

Blue Note Records 80th Birthday Celebration: The State Of Jazz 2019

featuring Kandace Springs, James Carter Organ Trio and James Francies

Tuesday, November 19, 2019



THE STATE OF JAZZ 2019

Celebrating eight decades of the venerable recording label, the Harris Center welcomes three jazz stars, each with a stellar band ready to sizzle Stage One. Performing with her trio, “Kandace Springs has a voice that would melt snow” (Prince). James Francies has worked with jazz royalty from Christian McBride to Pat Metheny; performing with his trio, he’s “a pianist with liquid dynamism in his touch” (*New York Times*). Finally, saxophonist James Carter has 18 recordings under his own name; he “can be sumptuously romantic or exhilaratingly funky... He’s at his earthiest and most accessible with this classic Hammond organ trio lineup” (*Guardian*). He has appeared with The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Herbie Hancock, and Wynton Marsalis among others.

ABOUT BLUE NOTE RECORDS

Blue Note Records is an American jazz record label, established in 1939. It derives its name from the characteristic “blue notes” of jazz and the blues. Originally dedicated to recording traditional jazz and small group swing, from 1947 the label began to switch its attention to modern jazz including Thelonious Monk, Art Blakey, Fats Navarro and Bud Powell.

This tour will be celebrating Blue Note’s 80th Anniversary. Under the watchful eye of its president, Don Was, they will be presenting the following three artists in a spectacular celebration of the label and Jazz Music today. Only Blue Note Records, with their unique brand of cool, could assemble such a dynamic evening of talent and music.

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BIOGRAPHIES

THE TRIO



KANDACE SPRINGS

Vocalist and keyboards/Trio
Every so often a new singer emerges who's able to assimilate multiple musical touchstones and still come off sounding remarkably fresh and unburdened by the past. Kandace Springs is one of those artists. The

29-year-old, Nashville-based singer, songwriter and pianist counts such stylists as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack and Norah Jones as her heroes, but she is very much her own person. Kandace's Nashville church upbringing infuses everything she touches, and with it she has captivated audiences worldwide with her unique approach to a dizzying array of jazz standards, R&B classics, and pop tunes. Chief among her earliest supporters was legendary icon Prince, who became a mentor to the young singer and once described her as having "a voice that could melt snow."

Springs' journey to discovering her uniqueness didn't happen overnight. In her early years, much of her inspiration came from her father, Scat Springs, a respected session singer in Nashville. It was due to him that Springs grew up surrounded by music, and he encouraged her to take piano lessons after he watched her pick out melodies on the instrument when she was 10. Yet as a girl, she was equally interested in other creative outlets, especially visual art and, more unexpectedly, automobiles. "My dad gave me a Matchbox car, a Thunderbird or something like that, and my mom gave me a Barbie," she says. "I drew a mustache on the Barbie and never played with it again, and I still have the Matchbox car." (Her obsession with cars, which she collects, rebuilds, and resells, continues to this day.)

It wasn't until later that a friend of her father's sparked something deeper in the young musician by giving her Norah Jones' 2002 Blue Note debut, *Come Away With Me*. "Norah's version of 'The Nearness of You' inspired me," Springs recalls, "Norah is my ultimate inspiration as far as women who play an instrument."

Springs did her own arrangement of "The Nearness of You" and performed at a music camp in Nashville, which led to her gaining more professional gig experience in the

city. She took a job at a downtown Nashville hotel where she valet parked cars by day and sang and played piano in the lounge at night. A demo Springs recorded at this time caught the ears of Evan Rogers and Carl Sturken, who have written hits for the likes of Shakira, Christina Aguilera, and Kelly Clarkson, and are best known for discovering and signing Rihanna as a teenager. Rogers flew down to Nashville with an offer to sign Springs to their SRP Music Group.

Kandace moved to New York and started working seriously on new songs and demo recordings. She soon landed an audition with Blue Note President Don Was at the Capitol Records Tower in Los Angeles, winning him over with a stunning performance of Bonnie Raitt's "I Can't Make You Love Me" (the original of which he had coincidentally produced). "That song is so soulful. When I first heard that song, it almost moved me to tears," Springs says. "I wrote my own arrangement for it a few years before I played it for him."

Her 2014 self-titled debut EP had a decidedly contemporary R&B/hip-hop sound, and led to TV performances on the *Late Show With David Letterman*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, as well as appearances at the Afropunk and Bonnaroo festivals.

This is also the time when Springs first attracted the attention of Prince, who heard her makeover of Sam Smith's "Stay With Me" on the website Okayplayer. The music icon invited her to perform with him at Paisley Park for the 30th anniversary of *Purple Rain*. "He coached me a lot, especially during the time in which I was trying to figure out my sound," Springs says. "He absolutely spoke into my life. He told me that I needed to do what comes naturally to me. He was absolutely right."

But throughout all of this, there was an album to be finished. Grammy Award-winning producer Larry Klein, who garnered Album of Year honors in 2008 for Herbie Hancock's *River: The Joni Letters*, was brought on board to bring Kandace's musical vision to reality. He pulled together an A-list group of players, including Grammy-winning trumpeter Terence Blanchard and master drummer Vinnie Calaiuta, and recorded the entire album live in the studio over the course of two weeks in the fall of 2015. The result was a jazz/soul masterpiece, with a level of subtlety and nuance that is rare in today's music, and it brought Kandace immediate attention worldwide as a jazz artist to be reckoned with.

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The U.K. in particular proved to be a welcome home, with Kandace doing a six-week tour opening for Gregory Porter in support of her single “Talk To Me,” as well as appearing on “Later...With Jules Holland.” Concerts throughout Europe and Asia followed, including such memorable moments as performing at a sold-out Royal Albert Hall with the 60-piece Metropole Orchestra for the BBC Proms broadcast series.

In the midst of this busy schedule Kandace found time to record her second album, *Indigo*, with the brilliant drummer and trackmaster Karreem Riggins at the helm as producer; the album is especially notable for featuring one of the last recordings by trumpet great Roy Hargrove.

And before the dust had even settled on that release, Kandace had already conceived of and started work on her third album. Entitled *The Women Who Raised Me*, it is a tribute to all the great female artists who inspired her to pursue her dream, and features songs made famous by legends ranging from Billie Holiday and Carmen McRae, up through contemporary greats Sade and Lauryn Hill. The album features an incredible duet with Norah Jones on the classic “Angel Eyes,” as well as stellar contributions from her friends Christian McBride, David Sanborn, and Chris Potter. Scheduled for release in early 2020, it will surely further establish, as the *Times* of London once remarked that “Kandace Springs is not just a star, she’s a entire galaxy.”



JAMES FRANCIES

Piano/Trio

Even before moving to New York City in 2013, pianist James Francies had generated a well deserved buzz in the jazz arena. He is the youngest recipient of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) President’s Youth

Award, *DownBeat Magazine* awarded him twice for Composition and Jazz Arrangement, his band opened for the legendary Jazz Crusaders reunion and he performed at Monterey Jazz Festival. Grammy-nominated pianist Taylor Eigsti describes Francies as, “poised to become a major voice on the instrument. He has the passion, creativity and ability to be a real leader amongst his generation.”

And he keeps moving forward. Since he’s been in NYC, James has toured internationally with Jeff “Tain” Watts, Chris Dave and Drumhedz, joined Stefon Harris’s band Sonic Creed and fronts his own bands, Kinetic and JF3, which included a successful debut at the Bern Jazz Festival

in Switzerland in Spring 2015. He has appeared with The Roots, Nas, Jadakiss, and Raekwon (Wu Tang Clan) during 2015 NBA All-Star Weekend, and recently played Newport Jazz Festival with Jose James. Francies has recorded with Watts, Robert Glasper and has a soon to be released Duo project with Eric Harland whom he is touring with Rude Unkal. He also recorded the Glasper produced soundtrack *Nina Revisited: Tribute to Nina Simone* featuring Lauryn Hill, Common and Jazzmine Sullivan among others. He works closely with Questlove writing and performing commercials (Target, ESPN NBA 2015 Draft), film scoring (Broadway show *Hamilton* and a new film from Zoe Kravitz) as well as performing with The Roots on *The Tonight Show*. He recently signed endorsements with Yamaha Piano and Korg instruments and appeared at the Monterey Jazz Festival in September 2015. Not surprisingly, James was named one of “8 Artists You Should Know” by the genre-bending website revive-music.com

Encouraged by his parents to learn by experience James reveled in the rich Houstonian culture exploring the arts and gaining early exposure to music in church and through formal lessons at age five. While assimilating the contemporary music of his peers he also developed a distinct interest in jazz. Three years attending Houston’s Summer Jazz Workshop helped solidify his foundation and set a clear path as a standout at HSPVA, the renowned performing and visual arts high school whose alumnae include Beyoncé, Jason Moran, Chris Dave and Eric Harland. During that time he won the Ruth and Eli Nadel Scholarship Award at Stanford Jazz Workshop (2012-2013), earned a full scholarship to Skidmore Summer Jazz Institute in Saratoga Springs, New York and was awarded the Moran Scholarship Award from pianist and 2010 MacArthur Fellow, Jason Moran. It was also evident that James was a talented composer. Bolstered by his inquisitive mind and synesthesia, the ability to hear in colors, James’ music is insightful and purposeful with a distinct melodic styling that is forward looking and comforting. He explores the full spectrum of keys from acoustic piano to Fender Rhodes to synthesizer. “I enjoy being able to describe life through sound... To me, that’s what makes music relevant; speaking on a subject without words.”

Francies’ impressive performance credits include Bobby Watson, Joe Lovano, Houston Person, Albert “Tootie” Heath, Arturo Sandoval, Antonio Hart, Julian Lage, Joel Frahm and Terrell Stafford among others. He has been a member of the Grammy Jazz Session Combo, The Thelonious Monk Institute All-Star Jazz Sextet, The Next Generation Jazz

Blue Note Records 80th Birthday Celebration: The State Of Jazz 2019

Orchestra, and the Texas Music Educators Association's (TMEA) All-State Jazz Ensemble and performed at some of the premiere venues around the country including Monterey Jazz Festival, Montreal Jazz Festival, The Kennedy Center and The Jazz Standard (NYC). Francies currently attends the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music on full-scholarship. Not bad for a 20 year old from Houston, Texas.



JAMES CARTER ORGAN TRIO **JAMES CARTER**

Saxophone/Trio

"To hear saxophonist James Carter is to be blown away," wrote the *Washington Post*, hitting the nail on the head. From moonlit ballads to funky workouts to the most cerebral kind of post-

bop, in an intimate club or on a sprawling festival stage, the Detroit-born saxophone master can seem to deliver all of jazz history on a single set.

"One of the most charismatic and powerful soloists in jazz," per the *New York Times*, Carter harbors a command of his instruments that is astonishingly complete, though he only employs that technique in the service of canny ideas. Even when he appears on the verge of shattering his horn, overblowing rapid-fire lines to otherworldly effect, he's evoking early jazz, jump blues, the avant-garde and other lessons residing inside his vast, scholarly knowledge of the music of the African-American experience.

Which is all to say that James Carter is a natural fit for Blue Note Records. Now 50, he's making his debut as a bandleader for the label with *James Carter Organ Trio: Live From Newport Jazz* (release date: August 30, 2019) — his first new release since 2011. A soulfully robust dispatch from America's most storied jazz festival, it's also a follow-up of sorts to *Chasin' the Gypsy*, an Atlantic release from 2000 that *The New Yorker* called "an alternately reverent and audacious tribute to the Belgian swing-guitar legend Django Reinhardt. It may be the rambunctious saxophone player's recorded masterpiece."

Although Carter has been among the most celebrated jazz figures of his generation, recording for major labels, headlining landmark venues and topping polls in *DownBeat*, he sounds humbled by his burgeoning relationship with jazz's most iconic brand. "Oh man," he begins. "As the label

puts it, 'The Finest in Jazz Since 1939.' There's history, legacy and longevity that goes with this label, and to be part of that in some fashion or form is a privilege and an honor."

Blue Note President Don Was, a fellow Detroiter, has followed the saxophonist's career for decades now, since the time Carter was a local guy who was "blowing people's minds" on the Motor City scene. He recruited Carter to take part in *Detroit Jazz City*, a benefit compilation released by Blue Note in 2015 and featuring a mix of classic cuts and contemporary offerings. There, Carter's fiery performance is, no surprise, utterly of a piece with hard-swinging tracks by Kenny Cox, Joe Henderson, Marcus Belgrave, Elvin Jones, Donald Byrd and other Detroit-rooted Blue Note greats, some of whom mentored the saxophonist. "He does seem like a natural for the label," Was agrees, "and this trio is a timeless Blue Note sound." The format fits Carter's own gritty, R&B-soaked sensibility like a glove, too. Or, as *The New Yorker* wrote, "The wail of a Hammond organ and a swinging force field of drums is just the backing for Carter's storming saxophone playing."

"It's compact and soulful," Carter says matter-of-factly, explaining why he digs an organ trio's chemistry so deeply. From jazz radio to neighborhood cookouts, growing up in Detroit meant plenty of Blue Note B-3 grooves, he reflects. "[That sound was] always in the background," Carter says. "You'd hear Jimmy Smith while somebody's passing the baked beans and the ribs and all that other good stuff. "The organ has always been a part of the African-American Diaspora," he continues, "coming up through the spirituals and on into soul, neo-soul. It's always been an integral part of the soulful landscape."

Joining Carter on *Live From Newport Jazz* are two more gifted Detroit sons: Hammond B-3 virtuoso Gerard Gibbs, a protégé of Richard "Groove" Holmes whose playing has internalized the stylistic underpinnings of all the heaviest organ voices; and Alexander White, a wildly versatile young drummer, equally adept at old school shuffles and break-beats and odd time, who "brings new breath, new life into our playing, a different youthful fire," Carter says. Gibbs is a veteran of Carter's group, whose tenure extends all the way back to when Carter conceived his organ-trio project in 2001; White is a relative newcomer, joining up at the start of 2015.

Live From Newport Jazz's unlikely repertoire comes from a jazz tradition that was, not unlike the organ trios jamming in Detroit's corner bars, historically a music of the people.

Blue Note Records 80th Birthday Celebration: The State Of Jazz 2019

The program includes six tour-de-force takes on compositions written by or associated with Django Reinhardt. Carter first heard the Gypsy-jazz architect in 1983, on radio veteran Jim Gallert's 'Jazz Yesterday' on WDET, a program that kindled discoveries the saxophonist continues to explore. Gallert spun Django's Quintet of the Hot Club of France playing "Ain't Misbehavin'" between big-band records, and although Carter taped it and listened to it nonstop, he didn't know it was Django because he hadn't recorded Gallert's intro. Fast-forward to 1998: On a tour stop at a gas station in Amsterdam, Carter picked up a budget compilation CD of Reinhardt's music, and while "Ain't Misbehavin'" didn't make the track list, he recognized the percussive, propulsive three-guitar attack he fell in love with in his early teens. "[Gypsy jazz] has a certain delicacy to it," he explains, "but at the same time it's still intense."

In 1999, while sound checking on a tour with Kathleen Battle, Carter and the rest of the singer's all-star backing band fell into a fantastic groove on Django's "Nuages," an impromptu arrangement that provided the spark for *Chasin' the Gypsy*. Another sound check, on Carter's tour supporting *Chasin'*, became the catalyst for the aesthetic behind *Live From Newport Jazz*. On that casual jam, "Nuages" was infused with a Tower of Power-style strut.

Newport Jazz is an exercise in musical transformation, a willful attempt to "give Gypsy jazz a hood pass," Carter says, cracking up, 'or urbanize it, if you will." Carter and company filter these romantic, Roma-tinged lines through their Detroit filter so intensely that you might scratch your head as to why Blue Note would print the titles to classic soul-jazz tunes in French. "It's a wild twist," Was says. "But it's not like it gets bogged down in concept. It stands on its own as this great groovin' music."

Carter burns out of the gate on "Le Manoir De Mes Reves," a mid- to uptempo swinger featuring extended tenor soloing (and some mind-blowing circular breathing). The closer, "Fleche d'Or," is modern funk that begs to be sampled, with surging, cathartic interplay, an earworm of an ascending riff and-no lie-a nod to Bell Biv DeVoe. In between, among other delights, "Melodie Au Crepuscule" melds a sweetly melancholy tune with a groove plucked from Bill Withers' "Use Me," and "Anouman" conjures up a timeless after-hours Blue Note organ vibe, before Carter's unaccompanied alto solo becomes a frenzied round of call-and-response with the enraptured festival crowd. "Just as with Blue Note,

you're looking at a place that has made seminal contributions," Carter says, reflecting on Newport's propensity for indelible performances.

Throughout the Newport recording, the excitement in the atmosphere is palpable; this is one of those spirited live sessions that positively could not be duplicated in the studio. In front of a fervent crowd, James Carter moves from master musician to proselytizing titan. "James is like a very dynamic conversationalist," Was says. "If his sax solos were stories that he was telling at a party, he'd have the whole room captivated. He taps into modes of expression that nobody else does. There's nobody quite like him."