

BIOGRAPHY

When the unmistakable musical influences of Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker intersect with J.S. Bach, Scott Joplin, and the folkloric rhythms of Cuba, could one possibly conceptualize the celebration that occurs at that intersection?

New York-based jazz pianist Kevin Harris plays a distinctive combination of traditional and contemporary music that seeks to explore such a crossroad.

Fred Hersch talks of Harris as one who *"plays and writes with flair and real soul"* and Downbeat Magazine writes that *"Harris' compositions deal with themes of strength, love, courage, and self awareness. It's a heavy task he's set up for himself, and he meets the challenge gracefully."*

One of the captivating elements of the Kevin Harris Project is the level of comfort and understanding they have with one another as they dive into soulfully expressive conversations and playful exchanges of ideas. Both live and recorded performances reflect Harris's determination to capture his audience through explorative interactions that Terri Lyne Carrington describes as *"an exciting commitment to quality"*.

Among his most notable collaborations are Greg Osby, Jeremy Pelt, Bill Pierce, Francisco Mela, Avishai Cohen, Eddie Gomez, Duane Eubanks, Richie Barshay, Ben Street, Ralph Peterson, Steve Langone, Jason Palmer, Jerry Bergonzi, George Garzone, Yoron Israel, Tommy Campbell, Dezron Douglas, Donny McCaslin, and Terri Lyne Carrington.

Harris performs at renowned national and international venues -Blue Note (NYC, Beijing, Milan, and Boston), Smalls Jazz Club, Mezzrow Jazz Club, JazzHus Montmartre, Wally's, to name a few. His ensemble has also participated at Jazz Festivals in Cuba, Panama, Italy, Denmark, Peru, Israel, and the USA.

Harris holds a master's degree in jazz performance from the New England Conservatory of Music and an undergraduate degree in music education (Morehead State University, KY). At the NEC, he studied with Fred Hersch, Mike Cain, Cecil McBee, George Garzone, and Danilo Perez, and performed with George Russell, Benny Golson and Bob Brookmeyer.

After graduating from the New England Conservatory of Music, Harris worked at further defining himself and his music through partnerships with Boston's jazz community while seeking further inspiration from historical pillars of improvisation such as Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, J.S. Bach and Beethoven The continuing search for growth and new expression is clearly recognizable in his albums.

In 2015, Harris released his 5th album *"Bird Interpretations"*, a pianist perspective on the music of Charlie Parker. The exciting new trio album exhibits captivating dialogue by Kevin Harris (piano), Francisco Mela (drums), and Ben Street (acoustic bass). In choosing to interpret some of Charlie Parker's repertoire, Harris seeks to echo the inspiring effect that Bird's music has had

on generations past and present, as well as documenting his own progress as a jazz pianist. As Parker's musical journey began in Kansas City to be later defined in New York City, Harris' playing certainly presents a contrast informed by geography: the understated elegance and soulfulness of his native Kentucky coalesces with the elevated energy and hustle and bustle of his adopted home towns, Boston (MA) and New York City to form a highly unique person and musician. Harris has also garnered praise and recognition for his distinctive combination of traditional and contemporary music, within which he consistently, and naturally, explores these various elements of his life.

With his 4th album as a leader, *'Museum Vol I'* released in 2013, Harris presents a personal collection of concepts in song form. DownBeat describes it as "*overall smart, lyrical and engrossing*". The Phoenix chooses it as the "Editor's Pick" and highlights "*the tight/loose elasticity, the tension between form and freedom that was the hallmark of so many Miles Davis sessions with Shorter and Herbie Hancock . . . calm and collected, but also loose and full of surprises.*" The initial release tour brings the ensemble to Panama, Copenhagen, Lima, Boston, New York, with thriving performances for both new and old fans.

In 2010, Harris released *'Chapters'* at Scullers Jazz Club and Blue Note NYC. The album is a courageous compilation of complex dialogue and a fearless ambition to continue to explore the world of improvisation. It includes compositions by Harris and drummer Steve Langone, along with new arrangements of Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, and Charlie Parker. Listeners of all musical tastes and genres are sure to enjoy!

Harris has also released two other albums as a leader, *'Freedom Doxology'*, demonstrating his ability to create an energetic interaction using odd meters and advanced harmony, a true treat for any curious listener. This album also displays Harris' interest in exploring and arranging Monk and Coltrane's tunes.

And Harris' very first album, *'The Butterfly Chronicles'*, holds a number of through-composed originals that take listeners through the stories told by the engaging notes played. JazzTimes magazine says of it "*Harris possesses a spare style and gentle touch*".

Harris is in demand as a clinician. He is currently on the faculty at Berklee College of Music where he has taught piano, jazz ensembles, summer theory classes, and piano labs; he is also a MIT affiliated artist. In previous years he has taught classes at the Boston Arts Academy and collaborated with the North Eastern University Fusion Art's Program teaching students from Brazil, India, and South Africa.

Committed to the community and to getting youth involved in music, Harris has conducted clinics and master classes in both public and private schools throughout the USA, Italy, Poland, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, Panama, Peru, Israel, Turkey, South Africa, China, and South Korea.

In 2000 he started five separate band programs with help from "Arts In Progress," a Boston based arts organization. He currently serves as a council member for the Brooklyn based arts organization "Music is my First Language", The Bronx Museum of Fine Arts, and the New England Conservatory Alumni Council.

Harris thrives on a courageously playful style of communication in music. A style, in his opinion, requiring a very special and sincere habit of listening and an equally patient endeavor to express oneself joyfully. He hopes that a typical interaction will always inspire the audience to walk away with a sense of joyful connectedness and community.

"Participation," he says, "is what keeps our souls alive."