

RICHEL BEIRACH (May 23, 1947 - Jan. 26, 2026) The Brooklyn-born pianist died at age 78 in Worms, Germany after a long illness. In 2001, Beirach had moved to Leipzig, where he served as a professor of jazz piano at the University of Music and Theatre, retiring in 2014. He studied with Lennie Tristano, and had a special 50-year partnership with saxophonist Dave Liebman, notably Beirach's 1973 recording debut (Liebman's *First Visit*, with Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette), as well as the bands Lookout Farm and Quest, in addition to the numerous duo performances they performed and recorded. His dissonant harmonic style was an influence on the late Kenny Kirkland, Ethan Iverson and many others. Beirach made significant contributions to the ECM catalog, including his debut leader album *Eon* (1974). He had other label credits including Polydor, CBS/Sony, Pathfinder, Columbia, Concord Jazz, SteepleChase, CMP and more. Album credits include Stan Getz, Chet Baker, Frank Tusa, Badal Roy, John Scofield, George Coleman, Ron McClure, George Mraz, Nora York, Steve Smith, Lee Konitz and Gregor Huebner.

HEDDY BOUBAKER (Mar. 3, 1963 - Jan. 19, 2026) The Marseille-born multi-instrumentalist and improviser, as part of the Toulouse experimental music scene, died suddenly at age 62 from an aortic dissection, the same condition that in 2010 caused him to switch from alto and bass saxophones to electric bass, guitar and analog synthesizer. He had his own or collaborative albums on labels such as Creative Sources, Insubordinations, Petit Label, Ayler, Mikroton, Re:konstrukt and Un Rêve Nu, performing with the likes of Ernesto Rodriguez, Birgit Ulher and Hernani Faustino.

FRANK CLAYTON (Nov. 1, 1942 - Jan. 16, 2026) The bassist and drummer (former spouse and collaborator of vocalist Jay Clayton), who in the '60s and '70s was a central figure in the NYC jazz Loft scene, died at age 83. Born in Wheeling, WV, his six-decade career included credits with Charles Mingus, Albert Ayler, Sam Rivers, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, McCoy Tyner, Andrew Hill, Leroy Jenkins, Cecil McBee, Eddie Harris, Barry Harris, Julian Priester, Gary Peacock, Randy Brecker, Lee Konitz, Mal Waldron, Billy Hart, Max Roach, George Cables and Black Yiddish Trio among many others.

CHRISTIAN DUCASSE (1954 - Feb. 3, 2026) The Marseille-born photographer, who spent over four decades documenting the global jazz scene, died at age 72 in Normandy. His first published photograph featured Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers. Ducasse collaborated extensively with *Jazz Magazine* and *Jazzman*, and had his images of Roy Haynes, Mal Waldron, Marion Brown, Barney Wilen, Linda Sharrock, Jeanne Lee, Steve Lacy, Joachim Kühn, et al. used in albums released by a wide range of labels, including Free Lance, Sunnyside, Sketch, Night Bird, IDA, Owl, BMC, Marge, Tzadik, Clean Feed, Corbett vs. Dempsey, OutNote, Storyville, Elemental and Label Ouest.

IMRE KÓSZEGI (Dec. 6, 1944 - Jan. 29, 2026) The award-winning Hungarian drummer and educator died in Budapest at age 81. He led several influential ensembles, including Kószegi Rhythm and Brass, the Super Trio with György Vukán and Balázs Berkes. His international collaborations were extensive, from Frank Zappa to Art Farmer and Kenny Wheeler. Kószegi had his own or collaborative albums on JG, HTSART, YVP Music and Fon-Trade Music. Other credits included Saturnus and work with Tommy Vig, Gábor Szabó, Lajos Dudas, Aladár Pege, Al Casey, Béla Szakcsi Lakatos, Hannes Beckmann, Attila Zoller and others.

JAMES "MINGO" LEWIS (Dec. 8, 1953 - Jan. 27, 2026) The percussionist, a foundational figure in Latin rock and jazz fusion, died at age 72 from complications of lung disease. He was a member of Chick Corea's Return to Forever during the *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* era

and appeared with Al Di Meola on the guitarist's first five studio albums. In 1976, Lewis released his only solo album, *Flight Never Ending*. Other credits include Carlos Santana/John McLaughlin, Bennie Maupin, Paul McCandless, Bill Summers and Headhunters.

JACEK MIELCAREK (May 17, 1964 - Feb. 4, 2026) Blind from birth, the Polish saxophonist, clarinetist (who also played duduk and bagpipes), ethnomusicologist and music journalist, died at age 61 from an aggressive form of cancer. Mielcarek seamlessly blended traditional jazz, folk and experimental music and gained recognition as a vocalist at the National Festival of Polish Song in Opole (1988), later collaborating with Polish artists such as Krzysztof Krawczyk, Natalia Kukulska and Zbigniew Wodecki. On Radio Opole, he hosted *Jazzofonia* and *Muzyka źródła* for over 30 years. He founded the Jacek Mielcarek Trio (2008), merging Polish folk dances and modern jazz improvisation, and in 2023 formed the quartet BASMyT. He had albums on Polskie Radio Opole, Jazz Forum and Audio Cave, some with his bassist son Jakub, alongside credits with Anna Panas and others.

GRAHAM MORGAN (Apr. 30, 1937 - Feb. 1, 2026) Credited as the most recorded drummer in Australian music history over a seven-decade career, and one who crossed musical genres, Morgan died at age 88. A staple of the TV and recording industries and as an educator, he wrote the influential textbook, *Analysis of Contemporary Drumming*. Morgan collaborated with the likes of Cleo Laine, Carmen McRae, Freddie Hubbard, Nancy Wilson, Clark Terry, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and additionally had credits with Graeme Lyall, John Dankworth, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Jackie Orszaczky, Peter Martin, Australian Radio Rhythm Orchestra and others.

KEN PEPOWSKI (May 23, 1959 - Feb. 2, 2026) The renowned clarinetist and tenor saxophonist unexpectedly passed away at age 66 of an apparent heart attack aboard the Celebrity Summit during "The Jazz Cruise" in the Gulf of Mexico. He had also been coping with multiple myeloma, a form of bone marrow cancer, since a 2021 diagnosis. "Peps" was widely loved for his humor, easy-going personality and extraordinary talent. A native of Cleveland, OH, he began in a family polka band, the Harmony Kings. He gained early professional experience with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra under Buddy Morrow before joining Benny Goodman's final swing band in 1984, playing tenor. Following Goodman's 1986 death, Peplowski returned to the clarinet, playing both tenor and clarinet on his debut album as leader, *Double Exposure* (1987). Over a career spanning five decades, he recorded more than 70 albums under his name and appeared on approximately 400 others as sideman. His final studio album, *Unheard Bird* (2024), featured previously unrecorded string arrangements commissioned by Charlie Parker. Peplowski was considered a bridge between the Swing era and modern jazz, able to balance tradition with innovation, and was frequently cited as the greatest living jazz clarinetist prior to his passing. Peplowski had his own or collaborative albums on labels such as Concord, Arbors, Koch, Jump, Mainstem, Nagel Heyer, Capri, Venus and Cellar Music. His credits and collaborations were numerous, including Mel Tormé, Rosemary Clooney, Hank Jones, Madonna, Loren Schoenberg, Marty Paich, George Shearing, Hank Jones, Terry Waldo, Daryl Sherman, Charlie Byrd, Steve Allen, Ruby Braff, Frank Vignola, Dick Hyman, David Ostwald, John Pizzarelli, Rebecca Kilgore, Barbara Carroll, Bucky Pizzarelli, Carol Sloane, Cheryl Bentley, Peter and Will Anderson, DIVA Jazz Orchestra, Ted Rosenthal and many, many others.

JACK PETERSEN (Oct. 25, 1933 - Feb. 5, 2026) The guitarist-educator, who built pedagogy departments at Berklee College of Music, University of North Texas and University of North Florida, died at age 92. Petersen also

performed and recorded throughout his career with a "who's who" of jazz and popular music, including Stan Kenton, Dave Brubeck, Nancy Wilson, Dr. Billy Taylor, Peggy Lee, Milt Hinton, Dave Brubeck, Doc Severinsen, Henry Mancini, Buddy DeFranco, Clark Terry and others. He had albums on Music Minus One, as well as Four Leaf Clover.

MICHEL PORTAL (Nov. 27, 1935 - Feb. 12, 2026) The French saxophonist and clarinetist/bass clarinetist, who also played the bandoneon and Hungarian taragot, died at age 90. He also had careers in classical music and soundtrack composing and was active in a movement to give jazz a distinct European identity. He appeared on what is widely considered France's first free jazz album, pianist and countryman François Tusques' *Free Jazz* (1965). His auspicious leader debut album, *Our Meanings And Our Feelings* (Pathé, 1969), included an A-list of European improvisers: Joachim Kühn (piano), J.F. Jenny Clark (bass), plus Aldo Romano and Jacques Thollot (drums). Portal co-founded New Phonic Art and the collective Michel Portal Unit as a lab for free improvisation. He had his own or collaborative albums on CBS, Le Chant Du Monde, L'Escargot, hatHUT, Saravah, Erato, Owl, Dreyfus, BMG, Universal Music and Sunnyside, among credits with Pierre Michelot, Serge Gainsbourg, Jef Gilson, Jean-Luc Ponty, Claude Bolling, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Alan Silva, Henri Texier, Richard Galliano, Daniel Humair, Vienna Art Orchestra, Martial Solal, Emile Parisien and Miroslav Vitous' just-released ECM album, plus many others.

CHRISTOPH STIEFEL (Jul. 29, 1961 - Jan. 21, 2026) The Zurich-born pianist, composer and producer, who fused contemporary and medieval compositional techniques, died at age 64. He first rose to prominence at age 23 as a member of Andreas Vollenweider's band and later formed Inner Language Trio to develop the style of layering 14th century isorhythms to create polyrhythms. He had his own or collaborative albums on Biber (his 1990 leader debut) and Jazzline (his 1995 *Ancient Longing* quartet included Charlie Mariano, Peter Erskine and Dieter Ilg), as well as Make Up Your World, Enja, Neuklang, Traumton, Challenge and Nwog.

RALPH TOWNER (Mar. 1, 1940 - Jan. 18, 2026) The guitarist (and pianist) who had lunar craters named after his compositions "Icarus" and "Ghost Beads" by the Apollo 15 astronauts, died at age 85. His career was defined by a 50-year-plus association with ECM and his role as a founding member of the acoustic quartet Oregon (with Glen Moore, Collin Walcott and Paul McCandless), a pioneer of "chamber jazz," blending folk, Indian classical and avant garde improvisation. With Oregon he made dozens of albums for ECM, Vanguard, Elektra, Chesky, Intuition, CAMJazz and others. Towner worked with Paul Winter Consort (its 1970 *Road* album, which included Towner's "Icarus", was the guitarist's recording debut), as well as Duke Pearson, Gary Burton, Weather Report, Keith Jarrett, Larry Coryell, John Abercrombie, Kenny Wheeler, Azimuth, Trilok Gurtu, Vince Mendoza, Jerry Granelli, Gary Peacock, Marc Copland, Charlie Haden and many others.

KEN WALKER (Jul. 1955 - Feb. 12, 2026) The Arkansas-born bassist-educator, who was a cornerstone of the Colorado music scene for over four decades, died at age 69. He had moved to Denver in 1985 where he was the house bassist at the storied El Chapultepec jazz and blues club from 1987-98. He was also the first Instructor of Jazz Bass at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music for nearly 30 years, and led a sextet for two decades. Walker performed with Freddie Hubbard, Joe Pass, Randy Brecker, James Moody and Nat Adderley. He had a 2002 leader date alongside credits with Ron Miles, Fred Wesley, Lew Tabackin, Charles McPherson, Fred Hess, Keith Oxman, Phil Woods/Carl Saunders, Richie Cole and Curtis Fuller.