

Courtesy, Ralph Peterson



MESSENGER LEGACY

ART BLAKEY CENTENNIAL

Drums Ralph Peterson
Saxophone Bill Pierce, Bobby Watson
Trumpet Brian Lynch
Piano Zaccai Curtis
Bass Essiet Essiet

PROGRAM

There will be an intermission.

Saturday, November 16 @ 8 PM

Zellerbach Theatre



This performance is
co-presented with
World Cafe Live.

PROGRAM NOTES

When it comes to Art Blakey, there is no living drummer more suited to honoring his legacy than the incomparable Ralph Peterson. As the last drummer chosen by Blakey to play by his side in the Jazz Messengers Two Drummer Big Band, Peterson is tasked with the unique responsibility to carry forth Buhaina's torch and tradition. On his latest album with the Messenger Legacy, *Legacy: Alive Vol. 6 at the Side Door*, the mission comes full circle as Peterson and his fellow Blakey alumni mark what would have been the icon's 100th birthday. Released in May on Peterson's own Onyx Productions label, *Legacy* presents Peterson in the company of five undisputed authorities and alumni of the Blakey tradition: saxophonists Bill Pierce and Bobby Watson, trumpeter Brian Lynch, pianist Geoffrey Keezer, and bassist Essiet Essiet.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The legacy of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers is a living, breathing tradition of hard-swinging music carried on by the many players that have come through the ranks of what was arguably the greatest small group in the history of jazz. Blakey began his storied career as a pianist in his native Pittsburg, but quickly switched to the drum kit and made a name for himself playing swing rhythms in the tradition of mentors Chick Webb and Big Sid Catlett with the Fletcher Henderson Big Band. It was during his tenure with the legendary Billy Eckstine orchestra driving the ensemble featuring the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Fats Navarro, Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon and other giants of the nascent bebop movement that his powerful approach to his instrument came to be fully formed and his work, with many of the group's players, that set a standard for the revolutionary new music that grew with the band's dissolution.

Blakey tried his hand forming his own big band The Seventeen Messengers for a short time in the late forties, but it was as a leader of small groups that he ushered his name into the jazz history books. On the live recording *A Night At Birdland*, with Clifford Brown, Lou Donaldson, Horace Silver and Curley Russell, the drummer can be heard saying "When these guys get too old, I'll get some young ones", and that proclamation became the blueprint of the thirty-five years run of the Jazz Messengers. It began with trumpeter Donald Byrd, Hank Mobley, Silver and Doug Watkins and went on to include many of the greatest names in jazz, including Kenny Dorham, Benny Golson, Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter, Bobby Timmons, Freddie Hubbard, Curtis Fuller, Cedar Walton, Reggie Workman, Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Terrence Blanchard, Donald Harrison and dozens of others, including the gentlemen heard on *Legacy: Alive Vol. 6 at the Side Door* recording.

Drummer Ralph Peterson holds the rare distinction of being one of the very few drummers selected by Blakey to enter the ranks of the Jazz Messengers. A favorite of Blakey from his early days as an acolyte following in the drummer's footsteps, Peterson played in the two drummer big band featuring trumpeters John Faddis, Terence Blanchard and Wynton Marsalis; trombonists Robin Eubanks and Kevin Weavers, saxophonists Donald Harrison, Jean Toussaint, Doug Miller and Branford Marsalis; pianist Johnny O'Neal and bassist Charles Fambrough. This group made its debut at The Boston Globe Jazz Festival on March 21, 1983. Peterson would go on to hold down that drum chair with future formations of the group that performed at the Mount Fuji Jazz Festival and other locations during the final three years of Blakey's life.

In his role of carrying on the Blakey tradition, Peterson has put together a fiery ensemble featuring five fellow alumni of the Jazz Messengers who continue to advance the cause of contemporary mainstream jazz as leaders in their own right. Of the group, alto saxophonist Bobby Watson was the first to enter illustrious pantheon of Jazz Messengers, making his recording debut with the group in 1977 on the *Gypsy Folk Tales* album that marked the resurgence of band as one of the premier units of the day. Tenor saxophonist Bill Pierce would join Watson in the Messenger front line in 1980, making his first appearances on the *Messenger Big Band Live at Montreux and Northsea* and *Album of the Year* records that introduced the world to Wynton Marsalis. The group's remaining members, trumpeter Brian Lynch, pianist Zaccai Curtis and bassist Essiet Essiet were all members of the final edition of the Jazz Messengers that played with Blakely until his death, at the age of 71 on October 16, 1990.