

Biography

An enduring presence for the last 30 years, saxophonist, composer and bandleader **Michael Blake** has built his reputation playing jazz and creative music in New York City. This visionary composer and arranger has produced a cornucopia of recordings that vary in context and mood. He has played tenor and soprano saxophone with a diverse range of artists including The Lounge Lizards, Charlie Hunter, Henry Butler/Steven Bernstein & the Hot 9 and Ray Lamontagne.

Michael was born on May 19th, 1964 in Montreal, Canada. His family moved to Toronto, Vancouver and to California's Bay Area where the indelible sounds of Psychedelic Rock, Funk and Soul would have a huge impact on his young ears. After resettling in Vancouver, Canada, he picked up the clarinet at 14 and a few years later the tenor saxophone, studying with David Branter, a disciple of renown saxophonist and teacher Eugene Rousseau. Michael was steeped in jazz and went to concerts where he heard Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck and Miles Davis.

Michael graduated from Vancouver Technical High School receiving the Music Award and enrolled in College. After his freshman year at Vancouver Community College he accepted a scholarship to Courtenay Music Center. During his sophomore year he set out on the local scene, cutting his teeth at jam sessions and learning the music of local trailblazer, trombonist, pianist and composer Hugh Fraser. In 1984 and 1985 Michael participated in the Banff School of Fine Arts Jazz Workshop under the direction of Dave Holland. At Banff, Michael was introduced to the music of guest artists AACM founder Muhal Richard Abrams and avant-garde pioneer Cecil Taylor. He attended masterclasses conducted by Holland, Kenny Wheeler, Don Thompson, John Abercrombie, Steve Coleman and David Liebman. The following year Michael received a grant from The Canada Council for the Arts to further his apprenticeship with Liebman in New York City. Michael fell in love with the vibrant scene New York had to offer and relocated there in 1987.

The city tested him but he endured the struggle developing his chops by playing with salsa, merengue and funk bands. A lucky break came along when John Lurie auditioned him to play in his outfit The Lounge Lizards. A perennial happening in the new 'downtown' music scene, John formed the band with his brother Evan in the late '70's, recruiting an impressive array of musicians to play their strange and beautiful compositions. Michael's tenure with The Lounge Lizards lasted from 1990-1999 and includes numerous recordings, TV appearances, a live concert film and film soundtracks including the Grammy nominated score for *Get Shorty*.

During the '90's he was a Composer in Residence in the Jazz Composers Collective and a member of Ben Allison's Medicine Wheel. Flaunting a stellar cast of musicians and unconventional instrumentation, Michael's group Free Association collaborated with rappers and dancers. This group would prove to be the perfect testing ground for him to compose and arrange original music.

Michael's multifaceted process is quite evident on all fifteen of his records. His first release *Kingdom of Champa* is a beautifully complex reflection of post war Vietnam that earned him high praise and critical acclaim. Michael sites his sidemen, producer Teo Macero and engineer Scott Harding for bringing his vision to life. Every album since has

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proven to further highlight his mastery of creating kaleidoscopic music. Whether tackling an ambitious new score or facing jazz tradition head on, Michael's saxophone always plays a center role in the mix. He takes a wily approach on every horn, favoring a variety of timbres that may evoke an elder, snap at a riff or blast off to the interstellar.

Michael has scored and arranged original music for film and television, big band and chamber ensemble. His work has been premiered and performed around the globe. He has toured and performed in concert halls and at the world's top jazz festivals and clubs. He has received commissions from Chamber Music America, The Canada Council for the Arts, The Doris Duke Foundation and The BC Arts Council. He is a respected teacher and has conducted workshops and classes in the US, Canada, Mexico, Denmark, Italy, Brazil and Thailand. Michael was on faculty at the Fondazione Siena Jazz Summer Workshop from 2009-2013.

Among the many artists he has recorded and performed with are Steven Bernstein, Stefano Bollani, Nicole Mitchell, Oliver Lake, Grachon Moncour III, Medeski Martin and Wood, Enrico Rava, Kresten Osgood, The Gil Evans Orchestra, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Jack McDuff, Ben E. King, Chubby Checker, Neil Sedaka, Natalie Cole, Martha and Rufus Wainwright, Nick Cave and Pinetop Perkins. He has worked with such luminary producers as Teo Macero, Tricky, Prince Paul, Hal Wilner and Sir Coxsonne Dodd.

Accolades

2017 Best Album Cover, "Red Hook Soul" (New York Jazz Record)
2016 Albums of the Year, "Fulfillment" (Bird is the Worm)
2014 Best Album of the Year, "Tiddy Boom" (Jazz Chronicles)
2014 Albums of the Year "Tiddy Boom" (Chicago Reader)
2014 Albums of the Year "Tiddy Boom" (Downbeat Magazine)
2010 Albums of the Year "Hellbent" (All About Jazz NY)
2008 Rising Star Category, Soprano Saxophone (Downbeat Magazine)
2002 Rising Star Category, Artist of the Year (Downbeat Magazine)
2002 Rising Star Category, Tenor Saxophone (Downbeat Magazine)
2002 Rising Star Category, Soprano Saxophone (Downbeat Magazine)
2000 Album of the Year "Drift" (Jazzthing Magazine)