

Center for the Performing and Cinematic Arts Boyer College of Music and Dance

Jazz on Broad Steve Wilson, saxophone

Wednesday, January 15, 2025
Temple Performing Arts Center Lobby

4:30 PM Master Class
7:30 PM Performance

About the Artist

STEVE WILSON has attained ubiquitous status in the studio and on the stage with the greatest names in jazz. A bandleader in his own right, *Jazz Times* calls him “the consummate saxophonist-composer and “one of the finest alto and soprano saxophonists of our time.” A musician’s musician, Wilson has brought his distinctive sound to more than 100 recordings led by such celebrated and wide-ranging artists as Chick Corea, George Duke, Michael Brecker, Dave Holland, Dianne Reeves, Bill Bruford, Gerald Wilson, Maria Schneider, Joe Henderson, Charlie Byrd, Billy Childs, Karrin Allyson, Don Byron, Bill Stewart, James Williams, and Mulgrew Miller among many others. Wilson has eight recordings under his own name, leading and collaborating with such stellar musicians as Lewis Nash, Carl Allen, Steve Nelson, Cyrus Chestnut, Greg Hutchinson, Dennis Irwin, James Genus, Larry Grenadier, Ray Drummond, Ben Riley, Nicholas Payton, Orrin Evans, Ugonna Okegwo and Bill Stewart.

In 2015 Wilson released his first project as a leader in 12 years, *Steve Wilson & Wilsonian’s Grain: Live in New York: The Vanguard Sessions*, on Random Act Records. Recorded live at the famed Village Vanguard in NYC on May 24 & 25, 2014, the recording features Wilson’s potent quartet with Orrin Evans, Ugonna Okegwo and Bill Stewart. The CD was conceived to truly capture the live experience and the sound of one of the best listening rooms in the world. The tracking order reflects a Wilsonian’s Grain set, and includes three Wilson originals, and tunes by Orrin Evans, Joe Chambers, Thelonius Monk and Migiwa Miyajima. WBGO Radio describes Wilsonian’s Grain as “...jazz at its finest – in conception, execution and spontaneity. “

He has recorded another project, *Sit Back Relax & Unwind*, for JMI Records that features Ray Angry, Ben Williams and Willie Jones, III just recently released. In the vein of the old CTI recordings, it is an analog recording and will be released a vinyl LP only. Produced by Steven Mandel (Music Supervisor the *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon, *The Roots*), he also contributed four tunes that were arranged by Wilson. There are two new tunes by Wilson and an arrangement by Ray Angry of David Bowie’s ‘Space Oddity.’”

One hundred eighty-third and eighty-fourth performances of the 2024-2025 season.



Starting his formal training on saxophone in his native Hampton, Virginia, Wilson also played oboe and drums in school bands while performing in various R&B/funk bands throughout his teens. After a year-long stint with singer Stephanie Mills he decided to major in music at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, where he performed and/or studied with Jimmy and Percy Heath, Jon Hendricks, Jaki Byard, John Hicks, Frank Foster and Ellis Marsalis. During those years he was also in constant demand for recording studio work, and as backing musician for touring shows such as The Four Tops and Sophisticated Ladies. Landing a chair with O.T.B (Out of the Blue), a sextet of promising young players recording on Blue Note Records, Wilson moved to New York in 1987 and the following year toured the U.S. and Europe with Lionel Hampton. Becoming a first-call choice for veteran and emerging artists alike, Wilson was the subject of a New York Times profile “A Sideman’s Life”, highlighting his work with Ralph Peterson, Jr., Michele Rosewoman, Renee Rosnes, Marvin “Smitty” Smith, Joanne Brackeen, The American Jazz Orchestra, The Mingus Big Band, The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, Leon Parker, and Buster Williams’ Quintet “Something More”. In 1996 he joined the acclaimed Dave Holland Quintet, and from 1998-2001 he was a member of Chick Corea’s Grammy winning sextet “Origin”.

Cited by his peers in a New York Times poll as one of the artists most likely to break out as an established leader, Wilson recorded four CDs – New York Summit, Step Lively, Blues for Marcus and Four For Time – on the Criss Cross label. He then recorded two projects for Chick Corea’s Stretch Records label – Generations, his multi-generational quartet with Mulgrew Miller, Ray Drummond and Ben Riley — and Passages which features his long-time musical partners Bruce Barth, Ed Howard and Adam Cruz, and special guest Nicholas Payton. Containing nine original compositions Passages established Wilson as a leader whose vision reveres the past, creates a soundscape of the present, and reaches toward the future.

In 2003 Wilson’s recording Soulful Song was released on MAX JAZZ launching the label’s Horn Series. It features special guest vocalists Rene Marie, Carla Cook, and Phillip Manuel and issues forth a powerful and provocative performance from these dynamic and versatile artists. As Wilson explains, “It’s a tribute Black radio, as it was called then, that was particularly inclusive in its programming and a galvanizing force in the community. On the same station one could hear R&B, jazz, blues, gospel, comedy, local news and affairs, and social commentary”. In addition to new original material the program includes arrangements of songs by Stevie Wonder, Chick Corea, Abbey Lincoln, Gil Scott Heron, Earth, Wind & Fire, Patrice Rushen, and The Staple Singers.

Wilson was a member of the Blue Note 7, an all-star septet assembled to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Blue Note Records in 2009. The project culminated in a successful 50-city tour of the U.S., and their recording Mosaic. Also that year Wilson made his orchestral debut performing Heitor Villa Lobos’ Fantasia for Soprano Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra with the Vermont Mozart Festival Orchestra. By popular demand he returned to the VMF in 2010 performing a commissioned work Sweet For Duke for Saxophone & Chamber Orchestra by Jonathan Ragonese.

In February 2011 Wilson celebrated his 50th birthday with a six-night engagement, leading six different bands at Jazz Standard, NYC’s premiere jazz club. The all-star line-up included Mulgrew Miller, Bruce Barth, Karrin Allyson, Lewis Nash, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Carla Cook, Geoffrey Keezer, Christian McBride,

Linda Oh, Ed Howard, Adam Cruz, Diane Monroe, Joyce Hammann, Nardo Poy and Troy Stuart. In a major interview feature preview, the Wall Street Journal proclaimed, "The Sideman Becomes the Star." The WSJ article by award-winning journalist Larry Blumenfeld added, "Mr. Wilson is essential to this city's jazz landscape." Since the 1990's Wilson has been regularly cited in the Downbeat Magazine Critics and Readers Polls in the soprano and alto saxophone categories. The Jazz Journalists Association nominated him for Best Alto Sax Player in 2008, and for Best Soprano Sax Player in 2010. His work in film has included being artistic consultant to Harvey Keitel for "Lulu On The Bridge" as well as being featured on the soundtrack.

Wilson's current projects reflect his multifaceted artistry, versatility, and associations with some of the most highly regarded artists on the scene. His quartet Wilsonian's Grain, which consists of Orrin Evans, Ugonna Okegwo, and Bill Stewart or Clarence Penn, has been featured on NPR live from the Kennedy Center and the Village Vanguard in New York City, and headlined at the prestigious Detroit Jazz Festival in 2011. Wilson is one-half of two dynamic duos, "Musical Dialogue" with renowned drummer Lewis Nash, they released their recording Duologue on MCG Jazz, and in another with pianist Bruce Barth as documented on their recording "Home" on the We Always Swing label. He co-leads an elegant trio with pianist Renee Rosnes and bassist Peter Washington, and with composer/arranger David O'Rourke has a repertoire as soloist with strings. Wilson is touring member of the Grammy-winning Maria Schneider Orchestra, the Billy Childs Quartet, Christian McBride & Inside Straight as well as McBride's Grammy-winning Big Band, and the Buster Williams Quartet.

An in-demand and passionate educator Wilson is the Director of Jazz Studies and an Associate Professor of Music at City College of New York. In 2019 he joined the prestigious faculty at Ravinia's Stean's Music Institute in Chicago, IL, in 2021 he was made a Co-Director with Rufus Reid and Billy Childs.

He has been artist-in-residence and/or guest artist at University of Oregon, University of Michigan, University of Maryland-College Park, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Delaware, Lemoyne College, North Carolina Central University, Bowling Green University, Lafayette College, University of Northern Colorado, SUNY New Paltz, Florida State University, California State University at Stanislaus, University of Manitoba, Hamilton College, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and for the award winning arts organization CITYFOLK in Dayton, Ohio.

With the support of friend and mentor Dr. Billy Taylor, Wilson was a frequent guest performer/educator at The Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. He has been a featured performer, panelist, and clinician at conferences of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, Chamber Music of America, and International Association of Jazz Educators. Wilson was honored with the Marc Crawford Jazz Educator Award from New York University 2001 and the Virginia Jazz Award 2003 Musician of the Year presented by the Richmond Jazz Society, recognizing his outstanding service in the advancement of jazz and education in their respective communities. He is an active mentor in the nurturing and promotion of his former students' emerging careers who have performed with The Count Basie Orchestra, Johnny Mandel, Beyonce Knowles, Roy Hargrove, and many others.