

BIOGRAPHY

His Music

When the unmistakable musical influences of Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis intersect with J.S. Bach, Scott Joplin, and the folkloric African rhythms of the Caribbean, 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.

Among his most notable collaborations are Greg Osby, Bill Pierce, Francisco Mela, Avishai Cohen, Eddie Gomez, Duane Eubanks, Richie Barshay, Ben Street, Jason Palmer, Rudy Royston, Frank Lacey, Jerry Bergonzi, George Garzone, Tommy Campbell, Denzon Douglas, Curtis Sunday, Eric McPherson, Dayna Stephens, Ralph Peterson, George Garzone, and Terri Lyne Carrington.

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."*

Harris performs at renowned national and international venues --Blue Note (NYC, Boston, Milan, Beijing), New York's Smalls, Mezzrow, and 55-Bar, Copenhagen's JazzHus Montmartre, Boston's Wally's Jazz Cafe, -- to name a few.

His ensemble has also participated at Havana's Jazz Festivals in Cuba, Panama Jazz Fest, Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy, Winter Jazz Fest in Denmark, Lima Jazz Fest in Peru, Levontin Fest in Israel, and various festivals in the USA.

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"*.

Discography as a Leader

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. 1'* released in 2013, Harris presents a personal collection of concepts in song form. DownBeat gives it three stars and 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 established fans.

In 2010, Harris released *'Chapters'* at Scullers Jazz Club and Blue Note NYC. This 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' second album, *'Freedom Doxology'*, demonstrates 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 his 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'*

His Story

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, 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.

Additional Endeavors

Harris is in demand as a clinician and consistently collaborates with both public and private education institutions nationally and internationally. He is currently on the faculty at Berklee College of Music where he coaches ensembles, theory classes, piano labs, and private piano instruction; 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, Denmark, Spain, Panama, Peru, Israel, Turkey, and South Africa. 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.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly...

Harris thrives on a courageously playful style of communication in music. A style, in his opinions, that requires 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."*