

ED NEUMEISTER

As a trombonist, composer-arranger and bandleader, Ed Neumeister is a musician's musician, as his elders and peers are glad to tell you. Influential trombonist-arranger and educator Bob Brookmeyer hailed him early on as “a gifted improviser,” while composer-arranger Manny Albam, co-founder of the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop, extolled Neumeister as “the perfect mixture as a musician – he knows Ellington as well as Bartók.” Saxophone star Joe Lovano has valued Neumeister as a colleague for some four decades, praising him as a conductor of “infectious flair” as well as “a soloist of deep expressive passion.” Another renowned saxophonist, Dave Leibman, simply dubbed him “one of the best trombonists in the business.” And veteran pianist Jim McNeely has said about Neumeister: “Whenever I play a gig with Ed, I know the music will be interesting. By the end of the evening, I will have asked myself a couple dozen times: ‘Why didn’t I think of that?’ ” Then there is praise from the press, with *DownBeat* calling Neumeister “a highly distinctive solo voice” and *JazzTimes* admiring his “compelling” compositions.

Neumeister has five decades of experience on both sides of the Atlantic as an artist and an educator. Born in 1952 and raised in the Bay Area, he was professional musician by his mid-teens. In his San Francisco years, he backed such iconic vocal stars as Frank Sinatra, Nancy Wilson and Sarah Vaughan, along with performing in various symphony orchestras. He also collaborated with Grateful Dead leader Jerry Garcia and such jazz notables as Noel Jewkes, Julian Priester, Jerry Granelli, Michael Formanek and Mark Levine. Moving to New York City in 1980 and becoming immersed in a still-active big-band scene, Neumeister played in outfits led by Lionel Hampton, Buddy Rich and Gerry Mulligan. He was also drafted by Mercer Ellington into the Duke Ellington Orchestra as both player and arranger for a 15-year tenure; at the same time, he was playing alongside the likes of Lovano and Tom Harrell in the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra (which would eventually become the award-winning Vanguard Jazz Orchestra). Neumeister’s arrangement of “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1992 with its appearance on the album *To You: A Tribute to Mel Lewis*.

After two decades in New York, Neumeister moved to Europe for an extended period, serving as a professor for 17 years at the University of Music in Graz, Austria, and working with some of the finest European musicians and Americans touring the continent. He recorded multiple albums there, leading large ensembles and small bands; he also wrote for various jazz ensembles, along with composing classical chamber pieces and large-scale concert works – including his *Fantasy for Cello & Big Band*. In a rare achievement, Neumeister created an acclaimed arrangement of Bartók’s String Quartet No. 4 for a quartet of trombones. Following

a post-Europe stint in Los Angeles – where he contributed orchestrations for scores to such films as *Inception*, *The Dark Knight* and *Sherlock Holmes* – Neumeister returned to the New York area in 2017. He has since been active as an educator, currently teaching at the School of Jazz and Contemporary Music at The New School, New York University and City College of New York, as well as William Paterson University in New Jersey.

As a leader, Neumeister has recorded nine albums featuring his compositions and arrangements, from large ensembles to small groups to solo trombone. He has released many of them via his own label, MeisteroMusic, including his latest: *3 for the Road*, an archival recording presenting his kindred-spirit trio with revered vocalist Jay Clayton and the late pianist Fritz Pauer, taped in 2001-2002 in Vienna. The current version of that trio includes Gary Versace on piano. Highlights of Neumeister's discography also include two albums, *New Standards* (2005) and *Reflection* (2006), featuring a road-honed quartet with Pauer, bassist Drew Gress and drummer John Hollenbeck. Another Neumeister gem is *Suite Ellington*, an album showcasing his arrangements for an all-star sextet of works by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn; recorded in 2010 for Austrian Radio, *Suite Ellington* includes *The Queen's Suite*, rarely heard in its entirety. *Jazz Weekly* raved over the disc, calling it "a great tribute and intro to the world of Ellingtonia."

Another highpoint of Neumeister's recorded catalog is the 2017 release *Wake Up Call*, presenting his original compositions performed by the final incarnation of his NeuHat Ensemble, an 18-piece jazz orchestra filled with top-class New York players. Neumeister's next release, a duo album with Austrian guitarist Karl Ratzer, is scheduled for early 2021 from MeisteroMusic. A new working New York small band for Neumeister is a quartet featuring the trombonist alongside Versace or Marc Copland on piano, Gress or Kenny Davis on bass and usually Tom Rainey on drums. Neumeister is also establishing a new jazz orchestra, the diverse, multi-generational *Assemblage*, which is the third such large group of his career, after the NeuHat Ensemble (1992-2017, in New York) and Ed Neumeister Jazz Orchestra (2006-2011, in Los Angeles). As a trombone soloist, Neumeister is a member of the Joe Lovano Nonet.

Upcoming from Neumeister as a composer is a large suite for expanded jazz orchestra, as well as a new sequence of trombone quartets. And MeisteroMusic's future projects include a collection of recordings featuring Neumeister's compositions and arrangements recorded by Holland's Grammy-winning Metropole Orkest from 1996 to 2000.

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