

NEW JAZZ COMPOSERS OCTET

With its dedication to cooperative ethos, the New Jazz Composers Octet nurtures the skills and explores the ever-expanding musical capabilities of all its members. The ensemble dates back to 1996 when trumpeter David Weiss recognized the lack of opportunities for younger composers to present serious original jazz writing. He joined forces with pianist Xavier Davis, saxophonist Myron Walden, and bassist Dwayne Burno and they recruited four more of New York's top young musicians and formed the New Jazz Composers Octet. Approaching the music as more of an expanded small group than a little big band, the five horns provide a broad compositional palette of colors for the composers to fully realize their compositional notions while retaining the flexible, ever shifting small group feel they thrive in.

The collective's passionate rendering of groundbreaking compositions and arrangements while retaining its firm rooting in tradition quickly established the group as the "sound of the new jazz mainstream" (Ben Ratliff, *The New York Times*) for their ability to "stretch hard bop's kind-of-unstretchable formula" (Jim Macnie, *Village Voice*). The Octet's 1999 recording debut, *First Steps into Reality* (Fresh Sound New Talent 059) was lauded as a "gem" and received a Critics' Pick as one of the Top 5 Albums of the Year in *Jazz Times*. In 2000, New Jazz Composers Octet pianist Xavier Davis was the recipient of the prestigious Chamber Music America *Doris Duke Jazz Ensembles Project: New Works*

Creation Presentation grant, which provides funds to a composer to create a new work for his ensemble. Further proof of the consistent high level of all the group's composers was confirmed when David Weiss was awarded the same highly competitive composer's grant in 2001.

The New Jazz Composers Octet built upon the success of *First Steps into Reality* with the release of *New Colors* (Hip Bop), which features trumpet legend Freddie Hubbard. Weiss first developed an interest in writing for octet while arranging a couple of Hubbard's compositions for his 1995 album *M.M.T.C* and the octet's version of Hubbard's dynamic "D Minor Mint" had caught the elder trumpeter's attention. Both Weiss and Hubbard liked the miniature big band sound and decided to collaborate on another album of arrangements of several of Hubbard's more distinctive pieces from throughout his great career. The resulting recording was voted one of ten CDs of 2001 by JazzUSA and was praised by *The London Observer* for the Octet's "fine, surging ensemble sound", as well as the group's "canny mixture of youth and experience" and finally observed, "Trumpeter-arranger David Weiss is definitely a name to watch."

2003 saw the release of the octet's sophomore effort, the critically acclaimed *Walkin' the Line* (Fresh Sound New Talent 151), which features compositions they explored live in performances throughout 2001 and 2002, giving them the freedom to experiment with the



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compositions before committing them to a recording. The record was one of the critic's top ten picks of the year 2003 in JazzWise magazine. The octet recently completed their latest recording *The Turning Gate*, which features the compositions of David Weiss and Xavier Davis commissioned by the Chamber Music America *New Works Creation Presentation* grant. In addition, there are other new works on the CD that have garnered more composition awards: another Chamber Music America *Doris Duke Jazz Ensembles Project: New Works Creation Presentation* grant for Xavier Davis (the first composer to win this award twice) and a grant from the American Composers Forum's *Jerome Composers Commissioning Program* for David Weiss.

As the Boston Herald said of one of their recent performances, the New Jazz Composers Octet plays "with style and substance, and you can't ask for much more".

Individual Biographies

Trumpeter **David Weiss** was born and raised in New York City and has performed and recorded with many legendary jazz musicians including Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Hutcherson, Curtis Fuller, Jimmy Heath, Jaki Byard, Junior Cook, Charles Tolliver, Jimmy Cobb, Pete LaRoca, Joe Chambers, Tom Harrell, Billy Harper, Gary Bartz, Barry Harris, Muhal Richard Abrams, Kenny Wheeler, and Dave Holland. A highly sought after arranger, he has arranged and transcribed music for over 80 albums. Key credits as an arranger include the Main Theme from the "The Cosby Mysteries" starring Bill Cosby, *Alto Summit* featuring Phil Woods and a Rahsaan Roland Kirk Tribute CD, *Haunted Melodies* featuring Joe Lovano, Donald Harrison and many others. Weiss has also recorded two critically acclaimed albums for the Fresh Sound/New Talent label, the most recent one being *The Mirror*.

Alto Saxophonist **Myron Walden** was born in Miami, Florida and moved to New York City at the age of 12. He has since performed with Wynton Marsalis, Nat Adderley, Dave Douglas, Jon Hendricks, Lou Donaldson, Ray Barretto and Roy Hargrove. He has also recorded with Brian Blade, Omer Avital, Russell Gunn and the Jason Lindner Big Band. A highly prolific composer, Myron has over 400 compositions to his credit. He has recorded 5 CDs as a leader, the most recent is entitled *This Way* on the Fresh Sound/ New Talent label.

Pianist **Xavier Davis** moved to New York in 1995 to work with vocal legend Betty Carter and appears on her final CD *I'm Yours, You're Mine*. Since then Xavier has performed and/or recorded with Tom Harrell, Stefon Harris, Freddie Hubbard, Abbey Lincoln, Joe Lovano, Donald Byrd, Bob Berg, Joe Chambers, Gary Bartz, Jon Faddis, Nat Adderley, Nicholas Payton, Wessell Anderson, Greg Tardy, Vanessa Rubin, Nnenna Freelon, The New York Voices, Billy Hart, and Diahann Carroll among others. Xavier has two CDs to his credit as a leader, the most recent being *Innocence of Youth* on the Fresh Sound/New Talent label.

Bassist **Dwayne Burno** is from Philadelphia and attended the

famed Berklee College of Music. While at Berklee, Dwayne began a personal and musical association with his first major employer, Alto Saxophonist Donald Harrison. In 1990, Burno began performing every weekend with Alto Saxophonist Jesse Davis' band at the New York City proving ground known as Augie's and soon after joined Betty Carter's. After leaving Ms. Carter late in 1991, Dwayne has gone on to perform, tour and record with notables such as Roy Haynes, Barry Harris, Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Cedar Walton, Joe Chambers, Wynton Marsalis, Joshua Redman, Roy Hargrove, Dignity Planets, Chucho Valdes, Abbey Lincoln, David Murray, Nicholas Payton, Bill Cosby, and an entire host of others from all walks of musical and entertainment life. As a sideman, Burno has performed on the stages of countless venues throughout the world and has also appeared on over 70 recordings.

Tenor Saxophonist **Jimmy Greene** began studying with Alto Sax legend Jackie McLean in High School and continued his studies with McLean at the Ham School/University of Hartford. In 1996, Greene was named First Runner-up in the prestigious Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Jazz Saxophone Competition. In 1997, he moved to New York City and became a member of the Horace Silver Quintet. In addition to the legendary pianist's group, Greene has performed regularly with Tom Harrell, Steve Tune, Lewis Nash, Avishai Cohen, Kenny



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Barron, Ralph Peterson, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, and the big bands of Harry Connick, Jr. and Jason Lindner. In June 1999, Down Beat magazine recognized Greene as one of "25 Young Rising Stars in Jazz" in an article looking toward the future of jazz into the 21st century. In 2004, Greene was awarded a commission from Chamber Music America's *Doris Duke Jazz Ensembles Project: New Works Creation Presentation* program to compose a new work for his group.

Trombonist **Steve Davis** is widely regarded as one of today's leading improvisers on the trombone. His lyrical, hard-swinging style first gained him broad recognition during the 1990's while working with the bands of jazz legends Art Blakey, Jackie McLean and Chick Corea's acclaimed sextet Origin. Since 1996, Davis has released eight CDs as a leader and nine with the renowned, cooperatively led sextet One For All (featuring Eric Alexander). Davis' resume also includes past work with the Roy Hargrove, The Mingus Big Band, Elvin Jones, Eddie Palmeri and Lionel Hampton. Davis is also featured on recordings with legendary jazz artists such as Cedar Walton, Harold Mabern, Eddie Henderson, Rene McLean, Leon Parker, Peter Bernstein, Brad Mehldau, Jimmy Greene, Steve Nelson, Nat Reeves and Dena DeRose.

Drummer **Nasheet Waits** is a New York native and his interest in playing the drums was encouraged by his father, legendary percussionist, Frederick Waits. He studied with percussionist Michael Carvin and added influences from his father as well as mentor Max Roach. It was Max that first gave Nasheet's formidable talent international spotlight by hiring him as a member of the famed percussion ensemble M'BOOM. One highlight of Nasheet's tenure with M'BOOM was the live concert performance of the group with special guests Tony Williams and Ginger Baker. Nasheet has since gone on to perform and record with such jazz notables as Geri Allen, Mario Bauza, Jaki Byard, Ron Carter, Cyrus Chestnut, Stanley Cowell, Stefon Harris, Joe Lovano, Jackie McLean, Mingus Orchestra, Greg Osby, Joshua Redman, Vanessa Rubin, Wallace Roney, Shirley Scott, Jacky Terrason, and Mark Turner. Today Nasheet is one of the most sought after drummers in jazz and is member of legendary pianist's Andrew Hill's band as well as the Fred Hersch Trio and Jason Moran's Bandwagon, the latter proclaimed as one of the most exciting rhythm sections in jazz of this millennium.



What the critics are saying....

"*Walkin' the Line*" - Top Ten CD of 2003

-**Tony Hall *Jazzwise Magazine***

"*First Steps into Reality*" - Top 5 CD of 2000

-**Doug Ramsey *JazzTimes Magazine***

"The sound of the new jazz mainstream".

-**Ben Ratliff *The New York Times***

"This think tank of young guys stretches hard bop's kind-of-unstretchable formula-an achievement right there".

-**Jim Macnie *Village Voice***

"The New Jazz Composers Octet's book is stuffed with new music by some of the idiom's most passionate, forward-thinking writers. The NJCO adheres unabashedly to a 1960s Blue Note esthetic, but its compositional palette is strikingly broad and contemporary, it's soloists sophisticated and brash in equal measure".

-**David Adler *DownBeat Magazine***

"*The Turning Gate* is another intelligent post-modern gem that swings effortlessly as it incites with smart compositions, thoughtful arrangements and dazzling solos.

-**Bill Milkowski *The Absolute Sound***

"The acutely intelligent charts, in their harmonic sophistication and meaningful melodic content, reflect an internalized awareness of the great acoustic mainstream as defined by seminal figures such as Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock. But they also refresh this tradition with post-modern, open, asymmetrical structures. Solos grow organically out of the carefully detailed designs, but then they find the freedom to fly, in phraseologies that acknowledge all the jagged history that has transpired since 1960. These guys invent with a zeal made relevant by musicianship and the passionate focus of players who have found their format".

-**Thomas Conrad *JazzTimes Magazine***

"This is some bad ass modern hard bop that swings hard and unrepentantly. It's loaded with the delightfully mad kind of jazz that shows the form is alive and well, looking forward with all deliberate speed. Hot stuff."

-**Midwest Record Recap**

"The arrangements-some broody, minor modes alternating with kicking, up-tempo tracks, all with shifting chords, rhythmically exciting accents and thoroughly satisfying, challenging, colourful voicings- and solos of

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equal caliber make this essential listening. Unreservedly recommended".

-Tony Hall *JazzWise Magazine*

"The melodically beautiful and harmonically complex music contained herein demonstrates that jazz isn't history, but alive and well in the talented hands of these young players".

-Bret Primack *Jazz Online*

"If this is the new jazz mainstream, then we're seeing a qualitative change away from Young Lion-ism that is wholly for the better. Music by people with passion and individuality as well as chops, 'Walkin' the Line' offers rich pickings and is strongly recommended".

-Fred Grand *Jazz Review*

"Like all the truly great jazz bands of the past, the New Jazz Composers Octet can turn on a dime from the sound of a roaring big band, breathtaking in its super-train precision, to a profusion of satisfying smaller units. The chemistry here, in mellower moments, recalls the Village Vanguard groups anchored by Mel Lewis and fronted by Thad Jones. Let one of NJCO's reedmen stand up behind the mic and the room is suddenly edgy, savage and wild."

"Bandleader-trumpeter David Weiss shepherds the overall chemistry brilliantly and is one of the cooler voices counterbalancing the thrilling cacophony."

-Perry Tannenbaum *JazzTimes*

"Now that the New Jazz Composers Octet has gained its richly deserved recognition, not to mention recording opportunities, its successive CD's continue elevating its reputation, providing evidence that the future of jazz is being created today by serious and creative musicians with their own identities and styles".

-Don Williamson *Jazzreview.com*

"The New Jazz Composers Octet roots their music in 1960s jazz with updated harmonic/melodic concepts. The result is incredible. The band plays with intensity and with a deep passion for the music"

-Thomas Erdmann *ITG Journal*

"The New Jazz Composers Octet is aptly named. These guys play original music and make the most of the palette available to them. Harmonically, rhythmically and melodically, this doesn't really remind you of anything you've heard before. This is original music in every sense of the word".

-Jan Klinecicz *Jazz Imrov Magazine*

"The five horns sound more like fifteen at times, with an astonishing breadth and depth and warmth. Weiss' 10 minute title piece is brilliantly orchestrated."

"The NJCO breaks quite a few boundaries and isn't afraid to move the musical goalposts. An important contribution to progress."

-Tony Hall *Jazzwise Magazine*



"NJCO works in a style that may remind some of Art Blakey or Charles Mingus; the songs have the power and drive of the former and the complex arrangements and melodic inquisitiveness of the latter."

"If you like mainstream jazz that doesn't settle for cliché, go find this CD"

-Richard Kamins *Hartford Courant*

"Things move in an aggressive swing direction behind Jimmy Greene's solo, a tour-de-force of angst and power."

"The harmonic shadings in the music are beautiful and David Weiss contributes some trumpet soloing that could melt your heart."

"Twilight" is a wonder of harmonic beauty with a superb blend and balance between the rhythm section and the horns."

"A program of great compositional integrity and artistry."

- Dan Bilawsky *Jazz Improv Magazine*

"The sheer number of hours spent writing, arranging, and playing material has strengthened this fresh ensemble into a superior example of jazz excellence."

"Onward" points to new directions with a stunning arrangement of harmonic voices, majestic, and mysterious. Walden's turn on flute is astonishing here, while the whole band develops a breath-like momentum throughout the piece."

"The Turning Gate marks a high point in 21st century acoustic jazz. The NJCO's soulful artistry and memorable compositions reveal subtle yet significant shifts in the ongoing evolution of the tradition."

-Greg Camphire *All About Jazz*