

KENNY BARRON

Pianist, Composer, Arranger

Kenny Barron's unmatched ability to mesmerize audiences with his elegant playing, sensitive melodies and infectious rhythms is what inspired *The Los Angeles Times* to name him "one of the top jazz pianists in the world" and *Jazz Weekly* to call him "The most lyrical piano player of our time."

Philadelphia is the birthplace of many great musicians, including one of the undisputed masters of the jazz piano: Kenny Barron. Kenny was born in 1943 and while a teenager, started playing professionally with Mel Melvin's orchestra. This local band also featured Barron's brother Bill, the late tenor saxophonist.

By 1959 Kenny had worked with drummer Philly Joe Jones while still in high school. At age 19, Kenny moved to New York City and freelanced with Roy Haynes, Lee Morgan and James Moody after the tenor saxophonist heard him play at the Five Spot. Upon Moody's recommendation Dizzy Gillespie hired Barron in 1962 without even hearing him play a note. It was in Dizzy's band where Kenny developed an appreciation for Latin and Caribbean rhythms. After five years with Dizzy, Barron played with Freddie Hubbard, Stanley Turrentine, Milt Jackson, and Buddy Rich. The early seventies found Kenny working with Yusef Lateef who Kenny credits as a key influence in his art for improvisation. Encouraged by Lateef, to pursue a college education, Barron balanced touring with studies and earned his B.A. in Music from Empire State College. By 1973 Kenny joined the faculty at Rutgers University as professor of music. He held this tenure until 2000, mentoring many of today's young talents including David Sanchez, Terence Blanchard and Regina Bell. In 1974 Kenny recorded his first album as a leader for the Muse label, entitled "Sunset To Dawn." This was to be the first in over 40 recordings (and still counting!) as a leader.

Following stints with Ron Carter in the late seventies Kenny formed a trio with Buster Williams and Ben Riley which also worked alongside of Eddie Lockjaw Davis, Eddie Harris, Sonny Stitt and Harry "Sweets" Edison. Throughout the 80's Barron collaborated with the great tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, touring with his quartet and recording several legendary albums including "Anniversary", "Serenity" and the Grammy nominated "People Time" Also during the 80's, he co-founded the quartet "Sphere," along with Buster Williams, Ben Riley and Charlie Rouse. This band focused on the music of Thelonious Monk and original compositions inspired by him. Sphere recorded several outstanding projects for the Polygram label, among them "Four For All" and "Bird Songs." After the death of Charlie Rouse, the band took a 15-year hiatus and reunited, replacing Rouse with alto saxophonist Gary Bartz. This reunion made its debut recording for Verve Records in 1998.

Kenny Barron's own recordings for Verve have earned him nine *Grammy* nominations beginning in 1992 with "People Time" an outstanding duet with Stan Getz followed by the Brazilian influenced "Sambao and most recently for "Freefall" in 2002. Other Grammy nominations went to "Spirit Song", "Night and the City" (a duet recording with Charlie Haden) and "Wanton Spirit" a trio recording with Roy Haynes and Haden. It is important to note that these three recordings each received double-Grammy nominations (for album and solo performance.) His CD, "Canta Brasil" (Universal France) linked Barron with Trio de Paz in a fest of original Brazilian jazz, and was named Critics Choice Top Ten CDs of 2003 by *Jazz* Magazine. His 2004 release, *Images* (Universal France) was inspired by a suite originally commissioned by The Wharton Center at Michigan State University and features multi-Grammy nominated vibraphonist Stefon Harris. The long awaited trio sequel featuring Ray Drummond and Ben Riley, *The Perfect Set, Live At Bradley's, Part Two* (Universal France/Sunnyside) was released October 2005.

In Spring 2008 Mr. Barron will release his first studio recording in four years with *The Traveler* (Universal France), an intoxicating mix of favorite Barron tunes set to lyrics and newly penned compositions. In a first for the noted pianist, he is joined by vocalists Grady Tate (who sheds his drumsticks for this special appearance), Tony award winner Ann Hampton Calloway and the young phenom Gretchen Parlato, winner of the Thelonious Monk International Competition for Jazz. On "Um Beijo", Mr. Tate's warm, leathery voice balanced by Mr. Barron's poignant touch make for a beautifully textured conversation, underscoring their longtime on stage collaboration. Another Barron original, "Clouds" is a lush vehicle for Ann Hampton Calloway's romantic pitch-perfect yearnings matched with Barron's trademark mastery of subtlety. The dramatic "Phantoms" intertwines Parlato's ephemeral intimacy and syncopatic rhythms in an emotional escapade between Barron's haunting notes, the West African stylings of guitarist Lionel Loueké, drummer Francisco Mela (who also adds a Cuban flavor to the vocals) and the

driving bass of Kiyoshi Kitagawa. The journey continues with the aptly named "Duet" an improvisation with Benin-born Loueké who also joins the trio for a rousing version of Barron's "Calypso". A composer who relishes in the moment, Barron's modern approach is highlighted by alto saxophonist Steve Wilson's open musings on "Illusion" and "The Traveler" who also brings an urgency to the fun-paced "Speed Trap".

Barron consistently wins the jazz critics and readers polls, including *Downbeat*, *Jazz Times* and *Jazziz* magazines. In 2005 he was inducted into the American Jazz Hall of Fame and won a MAC Lifetime Achievement Award. He is a six-time recipient of Best Pianist by the Jazz Journalists Association and was as a finalist in the prestigious 2001 Jazz Par International Jazz Award.

Whether he is playing solo, trio or quintet, Kenny Barron is recognized the world over as a master of performance and composition.

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