James Weidman

A valued pianist, James has been a sideman and accompanist in many settings over the past 30+ years, from Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra Wilson, Steve Coleman to Kevin Mahogany and the Grammy nominated Joe Lovano Us Five.  In addition, James has also proven to be an increasingly significant bandleader and composer/arranger. His recording on Inner Circle Music “Spiritual Impressions” featuring Ruth Naomi Floyd has garnered critical acclaim. It was selected by Cadence Magazine as one of the top ten albums of 2018. His 2023 piano trio release, “Sonic Realities,” features bassist Harvie S and drummer Alvester Garnett performing original compositions and works by Charlie Parker, Kurt Weill and Hale Smith.

Pianist James Weidman is indisputably an essential addition to whatever bandstand he graces. A partial list of Weidman’s affiliations is staggering in depth & breadth: Max Roach, Woody Herman, Archie Shepp, James Moody, Greg Osby, Bobby Hutcherson, Slide Hampton, Jay Hoggard, Marvin “Smitty” Smith, Gloria Lynne, Dakota Staton, MBase Collective, Cassandra Wilson, TK Blue (co-leader of TaJa), Abbey Lincoln, Ruth Naomi Floyd (Producer), Kevin Mahogany (Music Director), Joe Lovano, Marty Ehrlich and Ray Anderson.

Weidman’s music fits into the modern mainstream of jazz without being predictable. With original chord changes and voicings, his mastery is demonstrated with various changes in rhythm and time. Adroit in myriad styles, Weidman’s resourcefulness has served him well. “The more genres you’re comfortable with, the deeper your understanding of music,” is how Weidman characterizes his broad range of associations. Such versatility has helped Weidman develop his brilliant technique and, as his mantra to his students at the University of Georgia suggests, “the better your technique, the better your communication.” However, the content of that communication is the most important thing. “You’re really telling a story to your audience,” he says. “It’s a shared journey.”

A native of Youngstown, Ohio, Weidman was born into a musical family, learning jazz from his saxophonist-bandleading father at age seven. At 14 he was playing organ in his father’s band. Throughout his years at Youngstown State University (graduating cum laude with a degree in classical piano & music education), Weidman divided his time between studies and performance, becoming a first call player. “I’ve never forgotten my father’s advice the first time I ever played with him: ’Keep the time, stay out of the way, and tell a story.’”

Weidman’s move to the jazz cauldron of New York was inevitable.  Not long after relocating he found himself on the bandstand with jazz greats Cecil Payne, Harold Ousley, Bobby Watson, and Pepper Adams, before aligning himself with conceptualist Steve Coleman and the MBase Collective.  “Steve’s compositions force you to think differently; playing his very demanding rhythms and harmonies is really challenging.  It gave me a freer outlook on music.” Challenging himself musically continues to be of paramount importance to Weidman.

James Weidman has been a welcomed presence on myriad bandstands, including the world’s major venues and festivals; just a partial listing includes the Montreux, Monterey, Newport, North Sea and JVC Jazz Festivals, Carnegie Hall, Birdland, Blue Note, Sweet Basil, Village Vanguard, Iridium and Jazz Standard.

Weidman is an Assistant Professor of Jazz Piano and African American Studies at the University of Georgia.