



Henry Adenonjo

TERENCE BLANCHARD

Featuring The E-Collective

Terence Blanchard Trumpet/Lead

Charles Altura Guitar

David Ginyard, Jr. Bass

Oscar Seaton Drums

Taylor Eigsti Piano

PROGRAM

There will be an intermission.

Friday, October 21 @ 8 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

AFRICAN ROOTS, AMERICAN VOICES

Part of the African Roots, American Voices series.

Media Sponsor: 

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Terence Blanchard (Trumpet/Lead)

Since top-tier jazz and multiple Grammy® Award-winning trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard embarked on his solo recording career with his eponymous Columbia Records album in 1991, the New Orleans-born-and-based artist has traveled many paths musically, including delivering adventurous and provocative acoustic jazz outings of original material, composing over 50 soundtracks and even, in 2013, debuting *Champion: An Opera in Jazz*. He has also, in the spirit of his onetime membership in the jazz school of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, mentored several musicians in his bands who have gone on to have significant recording careers of their own including Lionel Loueke, Aaron Parks, Kendrick Scott and one of his current band members, Fabian Almazan.

As a leader and co-leader, Blanchard has recorded more than 30 albums that often defied genres, yet were still critically acclaimed. But for his latest Blue Note Records album, *Breathless*, Blanchard powerfully and playfully journeys into another jazz realm with his new quintet, The E-Collective—an exciting zone of grooved fusion teeming with funk, R&B and blues colors.

Produced by the trumpeter and his manager Robin Burgess and executive produced by Blue Note president Don Was, the adventurous 13-tune recording boasts several Blanchard originals, an epic-length piece by Almazan and a scattering of covers, sung by soothing and soulful vocalist P.J. Morton (a member of the band Maroon 5), including an exhilarating take on the modern standard “Compared to What” made famous by Les McCann and Eddie Harris, and the soul-vibed and lyrical take on “I Ain’t Got Nothin’ But Time” penned by Hank Williams. Plus, Morton sings the compelling pop-styled, song-of-strength tune, “Shutting Down,” written by Blanchard’s talented son, T. Oliver Blanchard Jr., aka JRei Oliver, who also contributes spoken-word excerpts on other songs.

It’s a first foray into straight-up grooveland for Blanchard, and he’s thrilled with the dance-steeped party he and his quintet (and guests) have cooked up. “*Breathless* is the album I’ve been wanting to do for quite awhile,” he says. “Growing up I was listening to the Head Hunters and Weather Report, which had a strong effect on me. I always listened to groove-based music—Jimi Hendrix, Parliament Funkadelic and then later listening to Prince and D’Angelo and later what [jazz trumpeter] Russell Gunn was doing. But up to this point, I had never explored it.”

It’s a subject that Blanchard and his rhythm-team friends—electric bassist Donald Ramsey (a colleague from their New Orleans high school days) and drummer Oscar Seaton (a Chicago native who got his first break playing with Ramsey Lewis in 1996 and later played in soundtracks written by Blanchard)—have been talking about for at least the last seven years. “But I could never find the time to do it,” Blanchard says. “I remember playing some groove-based stuff with Oscar for Spike’s [2006] film *Inside Man*, and I said that we needed to put together a band. All this time later, here we are. I figured, if not now, I’ll probably never do it.”

In prep for the recording, Blanchard and The E-Collective rehearsed for two days in October, did a two-week tour of Europe in November with a date at the Blue Note in Milan, and then soon after entered the recording studio in December and finished the week with a hometown show at Snug Harbor. Understandably, the leader was nervous. “Really, when we first started working on this, we had no idea what would happen,” he says. “In Milan, there were people who showed up and were expecting the jazz stuff. I think at first they were a little put off, but the young people got it immediately. That took a big weight off my

shoulders. We were having fun but were still entertaining. We got standing ovations." When The E-Collective took over the Blue Note in New York for an evening during this past year's NYC Winter Jazzfest, both shows were packed as anticipation for Blanchard's new musical vision was piqued.

The psychedelic-styled cover of the recording speaks volumes about Blanchard and The E-Collective. Designed by Andrew F. Scott, it depicts a fist with a peace dove and five sturdy tree roots, each one standing for the five primary band members—Ramsey, Seaton, guitarist Charles Altura and Almazan on piano and synths. "This represents all the members who are five individuals," says Blanchard. "We're all different, and on this album we're embracing and celebrating our differences."

Breathless opens with the funky, swinging "Compared to What," complete with a crowd noise in the background with Morton soulfully searching in his vocals while Blanchard blows his trumpet with party-like exhilaration. After the swirling, beat-driven Blanchard original and identity-without-filters anthem, "See Me As I Am," the band explores the 15-minute Almazan journey, "Everglades," with its stretches of mesmerizing, light-hearted calm that burst into turbulence with Blanchard playing anguished lines and the pianist tumbling notes. That moved into another Blanchard original, the title track written with the Eric Garner "I can't breathe" NYPD chokehold front of mind—rendered as a trumpet-toned, spoken-word protest.

Other Blanchard originals include the rhythmically-driving "Confident Selfishness" ("It comes from the Buddhism notion of being open and brave enough to be vulnerable," he says); the dirty-funk with a bounce and guitar edge "Soldiers" (written on the road while on tour and fueled by a defiant groove that sounds like "marching forward"); the meditative, reflective "Samadhi" ("It's about finding inner peace and knocking off all the nervous chatter"); the funky, multicolored "Talk to Me" (with spoken word text by Dr. Cornel West); the fun, whimsical "Tom & Jerry" (with Altura and Almazan playing off each other); and the propulsive "Cosmic Warrior" with an ominous tone and heavy-rock power chords in the open ("My kids said it sounds like a superhero warrior taking on our society that's so screwed up").

As for the Hank Williams number, "I Ain't Got Nothin' But Time," Blanchard picked up on the tune from a session he did with Orquestra Was—a project led by current Blue Note president Don Was—for the 1997 album *Forever's a Long, Long Time*. Blanchard's lyrical trumpet melody flows into The E-Collective's slow, R&B-vibed arrangement. "I really dig this song. It's a nice break from all the seriousness. I had no idea how it was going to turn out and I didn't give any instruction about the groove. But it came out fine." As for his lyricism, he says, "It's what I tell my young musician students: It's not about the notes, but the moment." The album ends with the gorgeous, slightly melancholic instrumental rendition of the Coldplay tune, "Midnight." "It's a beautiful song," Blanchard says. "I wanted to end the album by coming down emotionally."

As for the breadth of *Breathless*, Blanchard is pleased to have followed through with a project that's dear to his heart and deep in his history. As for his jazz diehard fans who may frown at the deep-grooved fusion, he's not worried. "I always think of Miles Davis," he says. "No matter what he played, he was always Miles. He changed, but most of all he was having fun. That's the way I look at it. Whatever comes, so be it. But for this recording, there was just one must. The groove. Everything else is up for grabs."