

Old Dominion University's
F. Ludwig Diehn Concert Series



Kenny Washington

with

John Toomey, piano

Jimmy Masters, bass

Billy Williams, drums

Monday, April 18, 2016, 8:00 p.m.

Wilson G. Chandler Recital Hall
F. Ludwig Diehn Center for the Performing Arts



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Biographies

Kenny Washington has thrilled San Francisco audiences with his soulful interpretations, seemingly limitless range, and rapid-fire scatting ever since making his home in the Bay Area. Fans are delighted by this New Orleans native that the San Francisco Chronicle describes as “the Superman of the Bay Area jazz scene, a vocalist with an exuberantly supple tenor that glides effortlessly into the stratosphere.” Ravi Coltrane declared Kenny Washington his favorite male vocalist, and Mark Murphy told JazTimes that Washington was the only contemporary male vocalist carrying on the tradition, stating, “Kenny’s got the gift.”

Describing the first time he heard Washington, vibraphonist Joe Locke, arguably the greatest vibraphonist of his generation, said, “I walked into a venue on the West Coast—the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society in Half Moon Bay, California, to be specific—and was introduced to Kenny’s voice as he sang ‘My Ship’ by Kurt Weill. It was a revelation. I was deeply affected by what I heard and vowed to find a way to collaborate with him.” Their first collaboration occurred on Bay Area saxophonist Michael O’Neill’s *Still Dancin’* with Washington on vocals and Joe Locke as a special guest.

The following year, Locke brought Washington to New York for a week-long run at the Lincoln Center’s prestigious Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola with The Joe Locke Group that includes Geoffrey Keezer, George Mraz, and Clarence Penn. The legendary players’ reaction to Washington’s talent and rare musicianship was simply “Where have you been?” Locke says, “Kenny’s one of the greatest living male vocalists, without a doubt. He’s a sublime storyteller and exquisite balladeer. I love his familiarity with R&B, with Donny Hathaway, Sam Cooke and Marvin Gaye and how he can inject that feeling into the American Songbook in a very mature way.” The group’s residency has since become

an annual Dizzy's tradition, and a wider national audience has welcomed the introduction to Washington's talent. He is featured on Joe Locke's *For The Love of You* (E1 Records, 2010) and in 2014 appeared internationally with The Joe Locke Group in Germany and Georgia and headlined the Pittsburgh Jazz Live International Festival.

In February 2013, Washington was tapped to appear at Jazz At Lincoln Center with Wynton Marsalis and The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra to perform Marsalis' Pulitzer Prize-winning oratorio *Blood On The Fields*, alongside vocalists Gregory Porter and Paula West. In 2014, Washington returned to Jazz at Lincoln Center to perform Basie & The Blues with pianist Eric Reed and again in 2016 as the featured vocalist in Jazz at Lincoln Center's tribute to Frank Sinatra, in celebration of Sinatra's 100th birthday.

Other recent highlights include the 58th Annual Monterey Jazz Festival in 2015 with the Michael O'Neill Quintet, a 2014 Grammy win for the eponymous album from The Pacific Mambo Orchestra, which featured Washington's stand-out rendition of Stevie Wonder's tune "Overjoyed" and two new releases that feature Washington on vocals: *Groove Conspiracy*, from drummer Tommy Igoe's modern big band, and *New Beginnings*, the third collaboration with saxophonist Michael O'Neill. In 2013, Washington appeared at The MidAtlantic Jazz Festival, The Virginia Arts Festival, and as an adjudicator for the Monterey Jazz Festival's Next Generation Jazz Festival. Recent solo international performances include dates in Japan, Russia, Singapore, and Copenhagen with more in the works for Canada and South Korea. With this growing recognition, Washington was voted a "Rising Star" in the male vocals category in the 57th Annual Downbeat Critics' Poll.

Born and raised in New Orleans, Washington grew up singing gospel in the church where his parents were choir members and playing saxophone in school bands. Jazz caught his interest during his senior year of high school, when the great clarinetist Alvin Batiste performed at his school with a band of students that included two precociously talented teenage brothers named Branford and Wynton Marsalis. Inspired, Washington went on to study music at Xavier University, playing saxophone and singing in a variety of styles including pop, classical, R&B and jazz, while listening closely to Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Mel Torme.

After college Washington joined the honorary U.S. Navy Band as a saxophonist, but when his singing prowess was discovered he became the band's featured vocalist. With the Navy band, he performed across Asia, Russia, Australia and the U.S.

After settling in the San Francisco Bay Area, Washington had an early success with a high profile project when he was cast in a featured role in an off-Broadway jazz theater production called *Fire at Keaton's Bar & Grill*, by saxophonist Roy Nathanson. Washington performed at the New York City debut in a glittering cast with Elvis Costello, Deborah Harry and Nancy King. He then went on the road for several European performances. While the production never picked up the kind of backing it would take to make an extended theatrical run, the project was captured on an excellent cast album, released in 2000 on Six Degrees Records.

Tenor-saxophonist Michael O'Neill, who leads one of the finest working quintets in the Bay Area, says of Washington, "The cat's like an instrument. He can take a five-minute solo and never repeat himself. It's like hearing a more swing oriented Bobby McFerrin." Washington is the featured vocalist on *The Long and the Short of It*, *Still Dancin'* and *New Beginnings* by The Michael

O'Neill Quintet (all Jazzmo Records releases; 2004, 2007 and 2014 respectively).

Washington has won over audiences at major jazz venues across the country, including seven residencies at Dizzy's Club Coca Cola at Jazz at Lincoln Center and headlining The Rochester Jazz Festival and Pittsburgh Live Jazz Festival with The Joe Locke Group, The Knitting Factory, Small's and The 55 Bar in New York City, Snug Harbor in New Orleans, The Oregon Coast Jazz Party in Newport, Or., The Jazz Bakery in Los Angeles and all of the major San Francisco Bay Area jazz clubs past and present, including Yoshi's, Jazz at Pearl's, The Jazzschool, The Rrazz Room, The Top of The Mark, Anna's Jazz Island and The Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society. He has headlined all of the major local San Francisco Bay Area festivals including the SFJAZZ Festival, The San Jose Jazz Festival, Jazz on the Hill, The Healdsburg Jazz Festival, The Stanford Jazz Festival, The Fillmore Jazz Festival and The North Beach Jazz Festival.

If you have never heard this New Orleans native sing before, prepare for a jaw dropping experience. Kenny Washington is described as one of "the Bay Area's best kept musical secrets." Emulating the classic styles of Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan while infusing the colors of Stevie Wonder and Donny Hathaway, Washington's astounding improvisational flights, inventive approach and emotional intensity are awe inspiring. Whether scatting up a storm or caressing a Rodgers and Hart ballad, Washington is the kind of performer who leaves the stage with an audience full of new fans.

www.kennywashingtonvocalist.com

John Toomey is currently a University Professor of music at Old Dominion University. A recipient of both the SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award and the Distance Learning Professor of the Year Award, Toomey teaches a myriad of classes in jazz studies and music technology. He is also chair of the Department of Music, and music director for the Attucks Jazz Series. Prior to joining the faculty at Old Dominion University, he was music director and keyboardist for jazz trumpet legend Maynard Ferguson, with whom he recorded two CDs. Toomey is still an active performer, touring the world with such artists as Mark Murphy and Rene Marie, and has performed in Africa, Portugal, France, Japan, Switzerland and the Dominican Republic. He has also composed several soundtracks for features and documentaries for the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and NBC. Professor Toomey holds a master of music degree from the Eastman School of Music.

Jimmy Masters has served as first call bassist in Hampton Roads for the better part of the last 25 years. His past endeavors include time spent teaching at the Governor's Magnet School for the Arts, Hampton University, the College of William and Mary and Tidewater Community College. He has performed with numerous jazz greats from vocalists such as Jon Hendricks, Sheila Jordan, Chris Connor and Kurt Elling; to pianists James Williams, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Drew Jr. and Fred Hersch; saxophonists Gary Thomas, Steve Wilson, Rich Perry, Ken Peplowski and Glenn Wilson; vibraphonists Joe Locke and Chuck Redd; and brass players such as Tim Hagans, Clark Terry, Terell Stafford, Ingrid Jensen, John D'earth and John Fedchock. He has produced several well-received recordings for the VSOJAZ label and for National Public Radio & Television. While continuing to serve as an active member of the Hampton Roads jazz community, his musical exploits have expanded to include contemporary acoustic music, bluegrass

and traditional country music. He has toured Europe and performed in legendary clubs such as Washington, D.C.'s Blues Alley and the One Step Down, and Ryles Jazz Club in Boston.

Billy Williams is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University. He has had the opportunity to work professionally with the likes of Larry Willis, Cyrus Chestnut, Steve Davis, Terrell Stafford, Tim Warfield, Warren Wolf, Delfeayo Marsalis and Ellis Marsalis among others. He has performed worldwide in prestigious venues such as the Village Vanguard in New York City, Duc Des Lombards in Paris, France, the A-Trane in Berlin Germany, Porgy and Bess in Vienna, Austria, Jazz At Lincoln Center Doha in Doha, Qatar and Umbria Jazz in Perugia, Italy. As an educator, Billy has been featured as an Artist-in-Residence at Duke University and JazzSTL, a St. Louis, Missouri-based nonprofit organization specializing in jazz education. To learn more about Billy, please visit www.bwdrumz.com.



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April 18, 2016

Kenny Washington with the John Toomey Trio



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