

## BIOGRAPHY

### His Music

---

A very distinctive trait of New York/Boston-based jazz pianist Kevin Harris is his desire to constantly grow, evolve, improve, and advance. Harris plays a distinctive combination of traditional and contemporary music that seeks to celebrate the musical influences of Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis intersecting with J.S. Bach, Scott Joplin, and the folkloric African rhythms of the Caribbean.

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, Curtis Lundy, Eric McPherson, Dayna Stephens, Ralph Peterson, Ameen Saleem, Greg Hutchinson, 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, Shanghai), New York's Smalls, Mezzrow, and 55-Bar, Copenhagen's Jazzhus Montmartre, Boston's Wally's Jazz Cafe, Rome's AlexanderPlatz -- 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, Levantin Fest in Israel, Round Midnight Festival in South Korea, 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"*.

### Projects and Discography as a Leader

---

2020 opened with the nomination by the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum to be a Neighborhood Salon Luminary. The primary goal of the Neighborhood Salon is to exchange creative ideas and dialogue with Boston's most innovative and thoughtful luminaries, fostering collaborations and artistic networks while shaping Gardner Museum programming.

In looking to expand his skills as a composer, in 2019 Harris set out to put music to the renowned and significant thoughts shared by James Baldwin, in particular those from the book 'The Fire Next Time'. The actualization of this idea is his project **"Roots, Water, and Sunlight"**, which comprises three movements for a wind octet and rhythm section, digital instrumentation, and recorded words of Baldwin. The next international performance for "Roots, Water, and Sunlight is scheduled for the 2020 Panama Jazz Festival.

**"Upwards and Onwards"** It's been said that Art is meant to comfort those in pain and courageously also awaken the comfortable. In 2018, through musical expression, Jason Palmer and Kevin Harris sought to honor, interpret, and imitate the courage of mothers who have lost their children to senseless acts of violence. Upcoming performance: Saturday, February 29, 2020 at The Kennedy Center, Washington DC.

In 2017 Harris successfully embarked upon **"Griot Series"**. For centuries, the West African Griot has encompassed the characteristics of musician, historian, poet, teacher, advisor, ambassador, storyteller, and much more. In modern times, the contemporary griot additionally speaks to the times we live in giving us a vision by which we can paint, carve, and mold the courageous society of which we can become.

In 2016, Harris debuted a highly interactive compilation of repertoire intended to interpret a message of strength through a very important poem, "*Invictus*" written by William Ernest Henley. Each tune of this through composed piece reflects ideas and statements that derive from the poem.

In 2015, Harris released his 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 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*'

## Educator

---

Harris is in demand as a clinician and consistently collaborates with both public and private education institutions nationally and internationally ([see Education page](#)). 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. 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.*"