

RUSSELL KIRK

Biography

Saxophonist/Composer Russell Kirk is a distinguished musician, an innovative force in the industry who offers a fresh approach that is both evocative and richly balanced. His expressive musical style punctuates his nuanced compositions, and nowhere is it more evident than in his latest release “To Journal Square”. A native of Baltimore, Maryland, Russell received his undergraduate degree from Johns Hopkins University, Peabody Institute. Following graduation he travelled with the USO, performing across several continents including Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, with singer/songwriter Jenny Boyle, for troops stationed far from home.

He was awarded a scholarship from the Eubie Blake Foundation, allowing him to pursue his graduate studies at New York University. While earning his master’s degree, Russell was an adjunct faculty member at Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, where he headed a music outreach program for inner city youth in Harlem and the East Village, interned at Saturday Night Live and played with various ensembles and artists such as John Scofield, Chris Potter, and Lenny Pickett. Being in New York in the heart of jazz central provided him with rare opportunities to listen and to meet some of the really progressive musical geniuses who would later have a subtle influence on the direction of the music he was composing.

After graduation from NYU he toured Japan with his long-time mentor Gary Thomas. Russell has performed and recorded with a widely diverse and celebrated list of musicians and orchestras, among them - The Baltimore Symphony, George Clinton’s Parliament Funkadelic, The Soulful Symphony, The Cab Calloway Orchestra, The Eubie Blake Legacy Band, The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Winslow Dynasty, and Rumba Club. In addition he has played with the best in the business - Sam Rivers, Terri Lyne Carrington, Dennis Chambers, Michael Formanek, Mike Clark, Sonya Kitchell, Wayne Krantz, Kenny Werner, Gary Thomas, Ed Howard, Kevin Mahogany, Cuba Gooding Sr., Jill Scott, and Vusi Mahlasela.

He and his band have opened for Herbie Hancock at The Clifford Brown Jazz Festival. Other festival performances have included the International Association of Jazz Educators Conference, The Jazz Educators Network Conference, Milford Jazz Festival, The Federal Hill Jazz & Blues Festival and many others.

Russell is a Buffet Crampon USA Performing Artist and holds annual master classes throughout the United States under their banner. He is a 4-time recipient of the Maryland State Arts Council's Individual Artist Award and has been featured in numerous published articles including an extensive artist profile in Saxophone Journal Magazine. His compositions have led to a residency at the John F. Kennedy Center and a position at the Carnegie Hall Creative Composition Workshop.

Baltimore Magazine selected him 2012 “Best Arranger” and featured him in the “Best of Baltimore” for his arrangement of Gary Thomas' “Who's In Control?”, performed by The Peabody Jazz Orchestra. Russell Kirk’s musical expressions stand out as distinctly modern in color and style, they retain the endearing, romantic sentiments of the American songbook. In his playing, as in his composition, he is sincere and provocative – a perfect confluence of old and new influences.

Russell Kirk is currently a recording artist on Greg Osby’s Inner Circle Music.