



"This Rock We're On – Imaginary Letters' feels like vespers sung for the Anthropocene before night falls."

*– environmental justice activist and author
Terry Tempest Williams*

Acclaimed composer/arranger Mike Holober creates an epic masterwork melding jazz, classical and art song for his Grammy-nominated Gotham Jazz Orchestra

This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters, due out June 14, 2024 via Palmetto Records, draws inspiration from the natural world and the insights of naturalists, artists and activists for a breathtaking double album featuring Holober's acclaimed large ensemble joined by Chris Potter and John Patitucci.

"Holober has brought a profound artistic vision to bear on today's jazz scene and confirmed his standing as one of the finest modern composer/arrangers of our time, in the tradition of Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer and Jim McNeely."

– Ed Enright, DownBeat

"Mike Holober's writing is in the expansive and ambitious lineage of Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer and Maria Schneider: music of varying moods that merges the thrust of jazz with atmospheric colors closer to the classical world. It can teem with energy or settle into a state of quiet, contemplative beauty."

– Jerome Wilson, [All About Jazz](#)

NEWS RELEASE: (Braithwaite & Katz Communications):

Hailed by *DownBeat* as "one of the finest modern composer/arrangers of our time," **Mike Holober** returns with his most ambitious and breathtaking work to date. **This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters** is an extraordinary multi-movement suite written for Holober's Grammy-nominated Gotham Jazz Orchestra that unites the composer's two lifelong passions: music and the natural world.

Due out **June 14, 2024** via **Palmetto Records**, *This Rock We're On* elegantly weaves together elements from the worlds of jazz, classical music and art song into a majestic double album that evokes the awe and wonder inspired by the country's most beautiful and endangered landscapes. The suite alternates art songs for chamber ensemble that take the form of imaginary letters to or from figures who have committed their lives to championing and defending the planet's precious natural resources, paired with sweeping orchestral pieces that reflect and comment upon the vocal works.

The music of *This Rock We're On* is in many ways the culmination of Holober's work to date, further expanding the “profound artistic vision” (*DownBeat*) and environmental themes that garnered critical acclaim and a “Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album” Grammy nomination for his 2019 release *Hiding Out*. With this album Holober adds his voice to the growing chorus of composers, songwriters and musicians across genre lines - from John Luther Adams to Paul McCartney to Common - who have employed their artistry to raise awareness of the existential threat posed by climate change. The music is once again brought vividly to life by the Gotham Jazz Orchestra, featuring a stand-out group of soloists including **Jason Rigby** (tenor saxophone), **Ben Kono** (alto saxophone), **Charles Pillow** (alto saxophone), **Marvin Stamm** (trumpet), **Jared Schonig** (drums), **Nir Felder** (guitar), **Jody Redhage Ferber** (cello) and **James Shipp** (percussion). The ensemble is joined for the occasion by tenor saxophonist **Chris Potter**, bassist **John Patitucci**, and the up-and-coming Brazilian vocalist **Jamile Staeve Ayres**.

“If I had to sum up my passions in life, I would point to my first two summer jobs during college,” says Holober. “The summer after my freshman year I worked as a trip leader, canoeing and backpacking in the Northwoods of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Minnesota. Then the next summer, I was a rehearsal pianist for the Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, New York.”

Those early experiences have blossomed in myriad ways over the ensuing decades. In addition to the Gotham Jazz Orchestra, Holober leads his quintet and Balancing Act, an octet with voice, and co-leads the Marvin Stamm/Mike Holober Quartet. He served as Artistic Director and Conductor of the Westchester Jazz Orchestra for six years and has arranged and conducted for such world-renowned ensembles as the WDR Big Band and HR Big Band, working closely with artists like Kurt Rosenwinkel, Dr. Lonnie Smith and Miguel Zenón.

At the same time, he's remained an avid outdoorsman and steadfast supporter of environmental organizations. Holober has enjoyed countless backcountry trips to the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountain ranges, as well as the Cascades and Southwest basins and ranges. He has led canoe trips in Northern Minnesota, climbed volcanoes in Mexico and hiked in the Austrian, Swiss and Italian Alps. Closer to home, he is an Adirondack 46'er (the term for hikers who have climbed all 46 of the region's highest peaks) and has summited all of the 115 highest peaks in the Northeastern United States.

For *This Rock We're On* Holober channels his sentiments about preserving the Earth's natural resources and beauty through the imagined words of six “protagonists,” each one an author, artist and/or activist who has dedicated their life to the natural world. They include **Rachel Carson**, largely responsible for launching the environmental movement in the U.S. with her pioneering book *Silent Spring*; the famed photographer **Ansel Adams**, whose iconic images of the American West have served as inspiration for generations of environmentalists; writer and conservationist **Sigurd Olson**; novelist, poet and essayist **Wendell Berry**; **Robin Wall Kimmerer**, an environmental scientist and

member of the Potawatomi Nation; and environmental justice activist and author **Terry Tempest Williams**, who also penned an insightful essay for the album.

“I tried to put myself into the heads of these people and imagine what they might have to say,” Holober explains. From there he constructed orchestral pieces in response to these texts, not in a programmatic sense but simply channeling the profound emotions summoned by these activists' vital work. Several grace notes are laced into the textures of the work – Rigby's fervent tenor underlying the vocal performance of his 8-year old son Ronan on the climactic title track, or the tender solo by saxophonist **Virginia Mayhew** on “Dear Virginia,” interpreting a letter from her grandfather, Ansel Adams, to her grandmother and namesake Virginia Best Adams.

In its vocal pieces *This Rock We're On* draws inspiration from Samuel Barber's *Hermit Songs* and Edward MacDowell's parlor songs, at once Romantic and contemporary, unearthing depths of emotion and human connection without succumbing to sentiment. Holober's orchestral writing reveals his profound study of jazz and classical forms, the results of which bloom vibrantly in Holober's elegant sonic tapestries, brilliant hues and intricate, imaginative orchestration, including his graceful and innovative incorporation of cello into the mix. The project's fluid blend of influences retains a solid grounding in the jazz orchestra tradition, with pieces penned with the ensemble's distinctive voices in mind and incorporating space for spirited improvisation as an organic element in the overall structures.

“My goal is always to write something that I haven't written before, to learn something and challenge myself,” Holober says. With *This Rock We're On* he's excelled at this goal, crafting a masterwork as broad as the horizon and as beautiful as an unsullied landscape.

Mike Holober

Trained as a classical pianist and conductor, Mike Holober was awarded the **2022 American Academy of Arts and Letters Andrew Imbrie Award in Music**. He has released seven recordings as a leader, the most recent of which, *Hiding Out*, was nominated for a **2020 Grammy Award for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album**. In addition to the Gotham Jazz Orchestra, Holober's projects include *Balancing Act*, an octet including voice, and the Mike Holober Quintet. His work as a composer and arranger for such esteemed ensembles as the **WDR Big Band** and **Westchester Jazz Orchestra** has earned him a reputation as one of the jazz scene's most respected jazz writers. As an educator, Holober has been a full Professor at The City College of New York for over 25 years and served as Associate Director of the BMI Jazz Composer's Workshop from 2007-2015, where he taught with Director Jim McNeely. Much of his music is inspired by the natural world and by champions of that world. When he's not at his beloved 1909 Steinway model C, Holober can be found somewhere on the trail.

EPK Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fwwg9SJMviU>

<https://www.mikeholober.com/>
<https://mikeholober.bandcamp.com/>