

Mike Holober

Pianist/Composer/Arranger/Conductor/Educator

Described by *Downbeat Magazine* as “one of the finest modern composer/arrangers of our time” Mike Holober was awarded the 2022 American Academy of Arts and Letters Andrew Imbrie Award in Music. His big band recording, *Mike Holober & The Gotham Jazz Orchestra: Hiding Out* (ZOHO Music, 2019) was nominated for a 2020 GRAMMY® Award (Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album), and features two of Mike’s extended works for jazz orchestra. The 5-movement title piece, “*Hiding Out*,” was commissioned by The Philadelphia Museum of Art (funded by the Pew Foundation), and was composed at the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming; “Flow” is a 3-movement work commissioned by the Westchester Jazz Orchestra (with funding from a NYSCA Individual Artist Grant), and was written during a residency at MacDowell. *Downbeat Magazine* proclaimed the double CD a “long-anticipated, epic work,” and it garnered rave reviews in the jazz press. Critics praised the composer’s “daring compositional voice,” “powerful orchestral magic,” and “profound artistic vision,” confirming his place in “the front rank of the most accomplished and inventive composers in jazz,” and “leading the charge to shift what a big band can sound like.”

Prior to the release of “*Hiding Out*,” Mike has served at the helm of some of the world’s most renowned large ensembles as director, conductor, composer, and arranger. From 2007-2013 he was Artistic Director/Conductor of the Westchester Jazz Orchestra (WJO), a non-profit organization that performed a regular program of newly commissioned works each concert season. During his tenure Mike commissioned over 140 new works for jazz orchestra, making the organization one of the leading sponsors of new jazz works. With WJO he curated, arranged and conducted concerts for jazz luminaries such as Joe Lovano, Kate McGarry, John Scofield, John Patitucci, Randy Brecker, and Paquito D’Rivera. WJO’s 2011 recording “*Maiden Voyage Suite*,” a reworking of the Herbie Hancock masterpiece, was on multiple “best-of” lists, and was described as “nearly perfect” by *Downbeat Magazine*.

Mike has also worked extensively overseas. From 2011-2015 he was Associate Guest Conductor of the hr-Big Band (Hessischer Rundfunk – German National Radio Big Band, Frankfurt, Germany), and he served as Guest Conductor of the WDR Big Band (WestDeutsche Rundfunk - German National Radio Big Band, Cologne, Germany) in 2009, and 2014-2016.

Projects for the hr-Big Band include arranging and conducting concerts featuring renowned jazz artists such as Kurt Rosenwinkel, Billy Cobham, Jane Monheit, Terje Rypdal, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Miguel Zenon, and a suite based on the music of Frank Zappa titled “*Jazz from Hell*,” which was performed at the Frankfurt Jazz festival in 2015. With the WDR Big Band Mike arranged and conducted projects for Israeli trumpeter Avishai Cohen and saxophonist Eli Degibri, and for legendary drummer Al Foster. Other international projects include arrangements for a concert featuring Eli Degibri with jazz orchestra and strings, which was premiered at the National Opera House in Tel Aviv in 2014 (DVD recording pending release), and a tour with the Stockholm Jazz Orchestra as guest composer, conductor and soloist in 2000.

Classically trained, Mike has often engaged in opportunities that extend beyond the boundaries of jazz. In 2005 he toured Venezuela as a Cultural Connect Envoy for the U. S. State Department, playing concerts of his original works for jazz quintet and orchestra with symphonies in Merida, Maracaibo, Caracas, and Valencia. He has been active as a composer in the contemporary classical idiom with commissions for various chamber works, including with members of the New York Philharmonic, and he is composer in

residence of the Gotham Wind Symphony, a 45-member wind ensemble made up of classical, commercial, and jazz musicians from the NYC music world.

Mike's previous recordings with The Gotham Jazz Orchestra include "Quake" (Sons of Sound, 2009) and "Thought Trains" (Sons of Sound, 2004), which both received 4-star reviews in *Downbeat Magazine*, and were listed as among the magazine's outstanding albums of the year. The UNC Jazz Press has published many of the works from these two recordings, and they have been performed and/or recorded by a wide range of professional and scholastic organizations, including UMO (Helsinki, Finland), RTV Big Band (Ljubljana, Slovenia), The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, Zagreb JazzOrkestar, The Airmen Of Note, The Army Blues, The US Army Jazz Knights, The Minnesota Jazz Orchestra, and many New York City based small jazz groups. His works are also programmed regularly by student groups at The Eastman School of Music, The Manhattan School of Music, Innsbruck Music Conservatory, The University of Michigan, University of Northern Colorado, The University of Colorado, The University of Toronto, Indiana University, Ball State University, The University of Vermont, Bowling Green State University, James Madison University, Lawrence University, Kunstuniversität Graz (KUG, Graz, Austria), MIT, and independent student groups such as Jazz Band Classic (NY Youth Symphony), and The Saarland Youth Jazz Orchestra (Germany), among many others.

Mike's smaller group projects include The Mike Holoher Quintet, which has released two critically acclaimed recordings "Canyon" (Sons of Sound, 2003) and "Wish List" (Sons of Sound, 2006), featuring Tim Ries on saxophone, Brian Blade on drums, Wolfgang Muthspiel on guitar, and Scott Colley or John Patitucci on bass. Recently, Mike teamed up with legendary trumpeter Marvin Stamm to form a quartet with bassist Mike McGuirk and drummer Dennis Mackrel. Their recent release, "The Marvin Stamm/Mike Holoher Quartet: Live @ Maureen's Jazz Cellar" was recorded live in December 2019, and was released in June 2020.

The formation of Mike Holoher & Balancing Act, a jazz octet with voice, marked a new direction in Mike's creative output, highlighting his talent for composing art-song-inspired lyrics set to music. The group's eponymous premiere recording "Balancing Act" (Palmetto, 2015) features vocalist Kate McGarry, saxophonists Jason Rigby and Dick Oatts, trumpeter Marvin Stamm, trombonist Mark Patterson, bassist John Hébert, and drummer Brian Blade. *Downbeat Magazine's* Carlo Wolf described it as an "emotionally persuasive album," and it was voted "Best Release of 2015" by several jazz critics.

In 2017 Mike received a Chamber Music America New Jazz Works Grant for "Don't Let Go," a suite of compositions for jazz octet with voice that enabled him to explore lyrics set to music more deeply. Structured as a song-cycle in the tradition of Robert Schuman, Samuel Barber, Francis Poulenc, and Ralph Vaughn-Williams, this concert-length project explores the nuances and complexities of "hope" in the context of current social, political, and environmental realities.

"Don't Let Go" was premiered by Mike Holoher and Balancing Act at the Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Peter Norton Symphony Space in New York City, and the Union Art Center in Sparkill New York in June 2018. Vocalist Jo Lawry (best known for her work with Sting) and drummer Gerald Cleaver replaced Kate McGarry and Brian Blade for this date. In October 2019, the group recorded a live concert at Aaron Davis Hall, City College Center for the Arts, with Jamile Staeivie Ayres on vocals, Mike McGuirk on bass, and Dennis Mackrel on drums. This recording is scheduled for release in Fall 2020.

Amongst his honors and awards, Mike was named the inaugural Stuart Z. Katz Professor in the Humanities and the Arts at The City College of New York in 2017 for "This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters," an

oratorio for jazz orchestra, voice, cello, and percussion. He has also enjoyed artist residencies at MacDowell (2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2020), The Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts (2019), The Ucross Foundation (2007; 2019), and Yaddo (2005).

Mike is a Full Professor at The City College of New York, where he has been teaching since 1995. He also teaches composing and arranging at The Manhattan School of Music. From 2007 - 2015 he was Associate Director of the BMI Jazz Composer's Workshop, where he taught with Director Jim McNeely. The brainchild of founding Directors Bob Brookmeyer and Manny Albam, The BMI Jazz Composers Workshop is widely considered the finishing school for jazz orchestra writers, and the international jazz scene is heavily populated by composers who have honed their craft under the tutelage of the workshop's Directors.

A member of the distinguished Steinway Artist roster, Mike remains active as a pianist, appearing as a sideman on over 70 recordings. A mentor to many young and emerging jazz orchestra composers, he has lately been fielding requests to serve as recording session producer for a new generation of composers that he has nurtured over the years in his various educational roles.

Much of Mike's music is inspired by the natural world, and by authors, artists, naturalists, and adventurers who share his passion. An avid outdoorsman, and steadfast supporter of environmental organizations, he has hiked and climbed in many of the major ranges in the United States and Europe, and has twice been employed as a trip leader, taking clients hiking and skiing in the northeast, or canoeing and backpacking in the north woods of the Midwest. When he is not at his beloved 1909 Steinway model 'C' he can be found somewhere on the trail.

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