



JESSICA JONES

TOWARD RICHER VARIANCE

BY SOPHIA VALERA HEINECKE

Tenor saxophonist Jessica Jones has never taken for granted the special place music has held for her. Beginning in 1973, she attended the renowned Berkeley High Jazz Program in northern California, whose alumni also included such soon-to-be illustrious names as David Murray, Lenny Pickett, Steven Bernstein, her husband Tony Jones and Peter Apfelbaum (of whose Hieroglyphics Ensemble she became a decades-long member). Jones emphasizes this rare, early training, noting that “it’s a deep cultural thing, because jazz education was part of integrating the school system, creating spaces that reflect the community and elevating Black American culture. Of the people I played with then, I still improvise with a lot of them.”

In her youth, Jones realized that two facets of musicianship must be developed: “One is about your instrument, the other is letting it come through you. That’s what Coltrane used to say, the music comes through you. Pianist Connie Crothers used to say, music is like a place that you go...Some things about yourself you have to figure out. You wind up being your own teacher. It’s the choices you make, how you enter into a space.” Jones sees most of what she does as part of her musical practice—that includes her interactions with her students at Bard College and her co-leadership (with Tony Jones) of the Rare Earth Vibration Association (REVA). Promoting creativity through a range of programs, REVA is a multipronged arts organization: it co-creates a series of Africa-based festivals; is a Mutual Aid program (pairing American instrument repair technicians with African instrumentalists to teach instrument-repair skills); supports the Global JazzWomen programs online and on the ground; and sustains Jones’ and her husband’s Reva boutique record label.

While improvisation informs every part of her living, Jones also values composed forms. She’s working through the sheet music she gathered while employed at Carl Fischer, NYC’s historic sheet music house. “Practicing is relaxing, meditative,” she says. “You spend a lot of time as a musician not exactly wishing you were better, but knowing that there’s just a little more that you can get.” She has also gleaned that one doesn’t necessarily get rewarded for cultivating practice in material means; rather, a musician should serve as an open vessel, prepared through training to be part of the music surrounding them, a lesson learned from her experiences with Crothers.

Crothers (1941-2016), on whose New Artists label Jones frequently recorded (including as a duo on *Live at the Freight* from 2011), was one of several of the saxophonist’s mentors. Two others include Don Cherry (1936-1995), whose *Multikulti* (A&M, 1989-1990) was Jones’ auspicious recording debut, and Joseph Jarman (1937-2019), the visionary musician of Art Ensemble of Chicago fame and a Shinshu Buddhist priest. Through her collaborations with Jarman, particularly at Brooklyn’s Jikishinkan Aikido Dojo, her love for small independent spaces deepened. It is in these spaces people are bound together by an intention they collectively set to make something important happen, and Jones urges us not

to undervalue this. The musical ecosystem—the radio stations, the writers, the venues—is, in her words, “a really fragile thing” that requires support. Jarman’s dojo in Carroll Gardens provided further opportunity to ground herself and cross an unexpected threshold into a life-changing degree of focus and presence. Jones would also appear with Jarman on several albums, including his *LifeTime Visions (For the Magnificent Human)* (Bopduda Music, 1998-1999), and with Chris Chalfant, the pianist, multi-media artist and member of the Brooklyn Buddhist Association.

Jen Shyu, co-founder (with fellow vocalist Sara Serpa) of M³ (Mutual Mentorship for Musicians, the platform that since 2022 has focused on giving visibility to women and non-binary musicians, including at its annual M³ Festival), recalls her first formative encounter hearing Jones with Jarman at the Jikishinkan Dojo: “I was so moved by her elegance and her warmth. The vibrations in the Dojo were very strong. It was a refreshing space apart from the jazz clubs, and it was really important for me to see her when I was primarily around male musicians. I remember hearing about her Global JazzWomen program, but it was when she joined M³ that I understood how far-reaching and impactful her teaching was, especially in Africa.”

When asked about the flow of their live presentations, Tony Jones speaks to the duration of time he has shared with Jessica. “It’s been so long that performing in public feels completely intuitive,” he says. “It’s almost like being of a single mind.” This spirit aligns with the meaning of Jikishinkan: direct mind. “Practice,” he notes, “isn’t just sitting down to zazen or meditation—we try to bring that onstage. It’s not about hours of practice, but about how Jessica moves and connects with others.”

Foundational to her practice is the fact that, she observes, “jazz...is honed from a Black American experience.” This statement reveals her respect and consideration for the struggle inherent in this music, and it informs her interactions through REVA, her teaching and her efforts to be collaborative and inclusive. “As a woman, not that all of this is about being a woman, I found that if I kept playing with people who respected me and I respected, and who were wonderful musicians, then what develops over time is amazing.”

The M³ Luminary Award, presented to musicians who participate in intergenerational programming, is an attempt to push against ageism. “Women musicians in mid and late careers often find that visibility narrows just as their artistry deepens,” notes Serpa. “Bookings, press attention, recording opportunities tend to favor younger artists, and women feel this shift earlier and more sharply than men. The result is a quiet loss for audiences—decades of musicianship that go largely unheard.” M³ is widening the impact of Jones’ work by presenting her with this year’s Luminary Award.

Jessica Jones remains an inspiration to the community at large, moving towards a richer variance of contributions and continuing to lead conversations, education and outreach.

For more info visit jessicajonesmusic.com. M³ presents Jones with its “Luminary Award” at National Jazz Museum in Harlem Nov. 6. The M³ Festival takes place at Roulette Nov. 7. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Jessica Jones Quartet—*Family* (Nine Winds, 1996)
- Jessica Jones Quartet—*Nod* (New Artists, 2003)
- Jessica Jones/Connie Crothers—*Live at the Freight* (New Artists, 2011)
- Jessica Jones—*Moxie* (New Artists, 2014)
- Jessica Jones Quartet—*Continuum* (Reva, 2018)
- Pitch, Rhythm & Consciousness—*Sextet* (Reva, 2023)

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NOVEMBER 2026

JAZZ CALENDAR

TUESDAYS 8-11 PM Weekly Jam Session House Band: Diego Voglino with guests	WEDNESDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM Two Miles A Day with Hery Paz, Jacob Sacks, Eivind Opsvik, Connor Parks (11/4) Emmanuel Michael (11/11) Alex Wintz Trio (11/18) Lolivone de la Rosa Quartet (11/25)
THURSDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM Glenn Zaleski (11/5) Adam Kolker, Gary Versace, Jeremy Stratton, Colin Stranahan (11/12), Yayoi Ikawa (11/19) TBA (11/26)	NO COVER ONE DRINK MINIMUM
FRIDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM Megumi Yonezawa (11/6) Adam Kolker, Gary Versace, Jeremy Stratton, Colin Stranahan (11/13), Alex Hamburger (11/20) TBA (11/27)	
SATURDAYS 6 - 7:30 PM DUET SET(S), followed by 8 & 9:30 PM sets: Victor Gould Trio (11/7), Adam Kolker, Gary Versace, Jeremy Stratton, Colin Stranahan (11/14), Alex Laurenzi (11/21), TBA (11/28)	

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