

## Joshua Redman Quartet at Annenberg

# Everything you wanted to know about sax

Judy Weightman

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The saxophone was invented in 1840 by Adolphe Sax, a Belgian who yearned to create an instrument that would blend the power of brass with the adaptability of woodwinds. It was originally created for use in military bands and adopted with gusto by Philadelphia's Mummichs, but it never entirely caught on in Classical music, though some modern composers (Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Vaughn Williams) have availed themselves of its distinctive timbre.



**Not quite in Daddy's footsteps.**

Instead, this most modern instrument found its home as the quintessential instrument in the most modern musical genre: jazz. After providing part of the sonic mix in the big band era of the 1930s, saxophonists of the '40s led the rebellion against the strictures of swing. From Charlie Parker to John Coltrane to Ornette Coleman to Stan Getz, sax players have been the groundbreakers and genre-shifters.

Joshua Redman was hailed as the next great savior of jazz when he burst on the scene in 1991, the year he graduated from Harvard and also won the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition. In the 22 years since, he's performed regularly, both with his own bands and as a sideman for others, including his saxophonist father Dewey Redman.

### Orchestras, too

Although Joshua has mostly remained loyal to his first love— bebop— he's also dabbled with fusion (in a trio called the Elastic Band), and his most recent album, *Walking Shadows*, featured ballads played by a quartet backed by a full string orchestra.

At the Annenberg Center this month, however, we saw the stripped-down, post-bop Joshua Redman at work. He delivered a tight 90-minute set featuring his virtuosic playing— the man can hit notes you'd swear couldn't possibly come out of a tenor sax— backed by Aaron Goldberg on piano, Reuben Rogers on bass and Gregory Hutchinson on drums.

It was, in some ways, a conventional jazz performance, oxymorons be damned— it was straight bop, the kind of jazz that people who hate jazz hate. It was, however, bop superbly played.

### Hipper crowd

Redman excels at Coltrane-style solos, and, although most of the songs were his own compositions, he seemed delighted when the audience recognized a Charlie Parker number. "You're much hipper than the crowd last night in Boston," he said happily.

The musicians were fully responsive to each other— Goldberg, for instance, is an excellent pianist who has played with Redman for almost 20 years. He had solos on most numbers that were well worth listening to, and his backing for other soloists— sometimes a full accompanying melodic line, sometimes just a few well-chosen notes— enhanced the overall experience.

After a hootin' and hollerin' standing ovation, the quartet played a single encore: an unexpectedly lush version of "Stardust."

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## Our readers respond



**David Richman**

of Philadelphia, PA on November 13, 2013

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Thanks for the review of the Redman concert at Annenberg, which I was sad to miss. Jazz in Philly is sparse, which is partly a function of the dearth of media coverage and marketing. The Kimmel has all but abandoned jazz, as has the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. Will the next review of a performance by world-class musicians at, say, Chris's Jazz Cafe be the first?

It's not just the paltry coverage, however. Philadelphia thinks of itself as a jazz town just as it thinks of itself as a pro basketball mecca, but the reality is that neither has ever succeeded at maintaining a paying audience here, regardless of the brilliance of the performers. (Convention Hall was one-third empty the night that I saw Wilt's Sixers take down the Celtics in the 1966-67 division finals— still, in my estimation, the peak moment of professional basketball in Philadelphia— and many were the Spectrum's unfilled seats at playoff games when the Doctor was operating.)

But stuff the basketball and the pessimism! Let's have more reviews of what was once "America's music," and is now clearly the world's.

#### ARTICLE OVERVIEW

Joshua Redman can hit notes you'd swear couldn't possibly come out of a tenor sax. At the Annenberg Center, his post-bop incarnation delivered a tight and virtuosic 90-minute set.

#### WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

Joshua Redman Quartet. Nov. 9, 2013 at Zellerbach Theatre, Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St. (215) 898-3900 or [www.AnnenbergCenter.org](http://www.AnnenbergCenter.org).

#### ABOUT JUDY WEIGHTMAN



Judy Weightman is *Broad Street Review's* managing editor. She lives in the East Falls section of Philadelphia.

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