



College of Music  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MSU Federal Credit Union  
SHOWCASE SERIES

# A Jazzy Little Christmas

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## **The Professors of Jazz**

Carmen Bradford, voice  
Walter Blanding, tenor saxophone  
Xavier Davis, piano  
Michael Dease, trombone  
Randy Gelispie, drums  
Randy Napoleon, jazz guitar  
Anthony Stanco, trumpet  
Rodney Whitaker, bass

*Generously sponsored by  
Joseph and Jeanne Maguire*

Saturday, December 14, 2024  
Fairchild Theatre, 8:00 p.m.

# PROGRAM

*selections will be taken from the following*

- Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas     Hugh Martin & Ralph Blane  
(1914–2011)     (1914–1995)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- The Christmas Song     Robert Wells & Mel Tormé  
(1922–1998)     (1925–1999)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- Jingle Bells     James Lord Pierpont  
(1822–1893)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town     J. Fred Coots & Haven Gillespie  
(1897–1985)     (1888–1975)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- White Christmas     Irving Berlin  
(1888–1989)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- What a Wonderful World     Bob Thiele & George David Weiss  
(1922–1996)     (1921–2010)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- Winter Wonderland     Felix Bernard  
(1897–1944)  
lyrics: Richard Bernhard Smith  
(1901–1935)  
arr. Tim Blackmon
- Sugar Rum Cherry     Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
(Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy)     (1840–1893)  
arr. Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn  
adapt. Walter Blanding
- Blue Christmas     Billy Hays and Jay W. Johnson  
(1906–1993)     (1903–1986)  
arr. Randy Napoleon
- God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen     Traditional  
arr. Xavier Davis

## ARTIST-FACULTY BIOS

**Carmen Bradford** is jazz royalty, a 2024 Grammy Award winner for the album “Basie Swings the Blues” recorded with the Count Basie Orchestra. She has been nominated five times for a Grammy Award and is the recipient of the Los Angeles Jazz Society's Jazz Vocalist Award. With her body of work, which reflects her vast experience, versatility, and technical brilliance, she has carved out her place in jazz history, and she continues to contribute to the preservation of this uniquely American art form. She was discovered and hired by William “Count” Basie when she was just 22 and went on to be the featured vocalist with the legendary Count Basie Orchestra for nine years. Bradford has performed and/or recorded with countless artists around the world. She has also performed with the Dallas Symphony, the Dani Felber Big Band, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and many other organizations. Bradford has loaned her inimitable voice to stage productions and the music of Hollywood films, cartoons for television and radio commercials, and the theater. Bradford is also CEO and Artistic Director of Carmen Bradford Productions, Inc., and an artist with Earthworks Audio. Bradford’s body of work reflects jazz’s improvisation, creativity, and freedom. She looks forward to continuing her work to preserve this uniquely American art, so reflective of the cultural fabric of our country.

From New York to China and everywhere in between, **Walter Blanding** has brought people joy through music for three decades. He has performed and recorded with Paul Simon, Aretha Franklin, Chick Corea, Dianna Ross, Cab Calloway, Branford Marsalis, and Tony Bennet, as well as the Count Basie Orchestra, Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, Wynton Marsalis Quintet, and orchestras in New York, Berlin, London, Paris, and Los Angeles. Born in Ohio and raised in New York City, Walter’s artistry impressed critics and listeners with his debut on *Tough Young Tenors*, acclaimed as one of 1991’s best jazz albums. Since then, his musical and spiritual presence has continued to evolve. In 1999, *Newsweek International* described Walter as the “Jazz Ambassador to Israel,” where he lived for four years. His touring and significant influence on the music scene there inspired the making of the film “Caravan 841”, in which he is a featured actor. Walter taught music in several Israeli schools and opened a private school in Tel Aviv. Dedicated to enriching lives through art as a means of cultural exchange, Walter served as Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Jazz Ambassador in Shanghai from 2018 to 2020.

## ARTIST-FACULTY BIOS (cont.)

**Xavier Davis** has been appointed associate professor of jazz piano at the MSU College of Music, following six years of teaching at the Juilliard School. He has performed and recorded with many world-famous jazz artists including the legendary Freddie Hubbard, Tom Harrell, and Wynton Marsalis. Davis has worked with the Boys Choir of Harlem as their musical director and he also played keyboard for the television series "Cosby". Davis is part of the Christian McBride Big Band and was featured on McBride's album, "The Good Feeling", which won a Grammy Award in 2012. In 2005, Davis became the first person to receive the prestigious New Works Grant twice from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation under the auspices of Chamber Music America.

**Michael Dease** first played alto sax as a teenager, soon switched to tenor sax, and won all-state honors for three consecutive years on the latter instrument. Teaching himself trombone during his senior year, he repeated his all-state achievement on his new instrument. In 2002, Dease was invited to join the inaugural class of the jazz studies division of The Juilliard School, where he received Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees. His teachers include Wycliffe Gordon, Steve Turre, Vincent Gardner, John Drew, and Joseph Alessi. While at Juilliard, Dease won many awards, including the Frank Rosolino Award, J.J. Johnson Award, the Sammy Nestico Jazz Composers Award, ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Award, and the Fish Middleton Jazz Competition. He began his career in Illinois Jacquet's Big Band in 2002, and is currently a featured member of the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band, Christian McBride Big Band, Roy Hargrove Big Band, Nicholas Payton Big Band, Jimmy Heath Big band, and the Charles Tolliver Big Band.

**Randy Gelispie** has traveled on the road with Wes Montgomery, Sonny Stitt, Dinah Washington, Etta Jones, Lou Donaldson, and Gene Ammons. He has performed with Joe Williams, Nancy Wilson, Dizzy Gillespie, Tommy Flanagan, Barry Harris, Oliver Jones, O. C. Smith, Al Hibbler, and most recently with Geri Allen, Jimmy Witherspoon, John Lee Hooker, Big Maybelle, Donald Walden, Marcus Belgrave, Perry Hughes, Rodney Whitaker, Gary Schunk, Rick Roe, Marian Hayden, Bill Heid, Andrew Speight, and Wycliffe Gordon.

## ARTIST-FACULTY BIOS (cont.)

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, **Randy Napoleon** began his journey in jazz immediately after finishing his studies at the University of Michigan. Napoleon's career took off, first touring with pianist Benny Green, and then full time with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. Napoleon is featured on Michael Bubl 's Grammy-nominated CD "Caught in the Act". He is the main arranger and the guitarist on "Freddy Cole Sings Mr. B", a 2010 Grammy-nominated release from High Note that features songs from the Billy Eckstine song book, as well as on "Talk to Me", Cole's 2011 album, and Cole's most recent album "This and That". Today, Napoleon is one of the most sought-after guitarists and he is known as a forward-thinking musician with a passion for the jazz guitar tradition.

**Anthony Stanco**, a product of Detroit's rich musical heritage, has spent his early years studying under local heroes such as Marcus Belgrave and Rodney Whitaker. He attended Manhattan School of Music to study with world-famous brass pedagogue Laurie Frink. Later, he transferred to Michigan State University to complete his undergraduate and Master degrees. During this time, he won the International Trumpet Guild's 2013 Jazz Improvisation Competition. Stanco leads The Crucial Elements, a nationally recognized five-piece ensemble who have served multiple tours with the U.S. State Department's "American Music Abroad" program. This is made possible through a partnership between American Voices and the U.S. Government's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. They have represented the United States in more than a dozen different countries around the world (including South Africa, Namibia, Indonesia, and Jordan) and have performed in leading international venues such as the Java Jazz Festival, Cairo Jazz Club, and the Windhoek Jazz Festival. Stanco's ensemble consistently receives rave reviews about their engaging live performances and equally captivating record titled "The Crucial Elements". Anthony has recently released a second CD entitled "You Know the Feeling" on the Detroit Music Factory label.

## ARTIST-FACULTY BIOS (cont.)

**Rodney Whitaker** is an innovative jazz bassist, University Distinguished Professor at MSU, and lifetime member of the premiere performing jazz orchestra in the U.S., the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra under the direction of Wynton Marsalis.

Professor Whitaker received national recognition performing with the Terence Blanchard Quintet and the Roy Hargrove Quintet, and during his 35-year career, he has performed with a plethora of legendary artists from Ray Charles, Bob James, and Dizzy Gillespie to Kathleen Battle, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Cassandra Wilson.

As an artistic director, mentor and educator, Professor Whitaker's expertise has led him to work as the artistic director for the East Lansing Summer Solstice Jazz Festival, the Dr. Phillips Center Jazz Orchestra in Orlando, and the Gathering Jazz Orchestra in Detroit. In addition to master classes around the U.S., in London, Japan, and Australia, he consulted with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in the development of its jazz education department and served on the faculties of University of Michigan and Juilliard Institute of Jazz.

A prolific recording artist and composer, Professor Whitaker has been bandleader on 17 albums and appeared on more than 90 recordings.

# The Jazz Club

## 2024-2025 Season

The Michigan State University Jazz Studies Program aims to be the best training ground in the nation for aspiring jazz musicians. Private contributions help ensure our ability to provide an environment that nurtures the highest level of excellence and inspires the next generation of jazz musicians. Gifts support student scholarships, fellowships, outreach activities, student travel, the opportunity to bring guest artists to campus to enhance the student experience, and other crucial areas that make MSU Jazz Studies the outstanding program that it is.

With grateful appreciation, we acknowledge the following members of The Jazz Club at Michigan State University beginning April 1, 2024.

### **KING OF SWING (\$5,000-up)**

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A JAZZY LITTLE CHRISTMAS



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**Donors listed in boldface are charter members of The Jazz Club.**

**Special thanks to our 2024-25 Jazz Concert Sponsors:**

**A Jazzy Little Christmas**

*Joseph and Jeanne Maguire*

**42nd Annual Jazz Spectacular - Finale**

*Ken and Sandy Beall*

*Merritt Lutz*

*Leonard and Sharon Tabaka*

**MSU Professors of Jazz – Jazz: Spirituals, Prayer, and Protest**

*Robert Last and Jill Canny*

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**Jazz Nonets**

*Jenny Chung and Family for Human Rights Fund*

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*Robert Last and Jill Canny*

**Special thanks to our generous donors who established the following named endowments:**

*Norman and Thelma Abel Endowed Scholarship in Jazz Trumpet*

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If you are interested in becoming a member of The Jazz Club please send your check, made payable to Michigan State University, with The Jazz Club listed on the memo line, to:

College of Music Advancement Office  
333 W Circle Drive, Room 153  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824

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For information about The Jazz Club or concert sponsorships, please contact the College of Music Advancement Office at (517) 353-9872 or e-mail [music.giving@msu.edu](mailto:music.giving@msu.edu)

# UPCOMING JAZZ STUDIES EVENTS

1/19 Sunday

## **MLK –Jazz: Prayer and Protest Concert**

Fairchild Theatre, 3:00 p.m. free (ticket required)

*Free tickets are available over the phone at 517-353-5340 or for pick-up from the College of Music main office (333 W. Circle Drive, East Lansing) M-F, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 24-Jan. 1)*

***Please note: Tickets that are not claimed 10 minutes prior to the start of the concert will be released.***

Friday, February 9

MSUFCU Jazz Artist in Residence

## **Jazz Nonets with Jazzmeia Horn, jazz vocalist**

8:00 p.m., Murray Hall, Music Building \$\$

Friday, February 16

WKAR Artist-Faculty and Guest Recital Series

## **Professors of Jazz**

8:00 p.m., Murray Hall \$

Friday, March 22

MSUFCU Jazz Artist in Residence

## **Jazz Orchestras with John Clayton, jazz bass**

8:00 p.m., Murray Hall, Music Building \$\$

Wednesday, April 10

## **Swing Dance**

Murray Hall, 7:30 p.m. \$

Thursday, April 11

## **Jazz Nonets**

Murray Hall, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 13

## **Essentially Elington Regional HS Jazz Band Competition**

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Murray Hall, Music Building, free

Saturday, April 13

## **Jazz Spectacular**

Fairchild Theatre , 8:00 p.m.

Adults \$25 – Seniors \$20 – Students \$15

### TICKET PRICES

\$ \$12 Adults, \$10 Seniors (age 60 and older), Students with ID and anyone under age 18 are free but require a ticket for admission.

\$\$ \$17 Adults, \$15 Seniors, \$7 Students with ID and anyone under age 18. Please note: *All events scheduled in Murray Hall are general admission seating.*

\$\$\$ \$22/\$25 Adults, \$20 Seniors, \$12/\$15 Students and those under age 18.



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