



## BIOGRAPHY

The wide-ranging body of work of internationally recognized pianist, composer, educator, and Yamaha Artist Kevin Harris, is guided by curiosity, discovery, and **a profound belief in music's capacity to cultivate meaningful human connection**. Emerging from a lifelong engagement with the musical traditions of the African diaspora, **his creative practice places music in conversation with literature, visual art, language, technology, science, and social history**.

Whether seated alone at the piano, collaborating with fellow improvisers, or composing for large ensembles, he approaches each project with the belief that attentive listening is among the most creative acts we can practice. *"Participation,"* Harris says, *"is what keeps our souls alive."*

This conviction shapes every aspect of Harris's artistic life. **For him, "music is not simply a performance to be observed but a shared act of discovery—a conversation between composer and performer, performer and audience, history and the present, structure and spontaneity"**.

Harris's artistic foundation was formed through the rich spectrum of Pan-African musical expression. While the Black Gospel tradition was as an essential part of his musical upbringing, the additional immersion into the sounds of Motown, funk, R&B, and hip-hop, allowed him to develop an early understanding of music as a vehicle for storytelling, community nurturing, personal resilience and joy. His later studies at the New England Conservatory and his professional life expanded this foundation through jazz, improvisation, composition, and an ever-growing appreciation of global musical traditions. Rather than replacing one musical language with another, these experiences broadened his artistic perspective, cultivating a voice that embraces both spontaneity and carefully crafted compositional design.

**This openness has become one of the defining characteristics of Harris's work. Rather than treating artistic disciplines as separate forms, he creates encounters between them.** Literature, philosophy, history, visual art, scientific thought, and technological innovation do not simply inspire his music—they become collaborators within it. His compositions seek to illuminate ideas as much as emotions, inviting audiences to consider how music can deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

NEA Jazz Master Terri Lyne Carrington has praised Harris for his *"exciting commitment to quality,"* while pianist Fred Hersch describes him as *"an artist who plays and writes with flair and real soul."* DownBeat Magazine has observed that Harris's compositions *"explore themes of strength, love, courage, and self-awareness,"* noting that he embraces these ambitious artistic pursuits *"gracefully."*

As a composer, Harris is particularly drawn to projects that engage questions of cultural identity. His symphonic work **RESONANCE: A Contemporary Symphonic Reflection Through the Courageous Lens of Steve Biko**, was premiered at the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival. Inspired by the likes of Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, he combined fully notated orchestral writing with improvisational language informed by artists including Herbie Hancock and Jill Scott. The work interweaves spoken allegory, orchestral performance, and improvisation into a meditation on the enduring ideas of Black Consciousness and the life of anti-apartheid leader Steve Biko. In bringing together orchestral musicians, jazz artists, spoken words, and audiences from diverse musical backgrounds, the work reflects Harris's interest in dissolving boundaries that too often separate artistic communities.

That same spirit animates much of his creative output. **Roots, Water and Sunlight: A Three-Movement Contemporary Octet Expedition through the Expressions of James Baldwin** brings Baldwin's writings into dialogue with original music and electronic media. **Pulse** explores the meeting point of through-composed chamber music and improvisation for oboe, strings, bass, and piano, while his **Griot Series** reimagines the traditional role of the African griot through an American historical perspective. As an Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Neighborhood Salon Luminary, Harris premiered his commissioned solo piano work **Doorways** at Calderwood Hall, a call to the Museums' visitors to patiently form opinions and perspectives of their own. **Upward Mothers**, created in collaboration with trumpeter Jason Palmer, honors mothers whose lives have been

forever transformed by the loss of children to senseless acts of violence, reflecting Harris's profound belief that music can serve as both artistic expression and compassionate witness.

Harris has released seven albums as a leader, each a testament to his artistic evolution. His most recent recording, **Vitruvian Echoes**, draws inspiration from Leonardo da Vinci's pursuit of interdisciplinary insight while celebrating artists whose originality has expanded our collective imagination. Reviewing the album, Scott Haas described Harris's music as *"a balance of freedom and structure."* Of Harris' earlier release **Embers**, Steve Elman wrote, *"Harris stands on the shoulders of the masters, adds a singular personal voice, and has recruited strongly individualistic players to give his music definitive interpretation."* Harris also appears on **Shorter Songs**, released by SteepleChase Records, a duo recording with trumpeter Jason Palmer whose compositions celebrate the artistry of Wayne Shorter.

Throughout his career as a performer, Harris has collaborated with many of today's leading jazz artists, including Terri Lyne Carrington, Dayna Stephens, Jazzmeia Horn, Ralph Peterson, Greg Osby, Jerry Bergonzi, George Garzone, Michael Mayo, Curtis Lundy, Rufus Reid, Francisco Mela, Avishai Cohen, Delfeayo Marsalis, Caroline Davis, Godwin Louis, Bill Pierce, Ben Street, Jason Palmer, Rudy Royston, Greg Hutchinson, Etienne Charles, Eric McPherson, Neal Smith, Frank Lacey, Ameen Saleem, Sheryl Bailey, and Brandy Younger.

His work as a composer has likewise fostered collaborations with distinguished chamber musicians and orchestral artists including José García Gutiérrez, Marco Silva, Bram van Sambeek, YaoGuang Zhai, Dwight Parry, Ekaterina Kornishina, Zoran Marković, David Cohen, Dana Zemtsov, Ian Watson, Nina Schumann, and Xandi van Dijk.

An equally devoted educator, Harris is an in-demand clinician, lecturer, and guest artist whose work has taken him to universities, conservatories, festivals, and cultural institutions worldwide. He serves on the faculty of Berklee College of Music, where he teaches private piano, coaches ensembles, participates in Berklee's Mentoring Program, and where he founded and continues to curate the Berklee Piano Club. His educational philosophy mirrors his artistic one: learning begins with attentive listening, grows through thoughtful participation, and flourishes in an atmosphere of generosity and shared inquiry.

Beyond performance, composition, and teaching, Harris remains deeply committed to service within the artistic community. He serves on the boards of the International Society of Jazz Arrangers & Composers (ISJAC), the New England Conservatory Alumni Council, and Berklee Soundboard, contributing to initiatives that support future generations of musicians and composers.

Across every dimension of his career, **Kevin Harris asks the continued question: "How can music invite us into deeper ways of listening—to one another, to history, to ourselves, and to the possibilities we have yet to imagine?"** His answer is in his music, the invitation to participate, to discover, and to experience music not as a finished statement, but as an ongoing conversation. ■

**[www.Kevin Harris Project.com](http://www.KevinHarrisProject.com)**