



# LAKECIA BENJAMIN

**ALTO SAXOPHONE** Lakecia Benjamin

**PIANO** Oscar Perez

**BASS** Elias Bailey

**DRUMS** Anwar Marshall

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Zellerbach Theatre  
Friday, May 9 @ 8 PM

There will be no intermission.

## INSIGHTS

Stay after the performance for a chat with the artist and Guthrie Ramsey, the Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor of Music at Penn.



Media support for this performance provided by WRTI 90.1 fm.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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### Lakecia Benjamin (Alto Saxophone)

Lakecia Benjamin is a five-time Grammy®-nominated, New York-based saxophonist, arranger, composer and educator. Benjamin was born in New York City and raised in Manhattan's predominantly Dominican Washington Heights neighborhood. She played recorder in grade school and junior high, where she also began writing songs and lyrics. She won admission to the Fiorello LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts. It was there that she began playing saxophone in earnest. She picked it up quickly and, after graduating, joined the renowned jazz program at New York's New School University.

At New School, Benjamin studied with jazz veterans including Billy Harper, Reggie Workman, Buster Williams and Gary Bartz. Bartz proved an important mentor. He introduced her to technical exercise techniques while facilitating her interest in the music of jazz saxophonists including Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Jackie McLean. She also played in and performed with Clark Terry's Young Titans of Jazz and some of Workman's ensembles. While struggling to make ends meet, she won paying gigs with Missy Elliott and Alicia Keys, widening her approach. These influences made their presence known on Benjamin's Motema leader debut album, *Retox*, in 2010. The unusual set included Benjamin's Soul Squad band backing several singers and rappers in a host of originals and covers, some of which didn't feature her horn at all. Benjamin explained in an interview that she didn't want to be heard as merely an instrumentalist and soloist but as an arranger and bandleader, too. She won opportunities to play and tour with a wide array of artists including former Coltrane drummer Rashied Ali, the David Murray Big Band, vocalist Vanessa Rubin and guitarist James Blood Ulmer. Her deep jazz roots and reputation for hard yet innovative work made her a first-call sidewoman, arranger and horn section leader, and she landed a touring gig with Anita Baker.

In 2015, she was part of the star-studded cast that played on vocalist and arranger Charenee Wade's *Offering: The Music of Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson*. In addition to Benjamin, some of its other participants included Marcus Miller, Christian McBride, Malcolm Jamal-Warner and Lonnie Plaxico. The following year, she was invited by pianist Robert Glasper to participate in the sessions for his Miles Davis tribute, *Everything's Beautiful*. Benjamin appeared with Stevie Wonder and DJ Spinna on the album's closing track, "Right on Brotha."

In 2018, Benjamin issued her Ropeadope debut album, *Rise Up*, leading a large ensemble in a savvy jazz-funk update for the 21st century that included not only players but singers and rappers as well. In the aftermath, she played dates in and around New York, joined Gregory Porter's road band, worked with Terri Lyne Carrington and was a featured musician and arranger for comedy star Craig Robinson. In addition to performing, Benjamin became an educator, teaching at Jazz at Lincoln Center and Jazz House Kids.

Benjamin turned heads with her third album by leaving R&B and funk by the wayside. May 2020's *Pursuance: The Coltranes* is unlike any other tribute project. Its 13 tunes were equally divided between compositions by Alice and John Coltrane and offered some radical reinterpretations. The outlier was "Going Home." Composed by Benjamin, its lineup included bass clarinetist Marcus Strickland and

string group Rootstock Republic. In addition to Benjamin's alto, it selectively featured horns of Bartz, Steve Wilson, Greg Osby and Bruce Williams; harpist Brandee Younger; violinist Regina Carter; bassists Workman, Lonnie Plaxico and Meshell Ndegeocello; and vocalists Dee Dee Bridgewater, Jazzmeia Horn, Zakiyyah Modeste and Dudley Perkins. The album was greeted with global acclaim by critics upon release and subsequently charted on streaming.

In January 2023, Benjamin released *Phoenix* on Whirlwind Recordings. The 12-track, mostly original album was performed by her septet and produced by Terri Lyne Carrington. *Phoenix* featured many guests including Dianne Reeves, Georgia Ann Muldrow, Patrice Rushen, Wayne Shorter, Wallace Roney, Sonia Sanchez and Angela Davis. The album led to three Grammy® nominations and universal praise.

### **Oscar Perez** (Piano)

Perez, a New York City native, has performed, traveled and recorded in the musical groups of Phoebe Snow, Lakecia Benjamin, Wycliffe Gordon, Christian McBride, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Charenee Wade, the Mingus Big Band, Dave Stryker, Steve Turre, Eddie Allen, Ted Chubb, Abel Mireles LatiNext Project, Charlie Porter, Roseanna Vitro, Bruce Williams and Don Braden. He has shared the bandstand with jazz legends Bunky Green, George Russell, Dianne Reeves and Curtis Fuller. He has performed on many of the world's most famous stages including the Kennedy Center, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, the Blue Note, the Jazz Standard and the Monterey, Detroit, Newport and Montreux Jazz Festivals, as well as the festival circuit throughout Europe, Asia, South America and Australia.

Perez is the recipient of the 2006 ASCAP/IAJE composition commission in honor of Billy Strayhorn. His group, featuring Antonio Hart, premiered the work at the 2007 International Association of Jazz Education Convention. He has also been commissioned to arrange music for Chick Corea, Regina Carter, Béla Fleck, Arturo Sandoval, R&B vocalist Jon B, and the MSM Jazz Orchestra featuring Sean Jones. His critically acclaimed CD, *Afropean Affair*, is the result of a New Works Grant by Chamber Music America for his septet Oscar Perez Nuevo Comienzo. His latest endeavor, *Prepare a Place for Me*, is available now.

### **Elias Bailey** (Bass)

Bailey has been a professional bassist for over 25 years, performing on five Grammy®-nominated albums and playing at top festivals and clubs around the world. He started gigging at 15 and studied with renowned bassists like Milt Hinton and John Clayton. By the time he finished high school, he had earned multiple national awards, including a top scholarship from the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts.

At 19, Bailey joined the legendary Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, touring internationally and performing with artists including Lynn Roberts and the Mills Brothers. He later began a long-standing collaboration with vocalist René Marie, recording and touring with her on two Grammy®-nominated albums. After moving to New York City, he spent 15 years with the Freddy Cole Quartet, appearing on nine of Cole's albums, two of which earned Grammy® nods. Widely respected in the jazz world, Bailey has also performed and recorded with artists including Benny Green, Houston Person, Peter Bernstein and Wycliffe Gordon. Known for his deep groove and versatility, he's one of NYC's most in-demand bassists.

## **Anwar Marshall (Drums)**

A Philadelphia native, Marshall was introduced to music early on by his mother and father, both accomplished musicians and music educators. He received a drum set as a Christmas gift and studied percussion in the School District of Philadelphia with Carl Mottola. He attended the High School for Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) and received his bachelor's degree from the University of the Arts where he studied with Erik Johnson and Joe Nero. He was also mentored by Byron Landham, Mike Boone, Sid Simmons and many other Philadelphia musicians. Marshall has been fortunate to collaborate with Orrin Evans, The Captain Black Big Band, Ed Cherry, Tim Warfield, Dave Douglas, Christian McBride, Pat Metheny, Robert Glasper, Adam Blackstone, Somi, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Peter Bernstein and John Swana. He is co-leader of a ten-piece ensemble, the Fresh Cut Orchestra, with trumpeter Josh Lawrence and Jason Fraticeli. His work as a sideman has earned him two Grammy® Award nominations and the chance to travel the world. Never not improving and exploring, Marshall released his first body of work as a leader, *Cold*, an EP, in 2022.

**25 ★ 26 SEASON**

# **JAZZ**

- SEP 28** Branford Marsalis Quartet  
**OCT 11** Jorge Luis Pacheco  
**NOV 2** Cécile McLorin Salvant  
**DEC 7** Dianne Reeves:  
*Christmas Time is Here*  
**JAN 24** Isaiah Collier & Keyon Harrold  
**FEB 6** Tyshawn Sorey:  
*Members, Don't Git Weary*  
**APR 26** Delbert Anderson Quartet  
**MAY 8** Arturo O'Farrill:  
Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble

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