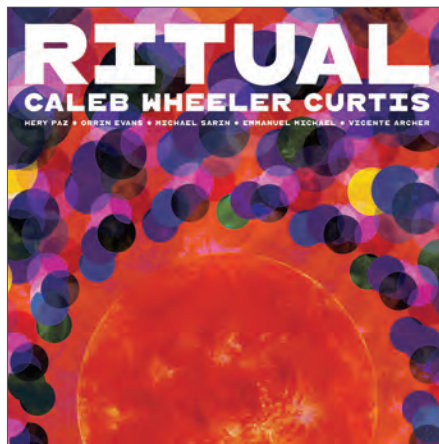
CHILL TONE

★★★★

The sixth leader record from New York-based multi-instrumentalist Caleb Wheeler Curtis, *Ritual* meditates on the ritualistic processes of music making: the countless hours of practice, the artistic choices, the performing experiences and the relationships between the band members.

*Ritual* highlights a top-tier ensemble of musicians: 9pianist Orrin Evans, saxophonist/flutist Hery Paz, guitarist Emmanuel Michael, bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Michael Sarin), the commitment and vision that led to Curtis’ dominant performance on the stritch (a rare E-flat alto saxophone with a straight body) and the inspiration and commanding jazz voice that created these nine introspective and exploratory tunes.

On the opening “Fantasmas,” Curtis and Michael share a lilting, searching melody that resounds like a call to the spirits, rising and falling overtop Sarin’s simmering drum work. The angular, jutting “Bleakout” follows, turning up the intensity as Paz’s tenor joins the fray. “You Just Can’t Keep the Music,” a short and sweet duet between Curtis and Evans, is another standout, as is the tender, lush “Pond,” featuring the full sextet with Paz on flute and a striking solo from Evans. The incantatory final tune, “Ritual,” with Curtis



on soprano saxophone and trumpet, lends a cathartic end to the record’s ceremony.

As it draws on the progressive bop and free improvisation influences Curtis is known for, *Ritual* swings between urgency and peace, featuring the sextet in various configurations. Technical prowess and invention are heartily present and balanced with the emotion and spirituality that inspires the listener to lean in. —Alexa Peters

**Ritual:** Fantasmas; Bleakout; Florence; Black Box Extraction; You Just Can’t Keep the Music; Pond; Tenastic; The End of Power; Ritual. (42:56)

**Personnel:** Caleb Wheeler Curtis, stritch, soprano saxophone (8), soprano saxophone (9), trumpet (9); Hery Paz, tenor saxophone (2, 3, 4, 9), flute (6, 7); Emmanuel Michael, guitar; Orrin Evans, piano (3-6); Vicente Archer, double bass; Michael Sarin, drums.

**Ordering info:** [chilltone.com](http://chilltone.com)



## Dave Douglas *Transcend*

GREENLEAF

★★★★½

On his latest recording, trumpeter and composer Dave Douglas reconvenes his Gifts ensemble, featuring guitarist Rafiq Bhatia, drummer Ian Chang (both from the Oscar-nominated post-rock group Son Lux), ace saxophonist James Brandon Lewis and a new addition, MacArthur Fellow cellist Tomeka Reid. The instrumentation makes the quintet unusually lithe and shapeshifting even by today’s eclectic standards. And like the ensemble’s previous endeavor, *Gifts* (2024), the repertoire is equal parts ambitious and endearing. Two years ago, Douglas and associates took on the music of Billy Strayhorn. On this recording, they tackle Duke Ellington: “Come Sunday,” “Heaven” and “Ocupaca.” The other six compositions are by Douglas often with Dukish inspiration.

Their opening dubby take on “Come Sunday” sets the tone for the eight tracks that follow. Like the previous *Gifts* recording, and *Soul On Soul* (Douglas’ 2000 tribute to Mary Lou Williams), the band is using classics as a point of departure rather than a destination. “Energy Fields” owes indirectly to Ellington, as it’s inspired by the sculpture of Jack Whitten, who often claimed Duke — and many other jazz musicians — as an impetus for his remarkable visual art. The piece features gritty solos from Reid and Bhatia. “Ocupaca,” from Ellington’s *Latin American Suite*, captures the arch qualities of late-era Duke orchestras and imbues the urgency of those bands with layers of group interplay and alternately forceful and playful solos from Lewis and Douglas.

*Transcend* lives up to its lofty title: It doesn’t just celebrate a great jazz musician for his work in his time, but it shows the contemporary relevance and ingenuity of those works. —Martin Johnson

**Transcend:** Come Sunday; Energy Fields; Gentle Collapse; Heaven; Curious Species; Argle Barge; Ocupaca; Slabs; Transcend. (59:27)

**Personnel:** Dave Douglas, trumpet; James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Tomeka Reid, cello; Rafiq Bhatia, guitar; Ian Chang, drums.

**Ordering info:** [greenleafmusic.com](http://greenleafmusic.com)

## Piano and More, Past/Present

On this short list of new/old releases, the item of greatest historical importance is undoubtedly the revelatory unburied treasure that is **Thelonious Monk's *Live In Paris 1967, Vol. 1*** (Rhythm-a-Ning; ★★★★★½ 46:39), the first of two albums from a classic archival cachet, elevated from the former bootleg ghetto into pristine restoration by the Monk Estate. We know and love the tunes: "Epitaphy" "Evidence," the glowsome ballad "Ruby, My Dear" and the angular dance "We See," heard in a rambling 14-minute epic version. But this familiar material springs to life and triangulates in new ways in the hands of minimalist Monk, his allies Charlie Rouse on tenor saxophone, drummer Ben Riley and bassist Larry Gales, as well as eager Monk-loving guests then in Europe: Johnny Griffin (who had played in Monk's group before Rouse), alto saxist Phil Woods and trombonist Jimmy Cleveland.

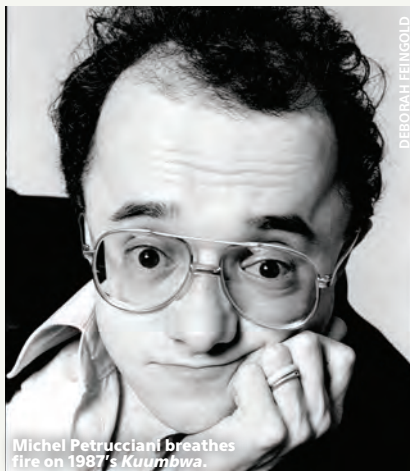
It adds up to a distinctive lovefest/Monk-fest, capturing a moment in time and place previously untapped — at least legally and in due, proper clarity.

Ordering info: [theloniousmonk.store](http://theloniousmonk.store)

When the late, great French jazz piano phenom **Michel Petrucciani** performed at the historically vital — and still active — Kuumbwa venue in Santa Cruz in 1987, he was only five years out from having veritably helped lure Charles Lloyd out of semi-reclusion in Big Sur, just down the coast highway from Santa Cruz. The new archival rescue mission that is ***Kuumbwa*** (Elemental; ★★★★★ 1:54:09), curated by jazz detective Zev Feldman from Kuumbwa director Tim Jackson's taped trove, celebrates a passionate, ever-on-his-feet virtuoso at work, with a power trio completed by bassist Dave Holland and the pianist's regular drummer, Eliot Zigmund. Opening with Wayne Shorter's "Limbo," Petrucciani boldly wends through rich, energized takes on the standards "All The Things" and "Stella By Starlight," makes graceful turns on ballads "The Prayer" and "Morning Blues" (with a lustrous solo from Holland) and revisits Lloyd's Monk-juiced "Sweet Georgia Bright." Even given a less-than-pristine piano to work with, Petrucciani's literate life force as a jazz titan shines through on this gem of a set.

Ordering info: [elemental-music.com](http://elemental-music.com)

A certain historical turning point is represented by **Brian Auger's *Oblivion Express*** (Strut; ★★★★★½ 40:12): the point, in 1970, when British keyboardist Auger was lured from his more soul-influenced style towards a more pointedly jazz-rock fusion base, partly inspired by his friend John McLaughlin's *Devotion* album. The six-track sequence of *Oblivion Express* is framed by two of the project's signature instrumental ravers, a version of John



Michel Petrucciani breathes fire on 1987's *Kuumbwa*.

McLaughlin's "Dragon Song" fueled by side-winding riffs and "Oblivion Express," which juggles tough-guy attitudes and a playful, carnival-evoking chromatic descending line. The vocals tracks in the mix of songs, sung in Auger's serviceable journeyman style, range from the restless prog rock of "The Light" to the smartened-up boogie rock of "On The Road," also a showcase for Auger's nimble-fingered B-3 work. Guitarist Jim Mullen plays in an edgy style yoking closer to a rock mode than the harmonic and dynamic sensitivity of jazz, as such. But that approach stays true to the pivotal rock part of Auger's jazz-rock — or rock-jazz — chemistry.

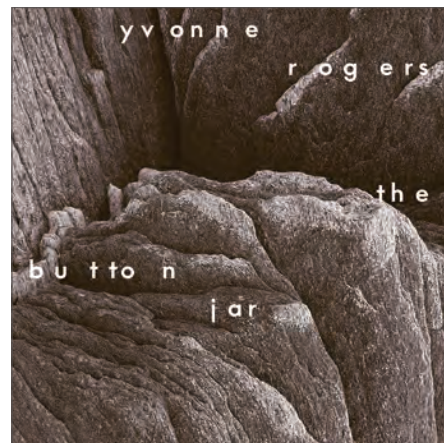
Ordering info: [strut-records.co.uk](http://strut-records.co.uk)

**Denman Maroney's *Mean Times*** (Cuneiform; ★★★★★½ 1:04:10) was recorded in 1995 at the Knitting Factory, and its bristling qualities of adventurism and freedom speak well for the musical powers of its relatively all-star cast — trumpeter Herb Robertson, tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Phil Haynes — as well as the innate brave spirit embodied in the historic Knitting Factory sensibility.

Maroney supplied the glue and the guiding principle for the six-section "Mean Times" (so named not necessarily for the temper of the times in the '90s, but the musical meantime temperament, symbolic of intermediary), as composer and an interwoven sonic palette on "sampled hyperpiano." But, Maroney's central role notwithstanding, this is very much an ensemble outing, with a tapestry-like blend of freedom and skeletal melodic and structural elements, sometimes in kinship with the Art Ensemble of Chicago's operations.

Addressing this project, Maroney writes that "Oscar Wilde said all art is quite useless. I disagree." Here lies some proof of his argument. **DB**

Ordering info: [cuneiformrecords.com](http://cuneiformrecords.com)



### Yvonne Rogers *The Button Jar*

PYROCLASTIC

★★★★½

Yvonne Rogers, who grew up in rural Maine, remembers with fondness the button jar that her mother kept. An artist, her mom used the button jar to store random objects that she might be able to use in the future for her projects. The young pianist sees the parallels between the button jar and her own batch of formerly unused ideas that she uses on this set of unaccompanied solos.

Rogers, who had previously recorded a quartet album (*Seeds*) and is a member of saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock's Lilith and Adam O'Farrill's Elephant, considers Kris Davis to be a mentor. Davis was so impressed by Rogers' creative ideas that she persuaded her to record for her Pyroclastic label and even produced the album.

*The Button Jar* consists of 11 originals by the pianist and three free improvisations. Rogers' playing on her fairly concise pieces is often so adventurous and spontaneous that it would be difficult to pick out the three songs that she made up on the spot. The pianist sometimes uses a repetitious figure in her left hand while her right plays freely on top, as on "Luster" where a three-note figure gradually becomes one with seven notes. She explores a variety of moods on this set with the hyper title cut being followed by the comparatively laid-back "Cloud Chorale" and "Scatter And Sort," which is soulful in an avant-gardish way.

Other selections include ones dedicated to Geri Allen (the eccentric "Linear Gel") and Kris Davis (a rather stormy free improv on "Avid Risks"), a joyful and bluesy "Little Dance" that could almost pass for Keith Jarrett and "Puzzle Building," which swings in its own way.

—Scott Yanow

**The Button Jar:** Luster; The Button Jar; Cloud Chorale; Scatter And Sort; Monkey's Fist; Avid Risks; Little Dance; Thread The Needle; Linear Gel; Puzzle Building; The Craft Room; Mismatch; First Attempt; Exhale. (46:39)

**Personnel:** Yvonne Rogers, piano.

Ordering info: [pyroclasticrecords.com](http://pyroclasticrecords.com)

## Aaron Irwin Trio

*Spark*  
ADHYÁROPA

★★★★½

Insularity is not part of saxophonist Aaron Irwin's agenda. He first road-tested *Spark*'s material on an 11-day tour and took audience reactions into account as he decided which tunes would make the cut.

"Tune" is the right word. Irwin writes catchy themes and repeating structures that ensure that a listener will have an opportunity to get to know them well. Most are titled after a man or beast that he appreciates, although he is pointedly not overly referential.

There's no mystery who "Mississippi Hurt" is about, given Mike Baggetta's ambling, bluesy accompaniment. But neither its sinuous theme nor Bill Campbell's springy pulse obviously references the music of Mississippi John. And while both the assertive opening fanfare of "Fahey," which is named for the late solo guitarist John Fahey, and the foundation of fingerpicking that Baggetta lays down in its wake reveal that Irwin has listened closely to his dedicatee's music, the electronic effects on his alto saxophone suggest neither the sardonic idylls of Fahey's work nor the bristling experimentalism of his last days. Nor do the electronics do his ingratiating tone any favors; he sounds much better without them on the unhurried, affectionate "Goodnight Laverne," which is named for one of his cats, not the TV character. —*Bill Meyer*

**Spark:** Spark; Mississippi Hurt; Skúli; Fahey; Goodnight Laverne; a song in the front yard (after Brooks); Giffure; A Blues Feeling; The Snow Man (after Stevens); Goodnight Shirley. (49:41)

**Personnel:** Aaron Irwin, saxophone, bass clarinet; Mike Baggetta, guitar; Bill Campbell, drums.

**Ordering info:** [aaronirwin.bandcamp.com](http://aaronirwin.bandcamp.com)



## Nick Fraser

*Areas*  
ELASTIC

★★★★½

Toronto drummer-composer Nick Fraser invites a Canadian compadre, Vancouver-born, Calgary-raised pianist Kris Davis, as well as a token Arizona-born saxophonist, Tony Malaby, to form a core trio — with three short cuts having Fraser's fellow Torontonian John Kameel Farah do electronic processing of the reeds and sticks materials to shape new pieces.

Davis and Malaby are the high-profile players, Fraser and Farah more obscure. Nevertheless, in the recording studio, everyone displays equal strength, their levels of media visibility not particularly important once immersed in the naked music. This is a resonant set of atmospheric explorations, dominated by two 11-minute heavyweights.

Davis imparts an Indonesian gamelan quality via her prepared attachments, while Malaby's thistly reeds push for an uncoiling, hectoring intensity, continually jabbing and pushing with his curt phrases. Fraser's drums spill and wash while the piano discovers its repetitive patterns. The title piece has Malaby needling with precision on soprano: He snarls, growls, squeals and barks, grabbing intensity by the gizzard, twisting hard. "Sketch 57," the other longer track, is calmer, reflecting on the damage already done, leading up to "Brood" and its cavern of cut-up doom. —*Martin Longley*

**Areas:** In The Wreckage; Mimic; Area; Howling Circuits; There Are Other Ways; Sketch 57; Brood. (40:22)

**Personnel:** Nick Fraser, drums, piano harp (1, 4, 7); Kris Davis, piano; Tony Malaby, saxophones; John Kameel Farah, electronics and sound processing (1, 4, 7).

**Ordering info:** [nickfraserthedrummer.bandcamp.com](http://nickfraserthedrummer.bandcamp.com)



## Shalosh

*What We Are Made Of*  
ACT

★★★★½

Sounds like the start of a bad joke: So the Gallagher brothers from Oasis, Natalie Imbruglia and ... Barbie are all together in a bar. OK? Then in walk a pianist, a bassist and a drummer, and ... What happens next is *What We Are Made Of*. It's the successor to the brilliant, beautiful *Broken Balance* and *Tales Of Utopia*, and these are the guys who really remade the piano trio. Seriously, when you listen back, were The Bad Plus, e.s.t. or any of the other contenders honestly doing anything that Jess Stacy, Nat Cole, Ahmad Jamal and Bill Evans weren't already doing? You'll only think so until you hear Shalosh.

And so to the joke. Having vowed to make a record that paid no attention to genre, the guys started scribbling down a bunch of earworms. Which is why you have a jazz album with covers of "Torn," "Don't Look Back In Anger" and "Barbie Girl." We're used to finding Joni and Radiohead among the composition credits; not so much lad-rock and Europop.

What Shalosh do is completely exhilarating. It's not a long record, and that's a measure of their self-confidence and their taste. Push this line too hard and the joke — for it is a kind of sublime joke — falls flat. So it's not just a near-perfect album, it's a perfectly weighted album that will appeal to the time-poor as well as the open-eared. —*Brian Morton*

**What We Are Made Of:** Elly Plays; Hysteria; Once Upon A Melody; Don't Look Back In Anger; Point Of Gravity; Valley Song; Torn; Barbie Girl; Circle. (39:00)

**Personnel:** Gadi Stern, piano; David Michaeli, bass; Matan Assayag, drums.

**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)



## Jimmy Farace

*Big Shoulders, Big Sounds*  
SHIFTING PARADIGM

★★★★★

Chicago bari saxophonist Jimmy Farace debuted on Shifting Paradigm with an ambitious hybrid for ensemble and strings. Now he clears the stage, playing with the same bassist and drummer for the lucid, airy,

swinging *Big Shoulders, Big Sounds*, nodding to masters who preceded him. Number one is Gerry Mulligan, whose piping sound Farace clinches so perfectly as to sound like a bass clarinet. Under-appreciated baritonist Charles Davis also gets props with his insinuatingly titled "Just Us Blues." And, while the album makes no reference to tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, Farace has absorbed that titan's uncanny blend of light touch and fierce intent.

Delightfully passionate, often playful, *Big Shoulders* features five originals, two romantic standards and Davis' blues. The opener, "Decorah's Dance," moves between a Latin riff and a tender melody that happily lands on a Strayhorn-ish note, foreshadowing a deliciously after-hours take on Stray's "Chelsea Bridge." Farace has a knack for melody; "DST" is a bouncy, chipper one, with drummer Dana Hall offering a long solo with palms and sticks. "Cloud Splitter" opts for a dreamy waltz feel. Lest we miscast Mr. Farace as all hearts and roses, he closes with the fire-breathing "Three Headed Dragon," in a tricky 7/4. It's the perfect send-off. —*Paul de Barros*

**Big Shoulders, Big Sounds:** Decorah's Dance; Just Us Blues; Prophetic Dreams; DST; I'll Be Seeing You; Cloud Splitter; Chelsea Bridge; Three Headed Dragon. (62:16)

**Personnel:** Jimmy Farace, baritone saxophone; Clark Sommers, bass; Dana Hall, drums.

**Ordering info:** [shiftingparadigmrecords.com](http://shiftingparadigmrecords.com)



## Good Things, Big Packages

A recent caller to my radio show expressed surprise that big band was music still being made in 2026. Not only is it still being made; there is both a reverence for the swing of yesteryear and thoughtful and inventive departures on display in a spate of recent large ensemble releases.

Pianist **Ben Markley's *Tuesday Morning Feeling*** (Origin; ★★★½ 77:51) is an excellent case in point. Everything about this project feels classic. The blues inflection of the rhythm section. The vibrancy of the horn section. Fans of this sound will see it applied to Markley's interpretations and arrangements of Thelonious Monk's "Off Minor" and the standard "Old Folks." On the latter, trumpeter Terell Stafford offers one of the brightest moments of the record. It is an album stock full of veterans of the large ensemble space seizing the opportunity: trombonist Steve Davis on Markley's "Snowy Range Blues" and Steve Nelson on that tune and another original, "Tell The Truth." As a zoomer would say, the classic sound still gives.

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

Since its premiere performance in 2022, **Julia Keefe's *Indigenous Band*** has been helping us reconceive the notion of jazz as America's only indigenous art form. Comprising performers that are all descendants of the original custodians of this land, they debut with ***Incarnadine*** (Independent Release; ★★★½ 46:01). The title of the work means "to redden." This reddening is a frame for rethinking not only jazz, but what it means to live and be in a place where this music happened. The tunes tell broad stories of that being, with plenty of space to be taken in by Keefe's vocals. Sharing the composing responsibilities with other ensemble members, Keefe's leading evinces a kind of unity with each story showing the interconnectedness of us all.

Ordering info: [juliakeefe.com](http://juliakeefe.com)

Another take on indigeneity comes from trombonist **Javier Nero and his *Jazz Orchestra's Alkebulan*** (Outside In; ★★★★★ 64:37), titled after an ancient name for the continent of Africa. This record exudes the primal affect of the big band idiom even as it expresses the stylistic range of modern jazz orchestra. Layered between selections of original compositions are gorgeous arrangements of standards "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise" and "Devil May Care," which may have worked as the album's peak if there were not multiple peaks, like the guest appearances from trumpeter Sean Jones and vibraphonist Warren Wolf that happen early on. Nero produces a crisply delivered program that allows the listener to settle in and explore the possibilities of the orchestra form. And while it does not approach experimental territories, the ornate texture of each arrangement works as its own kind of experimentation.

Ordering info: [outsideinmusic.com](http://outsideinmusic.com)



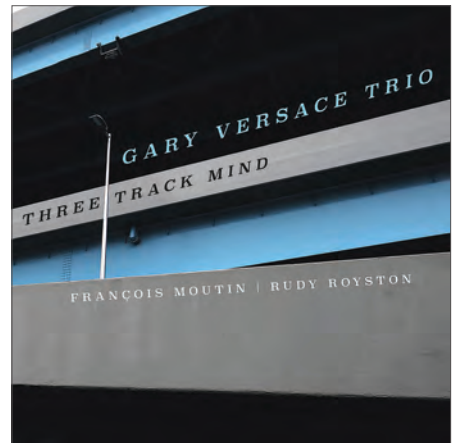
Julia Keefe reframes jazz as an "indigenous" art form with *Incarnadine*.

**Olivia Murphy's *Fateful Birds And Fledging Stories*** (Independent Release; ★★★½ 56:35) marks the arrival of band that operates in an experimental register. The U.K.-based conductor's debut is conceived as a narrative vehicle inspired by the behavior of birds as observed in literary and artistic modes. The music is itself reminiscent of flight and movement. The vocal arrangements place pressure and tension in just the right spaces. As vehicles for improvisation, Murphy's compositions are warm environments for solemn and sonic atmospheres that never dissipate. Each soloist resonates inside the narrative thrust that privileges what we might learn from those beings who populate the sky. One does not need the titles of each composition to gauge the value of transformation and growth and how beautiful it can be to observe such things.

Ordering info: [oliviamurahy.bandcamp.com](http://oliviamurahy.bandcamp.com)

If nothing else, ***Arakatak*** (V2; ★★★ 56:21) is a documentation of the paths tread by **Metropole Orkest** over the last several decades. Now under the leadership of Jules Buckley, the organization, which dubs itself a pop and jazz orchestra, has a definitive sound that has lent itself to powerful collaborations with leading figures in the music world. That sound may not be the most adventurous, but neither is it cocooned in the register of the average symphony orchestra. To celebrate its 80th anniversary, permanent guest conductor Miho Hazama leads the orchestra's interpretation of the music of eight composers, including works by Tineke Postma and Donny McCaslin. Highlights are Hazama's own "Splash The Colors" and another rendition of KNOWER's Louis Cole's "Doesn't Matter," previously released on their collaborative project, *nothing*. It is orchestral fare for listeners in search for groove, space and spirit. **DB**

Ordering info: [mo.nl](http://mo.nl)



### Gary Versace *Three Track Mind*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

Playing standards in a trio was the *raison d'être* for many pianists, yet it's a decision fraught with danger, as one decides to scale El Capitan; menaced by the abyss that swallows those who cannot summit to the impossibly high standard of legends who tread upon that hallowed, well-worn ground.

Into that rarefied air steps Gary Versace, the veteran pianist, organist and accordionist who has long earned the knowing admiration and respect from so many established players in the New York scene. Despite the aforementioned peril, he eschews a carefully planned footpath for an exhilarating frolic through seven standards and a few tuneful originals. No preplanned arrangements, intros or outros — and barely even the melodies — but the raw bones of the chordal and formal structures allow Versace and his able counterparts, bassist Francois Moutin and drummer Rudy Royston, to fill the gaps with spontaneous brilliance. They launch out of the gate with an abstracted but propellant rendition of "Doxy," displaying a quick-witted rapport between the three of them. Other long-standing chestnuts like "Stella By Starlight" and a variant of "All The Things You Are" are similarly deconstructed, held together only by the unbreakable bonds of superior musicianship.

It's a perfect vehicle for Versace to display his ferocious pursuit of inspiration, polished to a high-gloss sheen due to his prodigious technique and beautiful musical sensibilities. Here is a pianist worthy to carry the tradition of playing tunes through the rapidly changing landscape of creative improvised music — as far out and as long as he wants to go. —Gary Fukushima

**Three Track Mind:** Doxy; Autumn Leaves; Darn That Dream; Homeland; Stella By Starlight; All Our Things; In the Footsteps of Giants; Autumn Leaves (reprise); Turquoise; Walter Theodore. (60:11)  
**Personnel:** Gary Versace, piano; Francois Moutin, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)

## Turtle Island Quartet

### Island Prayers

AZICA

★★★★★

It's difficult not to think of the prolific, Grammy-winning Turtle Island Quartet as one of the few atop the music industry mountain with nothing to prove. Yet *Island Prayers* offers just the opposite: a scintillating revival of TIQ's original vision, performing artistic director/composer/founding violinist David Balakrishnan's works alongside those of jazz and American roots composers. On *Island Prayers* that includes Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, Rhiannon Giddens and Terence Blanchard.

Each piece bears intensity, delicacy and flexibility as needed, in order to reflect their unique stories and musical structures. The jovial bending of the melody in Blanchard's "Turtle Trajectory" underscores how well he knows what TIQ can do without missing a beat. The unified swells and recessions of chords in Balakrishnan's "Atonement" heighten the desire for reconnection. Tate's "Little Loksi" embraces TIQ's individual sonic strengths to impart the depths of panic and collective joy. *Island Prayers* thrills from every angle. It's as though the group realized their mountaintop isn't the end; that it goes higher, to even more musical interconnection. For this renewed journey, *Island Prayers* is a brilliant and inspired first step.

—Kira Grunenberg



**Island Prayers:** Island Prayers — I. Dialogue, II. Atonement, III. Redemption; Pompey Ran Away, Little Loksi; Turtle Trajectory, Darkness Dreaming, Groove in the Louvre. (55:49)

**Personnel:** Gabe Terracciano, violin; David Balakrishnan, violin, artistic director; Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola; Naseem Alatrash, cello.

**Ordering info:** [turtleislandquartet.com](http://turtleislandquartet.com)

## Matthew Stevens

### Matthew Stevens

CANDID

★★★★★

A distinctive voice among guitarists of his generation, Toronto-born Matthew Stevens makes a strong and lasting impression on his seventh release. Stevens demonstrates a chameleonic approach to his instrument as he deftly shifts from clean-toned, rhythmically precise attack on the driving, Afrobeat-flavored "Take Heart," featuring vibraphonist Joel Ross, to slight effects on the dreamy, Weather Report-ish "Hazy," to his pure steel string acoustic guitar sound on "SLMS," a haunting number featuring Corey King's ethereal falsetto vocals. Stevens emulates a Metheny-esque, delay-soaked sound on "1000 Times," then dials up some distortion lines on the meditative "Born Of Silence" before affecting a folk troubadour posture on the intimate "Alberta." He closes with a hip, neo-soul stance on "The Air Is Thick."

Perhaps the most soulful and moving track here is a stunning recreation of Sonny Sharrock's mesmerizing "Who Does She Hope To Be?" from 1991's *Ask The Ages*. With fellow Sharrock fan Jeff Parker on board as second guitar, and underscored by Carrington's alluring brushwork, this one ranks as one of Stevens' most depthful statements to date.

—Bill Milkowski



**Matthew Stevens:** Take Heart; Hazy (intro); Hazy; SLMS; 1000 Times; Edgewood; Who Does She Hope To Be?; Born of Silence; Alberta; The Air Is Thick. (45:00)

**Personnel:** Matthew Stevens, guitar; Chris Fishman, keyboard; Josh Johnson, alto saxophone; Kyle Miles, bass; Eric Doob, drums, percussion; Joel Ross, vibraphone (1, 10), Paulo Stanaro, percussion (1); Terri Lyne Carrington, drums (5, 7); Corey King (4), Anna B Savage (9), vocals; Jeff Parker, guitar (6, 7); Dylan Day, slide guitar (2, 3, 6, 8); Rich Hinman, pedal steel guitar (2, 3).

**Ordering info:** [candidrecords.com](http://candidrecords.com)

## Quinsin Nachoff

### Patterns From Nature

WHIRLWIND

★★★½

Quinsin Nachoff's *Patterns From Nature* is a mashup of "physics and film meets classical and jazz." The project was developed in conjunction with four filmmakers and physicist Stephen Morris, whose research involves pattern formation and where processes in nature and musical structure can meet. This blend of complex spaces feels overwhelming. However, there's a sweet spot that encourages repeated exploration of the album's creative and instrumental foundations.

Nachoff's focus on the idea of "architecture built for freedom" imparts a sense of direction to his 45-minute suite and the jagged harmonies of his 2017 saxophone concerto "Winding Tessellations." It's helpful to ground oneself in this "motto," as both works have stretches of amorphous musicality. On the title track, the scattered melodies feel manageable, even clever. Conversely, the disjointed instrumentals are much stronger on "Winding Tessellations," making it especially challenging to find a melodic anchor to grasp. *Patterns From Nature* does well to inspire reconsideration of sound, melody and the natural world but the music does call for some preemptive context to appreciate the work.

—Kira Grunenberg



**Patterns From Nature:** Patterns From Nature — I. Branches, II. Flow, III. Cracks, IV. Ripples; Winding Tessellations — I. Winding Paths, II. Convergence, III. Tessellations. (63:50)

**Personnel:** Quinsin Nachoff, tenor saxophone; J.C. Sanford, conductor; Roberta Michel, flute, piccolo, alto flute, bass flute; François Houle, clarinet; Sara Schoenbeck, bassoon; Tony Kadleck, trumpet; John Clark, French horn; Ryan Keberle, trombone; Aaron Edgcomb, percussion; Gene Hardy, musical saw; Matt Mitchell, piano; Carlo De Rosa, bass; Satoshi Takeishi, percussion; Molinari String Quartet: Olga Ranzenhofer, Antoine Bareil, violin; Frédéric Lambert, viola; Pierre-Alain Bouvrette, cello.

**Ordering info:** [whirlwindrecordings.com](http://whirlwindrecordings.com)

## Peter Erskine

### Peregrine

HARD WAG

★★★½

One of the things non-musicians most often misunderstand about virtuosity is that it's not only about being able to play a million notes per second; it can also be about knowing how to land just a few perfectly placed notes to make a groove come alive.

That's precisely where *Peregrine* starts, thanks to the lean, lazy vamp that introduces Alan Pasqua's "Gumbo Time." As drummer Peter Erskine's choked hi-hat ticks quietly in the background, Pasqua's piano unfolds a lithe blues, recalling Keith Jarrett at his churchiest. Scott Colley's bass plays off the left hand, moving from busy accompaniment to actual solo, until Pasqua takes over, gradually reframing the tune from gospel to hard-bop to polytonal modernism and back, a progression so subtle and effortless you might not even notice it on first hearing. It's not so much "look at me!" as "IYKYK."

Because it all goes down so smoothly, it would be easy to mischaracterize the music on *Peregrine* as middlebrow and predictable. Listen closely, though, and it's a master class in improvisational efficiency. Not only does every note count, but so do the spaces around them, with Erskine lightly sketching the pulse while Pasqua and Colley find the most melodic path through each chord progression. If only every virtuoso showed off so subtly.

—J.D. Considine



**Peregrine:** Gumbo Time; Bop Be; On the Lake; God Only Knows; Poetry Man; Chillipso; Wichita Lineman; Leaving IA; Contemplation; David's Blues; Dear Chick. (61:00)

**Personnel:** Peter Erskine, drums; Alan Pasqua, piano, electric piano; Scott Colley, bass; Kate Lamont, vocals (5); Bob Sheppard, saxophone (5, 7); Brian Kilgore, percussion (5).

**Ordering info:** [hardwagrecords.com](http://hardwagrecords.com)

# An Astonishing Data Dump

Ayman Fanous seems like a pretty interesting guy. He's a professor and the chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Arizona College of Medicine; he's also a clinical scientist who's spent decades working to uncover genetic risk factors for psychiatric illness, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. And/ but it would be easy to insert a lame joke about split personalities here, because Dr. Fanous is also an accomplished musician, performing and recording on guitar and bouzouki with a wide range of out-jazz and improvising/creative players, including violinist Mark Feldman, alto saxophonist Darius Jones, electronic musician Ikuo Mori, guitarist Bern Nix, accordion player Andrea Parkins, guitarist Elliott Sharp, tenor saxophonist Chris Speed and many others.

Fanous has released a few duo CDs in the past, including 2007's *Labyrinths*, with cellist Tomas Ulrich; 2013's *Zizal*, with violinist Jason Kao Hwang; 2019's *Negoum*, with cellist Frances-Marie Uitti; and 2025's *Zuhour*, with guitarist Joe Morris. But *Brooklyn Stories (Infrequent Seams; ★★★ 286:55)* is something else again: an astonishing data dump, delivering performances in a dozen different contexts recorded between 2013 and 2015, spread across five CDs.

The first disc documents a Richmond, Virginia, concert from September 2013 featuring bassist William Parker (who also plays wooden flute and bass duduk) and percussionist Tatsuya Nakatani. The whole thing runs about 68 minutes and journeys through a variety of moods. Fanous' guitar playing is somewhat Derek Bailey-ish, with lots of scrapes and pings and some percussive effects here and there, while Nakatani engages in highly abstract explorations of his kit, reminiscent of the work of Tony Oxley and Eddie Prévost. He rarely does anything so vulgar as hitting a drum with a stick, preferring instead to bow cymbals and shake chains. Parker is often silent, but when he contributes, whether by plucking or bowing or playing a flute, he adds a calming energy that gives the music weight and a central axis.

The second and third discs were recorded at Brooklyn's Firehouse Space on May 29, 2015, and feature — in order — duos with saxophonist Joe McPhee; a quartet featuring McPhee, violinist Jason Kao Hwang and Nakatani; a trio with pedal steel guitarist Susan Alcorn and Nakatani; and a trio with Alcorn and Ned Rothenberg, playing clarinet, alto saxophone and shakuhachi. Some of these encounters last just 10 minutes, while others may run a half hour or more. Consciously or unconsciously, McPhee, on tenor, seems to be quoting John Coltrane circa *Meditations*, inspiring gentle, almost classical figures from Fanous. But the encounters with Alcorn are some of the most eerily beau-



Ayman Fanous: Doctor by day, jazz adventurer by night.

tiful of the entire set. Her notes ring out like plucked barbed-wire fence running for miles through empty prairie, as Nakatani scrabbles and scratches behind her. And when the percussionist withdraws, and Rothenberg joins, the music seems to incarnate a kind of Big Sky Zen; it makes you want to lie in the grass and read the poetry of Jim Harrison.

The third and fourth discs were also recorded at Firehouse Space 24 hours later, and feature — in order — a duo with Rothenberg; a trio with Rothenberg and Nakatani; a trio with violinist Mark Feldman and cellist Tomas Ulrich; a quartet with Hwang, bassist James Igenfritz and Nakatani; and a trio with pianist Denman Moroney and Nakatani. Of this batch, the trio with Feldman and Ulrich is the most compelling. The three are speaking the same language from beginning to end; one player will offer a melodic thought that is instantly echoed and affirmed by the other two, or all three will decide on the same technical approach — all plucking in the same staccato manner at once, or all opting for half-atonal swirls and sweeps — and the sense of common purpose is so strong that it's difficult to believe they're not reading from a score.

One of the most revelatory things about this set is the facility with which Fanous switches from post-jazz improv when playing guitar to highly melodic, emotionally vivid Middle Eastern figures when playing bouzouki. He's almost two different people depending on which instrument he's got in his hands. But he's also a great collaborator — someone who not only listens carefully to what his fellow musicians are doing, but inspires them to greater creative heights. There's never a point across these nearly five hours of music when anyone involved falls back on rote licks or does the obvious thing. At the same time, the music never feels aimless or uncertain or misaligned. Somehow, everyone is telling the same story from first note to last. **DB**

Ordering info: [infrequentseams.bandcamp.com](http://infrequentseams.bandcamp.com)



## Gregory Uhlmann *Extra Stars*

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★

Gregory Uhlmann is a musical polymath who's moved between the post-bop of his early trio Typical Sisters and delicate, hyper-literate singer-songwriter terrain, but over time the distance between such endeavors has shrunk, with elements from disparate practices increasingly finding themselves colliding. The Chicago native has seemingly found a sweet spot years after moving to Los Angeles for school. Uhlmann famously plays in the elastic fusion quintet SML; his bandmates, including saxophonist Josh Johnson, keyboardist Jeremiah Chiu, bassist Anna Butters and drummer Booker Stardrum, all make cameos on *Extra Stars*, a solo recording that melts down ambient music, jazz harmony and pop tunefulness within a single, dreamy expanse.

*Extra Stars* is the product of years of studio tinkering, with Uhlmann using technology to translate his multifarious ideas and broad sonic palette into bespoke miniatures, each exploring very specific ideas without becoming merely schematic. On "Lucia," which includes guest Alabaster DePlume's conversational, vibrato-heavy tenor accenting a delicate lattice of cycling guitar arpeggios, sparse percussion, wobbly recorder and wan organ, we hear Uhlmann conjuring a warm, melodic cocoon. Even more fragile is "Days," a gauzy, reverb-drenched meditation, simple guitar patterns bearing a delicate, homey organ line. A terse vocal sample becomes a building block in "Voice Exchange," transforming a single tone into a pitch-shifted melody within a glistening, contrapuntal symphony of synthesizers. These tuneless vignettes establish his knack for mood setting, but it's anyone's guess where Uhlmann takes things next. —Peter Margasak

**Extra Stars:** Pocket Snail; View Above; Lucia; Like Tea; Days; Worms Eye; Burnt Toast; Dottie; Bristlecone; Voice Exchange; View Below; Back Scratch; Imprint; Sugar Water. (41:03)

**Personnel:** Gregory Uhlmann, guitar, bass, synthesizers, recorder, percussion, piano; Alabaster DePlume, tenor saxophone, voice (3); Anna Butters, bass (8); Josh Johnson, saxophone (8), effects (8); Jeremiah Chiu, synthesizers (10); Booker Stardrum, percussion (12).

Ordering info: [intlanthem.com](http://intlanthem.com)

## Willy Rodriguez *In The Unknown (I Will Find You)*

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★★

Drummer Willy Rodriguez has composed seven pieces for *In The Unknown* that explore a range of expressions; no two tunes are alike. Essentially a trio album, its theme is “loss, memory and spiritual connection,” specifically having to do with the death of Rodriguez’s mother.

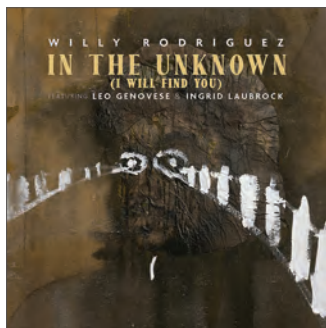
The title track is an appropriately haunting blend of floating toms, piano sprinkles and unison lines on tenor. “The Perplexity Of Eternity” kickstarts a more rock-like drone that sounds like someone seeking escape. “It’s Okay To Let Go” combines hearty tenor with sonic overlays in a drone of sorts that seeks, and finds, release. “A Room Full Of Confusion” gives us more haunting gestures with some exquisite piano work from Leo Genovese, a very lyrical then raucous Ingrid Laubrock again intertwining on tenor. “Where I Saw You Last” is the ambient center here, keyboard sonics floating front then rear, while “(The Route)” provides the album’s most asymmetrical tonalities, the music slow-moving, halting, Genovese’s piano stabs combining with Rodriguez’s probing punches. “Follow The Light” is a solo feature for Genovese’s organ. Its ethereal eeriness evokes a church in the sky.

—John Ephland

**In The Unknown (I Will Find You):** In The Unknown (I Will Follow You); The Perplexity Of Eternity; It’s Okay To Let Go; A Room Full Of Confusion; Where I Saw You Last; (The Route); Follow The Light. (42:06)

**Personnel:** Willy Rodriguez, drums; Ingrid Laubrock, tenor and soprano saxophones; Leo Genovese, piano, Hammond organ; Allan Harris, spoken word (2).

**Ordering info:** [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)



## Tumbao Bravo *Joy Of The Mambo*

GLOBAL PULSE

★★★★½

*Joy Of The Mambo* captures an exciting June 2024 show at a club in Ann Arbor, Michigan, by Tumbao Bravo, a sextet expert in Latin musical styles. While there’s mambo, rumba, cha cha, samba, even salsa, Paul Vornhagen and crew also include Herbie Hancock’s “Chan’s Son” and Tadd Dameron’s “On A Misty Night.” The set is well-paced, and much of the music is danceable, particularly “Rumba Espiritu” and “Gia No Cry.”

The rangiest track, “Rumba,” starts with Vornhagen’s mysterious ocarina, then spotlights his flute and Dave Rajewski’s cutting trumpet. On “Gia,” the band starts relaxed, but the tune gains power and drive as pianist Kurt Schreitmueller stretches out. The latter also impresses on “Theme For PVH,” which bassist Patrick Prouty wrote as a vehicle for Vornhagen’s burly tenor.

While versatility is a hallmark of Tumbao Bravo, so is variety, exemplified by Vornhagen. He blows hearty tenor on “Tres Hermanos,” subtle and jabbing flute on “Gratitude.” He’s judicious in choosing which instruments, including the rarely heard ocarina that announces “Firefly Mambo,” fit the tune. These fine players are masters of the jazz earworm.

—Carlo Wolff



## Gregory Hutchinson *Kind Of Now: The Pulse Of Miles Davis*

WARNER

★★★★½

As hinted by the title of Brooklyn-born, Rome-based Gregory Hutchinson’s intelligently conceived, beautifully executed second album, the 55-year-old drummer — joined by a pan-generational ensemble of similarly individualistic tonal personalities — mirrors the spirit of freshness that animated Miles Davis when he recorded the less-frequently covered repertoire interpreted herein. Hutchinson supports soloists Joe Sanders, Gerald Clayton, Ambrose Akinmusire and Ron Blake through sure-footed melodic declamations on “Ah-Leu-Cha” and sound paints a 21st-century matrix of rhythm timbre for guitarists Jakob Bro and Emmanuel Michael as they refract the trippy textures of “Bitches Brew” and “Feio.” The other six tracks give Hutchinson and company an opportunity to apply their granular investigations of compositions by Wayne Shorter and Tony Williams in Miles’ 1963–’68 era. An upper-echelon sideman for 38 years, Hutchinson has always targeted his deep dives into drum language of the masters he references on the fifth track towards ensemble imperatives, which perhaps accounts for his decision to allow his superb band to co-create this compelling album with him in the studio.

—Ted Panken

**Kind Of Now:** The Pulse of Miles Davis; Ah-Leu-Cha; Fran-Dance; Fall; Orbits; The Masters; Feio; Water Babies; Seven Steps to Heaven; Bitches Brew; Black Comedy; Ellencem’s Time; Circle In The Round; I’m Done. (57:20)

**Personnel:** Greg Hutchinson, drums; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Ron Blake, tenor saxophone; Jakob Bro, Emmanuel Michael, guitar; Gerald Clayton, piano; Joe Sanders, bass.

**Ordering info:** [gregoryhutchinson.lnk.to/kindofnow](http://gregoryhutchinson.lnk.to/kindofnow)



**Joy Of The Mambo:** Firefly Mambo; Tres Hermanos; Ritmo Bravo; Chan’s Song; Rumba Espiritu; Gia No Cry; Theme for PVH; On a Misty Night; Gratitude; Hey Pops. (60:56)

**Personnel:** Olman Piedra, timbales; Patrick Prouty, bass; Dave Rajewski, trumpet, fluegelhorn; Kurt Schreitmueller, piano; Armando Vega, congas; Paul Vornhagen, saxophones, flute, piccolo, ocarina, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [tumbaobravo.com](http://tumbaobravo.com)

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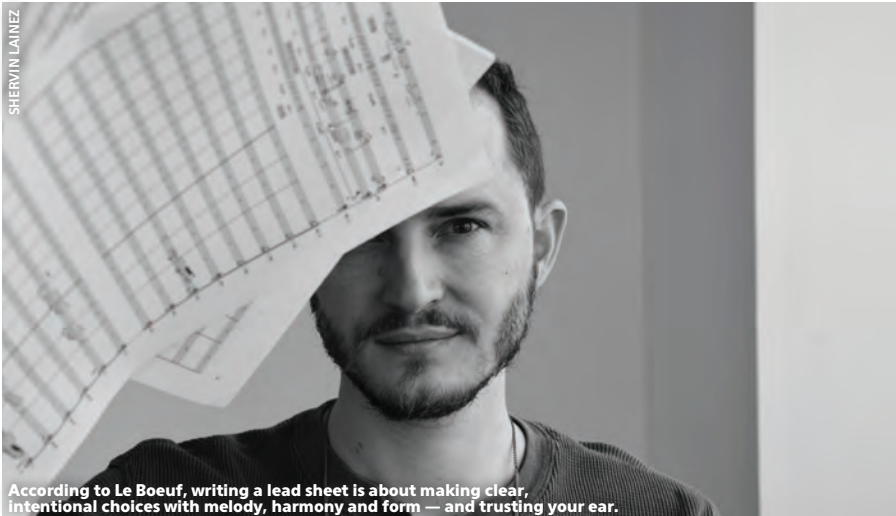
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According to Le Boeuf, writing a lead sheet is about making clear, intentional choices with melody, harmony and form — and trusting your ear.

# How to Craft a Strong Lead Sheet

A great composition, whether for a jazz orchestra or a trio, relies on three core elements: form, melody and harmony. Most of the time, it's that simple. Let's write a lead sheet together, so that we can better understand how the process works.

Let's start with a melody. A strong melody has a balance of thematic repetition and arc. "Happy Birthday" and "Pure Imagination" are familiar examples of melodies we all know that embody these principles. They take a rhythm and a melodic shape and repeat it, moving it around within a key. Can you think of other jazz standards that do this? Do you notice any patterns here? These patterns set up our listener's expectations, our own creative intuition, and are at the core of the jazz and Great American Songbook traditions.

Our melody involves two themes and some transitional notes with a little rhythmic adjustment. The melody reinforces these themes through a reasonable amount of repetition and provides an arc by moving them around diatonically in F major/D minor. See Figure 1.

Now let's add some chords. Focus on chords that contain the notes of the melody. For example, the first chord should contain an E and could be: C, A, Am, Am/C, Cmaj7, Dmaj9, Amaj7, Bm11, C#m7, F#m11, Am7, Gm13, Gm6/9, Bbmaj7#11, Eb7b9, Asusb9, etc. I recommend sitting at the piano and playing through different options. Composition is all about making choices — all you have to do is pick your favorite! Over time, you'll notice patterns

in the choices you make, and this is part of the process of developing your creative identity as a composer. For example, I tend to gravitate towards root motion that is stepwise or based on fourth/fifth movement. See Figure 2.

Notice how I left some space and variety in the chords. If you simply add a chord every measure, that consistency can be too predictable. Measures 3–4 give the piece some room to breathe. Bar 5 introduces a shift in the harmony with the addition of an Eb. This implies a departure from the established key and adds a little adventure to the journey of our melody. I added some hits at the end to build the energy, followed by some space for the rhythm section to fill in and set up the repeat back to the top.

Let's repeat the melody but add a second ending that leads into a bridge section. At this point I can see an AABA or AABC form working nicely. The bridge should go somewhere new and provide a shift in feel or harmony. The IV chord is a common landing point for a bridge (a.k.a. "Pure Imagination"). Another common place to go for a bridge is the relative minor ("My One And Only Love") or relative major ("My Funny Valentine"). We are in D minor/F major-ish territory here, so let's go to Bb major. See Figure 3.

The reharmonization in the 2nd ending adds build because of the chromatic bass motion leading into the bridge. It also combines something unfamiliar (new chords) with what is already familiar (the melody), making it engaging for the listener. Notice I extended the

melody at the end to build energy (higher register) and tension (B7b9b13), which we will resolve when arrive at the bridge.

We want the bridge to take us somewhere else. I often ask myself, "What haven't I explored yet that would add balance and contrast while also complementing the 'A' sections?" I decided that a pedal Bb in the bass would be nice here. This pedal nicely balances the "A" section by creating a sense of rest on a Bb for four bars, in contrast to the chord movement and active hits in the 2nd ending. See Figure 4.

Regarding the melody, the first note of the bridge is also the last note of the "A" section's melodic phrase. This makes the bridge transition smooth. Notice too that the first half of the bridge melody is built on the end of the extended "A" section phrase with all those A's and C's. Repetition reinforces this new melody.

To end the bridge, I at first used the same ending as the first "A" section, but I wanted some more excitement in the rhythm section, so I added more hits. I'm not using new melodic material here — the second half of the bridge is built on material from "Theme 1a."

While it isn't necessary, for the final "A" section (letter "C") I decided to reharmonize the melody further, add some anticipations in the rhythm section and extend the melody to more of a resolution. I felt it needed two extra bars of space before repeating back to the top for solos — this allows the listener to recover after the business of the hits and gives the first soloist a window to jump into the spotlight. I delayed the very last hit to surprise the listener, since we established an expectation with the rhythmic pattern, thus creating more anticipation, tension and a powerful resolution. Rather than notating the hits above the fourth and fifth bars, I just wrote accents with chords — in my experience, this is plenty clear as far as lead sheet notation goes. See Figure 5.

Our draft is complete, but we aren't done. Now that we have a big-picture sense of the song, we can make further adjustments as we see fit. Starting the song on beat 1 feels a bit basic. Let's add a pickup! I chose this one because it gives the phrase a nice, clean symmetry. See Figure 6.

Now we need an ending. It could end as is, but here is a coda and an opportunity to get the drummer more involved. It is, more or less, a "tag" as is typical in jazz. Because the rhythm is repeated, I decided to reharmonize the hits each time to provide more arc and build. Bringing the melody up an octave the last time makes the ending more powerful. See Figure 7.

Figure 8 shows our full song in its completed form. Notice that I changed several chords

and added a second horn part. Ultimately, writing a lead sheet is about making clear, intentional choices with melody, harmony and form — and trusting your ear to guide you from one decision to the next. **DB**

Composer-saxophonist Remy Le Boeuf ([remyleboeuf.com](http://remyleboeuf.com)) is Director of Jazz and Commercial Music Studies at the University of Denver. He is the founder of the jazz orchestra Assembly of Shadows, Chief Conductor of the Nordkraft Big Band and co-leader of Le Boeuf Brothers.

**Figure 1**

Figure 1 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time. The first staff contains 'Theme 1a' (measures 1-4), 'transitional material' (measures 5-6), and 'Theme 1b' (measures 7-8). The second staff contains '1b Fragment' (measures 9-10), 'transitional material' (measures 11-12), and 'Theme 1a (shortened)' (measures 13-14).

**Figure 2**

Figure 2 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with the following chords: D-9, BbA7, G-, Eb/G, D-/F, F#7, G-7, EbA9#11.

**Figure 3**

Figure 3 shows two sections of musical notation. Section A (measures 1-4) has chords D-9, BbA7, G-. Section B (measures 5-14) has chords Eb/G, D-/F, F#7, G-7, EbA9#11, D-7, C#7, C-13, B7(13).

**Figure 4**

Figure 4 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with the following chords: BbA7, A/Bb, BbA7, A7#9/Bb, G-6, F-/Ab, B-11, B-7, F#9/A, EbA13.

**Figure 5**

Figure 5 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with the following chords: D-9, F/A, G-7/A, C-7/Eb, D7, Bb-/Db, D6+47, C-11, B7(13), BbA9#11, C-11, A-7, D#9#4.

**Figure 6**

Figure 6 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with the following chords: D-9, BbA7, G-7.

**Figure 7**

Figure 7 shows a melodic line in 4/4 time with the following chords: BbA9#11, F-/Ab, Drum Fill..., F#7, G-7, Drum Fill..., EbA9#11.

**Figure 8**

Figure 8 is a lead sheet for the piece 'PIECE BY PIECE' by Remy Le Boeuf. It features four sections: A, B, C, and D. Section A (measures 1-4) has chords D#9#4, D-, G-/D, G-/D. Section B (measures 5-14) has chords D-9, BbA7, BbA7/A, A7/Bb, EbA9#11, D-7, C#7, C-11, B7(13). Section C (measures 15-24) has chords BbA7, A/Bb, BbA7, A7#9/Bb, G-6, F-/Ab, B-11, Bb7, F#9/A, EbA9#11. Section D (measures 25-34) has chords D-9, F/A, G-7/A, C-/Eb, D7, Bb-/Db, D6+47, C-11, B7(13), BbA9#11, C-11, A-7, D#9#4. The piece concludes with a 'Solo over ABCD then D.C. al Coda' section and a final section with chords B-11, C-11, A7#9, and EbA9#11.



Weber's solo is played out of time and beneath a drone.

# Eberhard Weber's Bass Solo on 'Later That Evening'

Eberhard Weber's 1982 album *Later That Evening* (ECM), for me, is a perfect record. I can listen to it from beginning to end and not find a single thing I would change. The focus is on the music more than any one individual (and the sidemen are all great musicians), which means not much bass soloing. But for the final movement, the album's title track, Weber does open with a gorgeous bass improvisation. In fact, he's the only one who gets a "solo" on this track.

It's played rubato, with no set meter. I

struggled with how to present it. Since the final melody is in 9/8, I'd thought of transcribing the entire thing in that meter. But Weber's playing before the piano enters sounds to me like he's not thinking in any meter, so I decided to go without a time signature, and also without bar lines. This, to me, presents Weber's playing more as it sounds but will make it more difficult to reference things in this article. And, as for reading through it, better to listen and imitate Weber than to spend time counting out my approximations.

When the piano enters (I'm calling that measure 1), it sets up the sense of 9/8, but the time is still elastic. Don't think of the rhythms as precise. They're still just my best representation of them.

Back to the previous bit. Weber's playing reminds me of the *alaap* that opens up a piece in Indian classical music: It's out of time, over a drone, and Weber takes his time exploring the pitches we're going to hear. We seem to be in the key of C (and when the piano enters it verifies that), but the reed-and-guitar drone is

ambiguous, especially since Weber is playing underneath them; his low notes can change our perception of the chords. For instance, notice how when he lands on those A $\flat$ 's and holds them it can make the harmony sound less like C and more like A $\flat$ maj7(#11). And other notes can create the sense of chord changes even though the upper drone hasn't changed. It's kind of like that optical illusion where the image can look like two different things depending on how you're seeing it, only done with sound (and he's leading us to hear it in certain ways, rather than us having to do it ourselves).

And even though Weber uses all of the notes of the chromatic scale in this intro, he doesn't appear to be doing it randomly, or just running them like passing tones. He's using them to create sounds against this drone, often exploring sounds we're going to hear later when the chords come in. For example, we hear a Cmaj7 sound in the second line after the initial low F, but it's telling that Weber bookends it with E naturals, a note that's missing from the drones. After the next note (G) he implies an Fmaj7, but then ends it off on an A $\flat$  note. This makes a lot of sense when we look at the next section, where Cmaj7, Fmaj7 and A $\flat$ maj7 all figure prominently. Weber appears to be alluding to the sounds that are coming up.

Even subtler: In the seventh line we get the implication of a D chord. D doesn't show up as a chord in the following section, but in measure 18, on the Am/D, Weber plays the first five notes of a D major scale. Notice the symmetry: Weber waited almost three-quarters of the way through the first section to introduce an F $\sharp$ , and then waits a similar amount before bringing it into the "B" section. Since in the second part this note was somewhat dependent on the chord changes, I suspect it was a matter of Weber tailoring his opening statement to reflect how he expected his second bit to go.

As evidence to this theory, I present the following: Four measures before this D sound in the second half (bar 14), Weber opens on a G natural that he leads to from an F $\sharp$  pick-up. A similar distance before the F $\sharp$  gets emphasized in the opening section, we hear Weber do the same thing. Was he consciously aware that he was doing this? I doubt we can ever know for certain, but I'd contend that it doesn't matter. It sounds great regardless.

Looking at the "B" section, we can see why Weber used the entire chromatic scale for the intro. He could've gotten away with just a C major scale, or something similar. But though the "B" part does start quite squarely in C ionian, the A $\flat$ maj7 and D $\flat$ maj7 create a pseudo-modulation to A $\flat$ , altering four of the notes from C major. Between these two scales

we have all the notes of the chromatic scale with the exception of F $\sharp$ . Am/D's implication of a D9 gives us that, or rather, Weber placing the F $\sharp$  on that chord creates the sense of D mixolydian. So even though he's not playing against these harmonies in the intro, Weber does set our ears up for them, which is sort of how an *alaap* works as well. This isn't to imply

that Weber has any knowledge of Indian classical music (maybe he does), but more that a good sound works no matter what genre it's placed into. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist, bassist and educator based in the New York area. He can often be witnessed performing, rehearsing, teaching or pontificating online at [twitch.tv/coincidencemachine](https://twitch.tv/coincidencemachine). Find out more about Durso's music at [jimidurso.bandcamp.com](https://jimidurso.bandcamp.com).

The image shows a musical score for a piece in 8/8 time, starting with a tempo marking of 'rubato'. The score is written in bass clef and features a chromatic scale introduction. The score is divided into sections with first and second endings marked with (S1) and (S2). The chords are indicated by symbols above the notes, including C(sus2), Am/D, Am7, Fmaj7, A $\flat$ maj7, D $\flat$ maj7, and Cmaj7. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like '8va'.

# Jamcorder MIDI Piano Recorder

## *Powerful Passive Device that Archives Everything You Play*

Ever had the experience of playing your instrument when a) the vibe and the stars and your fingers align perfectly, b) you unexpectedly knock out something brilliant, and c) when you go to write it down or reproduce it ... it's just kinda gone?

As improvisational musicians, I think we've all been there. That's why I got excited when I first learned about Jamcorder.

Jamcorder is a cute little baby-blue box that plugs into your keyboard, or other MIDI-enabled instrument, via old-school MIDI plug or USB-A connector. (The device also needs to be plugged into a power source via USB-B.) Once you install Jamcorder, you forget about it, and that's when the magic happens. Jamcorder passively records as MIDI data everything you play — up to 25,000 hours via the included 16GB memory card — so if your random 3AM noodling turns into something beautiful, you can revisit it with ease.

For any musician who composes based off of improvisational inspiration, or who wants to become a more meticulous examiner of their own practice sessions, Jamcorder has the potential to be a game changer. It's good that the device works as advertised.

My setup at home is based around a Yamaha Silent Piano, an acoustic piano that can be fully muted, listened to via headphones, and used as a MIDI-transmitting electric keyboard. Installing Jamcorder with the Silent Piano was simple and intuitive; it took maybe five minutes to plug in the device, download the Jamcorder app on my phone and sync the two so MIDI data could be shared easily via Bluetooth. Jamcorder gives a brief digital chirp when you turn it on and an LED shows you that it's working. Then it does its job, silently archiving everything you play.

It felt fun and exciting to play something funky on the piano with Jamcorder doing what it does, and then open the app on my phone and see my playing displayed in piano roll format. It was also cool to listen back with the app's surprisingly good synthesized piano tone, isolate snippets of my playing that I liked and export those selections for further use.

I used this workflow to record several solo piano pieces that I've since mixed, mastered and used for a variety of projects. To start each time, I casually sat down and played until I got something that felt good, whether that took seconds, minutes or longer. Then I went into the Jamcorder app on my phone to isolate whatever section of MIDI I wanted to work with. I Airdropped the resulting file from my phone to my laptop, imported it into Logic, paired it with my favorite solo piano software synthesizer and finished producing it from there.

The psychological ease of just being able to play freely, whenever and however, and knowing that anything I liked was safely stored and available — that was a new experience, and one that felt uniquely freeing.

In my ongoing use of Jamcorder, I love how easy it is to bookmark my playing as I go. Hitting the top three black notes of the keyboard in quick succession, before or after I play something I like, causes Jamcorder to mark the timestamp. A day/week/month later, I can jump to my bookmarked session without having to sift through hours of MIDI data to find it again.

The Jamcorder app has interesting additional functions. You can transpose and edit the volume of your MIDI performance if you like, or upload an .sf3 Soundfont for a different playback piano tone. If you want to export a performance not just as MIDI but as audio or even video, you can do so (colorful video effects are in Beta at the time I'm writing this review). None of these features were core to my use of Jamcorder, but I

like that there's another layer of functionality to explore as I keep using the device.

My one issue with Jamcorder is minor, and it's related to hardware connectivity. To make the device work, it needs two inputs: one for power, and one for MIDI data from your instrument. It would make everyday usage and cable management easier to have power and data flow through the same single port. Perhaps this is something future iterations of Jamcorder can address.

It's clear that Jamcorder was thoughtfully engineered with a creative musical workflow in mind. I imagine inventor Chip Weinberger wanted to make his device as transparent, functional and easy-to-use as possible. He deserves credit for creating something that can smoothly open artistic doors for a wide variety of musicians.

Jamcorder does exactly what it says it does without getting tweaky or precious about it. I mean this as a high compliment. Having already found it helpful for several projects and recordings, I expect to use it for many more.

—Michael Gallant

[jamcorder.com](http://jamcorder.com)



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More info: [woodwinddesign.com](http://woodwinddesign.com)

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More info: [yamaha.com](http://yamaha.com)

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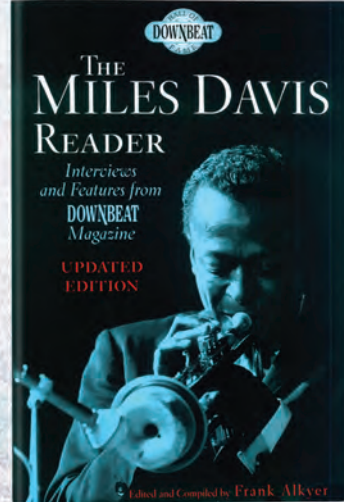
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"I'll always keep the jazz harmonic side in my music because I could never go all the way and be a straight smooth-jazz guy," says Warren Wolf of his groove-oriented music.

# SMOOVE VIBES: WARREN WOLF'S DIY GROOVE

March 2020: Less than 24 hours before Baltimore residents begin sheltering in place, Warren Wolf is preparing for his studio date when he gets a call from his piano player. He won't make the session.

Proximity to the other players is just too dangerous.

Around midnight that night, Wolf weighed

his options. His mind was scrolling through available pianists when he had a thought:

"You know, I play piano very well. I'll just do

it myself." That moment of resolve would spark the creation and September 2020 release of *Christmas Vibes*, one of his five albums for Mack Avenue Records.

Six years later, the vibraphone master and multi-instrumentalist would refine and expand what he started during the pandemic, prompting the self-produced April 2026 release of *SMOOVE VIBES*, his 10th leader album. "All of this leads back to the COVID years," says Wolf, who, like so many artists, played countless remote sessions during lockdown. Back then, he'd spend hours on the phone with his friends, drummer Lee Pearson and trumpet player Darren Barrett. "They started hipping me to the audio game of self-recording at home."

For this project, whose title traces its origins to a conversation with bassist Vicente Archer, Wolf sought an invitational energy. "My goal lately, with a lot of recordings, is for people to be able to listen to the music without intently having to study it," he says. "I want them to just be able to put it on and say, 'This feels good.'"

Groove persists, but so do harmonic tensions and searing solos. "I'll always keep the jazz harmonic side in my music because I could never go all the way and be a straight smooth-jazz guy," says Wolf. "I go from playing with Christian McBride & Inside Straight, which is traditional swing, to a group like the SFJAZZ Collective, which is completely modern, to Aaron Diehl, which is a mix of classical and jazz, to Etienne Charles to Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center. And I try to take all those styles and put them into one. So when I'm creating these tracks, I know from the very beginning what I want this music to sound like and how it's supposed to flow."

Wolf worked through two originals and six songs from a range of influential composers, including Cesar Camargo Mariano's "Fábrica," Ramsey Lewis' "Sun Goddess," "Some Skunk Funk" from the Brecker Brothers and "Yesterday" from Paul McCartney and John Lennon. Beginning with a muted bass or classic fretless patch, he tracked every song in his basement studio via Logic Pro X, performing vibraphone, marimba, piano, Fender Rhodes, Hammond B-3, drums, vocals and all sampled material himself. He then convened a session with Brandon Lane on electric bass, Brent Birkhead on alto saxophone, flute and vocals, Terrence Cunningham on organ, Elan Trotman on soprano saxophone and Imani-Grace Cooper on vocals.

How Lane was able to create a consistent feeling of live energy between his bass and Wolf's recorded drums is a testament to the bassist's skill and artistry. "He was very quick and professional about it," says Wolf. "He doesn't play traditional upright bass



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like most jazz players, but he has a serious jazz background as well as playing R&B and funk."

A studio practice Wolf has leaned into as he's developed his producer muscle is recording to click, as he does on Greg Howe's "Contigo," delivering a montuno-fueled drum feature inspired by his hero Dennis Chambers. He admits the method is controversial. "[It] totally goes against 95 percent of jazz recordings," he says. "When I talk to a lot of people about using the click, they don't want to do that — and I totally get it. They want the music to feel more organic. They don't want to be locked into something."

slow like that," he says, "but I wanted to include those elements of gospel music in there, still making it jazzy."

Apart from its obvious Eminem reference, "Will The Real Kenny Gee Please Stand Up" serves as a dual homage. "Both Kenny G's — Kenny G and Kenny Garrett — they are two of my favorite artists," says Wolf. Kenny G was one of the first artists he experienced live. "I actually picked up a couple of records where he's playing some music by Outkast," says Wolf. "I've seen some videos where he's playing 'Giant Steps.'"

And as a young artist living in Boston, Wolf remembers purchasing Garrett's

*'I want to reach more people. As the years go by, I want to continue to get on a higher ground, like a Herbie or a Chick Corea-ish person.'*

But in recent years, Wolf has taken opportunities to explore the method in different contexts. During an ensemble session in 2025, he was the only artist in the studio recording to click, which led to some emotional responses among his fellow artists. "It's a certain skill to know how to do it," he says, "to be able to be a natural musician and do the things that you can do [while having] this beat in your ears. So we had a few tiffs in the studio about that but eventually we got it done."

That same year, he played on Mauricio Morales and Adam Hersh's *Between Dreams & Twilight*, which features a string quartet. According to Wolf, the artists recorded the entire album to click. "I think it was planned out because we had certain sections with shifting meters," he says. "They knew what they wanted to do beforehand. Kind of like me with this record. I knew exactly what I wanted to hear." Over time, Wolf has adopted an attitude of "click and let click": "This is no shade to anybody: I'm certainly used to recording without a click, that's totally fine. But when it comes to my own projects, I just like for everything to be nice and steady and even."

Inspired in part by D'Angelo's xennial anthem "Untitled (How Does It Feel)," Wolf's original song "First Kisses" transmits young romance nostalgia through a slow 3/4, with Cooper interpreting his original lyrics. "I decided to do something nice and

1999 Warner Records release *Simply Said* on CD. "You hear this blazing beat from Chris Dave," he says, "and then the thumping bass from Marcus Miller, and Shedrick [Mitchell] comes in with the organ. The entirety of that record gave me the idea to do a record like this one. He's still playing jazz; he's just doing something different."

For this song in particular, Wolf knew he wanted and needed Trotman's alto. "I used him because he has certain similarities between both Kenny G and Kenny Garrett. People say, 'There's only one Kenny G and that's Kenny Garrett.' So I decided to write a song I could easily hear both of them playing." [laughs]

*SMOOVE VIBES* creates a groove-centered mosaic of Wolf's musical influences, but the release means much more to him than a feel-good record.

"I want to reach more people," he says. "As the years go by, I want to continue to get on a higher ground, like a Herbie or a Chick Corea-ish person. When [Herbie] came out, he was playing a lot of straightforward jazz. But then, eventually, as the years went on, going from the Headhunters to the other groups, he went from straightforward jazz to avant garde-ish rock music to playing funk, and then he came out with hits in the '80s. And now Herbie Hancock is who he is, and I wanted to model my career after that. I guess the point of this record is that when you hear everything, it's smooove." —Stephanie Jones

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MICHAEL JACKSON

"Roy truly sang through the instrument and didn't feel the need to play every note known to man, not because he couldn't," says Connor Bernhard of Roy Hargrove, who he pays tribute to on his new album, *Pathways*.

# CAP'N CONNOR & HIS MANY TALENTS

When Connor Bernhard first walked into a photo shoot, there was a bit of skepticism. There hasn't been a flame-haired trumpet star since Red Rodney or Brad Goode (who's still very active).

Bernhard is not as well known yet. The question becomes, does he have the goods? But with a Roy Hargrove recording playing in the background, Bernhard puts everything

in place. Recognizing Hargrove's sound, he plays along, note-for-note. "That's the duo with Mulgrew Miller," he said, referring to Hargrove's 2006 date at Merkin Hall. Yup.

Bernhard pays heartfelt tribute to Hargrove on "Lament For Roy" from his sophomore self-release, *Pathways*. He talked about the influence of Hargrove's RH Factor, his horn arrangements on D'Angelo's *Voodoo* and his musicality. "Roy truly sang through the instrument and didn't feel the need to play every note known to man, not because he couldn't," Bernhard said.

Bernhard he has chops to burn, but the quality of his writing indicates a fully rounded musician. Case in point: the epic "Bourdain's Final Tour" from *Altitude*, his cracking 2020 debut.

"I wrote that on the boat when I first learned Anthony Bourdain had died," recalled Bernhard. The vessel in question was one of several he skips on the Chicago River, where he transports tourists on architectural tours. "The ostinato bass line suggests continuous travel, movement, the journey." But then the track opens into an extended free section. "That's about taking flight, being prepared for the unpredictable, plus the mental health struggles Bourdain battled. His life seemed glamorous but he hid his loneliness."

Bernhard's tunes aren't all elegies. One that he dedicated to Claudio Roditi reflects the late Brazilian trumpeter's sunny, unpretentious approach. "There was no diarrhea of notes with Claudio" he said. "His music was bright, melodious, danceable."

Bernhard absorbed secrets to the lilt and intricacies of groove through such colleagues as trombonist/singer Mark Bettcher and, more formatively, legendary educator Ron Carter at Northern Illinois University. "Ron stressed music should instill enjoyment, yet was serious about the tenets of swing, jazz history all the way back through blues, gospel and West African drum circles, the honoring of its progenitors."

Bernhard's own music is infectiously buoyant, preferring a 3-over-4 or 4-over-3 sensibility, as evidenced on "Jackalope," the 12/8 opener to *Pathways*, which imagines the lopsided gait of the folkloric pronghorn jackrabbit. Inner triplet rhythms occur on the track "Struttin'," too.

Another challenging head on the new album is the bruising postbopper "Altitude," which doesn't feature on the album of the same name. "It's a running joke," he said. "A composition called 'Pathways' will be on my next album but not on this one!"

Though his two quintet records were released five years apart, Bernhard called on pianist Julius Tucker for both sessions (check Tucker's nimble solo on "Moo The Moose," named for the Bernhard family dog) and drummer Clif Wallace.

"I was blown away by Julius' happy-go-lucky attitude," he said. "Clif swings harder than most, listens more and really interacts with a soloist."

Guitarist Jeff Swanson serves as crucial accomplice, given that Bernhard is also a serious guitarist (his first instrument from age 7). "Jeff studied with Fareed Haque a few years ahead of me and has that technical proficiency," Bernhard said. "He hangs with intense harmony and hard swing."

Bernhard's lessons with Haque would last three or four hours, then he'd be left to chew on what he'd learned for several months; concurrently, he learned a lot from trumpeter Art Davis at NIU, eventually completing his studies under trumpeter Victor Garcia at Chicago's Roosevelt University.

Turning to teaching himself of late, Bernhard has been associate band director at Oswego High School in Aurora, Illinois, for the past two years. His merchant mariner obligations aren't as demanding during the school year, he noted. "Evenings With Linnea," incidentally, references the name of one of the boats he captains. He wrote the plaintive ballad, a feature for Evan Salvacion Levine's dancing bass, while practicing aboard ship after completing cleanup, safety and mechanical drills with his crew, bouncing his sound off downtown skyscrapers along the Chicago River.

While growing up in Wisconsin, Bernhard

was mesmerized watching the ferryboat cross the Door Peninsula. As a neurodivergent kid, he could soon recognize any vessel by the sound of its exhaust. Now he'll routinely combine skills steering water taxis and boats up to 100 tons by day, then throw down evening sets at clubs like the popular Windy City jazz venue Andy's.

Despite his talent for composition, Bernhard is not averse to revamping tested repertoire, which on *Pathways* includes Bobby Timmons' "Dat Dere," the existential country classic "Wichita Lineman" and the 1930 standard "Three Little Words." The latter he learned in knee pants from a Jamey Aebersold play-along volume kicking around the basement, the legacy of his father's days as a saxophone player before he became a lawyer to support the family.

"Apparently, when I was too tiny to remember, I used to insist, grunting and pointing, that my dad practice his saxophone for me, which he eventually had to let go as a serious proposition."

Meantime the son balances several careers, yet there's no questioning his musical ambitions. Freelancing prolifically, Bernhard works with, among others, the Clif Wallace Big Band, The Shout Section and the funk

band Zoo Funk You, as well as a nonet called New Nostalgia led by saxophonist Neil Carson. "Neil's a meticulous arranger: we do a reharmonization of Tracey Chapman's 'Fast Car' that you would barely recognize," he insisted. "It's ingenious."

The steady group he intends to record with next, this time focusing on his guitar playing, is The Chicago Experiment: an organ trio featuring Andrew "Larry" Lawrence and drummer Zack Marks.

Back in the photo studio, more music drops. Without checking personnel, Bernhard thinks the alto player might be Eric Dolphy. It turns out to be the relatively obscure Sonny Red. Nevertheless Bernhard, a surefire Blindfold Test candidate, nails the trumpet player — "Kenny Dorham: that unfettered, no nonsense style," he announced, after jamming along.

Bernhard describes his curly hair as blonde: "dirty blonde, but it gets a little redder in the sun," he admitted, "reflecting my Irish [and Lithuanian/French/German] ancestry."

Whatever. At 33, we won't say he's "grounded," given his floating lifestyle. But he's a star on the rise, a self-made triple threat with his trumpet, guitar and composing chops. Full steam ahead!  
—Michael Jackson

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"You know, we're not just putting things out because we have to — it's all music that we really enjoy listening to and people we really enjoy working with," says Out of Your Head's Scott Clark, left, with label partner Adam Hopkins.

# OUT OF YOUR HEAD AND INTO YOUR EARS

Is it weird that so much of the most forward-looking jazz being made in Brooklyn is being released on a label based in Richmond, Virginia?

Perhaps, but it's undeniably the case. Our story begins in 2018, when bassist Adam Hopkins was living in Brooklyn and preparing his debut album, *Crickets*. "I guess there were a couple of labels that I could have seen my music being on, but I don't think those labels had any interest in putting out my music because they didn't know who I was," he recalls. "So instead of doing the whole thing of pitching labels and all that, I decided it'd be cool to start a label."

The label he started, Out of Your Head Records, carried on the name of a music collective Hopkins and friends had run in Baltimore beginning in 2009. He got encouragement from a friend and neighbor, saxophonist Tim Berne, who had been running his own Screwgun imprint for decades. "I called Tim and just said, 'Hey, I'm thinking about starting a record label; do you have any advice?' And I went to his house and he basically just said, 'You should do it and just figure out how you do it along the way,' so that's what we've been doing since then."

Hopkins and his wife bought a house in Richmond, Virginia, just as Out of Your Head launched, and brought Scott Clark in as a creative and business partner. "I had known Scott for years before then from doing tour-

ing bands. ... If you were gonna do a concert in Richmond, Scott's the person you called. And it just seemed we had a lot of the same sort of ideas and approach to putting out records. So we teamed up pretty much from the beginning with the curation of the label."

Clark and Hopkins are of one mind in regard to the philosophy behind Out of Your Head, and in their reasons for being involved in avant-garde jazz and improvised music. "It's all stuff that we like a lot, and I think that's the the crux of it," Clark says. "You know, we're not just putting things out because we have to: It's all music that we really enjoy listening to and people we really enjoy working with."

Another key member of the team is artist TJ Huff. Although Out of Your Head releases don't have a uniform look (like the work of a label like Tzadik or Screwgun), Clark says, "they all kind of have a similar [visual] vibe because they all get filtered through his eyes, even though the musicians have input and they're able to work closely with him. I think the fact that we're able to do this all in-house, the identity just gets filtered through us."

The Out of Your Head catalog spans a broad range of ensembles and sounds; the label has released everything from solo perfor-

mances (cellist Christopher Hoffman's *REX*, flutist Laura Cocks' *FATHM*) to string quartets (the Hemphill Stringtet's *Plays The Music Of Julius Hemphill*) to large ensembles (the Webber-Morris Big Band's *Unseparate*). What unites albums as disparate as these — say, Adam O'Farrill's *ELEPHANT*, Tomeka Reid's *dance! skip! hop!* or Tomas Fujiwara's *Dream Up* — is a focus on composed music and unexpected combinations of instruments.

O'Farrill's band has relatively conventional instrumentation — trumpet, piano, bass and drums — but the addition of synthesizer and electronic effects on the horn takes it into a more adventurous realm. Reid's album is the fourth by her long-running quartet with guitarist Mary Halvorson, bassist Jason Roebke and Fujiwara on drums. Meanwhile, *Dream Up* showcases Fujiwara's Percussion Quartet, with Tim Keiper on a range of African instruments, Kaoru Watanabe on Korean instruments and Patricia Brennan on vibraphone.

Out of Your Head has also balanced physical releases — CDs and vinyl — with digital-only albums. During the pandemic, the label launched the Untamed series to showcase DIY music, and in 2025 it created Beacons, a series focused on entirely improvised live performances, often by one-off or first-time aggregations of musicians.

Most Out of Your Head releases are by new groups, but Reid's two previous albums appeared on Cuneiform. Hopkins explains, "We know Steve [Feigenbaum] from Cuneiform pretty well; you know, he's in D.C./Baltimore and we're in Richmond. The main reason that Tomeka wanted to do that is because she did want it on some streaming services, and Cuneiform generally doesn't do that."

Clark adds, "I've always seen it as, most everybody is just working, you know? So if someone is wanting to put out a record and they ask us, then I think, we just want the music to be out there just as much as they do. We're both working musicians, and we kind of come at it in that way: Honestly, all the records that we put out, we really believe in, and the artists are people that we believe in and care about and whose music we've been following for a really long time."

After close to a decade, the label has become recognized as a good home for adventurous jazz, and its founders are now working on a longer timeline than when they started. Clark says, "Adam and I were joking not long ago that we're kind of caught up and able to start planning a little bit further out; I think we're getting lucky enough that we're having some people reach out to us more and more [and] that we can kind of tell them, well, you know, we're full for this year, but we can start looking at early 2027 now. That kind of stuff has been nice, to feel like we're not constantly trying to catch up. We already have a couple releases for 2027 on the radar."

—Phil Freeman

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featuring Steve Arnold & Jordan Shimmy  
RED RHINOCEROS  
MULTIVERSAL LIVE AT BOP STOP  
STEPHEN PHILIP HARVEY JAZZ ORCHESTRA  
Bobby Selvaggio

**New & Upcoming Releases**

Golden Hour - Stephen Philip Harvey (HCR 2603) (August 21, 2026)

Where We Started - Aidan Plank (HCR 2602) (April 24, 2026)

Red Rhinoceros - Bobby Selvaggio (HCR 2601) (March 27, 2026)

Multiversal Live at Bop Stop - Stephen Philip Harvey Jazz Orchestra (HCR 2501) (August 22, 2025)

Hidden Cinema Records (HCR) is a boutique record label that produces and distributes new and exciting jazz and jazz-influenced music from the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

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**MA:Q**  
WHEN THE LIGHT COMES TO PLAY

MA:Q is the brainchild of Mary Ancheta (composer, keyboardist). The group will open for The Headhunters at the Montreal Jazz Festival this summer.

The new album deals with the transitional state between waking and sleeping and features Mike Stern on "20 Feet From the Street".

[maryanchetamusic.bandcamp.com](http://maryanchetamusic.bandcamp.com)

Siril Malmedal Hauge & Kjetil Mulelid  
I Remember Oranges

**SIRIL MALMEDAL HAUGE & KJETIL MULELID**  
I REMEMBER ORANGES  
MAY 5

ESPEN BERG  
BASKIN KREMER-POLLAN  
SMON ALBERTSEN

**ESPEN BERG TRIO**  
ENTROPIES  
JUNE 5

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# a decade of EXCELLENCE



Congratulations to our students and faculty on earning 12 DownBeat Student Music Awards in 2026 and 79 Student Music Awards in the past ten years!

## 2026 DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC AWARD WINNERS

### **Jazz Soloist WINNER**

Community College  
Parker Woolworth, piano

### **Vocal Jazz Soloist WINNER**

Community College  
Heidi Lanita

### **Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble WINNER**

Community College  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
John Stafford II, Director

### **Original Composition WINNER**

for Small Ensemble  
Community College  
Parker Woolworth  
"Where The Wind Blows"

### **High School Honors Ensemble WINNER**

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
2025 Arizona Choral Educators  
All-State Jazz Choir  
Justin Binek, Guest Conductor

### **Engineered Live Recording Outstanding Recording**

Community College  
Kristina Ning

### **Jazz Soloist Outstanding Performance**

Community College  
Jackson Harrison, tenor saxophone

### **Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Outstanding Performance**

Community College  
Collier Cash, guitar

### **Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Outstanding Performance**

Community College  
Noah Randall, alto and soprano  
saxophones

### **Blues/Pop/Rock Group Outstanding Performance**

Community College  
KCKCC Blue Devil Funk Band  
Justin Binek, Director

### **Latin Group Outstanding Performance**

Community College  
The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
John Stafford II, Director

### **Original Composition for Small Ensemble Outstanding Composition**

Community College  
Joel Martinez "The Crow"

### **Join us for our annual KCKCC Music events!**

The KCKCC Jazz Camp  
June 8-11, 2026

The M-PACT Vocal Festival  
November 17-18, 2026

The Kansas City Jazz Summit and  
Basically Basie Jazz Heritage Competition  
April 27-30, 2027

### **Full-tuition scholarships are still available for 2026-27.**

### **Contact our faculty for more information!**

Dr. Justin Binek – [jbinek@kekcc.edu](mailto:jbinek@kekcc.edu)  
Music Theory & Commercial Music

Dr. Ian Corbett – [corbetti@kekcc.edu](mailto:corbetti@kekcc.edu)  
Audio Engineering

Brett Jackson – [bjackson@kekcc.edu](mailto:bjackson@kekcc.edu)  
Instrumental Music

John Stafford II – [jstafford@kekcc.edu](mailto:jstafford@kekcc.edu)  
Choral Music

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out  
more**



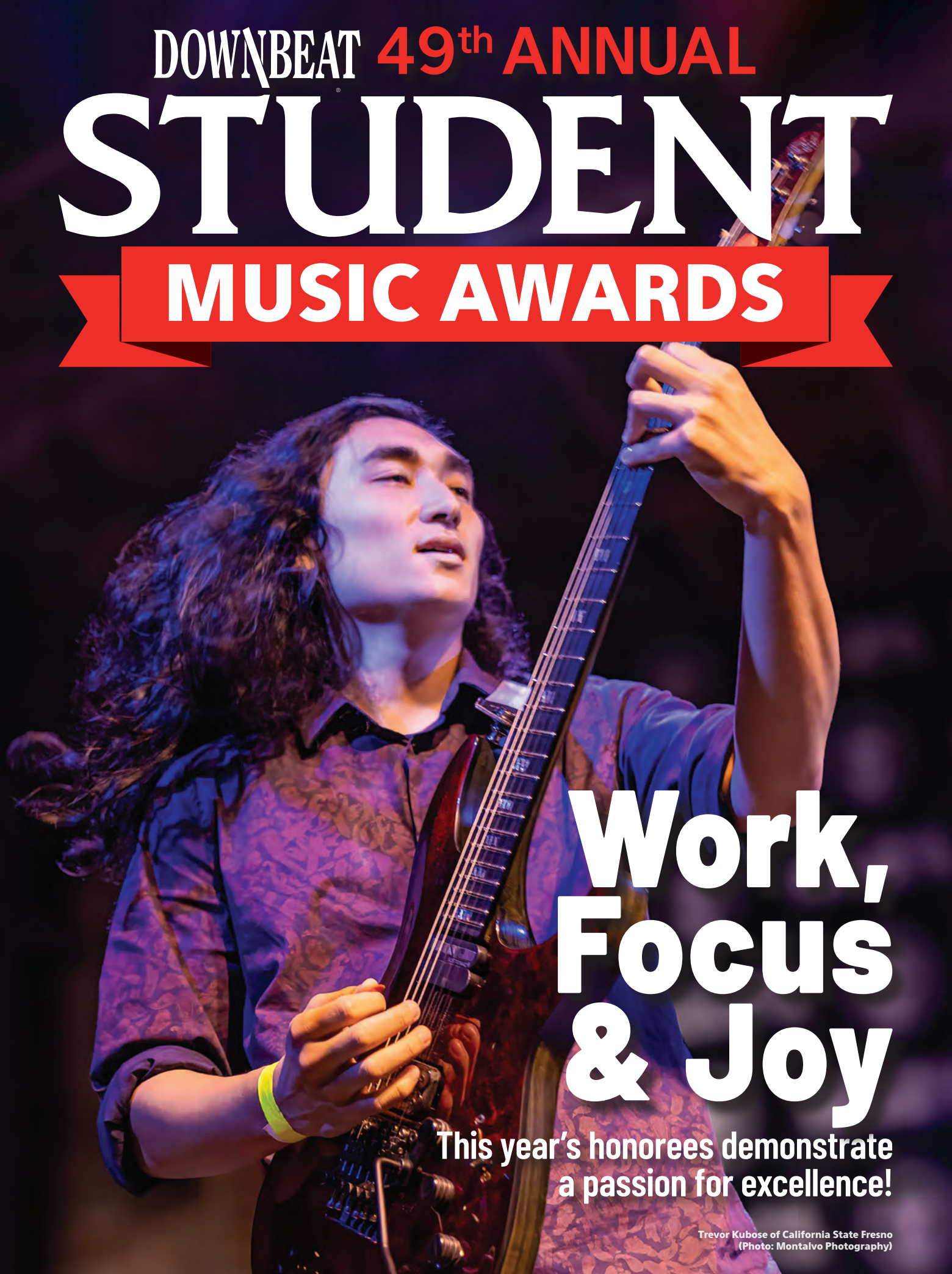
Kansas City Kansas  
Community College

DOWNBEAT 49<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
**STUDENT**  
MUSIC AWARDS

DOWNBEAT 49<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

# STUDENT

MUSIC AWARDS



Work,  
Focus  
& Joy

This year's honorees demonstrate  
a passion for excellence!

Trevor Kubose of California State Fresno  
(Photo: Montalvo Photography)

# WELCOME TO THE

# DOWNBEAT 49<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS



Calhoun Community College Show Band

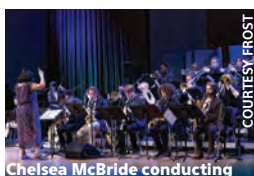
## FEATURES



Simon Comté

### 74 THE SOLOISTS

From pursuing teaching options, switching instruments and expanding academic pursuits to changing from classical to jazz and taking an indirect scholastic path, this year's undergraduate and graduate Student Music Awards Soloist honorees have compelling back stories.



Chelsea McBride conducting

### 84 ARRANGERS

All praise to SMA winners in every instrumental and vocal category. But save an extra round of applause for the winners in the Jazz Arrangement category. Not only do they have to be considerably talented on their instrument, they have to take an established work by another composer and put together a fresh take.



Blair Big Band

### 78 LARGE ENSEMBLES

Ranging from community college to graduate level, this year's large ensemble winners serve as the backbone of successful jazz programs.

## SMA WINNER LISTINGS

- 66 Jazz Soloists
- 68 Small Jazz Combos
- 72 Large Jazz Ensembles
- 80 Vocal Jazz Soloists
- 81 Vocal Jazz Groups & Ensembles
- 83 Blues/Pop/Rock Soloists
- 86 Blues/Pop/Rock Groups
- 87 Latin Jazz Groups
- 89 Original Composition — Small Ensemble
- 90 Original Composition — Large Ensemble
- 92 Jazz Arrangement
- 94 Engineering
- 95 Judging Criteria

A portrait of Brad Leali, a Black man with short, curly grey hair, wearing glasses, a dark grey suit jacket, and a light pink shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile. The background is a blurred red brick wall. The entire image is framed by a thick green border.

# *Congratulations*

Brad Leali, Professor of Jazz Saxophone  
Ellis Marsalis Jr. Jazz Educator of the Year  
Jazz Education Network

# STUDENT MUSIC AWARDS

## COMPLETE RESULTS



Yeshe Tripathi



Ronnie Elliott



Rebecca Ramirez



Samuel Streeter



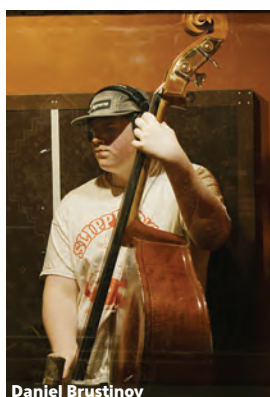
Jordan Yaeger



Mac Tarrant



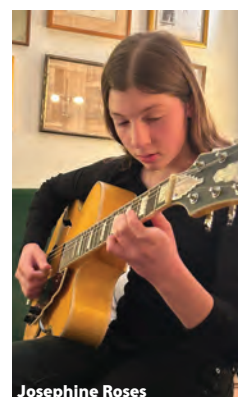
Noah Tamiso



Daniel Brustinov



Lucas LaBeau



Josephine Roses

### JAZZ SOLOIST

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

##### Julia Vaughan

*Flute*  
Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington

##### Yeshe Tripathi

*Electric Bass*  
Timothy Edwards Middle School  
Frank Marci  
South Windsor, Connecticut

#### High School Winners

##### Jordan Yaeger

*Tenor Saxophone*  
Mission Bay High School  
Jean Paul Balmat  
San Diego, California

##### Noah Tamiso

*Alto Saxophone*  
Newark Academy  
Julius Tolentino  
Livingston, New Jersey

#### High School Outstanding Performances

##### Colton Checchi

*Piano*

Harvard-Westlake School  
Chris Sullivan  
Studio City, California

##### Hugh Cheng

*Alto Saxophone*  
Harvard-Westlake School  
Chris Sullivan  
Studio City, California

#### Performing Arts High School Winner

##### Mac Tarrant

*Tenor Saxophone*  
Las Vegas Academy of the Arts  
Patrick Bowen  
Las Vegas, Nevada

#### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

##### Josephine Roses

*Guitar*  
Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and Performing Arts  
Gregory Skaff  
New York, New York

#### High School Honors Winner

##### Ronnie Elliott

*Guitar*  
Homeschool/Fine Arts Center  
Greenville, South Carolina

Jonathan Kreisberg  
Brooklyn, New York

#### High School Honors Outstanding Performance

##### Daniel Brustinov

*Bass*  
Modern Artist All Stars  
Alex Hahn and Michael Ragonese  
Tustin, California

#### Community College Winner

##### Parker Woolworth

*Piano*  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Brett Jackson  
Kansas City, Kansas

#### Community College Outstanding Performance

##### Jackson Harrison

*Tenor Saxophone*  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Brett Jackson  
Kansas City, Kansas

#### Undergraduate College Winners

##### Benjamin Collins-Siegel

*Piano*

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Martin Bejerano  
Coral Gables, Florida

##### Simon Comté

*Tenor and Soprano Saxophones*  
Manhattan School of Music  
Jaleel Shaw  
New York, New York

#### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

##### Cameron Shave

*Trumpet*  
Manhattan School of Music  
Jon Faddis  
New York, New York

##### Lucas LaBeau

*Piano*  
Berklee College of Music  
John McGee  
Boston, Massachusetts

##### Samuel Streeter

*Trombone*  
Eastman School of Music  
Marshall Gilkes  
Rochester, New York

#### Graduate College Winners

##### Alan Bartuš

*Piano*

CONGRATULATIONS



49th Annual DownBeat

Student Music Awards

VANDERBILT  
Blair School of Music



DIRECTOR OF JAZZ STUDIES RYAN MIDDAGH

Vanderbilt University  
**LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE**  
WINNER

Blair Big Band • Ryan Middagh

Vanderbilt University  
**LATIN GROUP**  
OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

Vanderbilt Latin Jazz • Dr. Marc Widenhofer

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JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK CONFERENCE PERFORMANCES, 2017, 2022, 2023, 2025  
U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT TOURS, 2016, 2019, 2024

[blair.vanderbilt.edu](http://blair.vanderbilt.edu)





HSPVA Combo 1

Jam Music Lab Private University  
Danny Grissett  
Vienna, Austria

**Sam Taylor**  
*Tenor Saxophone*  
DePaul University  
Scott Burns  
Chicago, Illinois

**Graduate College  
Outstanding Performances**

**Mekhi Boone**  
*Drums*  
Temple University  
Ted Nash  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Nelsen Campbell**  
*Trombone*  
Eastman School of Music  
Marshall Gilkes  
Rochester, New York



Free State Bonas from University of Kansas

Chris Sullivan  
Studio City, California

**High School  
Outstanding Performances**

**Jazz Combo**  
Edmonds-Woodway High School  
Jake Bergevin  
Edmonds, Washington  
*Outstanding Soloist:*  
Gavin Bunbury, Trumpet

**Jazz Explorers**  
Harvard-Westlake School  
Chris Sullivan  
Studio City, California  
*Outstanding Soloist:*  
Manos Vourgourakis, Bass

**O Negative**  
Ann Arbor  
Community High School

**SMALL JAZZ COMBO**

**Junior High School Winner**

**Jazz Combo**  
Valley Christian Jr. High School  
Michael Jones  
San Jose, California

**Junior High School  
Outstanding Performance**

**The Good Vibes  
Fellowship**  
Timothy Edwards Middle School  
Frank Marci  
South Windsor, Connecticut

**High School Winner**

**Jazz Band Trio**  
Harvard-Westlake School

Jack Wagner  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
*Outstanding Soloist:*  
Sam Davidson, Alto Saxophone

**Performing Arts  
High School Winners**

**HSPVA Jazz Combo 2**  
Kinder High School  
of the Performing  
and Visual Arts  
James Westfall  
Houston, Texas

**Jazz Combo**  
Douglas Anderson School  
of the Arts  
Phillip Michanowicz  
Jacksonville, Florida  
*Outstanding Soloist:*  
Spencer Carnochan, Tenor  
Saxophone

**Performing Arts High School  
Outstanding Performances**

**Alexander Hamilton High  
School A Combo**  
Alexander Hamilton  
High School  
Phillip Topping  
Los Angeles, California

**Combo Prime**  
Las Vegas Academy of the Arts  
Patrick Bowen  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**NEWTON SOUTH  
HIGH SCHOOL**  
Newton, MA

---

**OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE**  
Large Jazz Ensemble  
Lisa Linde, director

**WINNER - MAX STOBER**  
Original Composition - 'Fervor'  
(Large Ensemble)

**DOWN BEAT MAGAZINE**

---

**BEST BIG BAND**  
Newton South High School  
Jazz Ensemble

**FINALIST**  
Triplet Feel  
Combo

**18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CHARLES MINGUS  
FESTIVAL & HIGH SCHOOL  
COMPETITION**

---

**CONGRATULATIONS!**  
from NSHS POPS!

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CONGRATULATES  
BRYCE ENGBERG!**

Engineered Studio Recording  
Community College Outstanding  
Recording  
Kirkwood Community College

**O**

**UNIVERSITY OF  
OREGON**

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**M** Manhattan  
School of Music



**CONGRATULATIONS  
TO OUR WINNERS**  
of *DownBeat's*  
49th Annual Student  
Music Awards

**Jazz Soloist**

Undergraduate College—  
Winner

**Simon Comté (BM '27), tenor  
and soprano saxophone**

Jaleel Shaw, teacher

Undergraduate College—  
Outstanding Performance

**Cameron Shave (BM '26),  
trumpet**

Jon Faddis, teacher

**JAZZ  
ARTS**

JIM SALTZMAN  
DEAN

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RCC Combo Blue



Milwaukee Jazz Institute's "A" Train Ensemble

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

### Herbert Gussman Jazz Septet

Cornell University  
Paul Merrill  
Ithaca, New York

### Keegan Kaiser Ensemble

University of Kansas  
Matt Otto  
Lawrence, Kansas

### HSPVA Jazz Combo I

Kinder High School  
for the Performing  
and Visual Arts  
James Westfall  
Houston, Texas

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Soloist

#### Miri Izenberg, Trumpet

Chuck Wackerman  
Memorial Combo  
Orange County School  
of the Arts  
John Reynolds  
Santa Ana, California

### High School Honors Ensemble Winners

#### Colburn Jazz Workshop

### Thursday Night Band

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

### Advanced High School Jazz Workshop I

The Jazzschool  
Peter Horvath  
Berkeley, California

### High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

#### "A" Train Ensemble

Milwaukee Jazz Institute  
Mark Davis  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

#### Charlie Parker Combo

Various High Schools  
Mason Millard  
New York, New York

### Community College Winner

#### RCC Combo Blue

Riverside City College  
Steven Ragsdale  
Riverside, California

### Community College Outstanding Performance

#### BMCC Small Jazz Combo

Borough of Manhattan  
Community College  
Quentin Angus and Jon DeLucia  
New York, New York

### Undergraduate College Winner

#### Minja Mijušković Nonet

Conservatorium van Amsterdam  
Yaniv Nachum  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Soloists

#### Colin Woniewski, Trombone

Colin Woniewski Jazz Collective  
Western Michigan University  
Scott Cowan  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

#### Haden Bovee, Alto Saxophone

Nick Birchler Quartet  
Western Michigan University  
Matthew Fries  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

#### Haden Bovee, Alto Saxophone

The Chris Majure Sextet  
Western Michigan University  
Keith Hall  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

# CONGRATULATIONS

to our 49th Annual Downbeat Student Music Award Winners

DOWNBEAT 49<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
STUDENT  
MUSIC AWARDS



**Jonathan McPhee**  
Jazz Arrangement  
"He Won't Hold You"  
High School Winner



**Measure 25**  
Small Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
High School Winner



**Elle Michelson**  
On "Spain" with Soundwaves  
Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
Outstanding Soloist



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Christine Tavares-Mocha  
Choral Director, Valencia High School Choir

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by the Ella Fitzgerald  
Charitable Foundation



# KU SCHOOL OF MUSIC

The University of Kansas

## Congratulations to our 2026 DownBeat Student Music Awards Winners!

### KU Jazz Ensemble I

Large Jazz Ensemble

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

### Keegan Kaiser

Engineered Live Recording

Graduate College Winner

### KU Jazz Singers

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Heidi Lanita and Josie Jones, vocal soloists

### John Fraka, guitar

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist

Undergraduate College Winner

### Keegan Kaiser Ensemble

Small Jazz Ensemble

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

### Free State Bones

Small Jazz Ensemble

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance



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A hands-on degree that blends music business and audio production with a focus on:

- Entrepreneurship
- Live sound
- Studio production

For more information



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Blues/Pop/Rock Group Undergraduate College  
**OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE**  
Fredonia Jazz Flextet

Blues/Pop/Rock Group Undergraduate College  
**OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE**  
Fredonia Jazz Orchestra

Latin Group (2+ musicians)  
College/Undergraduate  
**WINNER**  
Fredonia Jazz Orchestra

### Jazz Faculty

Nick Weiser  
John Bacon  
Leon Dorsey  
Kieran Hanlon  
James Harrington  
Elliot Scozzaro



Dreyfoos School's Jazz Ensemble I



RCC Jazz Orchestra

**Jonathan Arcangel, Tenor Saxophone**  
Jonathan Arcangel Quartet  
University of North Texas  
Brad Leali  
Denton, Texas

Chuck Bergeron  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Paolo Zulueta-Lomanno, Alto Saxophone**  
Horace Silver Ensemble  
University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
John Daversa  
Coral Gables, Florida

### Graduate College Winners

**Pete McCann Graduate Ensemble #1**  
City College of New York  
Mike Holober  
New York, New York

**Ingrid Jensen Ensemble**  
City College of New York  
Mike Holober  
New York, New York

**Sam Leviatin, Trumpet**  
Sam J. Leviatin Quintet  
University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Brian Lynch  
Coral Gable, Florida

### Graduate College Outstanding Performances

**Free State Bones**  
University of Kansas  
Dan Gailey and Mike Davidson  
Lawrence, Kansas

**Herbert J. Merker JazzArts Combo Oregon**  
University of Oregon  
Keith Brown  
Eugene, Oregon

### LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE

#### Junior High School Winners

**Beaumont Jazz Ambassadors**  
Beaumont Middle School  
Cynthia Plank  
Portland, Oregon

**Jazz Band I**  
Prairie Grove Junior High School  
Jeff Crylen  
Crystal Lake, Illinois

### Graduate College Outstanding Soloists

**Hans Hansen, Guitar**  
Liam Drzewicki Trio  
Western Michigan University  
Keith Hall  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Jack Phillips, Trumpet**  
**Runsheng Zhao, Guitar**  
Greenhouse Combo  
University of North Texas  
José Aponte  
Denton, Texas

#### Junior High School Outstanding Performances

**HMS Jazz Ensemble**  
Hinsdale Middle School  
George Andrikokus  
Hinsdale, Illinois

**Jazz Ensemble**  
Timothy Edwards Middle School  
Frank Marci  
Windsor, Connecticut

#### High School Winners

**Byron Center Jazz Orchestra**  
Byron Center High School  
Marc Townley  
Byron Center, Michigan

**Jacob Batchelder, Trumpet**  
**Pablo Muller, Trombone**  
The Frost Septet  
University of Miami, Frost School of Music

**Foxboro Jazz Ensemble**  
Foxboro High School



FREDONIA  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC



fredonia.edu/jazz

# CONGRATS

## TO OUR 2026 DOWNBEAT MUSIC AWARDS STUDENT RECIPIENTS AND INSPIRING FACULTY MENTORS

**Undergraduate College Winner  
Jazz Soloist**

Benjamin Collins-Siegel, piano  
Martin Bejerano, faculty mentor

**Undergraduate College Winner  
Vocal Jazz Soloist**

Leah Rutherford  
Kate Reid, faculty mentor

**Undergraduate College Winner  
Original Composition (Small Ensemble/Combo)**

Sam Leviatin, "The Bird"  
Brian Lynch, faculty mentor

**Undergraduate College Winner  
Outstanding Composition**

Original Composition — Large Ensemble  
Sam Leviatin, "Closet Dwellers"  
Brian Lynch, faculty mentor

**Undergraduate College Winner  
Blues/Pop/Rock Group**

Frost Fusion Ensemble  
Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Arrangement — Big Band  
Jazz Arrangement**

Jorge Machain, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"  
Steve Guerra, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Performance**

**Blues/Pop/Rock Group**  
Hammond B3 Ensemble  
Renato Diz, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Blues/Pop/Rock Group**

Frost Funk Ensemble  
Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Performance**

**Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist**  
Sebastian Kuchczynski, drums  
Renato Diz, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Recording**

**Engineered Studio Recording**  
Florence Hughes  
Dana Salminen, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Arrangement — Studio Orchestra  
Jazz Arrangement**

Justin Kinchen, "Maiden Voyage"  
Steve Guerra, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner — Studio Orchestra  
Jazz Arrangement**

Chelsea McBride, "Fortress of Solitude"  
Steve Guerra, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner — Outstanding Soloist  
Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo**

*Outstanding Soloist: Jacob Batchelder, trumpet*  
The Frost Septet  
Chuck Bergeron, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner — Outstanding Soloist  
Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo**

*Outstanding Soloist: Pablo Muller, trombone*  
The Frost Septet  
Chuck Bergeron, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner — Outstanding Soloist  
Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo**

*Outstanding Soloist:*  
Paolo Zulueta-Lomanno, Alto Saxophone  
Horace Silver Ensemble  
John Daversa, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner — Outstanding Soloist  
Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo**

*Outstanding Soloist: Sam Leviatin, trumpet*  
Sam J Leviatin Quintet  
Brian Lynch, faculty mentor

**Graduate College Winner  
Small Vocal Jazz Ensemble/Combo (3-9 musicians)**

Frost Extensions  
Kate Reid, faculty mentor



COURTESY PARKER WOOLWORTH

Parker Woolworth



COURTESY BENJAMIN COLLINS-SIEGEL

Benjamin Collins-Siegel



COURTESY ALAN BARTUŠ

Alan Bartuš



COURTESY MAËL G. LAGADEC

Simon Comté

# JAZZ SOLOISTS FOR THE FUTURE

**FROM PURSUING TEACHING OPTIONS,** switching instruments and expanding academic pursuits to changing from classical to jazz and taking an indirect scholastic path, this year's undergraduate and graduate Student Music Awards Soloist honorees have compelling back stories that make their unimpeachable improvisational skills even more impressive.

"Parker has a lot of technical aptitude, which is fantastic," said Brett Jackson, Kansas City Kansas Community College director of instrumental activities, jazz studies, jazz bands, jazz combos and applied saxophone, when speaking about Community College winner Parker Woolworth. "But he's also been very good at mentoring some of our younger students, so I've really loved having him around."

Woolworth has a diverse musical path in which he started as a classical pianist and a jazz trumpeter before focusing on jazz piano in college. "My original scholarship was actually for voice, and then I just provided jazz trumpet in the ensembles and the combos," he said. "Now my playing is heavily influenced by what I'm listening to." He noted favorites such as videos by pianist Emmet Cohen and the music of Oscar Peterson.

"I'm planning on becoming an educator," he continued. "I really enjoy teaching. It's more of my passion than anything. So it's been a luxury to get an experience here to mentor some of the younger students who want to pursue this a little bit more professionally."

Pianist Benjamin Collins-Siegel is one of two undergraduate winners and currently studies at University of Miami's Frost School of Music. The freshman isn't far removed from his life growing up in the township of Maplewood, New Jersey, which is a little over 20 miles west of Manhattan. "That made it actually a difficult decision to study," he admitted. "It made sense for me to study in New York, an environment where I'm surrounded by all these clubs

and all the history where the music develops. But I felt like I had already experienced a lot of that since I grew up close to that area."

Attending a music school embedded in a university with a student body population of 20,000 has exposed him to undergraduates in a myriad of non-music programs. "I've also got to explore an interest in psychology as a minor," he said.

"As a player and pianist, Ben is extremely mature for his age," shared Martin Bejerano, a professor at the Frost School. "He plays with a lot of intention. There's always just a lot of meaning behind what he's playing, especially with regard to his improvisation."

"Simon is diligent," said Jaleel Shaw, Manhattan School of Music faculty member, of undergraduate winner Simon Comté. "He's always asking questions, and he just loves the saxophone. He had a lot together when he came into the school already, but he wants to grow. And he doesn't waste any time. Every week he's totally prepared."

Comté was a classical alto saxophonist in his native Belgium until age 14, when he transitioned to playing jazz on tenor and eventually adding soprano to his palette. A year later, he became the youngest-ever student in the jazz department of the Royal Conservatory of Brussels. But he didn't have his first experience playing in a big band until his freshman year of college in the States.

"Jaleel and I worked a lot on altissimo stuff," he replied, when asked about refining his approach to soloing. "It's an infinite quest. I'm really interested in developing a vocabulary that's easy on the whole range."

Graduate winner Alan Bartuš of Jam Music Lab Private University also made the change from classical to jazz. The pianist's family moved from Slovakia to Austria when he was 12, and he earned a bachelor's degree in Vienna and a master's of music from the Manhattan School of Music. He's currently working

toward his master's of music education and studies with Danny Grissett.

"Alan is a very strong soloist, with a budding voice and the potential to become one of the leading voices of his generation," Grissett wrote, in an email. "That's exciting. In our lessons, I aimed to challenge him primarily on a conceptual level, encouraging him to embrace the unfamiliar and to stretch beyond the musical instincts and vocabulary that, while valuable, can sometimes become too comfortable. He was always open to that challenge, and I believe that spirit is one of his greatest assets."

Bartuš, whose jazz bassist father had actually gigged with Grissett as well as with his own son, endorses transcribing as a tool for better soloing. His approach, though, is to become familiar with a piece first. "I listened to my favorite recordings all the time, and then I started to transcribe them. It was much easier to transcribe it because I had it all in the ear," he said.

Fellow graduate winner Sam Taylor wasn't even aware that he'd been submitted this year. Already a two-time individual SMA honoree and having now graduated from DePaul University with a master's in jazz studies, the saxophonist's recordings were sent in by Scott Burns. "Sam's a prodigious talent," said Burns, director of jazz studies (among several titles) at DePaul. "In his second year, his weekly lessons were oftentimes transcribing arrangements of modern jazz tunes."

With an atypical path that illustrates that there's no set way in getting one's education, Taylor studied jazz at Florida State University from 2008 to 2012 before dropping out and then moving to New Orleans in 2016 to gig full time. He commuted from NOLA to FSU to finish his bachelor's in 2022 and then enrolled at DePaul the next year. One of his two master's theses likely informed his soloing. "It's a treatise of melodic construction over various harmonic circumstances," he said. —Yoshi Kato

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# **ROCK ENSEMBLE I**

**2026 WINNER: Blues/Pop/Rock**  
**Kevin Kjos, Director**

For information about the Commercial Music program: [www.kutztown.edu/music](http://www.kutztown.edu/music)

Aaron Bush  
Foxboro, Massachusetts

## High School Outstanding Performances

### Jazz Ensemble I

McKinney North High School  
Connor Vaughn  
McKinney, Texas

### Jazz Ensemble

Newton South High School  
Lisa Linde  
Newton, Massachusetts

### Jazz Ensemble I

Oswego High School  
Kevin Schoenbach  
Oswego, Illinois

### PM Jazz Band

Brazoswood High School  
Jeremiah Jones  
Clute, Texas

## Performing Arts High School Winners

### Jazz Band A

Osceola County School for the Arts  
Jason Anderson  
Kissimmee, Florida

### Jazz Ensemble I

Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts  
Christopher De León  
West Palm Beach, Florida

## Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

### Jazz Band

Las Vegas Academy of the Arts  
Patrick Bowen  
Las Vegas, Nevada

### Jazz Ensemble I

Kinder High School for the Visual and Performing Arts  
James Westfall  
Houston, Texas

### Jazz Ensemble

Tarpon Springs Leadership Conservatory for the Arts  
Dr. Timothy Sexton  
Tarpon Springs, Florida

## High School Honors Winners

### Colburn Jazz Workshop Big Band

Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

### Youth Jazz Ensemble of DuPage

YJED  
Robert Blazek  
Wheaton, Illinois

## High School Honors Outstanding Performances

### Jazz House Big Band

Jazz House Kids  
Nathan Eklund  
Montclair, New Jersey

### SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Big Band

SFJAZZ  
Paul Contos  
San Francisco, California

## Community College Winner

### RCC Jazz Orchestra

Riverside City College  
Charles Richard  
Riverside, California

## Community College Outstanding Performance

### Oceanside Jazz Orchestra

MiraCosta College  
Steve Torok  
Oceanside, California

## Undergraduate College Winners

### Blair Big Band

Vanderbilt University  
Ryan Middagh  
Nashville, Tennessee

### Jazz Band I

Central Washington University  
Keith Karns  
Ellensburg, Washington

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

### The Five O'Clock Lab Band

University of North Texas



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Latin American Ensemble  
Latin Group

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Professor Fernando Valencia, director

**UArkMusic**  
jazz.uark.edu





**2026 Downbeat  
Music Award Winners**



**ANTHONY ALDISSI**  
College/Graduate  
Winner, Jazz Arrangement,  
Small Ensemble  
"Riff Primitif"



**MEKHI BOONE**  
College/Graduate  
Outstanding Performance  
Jazz Soloist, Drums



**GRAHAM KOZAK**  
College/Graduate  
Outstanding Arrangement,  
Small Ensemble  
"Bartok"

**CONGRATULATIONS!**



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and Cinematic Arts



Learn more about Temple Jazz



Ryan Middagh conducts the Blair Big Band.



The Riverside Community College Jazz Ensemble



The Eastman Jazz Orchestra



Central Washington University Jazz Band 1

# JAZZ ENSEMBLES DEVELOP COMMUNITY

**THE SMA JAZZ ENSEMBLES FEATURED** here — from community college to graduate level winners — all have distinctive attributes that have helped build successful jazz programs.

At Riverside City College in Riverside, California, Charlie Richard, professor of music and an alumnus of Riverside, has built a strong jazz program over his 35-year tenure. “We’re a two-year community college,” explains Richard, “and we’re fortunate to be the institution that local musicians attend if they can’t afford to go to a four-year college right away. It would be nice to enjoy talented students when they become seniors, but four-year institutions get the fruit of our labor. Many of our student musicians transfer to top programs and earn scholarships.”

Richard returned to at Riverside in 1990 to lead the jazz department and teach saxophone, and over the years has built an outstanding jazz program that enjoys tremendous local support from the community.

“We’ve been embraced by the local community for many decades,” he says. “It’s become a great tradition. Our student jazz bands meet during the day, and our community jazz bands meet in the evening. We now have a total of seven big bands — four student bands and three community bands. It’s a thriving community outreach.”

Despite a limited travel budget, RCC jazz groups often travel to the Western States Jazz Festival, and they were able to attend JEN when it was held in San Diego. “And in a few weeks, we’re going on a tour of Costa Rica, thanks to support from the community,” said Richard. “And I have to mention we also have great faculty colleagues — many of them alumni.”

Keith Karns, assistant professor of music at Central Washington University, started working with the jazz program there in 2022. And although Central Washington only offers a jazz certificate, he’s established a thriving jazz

program. “The music students here are mostly classical and music education majors,” he explains. “But there’s a strong jazz tradition here that goes back to the 1940s. Of the 350 music majors here, 280 to 300 play jazz. In fact, 14 out of 17 students in Jazz Band 1, which won the Student Music Award, are majoring in music education.”

Karns has three jazz bands, an Afro-Cuban band and up to seven jazz combos — depending on the semester. “It definitely keeps us busy,” says Karns. “One recent highlight was the opportunity to play at this year’s JEN convention in New Orleans. That was a great experience for many of the students who had never traveled out of the Pacific Northwest. I’m most proud of the attitude, the work ethic and the commitment to musical excellence the students bring to playing jazz as well as to their musical majors.”

Ryan Middagh, director of jazz studies at the Blair School at Vanderbilt University in Nashville since 2014, has built a strong program — creating a new jazz curriculum and gaining the university’s approval of a major in jazz for the first time in 2020. The results have included multiple Student Music Awards for the Blair Big Band as well as individual honors for student musicians and other ensembles.

“This large jazz ensemble Student Music Award is our sixth for the Blair Big Band,” says Middagh. “And we’ve won 16 overall through the years since 2020 in a variety of categories, including individual student awards as well as for jazz, pop and rock and Latin jazz ensembles. And it’s still a very young program. The Blair Big Band started in 2002. And when we were able to finally recruit jazz majors in 2020, that was a real game changer.”

Middagh also noted that Vanderbilt’s proximity to Nashville’s dynamic music industry has been a positive for the program. “We’ve been able to arrange guest master classes with Sean Jones and drummer Ignácio Berroa just this year. We’ve had Joe Lovano come by and

hang out in Jeff Coffin’s office. The place was jammed with student sax players! And when Jon Batiste came to town, he stopped by and talked to our students for an hour. In addition, there are opportunities for our music students to play at clubs throughout the city.”

With her deep experience leading her own award-winning Jazz Orchestra, Christine Jensen has become an ideal fit in her role as associate professor of jazz studies and contemporary media at Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, where she serves as the director of Eastman’s top graduate-level band, the Eastman Jazz Orchestra. Since she began teaching at Eastman, the Jazz Orchestra has won back-to-back SMAs in the large Jazz Ensemble category.

Jensen realizes that working with talented graduate students is a different ballgame than directing a band of professional musicians, and she enjoys the distinction.

“Since Eastman has a two-year graduate program, I’m dealing with at least a 50% turnover in the ensemble every year,” she explains. “We have several large ensembles, and I’m lucky enough to get the cream of the crop in my orchestra, but the other bands have just as many strengths.”

“My goal with the grad musicians is to give them a professional experience. But in addition to that, I want them to have professional experience, I want them to also enjoy the personality of friends and community coming together. Music should be really fun — but I have to remember a lot of effort is needed to make that happen. When we’re all in a room together creating great moments — moments when we’re all engaged with each other — that’s the key to developing a great band sound.

“The beauty of Eastman is that we’re working to consistently grow in size and also build excellence between faculty and students. Directing the orchestra has really been a game changer for me since I arrived here.”

—Terry Perkins

# CONGRATULATIONS!

## DOWNBEAT 49TH STUDENT MUSIC AWARD WINNERS

**Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Graduate College**  
Bailey Ehrgott, guitar

**Jazz Arrangement College/Graduate  
Outstanding Arrangement Big Band**  
Teresa Um, Airegin

**Jazz Arrangement College/Graduate  
Vocal Ensemble**  
Reagan Garza, Eleanor Rigby  
Jennifer Barnes, director

**Large Jazz Ensemble College/Graduate  
Outstanding Performance Ensemble**  
Viento Across Borders  
Richard DeRosa, director

**Large Jazz Ensemble College/Undergraduate  
Outstanding Performance**  
The Five O'Clock Lab Band  
Harlan Hodges, director

**Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble (10+ musicians)  
Graduate College Outstanding Performance**  
UNT Jazz Singers  
Jennifer Barnes, director

**Outstanding Soloist**  
Ava Ramsey  
on "Cheek to Cheek"

**Outstanding Soloist**  
Luke Bielfeldt  
on "Green Dolphin Street"

**Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble  
High School Honors Outstanding Performance**  
ACDA National Honor Jazz Choir  
Jennifer Barnes, director

**Latin Group College/Graduate**  
Greenhouse Combo  
José Aponte, director

**Original Composition (Large Ensemble)  
College/Graduate**  
Teresa Um, Phonophobia

**Original Composition (Small Ensemble/Combo)  
College/Graduate**  
Teresa Um, Wheel of Chronicles

**Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo  
College/Graduate Outstanding Soloist**  
Jack Phillips, Trumpet  
Greenhouse Combo

**Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo  
College/Graduate Outstanding Soloist**  
Runsheng Zhao, Guitar  
Greenhouse Combo

**Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo  
College/Undergraduate Outstanding Soloist**  
Jonathan Arcangel, Tenor Saxophone  
Jonathan Arcangel Quartet

**Small Vocal Jazz Ensemble/Combo  
(3-9 musicians) College/Undergraduate**  
Surround Sound  
Jennifer Barnes, director

**Outstanding Soloist**  
Sasha Garcia  
on 'So Cool'

**Vocal Jazz Soloist College/Undergraduate  
Outstanding Performance**  
Sasha Garcia

**Vocal Jazz Soloist College/Undergraduate**  
Hannah Goodwin

**Vocal Jazz Soloist Graduate College  
Outstanding Performance**  
Brooke Lambert



Hannah Goodwin



Emmanuel Amanfor



Isabel Van Aalst



Southwestern Community College's First Take

Harlan Hodges  
Denton, Texas

### Graduate College Winner

#### Eastman Jazz Orchestra

Eastman School of Music  
Christine Jensen  
Rochester, New York

### Graduate College Outstanding Performances

#### Ensemble Viento Across Borders

University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, Texas

#### KU Jazz Ensemble I

University of Kansas

Dan Gailey  
Lawrence, Kansas

### VOCAL JAZZ SOLOIST

#### Junior High School Winner

#### Sabrina Berger

Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington

#### Junior High School Honors Winner

#### Sana Grewal

Orange County School of the Arts  
Lia Booth  
Santa Ana, California

### High School Winner

#### Madison Kate

Rio Americano High School  
Joshua Murray  
Sacramento, California

### High School Outstanding Performance

#### Maya Kaiser

Foxboro High School  
Aaron Bush  
Foxboro, Massachusetts

### Performing Arts High School Winners

#### Lexie Shehab

Orange County School of the Arts  
Lia Booth  
Santa Ana, California

#### Miri Izenberg

Orange County School of the Arts  
John Reynolds  
Santa Ana, California

### Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

#### Layla Ahmann

Natomas Charter School  
Performing and Fine Arts Academy  
Jesse Crosson  
Sacramento, California

### High School Honors Winner

#### Anya Ustin

Tri-C JazzFest Academy  
Alyssa Boyd  
Cleveland, Ohio

### High School Honors Outstanding Performance

#### Charley Smith

Mountaintop Music Institute  
Jaden Bueno  
Saratoga Springs, Utah

### Community College Winner

#### Heidi Lanita

Kansas City Kansas Community

College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

### Community College Outstanding Performance

#### Isabel Van Aalst

Santa Monica College  
Marisa Bradfield  
Santa Monica, California

### Undergraduate College Winners

#### Emmy Irvine

Oberlin College  
La Tanya Hall  
Oberlin, Ohio

#### Hannah Goodwin

University of North Texas  
Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, Texas

#### Leah Rutherford

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Kate Reid  
Coral Gables, Florida

#### Nelly Hawley-Hayes

University of Arizona  
Angelo Versace  
Tucson, Arizona

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

#### Maisie Aitken

Adelaide University  
Lauren Henderson  
South Adelaide, Australia

#### Sasha Garcia

University of North Texas  
Rosana Eckert  
Denton, Texas

### Graduate College Winners

#### Lizzi Trumbore

DePaul University  
Kathryn Sherman  
Chicago, Illinois

#### Tama Shutts

California State University,  
Long Beach/Bob Cole  
Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich-Guter  
Long Beach, California



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clockwise from top right  
Hans Hansen  
Rebecca Ramirez  
Colin Woniewski  
Chris Majure  
Haden Bovee  
Fourtunate Cats



## Graduate College Outstanding Performances

### Alexandra Baird

California State University,  
Long Beach/Bob Cole  
Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich-Guter  
Long Beach, California

### Brooke Lambert

University of North Texas  
Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, Texas

### Rebecca Ramirez

Western Michigan University  
Gregory Jasperse  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

## SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

### High School Winner

#### Measure 25

Valencia High School  
Christine Tavares Mocha  
Valencia, California

### High School Outstanding Performance

#### Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Leyden High Schools  
Stacy Cunningham  
Franklin Park, Illinois

## Performing Arts High School Winner

### Natomas7

Natomas Charter School,  
Performing & Fine Arts Academy  
Jesse Crosson  
Sacramento, California

## Community College Winner

### JAZZ-ology

Contra Costa College  
Stephanie Austin  
San Pablo, California

## Community College Outstanding Performance

### First Take

Southwestern  
Community College  
(The School for Music Vocations)  
Tobi Crawford  
Creston, Iowa

## Undergraduate College Winner

### Surround Sound

University of North Texas  
Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, Texas  
**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Sasha Garcia on "So Cool"



Mt. San Antonio's Singcopation

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

### Fortunate Cats

Western Michigan University  
Gregory Jasperse  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

### The Wardells

Adelaide University  
Lauren Henderson  
Adelaide, South Australia

## Graduate College Winner

### Frost Extensions

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Kate Reid  
Coral Gables, Florida

## LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

### Junior High School Winner

#### Eckstein Vocal Jazz

Eckstein Middle School  
Moc Escobedo  
Seattle, Washington  
**Outstanding Scat Soloist:**  
Sabrina Berger on "Splanky and  
Time after Time"

## High School Winner

#### Wizardry

Windsor High School  
Amy Murphy  
Windsor, Colorado  
**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Kimberlin Cohen on "Confirmation"



## Congratulations to our winners in DownBeat Magazine's 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Music Awards!

Vocal Jazz Soloist  
Graduate College Winner  
Outstanding Performances  
**LIZZIE TRUMBORE**  
Kathryn Sherman, faculty



Jazz Soloist  
Graduate College Winner  
**SAMUEL TAYLOR**  
TENOR SAXOPHONE  
Scott Burns, faculty



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Small Vocal Jazz Ensemble Winner  
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Vocal Jazz Soloist  
Outstanding Performance  
Layla Ahmann



Outstanding Soloist  
Emmanuel Amanfor



Outstanding Soloist  
Juniper Thompson



Windsor High's Wizardry

## High School Outstanding Performance

### Vocalese

Valley High School  
Heather Nail  
West Des Moines, Iowa  
**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Lauren Igou on "Yesterday"

## High School Outstanding Soloists

### Angel Cazachkoff

Soloist on "Turn That Frown Upside Down"  
EPIC Jazz Choir  
Downey High School  
Cory Olariu  
Downey, California

### Elle Michelson

Soloist on "Spain"  
Soundwaves Vocal Ensemble  
Valencia High School  
Christine Tavares Mocha  
Valencia, California

## Performing Arts High School Winner

### Natomas Charter Vocal Ensemble

Natomas Charter School, Performing and  
Fine Arts Academy  
Jesse Crosson  
Sacramento, California  
**Outstanding Soloists:**  
Emmanuel Amanfor on "Bag of Bones"  
Juniper Thompson on "Sunny Side of the  
Street"

## Performing Arts High School Outstanding Soloist

### Kristy Centeno

Soloist on "The List"  
Singers At Grand Arts  
Ramon C. Cortines School of  
Visual and Performing Arts  
Drew Lewis  
Los Angeles, California

## High School Honors Winner

### 2025 Arizona Choral Educators All-State Jazz Choir

Various Arizona High Schools  
Guest Conductor: Justin Binek  
Kansas City Kansas  
Community College  
Kansas City, Kansas



Department of Music

RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE

Henry W. Coil, Sr. and  
Alice Edna Coil  
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## 2026 Downbeat Student Awards

**Large Jazz Ensemble**  
Community College Winner  
RCC Jazz Orchestra  
Charles Richard, director

**Small Jazz Ensemble/Combo**  
Community College Winner  
RCC Combo Blue  
Steven Ragsdale, director

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Cal. State's Pacific Standard Time

**High School Honors Outstanding Performance**

**ACDA National Honor Jazz Choir**

Guest Conductor: Jennifer Barnes  
University of North Texas  
Denton, Texas

**High School Honors Outstanding Soloist**

**Kailin Smith, Plainview High School**

Choir Teacher: Diana Carter, Ardmore, Oklahoma  
Soloist on "Don't Lose Sight"  
Oklahoma ACDA Honor High

School Vocal Jazz  
Guest Conductor: Dave Barduhn  
Seattle, Washington

**Community College Winner**

**The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble**

Kansas City Kansas Community College  
John Stafford II  
Kansas City, Kansas

**Community College Outstanding Performance**

**Singcopation**

Mt. San Antonio College  
Dr. Jeremy Fox  
Walnut, California

**Undergraduate College Winner**

**The Northern Colorado Voices**

University of Northern Colorado  
Marion Powers  
Greeley, Colorado

**Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances**

**Advanced Vocal Jazz Ensemble**

Berklee College of Music  
Ned Rosenblatt  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Central Standard Time**

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point  
Timothy Buchholz  
Stevens Point, Wisconsin

**Graduate College Winner**

**Pacific Standard Time**

California State University, Long Beach/Bob Cole Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, California  
Outstanding Scat Soloists on "A Night in Tunisia":  
Alexandra Baird  
Daniel Muñoz  
Maggie Robertson  
Marit Granmo Buffington

Marly Mitchell  
Tama Shutts

**Graduate College Outstanding Performances**

**KU Jazz Singers**

University of Kansas  
Kerry Marsh  
Lawrence, Kansas  
Outstanding Scat Soloist:  
Heidi Lanita on "Just Friends"  
**Outstanding Soloist:**  
Josie Jones on "October Sky"

**UNT Jazz Singers**

University of North Texas  
Jennifer Barnes  
Denton, Texas  
**Outstanding Soloists:**  
Ava Ramsey on "Cheek to Cheek"  
Luke Bielfeldt on "Green Dolphin Street"

**BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST**

**Junior High School Winner**

**Dora Adelman**

*Vocals and Guitar*  
Crossroads School for the Arts and Sciences  
Jarod Sheahan  
Santa Monica, California

**Eastman Congratulates its 2026 DownBeat Student Award Winners**

**Zhengtao Pan, "The Tomb of Couperin I. Prelude"**

**Dave Rivello**  
Jazz Arrangement (Big Band)  
College/Graduate Winner

**Nelsen Campbell, Trombone Marshall Gilkes**

Jazz Soloist  
College/Graduate  
Outstanding Performance

**Samuel Streeter, Trombone Marshall Gilkes**

Jazz Soloist  
College/Undergraduate  
Outstanding Performance

**Eastman Jazz Orchestra**

**Christine Jensen**  
Large Jazz Ensemble  
College/Graduate Winner

**Zhengtao Pan, "Day by Day"**

**Dave Rivello**  
Original Composition (Large Ensemble)  
College/Graduate  
Outstanding Composition

**Zhengtao Pan, "Mirror Floating on the Water"**

**Dave Rivello**  
Original Composition (Small Ensemble/Combo)  
College/Graduate  
Outstanding Composition





Anthony Aldrissi performs on piano at Jazz at Lincoln Center with a combo from Temple University's Boyer School of Music.



Chelsea McBride

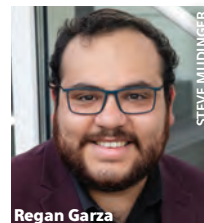


Renzon Malballo



WENJIAN HU

Zhengtao Pan



STEVE MUDINGER

Regan Garza

# ARRANGERS SERVING THE MUSIC

**ALL PRAISE TO SMA WINNERS IN EVERY** instrumental and vocal category. But save an extra round of applause for the winners in the Jazz Arrangement category. Not only do they have to be considerably talented on their instrument, they have to take an established work by another composer and put together a fresh take — without losing the core of the original. They must also have a strong grasp of the strengths of all the musicians in the ensemble.

Regan Garza earned degrees in saxophone and voice at North Texas State University but didn't pursue a vocal degree until his last semester as an undergrad. "I always dreamed of singing, and decided to audition for Professor Jennifer Barnes, who asked me to be in the top vocal group at UNT."

Garza then decided to pursue a master's in jazz voice, and after hearing Sarah Vaughan's funky version of "Eleanor Rigby" on the way home from a gig, he talked to Barnes about doing his own arrangement of her version. "Reagan brought the idea to me," recalls Barnes, "and I told him to write the arrangement yesterday!"

"It turned out to be a great vehicle for our vocal group and instrumental musicians," Barnes continues. "I think the vocal arrangement he wrote featured every female singer in the group — first listening to Sarah, then bringing their own sensibilities to it."

"I graduated last August," adds Garza, "and I'm now a music professor at Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa. I'm also the chairman of the board for the Iowa Vocal Jazz Championships."

Pianist Anthony Aldrissi won for an arrangement of the Herbie Nichols tune "Riff Primitif." Aldrissi, a native of Clearwater, Florida, started classical and jazz lessons in middle school and had the chance to intern with pianist Chick Corea at Corea's studio.

Now a graduate student at Temple Univer-

sity in Philadelphia, Aldrissi worked with saxophonist Ted Nash over the past school year in a combo class. "Ted suggested arranging Herbie Nichols tunes," he recalls. "I've always been into modern harmony, and 'Riff' was very modal and minor sounding. I tried to blend in my own spin on different sections."

"The group got so excited about Herbie's compositions that we decided they would play a concert of his music," explains Nash. "Anthony heard 'Primitif' and said, 'I'm totally hearing this one.' I said great. He took it apart and put it back together in a way that didn't cause any loss of integrity to the original music. It retains the important parts of the song, but it feels like a fresh composition."

Shanghai-born Zhengtao Pan, a graduate of Berklee School of Music with a double major in jazz composition and classical music composition, is currently pursuing a dual master's in jazz writing and film scoring at the Eastman School of Music. Winner of five previous SMAs, Pan has been working closely with Dave Rivello, Eastman associate professor of jazz studies and contemporary media for three years — starting with Zoom meetings with Rivello while Pan was still at Berklee.

"I don't take many students outside of Eastman," says Rivello, "but he contacted me, and I listened to his music and was blown away from the very beginning. We're now in year three of working together, and his work ethic and ability has made him a joy to teach."

When asked what attracted him to doing an arrangement of Ravel's "The Tomb Of Couperin I. Prelude," Pan explains, "Ravel sounds jazz to me, to be honest. When I re-imagine his work, I try to reveal the beauty of his music to more people."

Chelsea McBride earned her SMA for an arrangement of saxophone player Scott Robinson's "Fortress Of Solitude." A native of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, McBride completed a bachelor's in music at Humber

College in Toronto and a master's of music at William Paterson University in New Jersey. In addition to her studies, she also started and toured with her big band (Chelsea McBride's Socialist Night School) as well as a sextet (Chelsea and the Cityscape) and her trio (Chelsea McBride Group).

Now a doctoral student at Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, McBride is advised by Steve Guerra, assistant professor and director of the studio jazz writing program. When Robinson came with the Maria Schneider Orchestra to Frost with several compositions to be arranged and performed by students at a Henry Mancini Institute concert, McBride chose to do an arrangement of Robinson's "Fortress Of Solitude."

"Chelsea embraced the sound of the baritone and bass sax in 'Fortress Of Solitude,'" explains Guerra. "She wanted the challenge of arranging those lower instruments. She told me she was going to make it work, and she did."

Renzon Maballo, a music student at the University of Las Vegas, is the only undergraduate student featured among these Jazz Arrangement SMA winners. But in terms of his involvement with arranging music, he certainly has plenty of experience.

"In middle school, I switched to playing sax, and I just really dug the jazz charts we were playing," says Maballo. "I even sought out scores on my own that I thought I might like to play. I actually wrote my first big band chart when I was 14."

After attending the music program at Las Vegas Academy, Maballo went on to enroll in the University of Las Vegas jazz program, working with Ricardo Arana on arranging. "At the beginning of the academic year working with Ricardo, I brought the start of an arrangement of Ellington's 'Just Squeeze Me' to him," recalls Maballo. "I took the melodies and used them as cells for new compositions."

—Terry Perkins

**Junior High School  
Honors Winner**

**Joseph Diaz**  
*Vocals and Percussion*  
Diaz Music Institute  
José Antonio Diaz  
Houston, Texas

**Junior High School Honors  
Outstanding Performance**

**Aria Song**  
*Piano*  
Mayflower Art Center  
Haibei Wang  
Andover, Massachusetts

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**Ian Chenne**  
*Vocalist*  
Sammamish High School  
Ryan Hyde  
Bellevue, Washington

**High School  
Outstanding Performance**

**Grey Nielson**  
*Guitar*  
Homeschool  
J.C. Nielson  
Cedar Hills, Utah

**Performing Arts  
High School Winner**

**Amiracle Evans**  
*Vocalist*  
Milwaukee High School of the Arts  
Raymond Roberts  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**Performing Arts High School  
Outstanding Performance**

**Lex Crump**  
*Vocalist*  
Milwaukee High School of the Arts  
Raymond Roberts  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**High School Honors Winner**

**Coco Oaks**  
*Vocalist*  
Mountaintop Music Institute  
Jaden Bueno  
Saratoga Springs, Utah

**High School Honors  
Outstanding Performances**

**Shion Sonomura**  
*Alto Saxophone*  
Mountaintop Music Institute  
Jaden Bueno  
Saratoga Springs, Utah



**Sebastian Kuchczynski**



**Amiracle Evans**

**Sofia Prado**  
*Vocalist*  
Mountaintop Music Institute  
Jaden Bueno  
Saratoga Springs, Utah

**Community College Winner**

**Lizzy McCrary**  
*Vocalist*  
Calhoun Community College  
Dr. Matt Leder  
Decatur, Alabama

**Community College  
Outstanding Performances**

**Collier Cash**  
*Guitar*  
Kansas City Kansas  
Community College

Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

**Noah Randall**  
*Alto and Soprano  
Saxophones*  
Kansas City Kansas  
Community College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

**Undergraduate College Winners**

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*Guitar*  
University of Kansas  
Matt Otto  
Lawrence, Kansas

**Trevor Kubose**  
*Electric Guitar*  
California State University,



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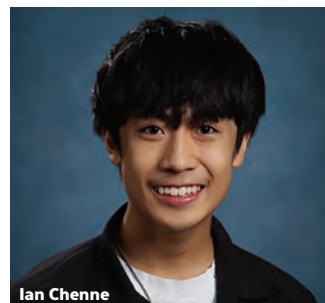
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Amherst  
Jeffrey Holmes  
Amherst, Massachusetts

**Maggie Robertson**  
*Vocalist*  
California State University, Long  
Beach  
Christine Helferich Guter  
Long Beach, California

**Graduate College Winner**

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*Guitar*  
University of North Texas  
Davy Mooney  
Denton, Texas

**Graduate College**  
**Outstanding Performance**

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*Drums*  
University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Renato Diz  
Coral Gables, Florida

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Damon Morreale  
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Cary-Grove High School  
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Cary, Illinois

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**Outstanding Performance**

**SoundScape**  
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Decatur, Alabama

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Community College  
Can Olgun  
New York, New York

**KCKCC Blue Devil Funk Band**

Kansas City Kansas  
Community College  
Justin Binek  
Kansas City, Kansas

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**Frost Fusion Ensemble**

University of Miami,  
Frost School of Music  
Steve Rucker  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Kutztown University Rock Ensemble I**

Kutztown University  
of Pennsylvania  
Kevin Kjos  
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

**Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances**

**Fredonia Jazz Flextet**

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of New York at Fredonia  
Nick Weiser  
Fredonia, New York

**Fredonia Jazz Orchestra**

The State University  
of New York at Fredonia  
Nick Weiser  
Fredonia, New York

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**Frost Funk Ensemble**

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Frost School of Music  
Steve Rucker  
Coral Gables, Florida

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**Hammond B3 Ensemble**

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Frost School of Music  
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Amherst  
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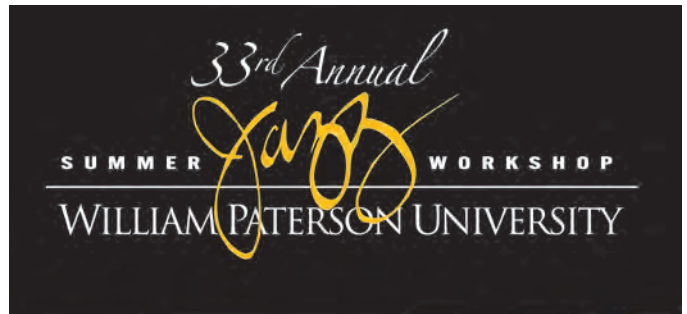
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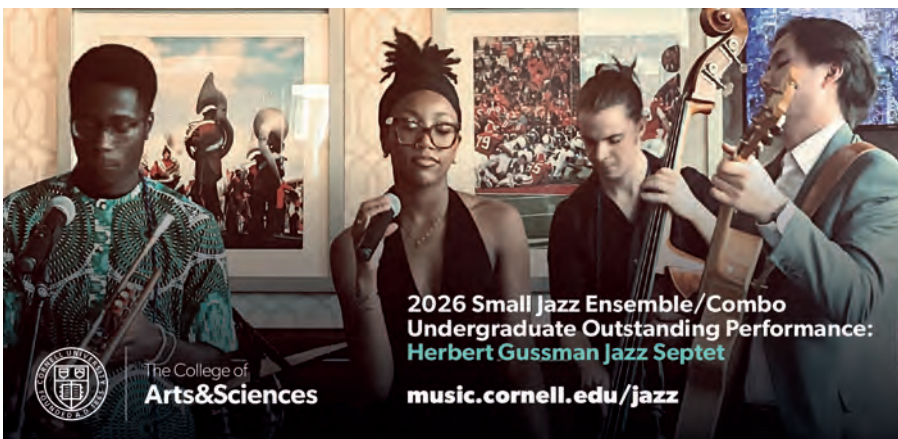
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Santa Ana, California

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**Joshua Prabhakar,  
“In Case”**  
Valley Christian High School  
Michael Jones  
San Jose, California

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“El Baile de Eloisa”**  
Plano West Senior High School  
Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

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Colburn Community School  
Lee Secard  
Los Angeles, California

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Mayflower Art Center  
Yiming Wu  
Andover, Massachusetts

**Mateo Arce,  
“Henchmans Theme”**



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“Quiet Like the Ocean”**  
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Small Ensemble & College/Graduate



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Jason Anderson  
Kissimmee, Florida

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Conservatorium van Amsterdam  
Simon Rigter  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Meiko Ibanez, "Blues For Nara"**  
Booker T. Washington HSPVA  
Terence Hobby  
Dallas, Texas

## Community College Winner

**Parker Woolworth, "Where The Wind Blows"**  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Brett Jackson  
Kansas City, Kansas

## Community College Outstanding Composition

**Joel Martinez, "The Crow"**  
Kansas City Kansas Community College  
Brett Jackson  
Kansas City, Kansas

## Undergraduate College Winners

**Greg Tan, "Kenangan"**  
Berklee College of Music  
Edvard Lee  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Sam Leviatin, "The Bird"**  
University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Brian Lynch  
Coral Gables, Florida

## Undergraduate College Outstanding Composition

**Tommy Wu, "Mass Ave 3AM"**  
Berklee College of Music  
Bob Pilkington  
Boston, Massachusetts

## Graduate College Winner

**Teresa Um, "Wheel Of Chronicles"**  
University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, Texas

## Graduate College Outstanding Composition

**Zhengtao Pan, "Mirror, Floating On The Water"**  
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Preston Pierce  
Plano, Texas

### Performing Arts High School Winner

**Xavier Anderson, "Epiphany"**  
Osceola County School for the Arts  
Jason Anderson  
Kissimmee, Florida

### High School Honors Winners

**Evan Wiederanders, "Wandering"**  
SFJAZZ  
Paul Contos  
San Francisco, California

**Max Roston-Saul, "The Blues Can Sneak Up On You"**  
Jazzschool  
Dave Eshelman  
Berkeley, California

### High School Honors Outstanding Composition

**Ho Sen Ken Xiao, "A Flock Descends Into The Paradoxical"**  
Mayflower Art Center  
Yiming Wu  
Andover, Massachusetts

### Undergraduate College Winner

**Chiara Minotto, "Still Water"**  
Sydney Conservatorium of Music  
Andrew Robertson  
Sydney, Australia

### Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

**Sam Leviatin, "Closet Dwellers"**  
University of Miami, Frost School of Music  
Brian Lynch  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Sean Kiefer, "Shattered Sky"**  
University of Northern Iowa  
Michael Conrad  
Cedar Falls, Iowa



Sean Kiefer



Max Roston Saul

### Graduate College Winners

**Ben Partridge, "(re) Iterate"**  
University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz  
Ed Partyka  
Graz, Austria

**Teresa Um, "Phonophobia"**  
University of North Texas  
Richard DeRosa  
Denton, Texas

### Graduate College Outstanding Compositions

**Ryota Sasaki, "Where Did She Go"**  
Berklee College of Music  
Bob Pilkington  
Boston, Massachusetts

**Zhengtao Pan, "Day By Day"**  
Eastman School of Music  
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**Aidan Peng, "Shoreline Drive"**

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Shawn McGinn  
Palo Alto, California

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**Evan Wiederanders, "Little B's Poem"**

SFJAZZ  
Paul Contos  
San Francisco, California

#### High School Honors Outstanding Arrangement

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Los Angeles, California

#### Performing Arts High School Winner

**Egor Tokarev, "Speak Low"**

Conservatorium van Amsterdam  
Simon Rigter  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

#### Undergraduate College Winner

**Renzon Maballo, "Just Squeeze Me"**

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Dave Loeb  
Las Vegas, Nevada

#### Undergraduate College Outstanding Arrangement

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University of Northern Iowa  
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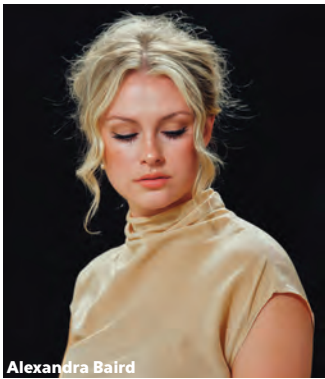
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Long Beach, California



Teresa Um

**Max Smith and Ryan Dong, "Shed A Little Light"**

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Conservatory of Music  
Christine Helerich Guter  
Long Beach, California

**Rebecca Ramirez, "Tell Me A Bedtime Story"**

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Gregory Jasperse  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Graduate College Winner — Small Ensemble**

**Anthony Aldissi,**

**"Riff Primitif"**

Temple University  
Ted Nash  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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**Benjamin Canfield, "Reflections"**

University of Arizona  
Brice Winston  
Tucson, Arizona

**Graham Kozak, "Bartok"**

Temple University  
Ted Nash  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Graduate College Winner — Big Band**

**Zhengtao Pan, "The Tomb Of Couperin I. Prelude"**

Eastman School of Music  
Dave Rivello  
Rochester, New York

**Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements — Big Band**

**Fletcher Clark, "Stone Flower"**

University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst  
Jeffrey Holmes and Felipe Salles  
Amherst, Massachusetts

**Jonathan Bumpus, "When You Dream"**

University of Northern Colorado  
Dana Landry  
Greeley, Colorado

**Jorge Machain, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"**

University of Miami, Frost School  
of Music  
Steve Guerra  
Coral Gables, Florida

**Luke Turner, "You're My Everything"**

University of Oregon  
Steve Owen  
Eugene, Oregon

**Teresa Um, "Airegin"**

University of North Texas  
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University of Miami, Frost School  
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- Don Braden:** Saxophonist, flutist, composer, arranger; Director, Harvard Jazz Combo Initiative.
- Jeff Coffin:** Saxophonist, composer, bandleader, educator/clinician.
- John Daversa:** Chair, Department of Studio Music and Jazz, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.
- Orbert Davis:** Emmy Award-winning trumpeter, composer, educator; co-founder and conductor of the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.
- Monika Herzig:** Pianist, composer, author, Vice Rector and Professor of Artistic Research at Jam Music Lab University, Vienna.
- Fred Irby III:** Howard University coordinator of Instrumental Music, trumpet instructor and Director of the Howard University Jazz Ensemble.
- Bart Marantz:** Legendary jazz educator whose bands have won 245 DownBeat Student Music Awards.
- Miles Osland:** Saxophonist; Director of Jazz Studies, University of Kentucky.
- Bob Parsons:** Saxophonist, arranger and composer.
- Dave Rivello:** Eastman School of Music Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, and Director, New Jazz Ensemble.
- Albert Rivera:** Saxophonist, composer, educator; Director of Operations, Litchfield Jazz Camp.
- John Santos:** Percussionist, clinician, label owner; U.S. Artists Fontanals Fellow; writer/historian.
- Gregory Tardy:** Recording artist, Assistant Professor of Jazz Saxophone, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Dan Thomas:** Award winning performer, composer, arranger, educator and saxophonist. Director of Jazz Studies and Chair of Music, Ottawa University, Kansas City.
- Roger Treece:** Arranger/composer, UNC Jazz Press author and educator.
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## Isaiah Collier

Isaiah Collier, the fiery, 27-year-old multi-reedist (and multi-instrumentalist), blew into Knoxville, Tennessee, last March and blew the doors off the Big Ears Festival with his *Isaiah Collier Plays Coltrane* set, one of the most thoughtful and thought-provoking tributes to John Coltrane's centennial that folks will hear this festival season. Before taking the stage, Collier sat down for his first Blindfold Test in front of a packed audience in the Blue Note Lounge, a cool pop-up shop for the label.

"Growing up being in this music to this point, I hear about this all the time. I feel very unqualified being here [laughs], however, we'll see what happens," Collier said before the event. But he proved to be more than up to the task.

The following has been heavily curated for space. An editor's cut of the test will be posted online later at [downbeat.com](http://downbeat.com).

### Albert Ayler

"Truth Is Marching In" (*Live At Slugs' Saloon*, Base Records/DIW/ESP-Disk, 1966) Ayler, tenor saxophone; Don Ayler, trumpet; Michel Sampson, violin; Lewis Worrell, bass; Ronald Shannon Jackson, drums.

That Albert? I'm going to say Albert Ayler. It reminded me of the way, the approach of the sound ... it's kind of akin to Dixieland-ish in the sense of how the harmony is displaced. There's another harmonic instrument. But then it's like, what do they call it, like a dirge. And then the motif speeds up a bit. I like when pieces like that start with a kind of ambiguity of where it's going to formulate or how it's going to catch on. I'm reminded of a concept of when I was hanging with Ernest Dawkins and he used to say when we were playing in group settings, he'd be like, "I don't want the drummer to worry about time." And I'd be, "Well, like, isn't it a rhythm instrument?"

However, the concept is that time is relevant to everyone. So, this inherent responsibility that you think is on someone else's instrument, your instrument adheres to the rules and logic and laws of music, which is melody, rhythm and harmony. So, at any time, anybody can suggest or take charge of it and then it pivots to somebody else. So, as I was listening, the theme was being thrown around and then in certain sparse moments do you realize, "Oh, there's a violin. Oh, snap, the drums are doing this on purpose and setting it up, then Ayler's able to intertwine and mesh." Step back to the theme. Step away from it. Let it build. Let's arch it. Let's bend it.

### Von Freeman

"An Affair To Remember" (*Good Forever*, Premonition Records, 2006) Freeman, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Cobb, drums; Richard Wyands, piano; John Webber, bass.

The sound is smoother. The first thing I want to say is the phrase reminds me a little bit about Jug [Gene Ammons], but it's not as heavy. There's a weight to the sound but it's still breathier. Ugh. Who are you?

**Frank Alkyer:** Can I throw you a hint? Chicago.

**Collier:** OK, so he's also from Chicago. This can only ... wait, not yet. Clifford? How old? He's not a DuSable guy.

**Alkyer:** He ran one of the greatest jam sessions in Chicago.

**Collier:** Not Von? This is Vonski? Shit! [laughs] That explains everything. Him and Jug created the tenor school for Chicagoans. Both South Side natives, but the weight. Vonski. And it's funny, now that I think about it. If we get on that astrology, nerd thing, Von was a Libra and Jug was his opposite sign.

**Alkyer:** Almost like two sides of a coin.



Isaiah Collier, left, and Frank Alkyer share a laugh during the live Blindfold Test at Big Ears.

**Collier:** Literally. I think that's what I mean by the heaviness. Jug had this smokiness and I could blame that on being a fire sign, if you want to. And Vonski was always just fluid. You couldn't contain the phrases. Even the older he got, it just got slicker.

### Lakecia Benjamin

"Trane" (*Phoenix*, Whirlwind, 2023) Benjamin, alto saxophone; Josh Evans, trumpet; Victor Gould, piano; Ivan Taylor, bass; EJ Strickland, drums; Terri Lyne Carrington, producer.

Obviously, a modern musician. Is this Lakecia? Is this from the *Phoenix* record? This is going to sound hilariously biased, but I mean it in the greatest way possible: It's a very East Coast sound for the alto. You know what I mean? It's like they have this certain type of circumference of sound. Similar to Gary Bartz, Antonio Hart, Jaleel Shaw. There's a certain type of roundness and then the point of the sound comes out like a cone. The drive is the point of the cone.

What do I think of it? I have no highs in my right ear, so it's kind of hard to hear. [laughs] I dig this type of sound. I like good modal music. [listens for a high note] All right. If you aren't squealin', you ain't dealing. [laughs]

### Sonny Rollins

"I Can't Get Started" (*A Night At The Village Vanguard, The Complete Masters*, Blue Note 2024) Rollins, tenor saxophone; Wilbur Ware, bass; Elvin Jones, drums.

[after one note] Come on, Sonny! [starts humming along] "I Can't Get Started." Can't get started. Is this with Wilbur or Jimmy? This is Wilbur and Elvin. It's the first night. Because Pete La Roca does the other night. We talk about Sonny Rollins, but I don't think a lot of us put the chronological pieces of [his] influence and how, simply, he was one hell of a trailblazer. He was so ahead of his time that he had your own contemporaries trying to bite off of what you were doing.

I remember one of my favorite records is *East Broadway Rundown* with Freddie Hubbard, Elvin and Jimmy [Garrison]. And I always call that the funniest record: Did he just gangster Trane's rhythm section for a record? But most people forget that Sonny's sound is not just the collage of being from New York. A lot of people don't know that the way he got the gig with Max Roach was [Sonny] lived in Chicago. And around that time, he was getting a lot of information from Jug, Sonny Stitt, Von. And I couldn't put my finger on it. What's this husk in his sound? And then people would say, "Oh, he used to live in Chicago and hear all these guys." And I said, "Oh, my God. It makes so much sense now."

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.



# JOSH LEE

SAXOPHONIST, COMPOSER  
AND ARRANGER

Grammy nominated Saxophonist Josh Lee has performed with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Jazz Orchestra of Philadelphia, the Sun Ra Arkestra, and Ms. Lauryn Hill. He is co-founder of Philadelphia and leads Josh Lee and the Extended Family, an ensemble dedicated to swing era music at Temple University and is the baritone sax player for The Count Basie Orchestra, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Igmar Thomas and the Revive Big Band. He depends on P. Mauriat to give voice to his art.

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