



LAKECIA BENJAMIN & PURSUANCE

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

WORLD PREMIERE | PHILADELPHIA HEADLINE DEBUT

SAXOPHONE/LEADER Lakecia Benjamin

PIANO Miki Hayama

BASS Ivan Taylor

DRUMS EJ Strickland

SPECIAL GUESTS Dee Dee Bridgewater, Gary Bartz

SUNDAY, **OCTOBER 16** @ 7 PM

Annenberg Center, Zellerbach Theatre

There will be no intermission.

PENN LIVE ARTS



Media support for Alice & John: A Coltrane Festival
provided by WRTI.

22/23 SEASON

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Lakecia Benjamin (Saxophone, Band Leader)

Voted Rising Star Alto Saxophonist by 2020 *Downbeat* Critics Poll and Up and Coming Artist of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association, charismatic and dynamic saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin fuses traditional conceptions of jazz, hip-hop and soul. Benjamin's electric presence and fiery saxophone work has shared stages with several legendary artists, including Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, The Roots and Macy Gray. As the bandleader of Lakecia Benjamin and Soul Squad, she melds the vintage sounds of James Brown, Maceo Parker, Sly and the Family Stone and the Meters with soaring, dance-floor worthy rhythms. Benjamin's grooves take the classic vibe to a whole new level with sultry alto saxophone creating something special on every cut, be it a smoldering late-night ambiance, a forceful jazz intensity or even the tight funk multi-horn harmony sections.

A streetwise New York City native, born and raised in Washington Heights, Benjamin first picked up the saxophone at Fiorello LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts. From there, she joined the renowned jazz program at New York's New School University. However, even at that early stage, Benjamin was already playing with renowned jazz figures like Clark Terry and Reggie Workman, which introduced her to opportunities to play and tour with an array of artists such as Rashied Ali, the David Murray Big Band, Vanessa Rubin and James "Blood" Ulmer. With her deep jazz roots, she was soon in demand as an arranger and horn section leader, landing stints with such acclaimed artists as Anita Baker.

Currently, Benjamin's latest album, *Pursuance*, is an intergenerational masterpiece that takes a journey through the lineage of the music of John and Alice Coltrane. Benjamin pays homage to those who have come before by featuring innovative bandleaders of her generation, such as, Reggie Workman (co-producer and performer), Ron Carter, Gary Bartz, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Meshell Ndegeocello, Regina Carter, Bertha Hope, Last Poets, Greg Osby, Steve Wilson, John Benitez, Marc Cary, Marcus Gilmore, Keyon Harrold, Marcus Strickland, Brandee Younger, Georgia Anne Muldrow and Jazzmeia Horn.

Miki Hayama (Piano)

Born in Kyoto, Japan, Hayama is a Grammy® Award-nominated jazz pianist, arranger and musical director, living in New York City. Hayama graduated from Osaka College of Music with a major in classical piano, but she pursued jazz study with renowned jazz pianist Sadayasu Fujii at Fuji Jazz School in Kyoto. She was the first winner of The Yokohama Jazz Competition in 1996. After graduating from college, she worked at many Jazz clubs in the Kansai area. Since 2003, Hayama has been making a name for herself in New York's jazz scene. She has performed with many greats, including Kenny Garrett, Ralph Peterson, Sean Jones, Tia Fuller, Michael Dease, Vincent Herring, Bruce Williams, Roy Hargrove, JD Allen, Greg Osby, Mark Shim, Cindy Blackman-Santana, Nnenna Freelon, Jazzmeia Horn, Christian McBride, Eric Harland, Gary Thomas, and even the queen of soul, Aretha Franklin. Her 2006 sophomore release, *Prelude to a Kiss*, received a five-star rating in *Swing Journal*. Her third album, *Wide Angle*, got *Swing Journal's* Gold Disc Award in March 2009 and Best Production Award in January 2010. She appears on more than 40 recordings as a side person, including on Tia Fuller's *Pillar of Strength* and *Healing Space*, Sharel Casity's *Evolve*, Mimi Jones's *A New Day* and *Balance*, Michael Dease Big Band's *Relentless* and Nnenna Freelon's *Christmas*. Recently, she worked as a musical director, arranger and keyboardist on Nnenna Freelon's album, *Time Traveler*, which was nominated for the Best Jazz Vocal Album Grammy® in 2022. Hayama has traveled and performed at many jazz festivals across the world.

Ivan Taylor (Bass)

Born in Southern Illinois in 1984, Taylor has been playing the bass since he was nine years old. He had an illustrious high school career, playing with the Illinois All-State Jazz band, The Grammy Band, and Chicago Jazz masters Von Freeman and Orbert Davis. Taylor was a star performer at the 2002 Essentially Ellington competition, where he met Wynton Marsalis. This meeting led him to enroll in The Juilliard School.

He had a strong impact on the New York scene, performing with Rashid Ali, Juilliard Jazz Orchestra, Louis Hayes, Nicholas Payton, Curtis Fuller, Mike Phillips, Kenny Garrett, Delfeayo Marsalis, Wynton Marsalis, Robert Glasper, Take 6, Rodney Jones, Russell Malone, Steve Nelson, Carmen Lundy, Hank Jones, Hal

Weary, Cyrus Chestnut, Jonathan Baptiste, Maurice Brown, Diana Ross, KJ Rose, Marly Marl, Chris Madsen, Jennifer Sloan, Tia Fuller, Shamie Royston and many others. He has studied with Ben Wolfe and continues to study with Ron Carter. For seven years, he was a member of Mulgrew Miller's trio and sextet, Wingspan, touring internationally. Taylor's major influences are George Benson, Ray Brown, Israel Crosby, Stanley Clark, Gary Granger, Jaco Pastorius, John Patitucci, Ron Carter and Christian McBride. He has the ability to play both upright and electric bass with equal agility. Taylor also plays the guitar at an exceptional level which he plans to feature on future albums.

EJ Strickland (Drums)

Drummer E.J. Strickland (Enoch Jamal Strickland) was born in Gainesville and raised in Miami, FL. His sound on the instrument has been described as "fields of cumulative energy, clouds of feather-touch and heavy-handed syncopations, latent with power like an oncoming storm" by Thomas Conrad of *Downbeat Magazine*. Some of his early influences include drummers like Elvin Jones, "Philly" Joe Jones, Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette, Roy Haynes, Art Blakey and Jeff "Tain" Watts.

At 11, he was taught the rudiments and drumset by his father, Michael Strickland. He started playing drums and percussion in the middle school jazz band and concert band. He decided early on that he wanted to pursue a career in music, furthering his studies in jazz and classical music at the New World School Of The Arts. He moved to New York in 1997 to attend the conservatory New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. His first gigs were short stints on the New York scene with Wynton Marsalis, Vincent Herring and Russell Malone. He had much longer stints with Ravi Coltrane, David Weiss and Marcus Strickland, his saxophonist twin brother. Since his career started, he's been fortunate to appear with Nnenna Freelon, David Sanchez, Cassandra Wilson, Lizz Wright and many others. He has recently toured with The Manuel Valera Trio and Reggie Washington's Vintage New Acoustic. Since 2009, he has been touring and recording with his own projects, such as The E.J. Strickland Quintet, Transient Beings and Pads N Loops. When one hears Strickland's music, one can hear simple lyrical melodies supported by complex figures from the rhythm section.

Dee Dee Bridgewater (Special Guest Performer)

Over the course of a multifaceted career spanning four decades, Grammy® and Tony® Award-winning jazz giant Dee Dee Bridgewater has ascended to the upper echelon of vocalists, putting her unique spin on standards, as well as taking intrepid leaps of faith in re-envisioning jazz classics. Ever the fearless voyager, explorer, pioneer and keeper of tradition, the three-time Grammy® Award-winner most recently won the Grammy® for Best Jazz Vocal Album for *Eleanora Fagan (1915-1959): To Billie With Love From Dee Dee*.

Bridgewater's career has always bridged musical genres. She earned her first professional experience as a member of the legendary Thad Jones/Mel Louis Big Band, and throughout the 70s, she performed with such jazz notables as Max Roach, Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon and Dizzy Gillespie. After a foray into the pop world during the 1980s, she relocated to Paris and began to turn her attention back to jazz. Bridgewater began self-producing with her 1993 album *Keeping Tradition* (Polydor/Verve) and created DDB records in 2006 when she signed with the Universal Music Group as a producer (Bridgewater produces all of her own CDs.) Releasing a series of critically acclaimed CDs, all but one, including her wildly successful double Grammy® Award-winning tribute to Ella Fitzgerald, *Dear Ella*, have received Grammy® nominations. Artist Theo Croker is signed to DDB Records, and Irvin Mayfield and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra also recorded a project with Bridgewater released by her label in 2014.

Bridgewater also pursued a parallel career in musical theatre, winning a Tony® Award for her role as Glinda in *The Wiz* in 1975. Having recently completed a run as the lead role of Billie Holiday in the off-Broadway production of *Lady Day*, her other theatrical credits include *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Black Ballad*, *Carmen*, *Cabaret* and the Off-Broadway and West End Productions of *Lady Day*, for which Bridgewater received the British Laurence Olivier Nomination for Best Actress in a Musical.

As a Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Bridgewater continues to appeal for international solidarity to finance global grassroots projects in the fight against world hunger. She recently toured worldwide in support of her CD, *Memphis*. In 2017, Bridgewater was the recipient of an NEA Jazz Masters Fellows Award with honors bestowed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and the ASCAP Foundation Champion Award for her humanitarian work. In 2018, she was awarded the Doris Duke Award.

Gary Bartz (Special Guest Performer)

Bartz studied at The Juilliard School. In the early 1960s, he performed with Eric Dolphy and McCoy Tyner in Charles Mingus' Jazz Workshop. He worked as a sideman with Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln before joining Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. In 1968, he was a member of McCoy Tyner's band, Expansions.

In mid-1970, he joined Miles Davis' band, performing live at the Isle Of Wight festival; and at a series of dates at The Cellar Door club in Washington, D.C. Portions of these shows were initially released on the 1971 *Live-Evil* album, with the entire run eventually released in full on the 2005 *Cellar Door Sessions* box set. He later formed the band Ntu Troop, which combined jazz, funk and soul.

Bartz was awarded a Grammy® for Best Latin Jazz Performance for his work on Roy Hargrove's *Habana* at the 40th Annual Grammy® Awards, and for Best Jazz Instrumental Album, Individual or Group for McCoy Tyner's *Illuminations* at the 47th Annual Grammy® Awards.

Bartz was awarded the BNY Mellon Jazz 2015 Living Legacy Award, which was presented at a special ceremony at the Kennedy Center. In the liner notes to the album *The Red and Orange Poems*, jazz critic Stanley Crouch called Bartz "one of the very best who has ever picked up the instrument".

In 2019, Revive Music and Bartz celebrated the 50th Anniversary of his *Another Earth* album at Winter Jazzfest in New York City, alongside original member Pharoah Sanders. Later that year, in collaboration with Moon31, he celebrated the same album at the North Sea and Newport Jazz Festivals with original member Charles Tolliver and Nasheet Waits (son of Freddie Waits), alongside Ravi Coltrane.