

Grammy-winning producer, guitarist and vocalist John Pizzarelli celebrates the centennial of iconic singer Tony Bennett with a pair of heartfelt tributes

***Dear Mr. Bennett*, to be released March 3, 2026 via Green Hill Music, features Pizzarelli's trio with bassist Mike Karn and pianist Isaiah J. Thompson performing timeless songs made famous by Bennett**

A 5-song EP will follow on August 7, the week of Bennett's 100th birthday

When Tony Bennett passed away in July 2023, just shy of his 97th birthday, the loss was felt throughout the world of music. Few artists have made as profound an impact over such a wide range of styles and eras, with connections spanning Frank Sinatra, Bill Evans, Willie Nelson and Lady Gaga.

For world-renowned guitarist and vocalist **John Pizzarelli**, Bennett was more than simply an influence. Pizzarelli's late father, the revered guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, was a frequent sideman for the legendary singer, appearing on albums including 1960's *To My Wonderful One* and 1969's *I've Gotta Be Me*. John got his own opportunity to accompany Bennett for a radio broadcast that also featured pianist Ralph Sharon and bassist Jay Leonhart.

The admiration was mutual – Bennett could be found in the audience for a number of Pizzarelli's performances, and sketched his likeness on two occasions. The charming artwork that graces the cover of Pizzarelli's heartfelt new tribute album, ***Dear Mr. Bennett***, was rendered during an engagement at Feinstein's nightclub at New York's Loews Regency hotel.

Dear Mr. Bennett, set for release on **March 3, 2026** via **Green Hill Music**, is on the one hand a loving farewell to a profoundly influential musician who meant so much to so many. At the same time, it's a spirited celebration, arriving just in time for Bennett's landmark August 3rd centennial. A five-song EP will follow on **August 7th** to coincide with the occasion. Both releases feature songs made famous by Bennett over the course of his remarkable seven-decade career, rendered with lively warmth, soulful balladry and embracing swing by Pizzarelli and his trio featuring bassist **Mike Karn** and pianist **Isaiah J. Thompson**. Pizzarelli and the trio will be touring the world to perform this repertoire throughout 2026 and into 2027.

Few performers in any genre or medium can tout the kind of longevity and universal admiration that Bennett enjoyed. As Pizzarelli marvels, "Tony's artistry was just so magnificent. And he was able to continually reinvent himself. He went from being a pop singer in the '60s to a singer/entertainer who always had to play second fiddle to Sinatra in the '70s. Then, because he was such a great singer, he was able to do what he really wanted to and move from making commercial records to working with the likes of Bill Evans, George Barnes and Ruby Braff. He had one of the great second acts, and became a superstar all over again with the MTV generation, Amy Winehouse and Lady Gaga."

Dear Mr. Bennett kicks off with a sprightly rendition of Michel Legrand's "Watch What Happens," which Bennett was the first to record following its debut in the French musical *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. Pizzarelli recalls seeing Bennett open one of his final performances in Toronto with the song. "His vocal quality remained great, right until the end of his life. It was wonderful."

"The Best is Yet to Come" is the first of four favorites by the songwriting team of Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh that grace the album. Pizzarelli's breezy, joyous version is followed by an intimate take on the ballad "It Amazes Me," the buoyant "Firefly," a manic bask in the elusive glow of new love, and

the Roman holiday abandon of “When in Rome.” By contrast, “Boulevard of Broken Dreams” skulks in the shadows, while “Because of You” emphasizes the singer’s vulnerability.

Bennett’s jazz bona fides are emphasized by Duke Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing),” the trio’s blistering swing propelled by Karn’s muscular bass line and some dazzling fretwork by Pizzarelli. “Waltz for Debby” stems from Bennett’s collaboration with Bill Evans, essayed here by Pizzarelli alone as a tender lullaby. Thompson’s elegant, wistful piano is the sole accompaniment for Pizzarelli’s voice throughout most of “Young and Foolish,” finally joined by Karn to support the pianist’s delicate solo.

The inevitable “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” follows, Pizzarelli’s heart-on-sleeve yearning serving as a reminder of why the song became Bennett’s trademark hit. The album concludes with a bristling race through Irving Berlin’s “Shaking the Blues Away,” a final spotlight for the trio’s unbridled virtuosity.

The trio has established a brilliant chemistry over the last six years (give or take a pandemic-induced year and a half). Karn will commemorate his tenth anniversary with Pizzarelli at the end of 2025. He arrived via the recommendation of two of Pizzarelli’s most respected friends, trombonist John Mosca and saxophonist Harry Allen. Pizzarelli met Thompson back in 2013, when the pianist was just 16 years old. The guitarist was hosting a film and performance series at the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, New York accompanied by students from Jazz House Kids, the non-profit organization founded by Melissa Walker and Christian McBride. That first impression persevered, and he proved a perfect fit when the piano chair opened up in 2019.

The trio’s first album together, the 2023 celebration of Broadway and Hollywood *Stage and Screen*, was recorded just months after they resumed work post-lockdown. *Dear Mr. Bennett* finds them in dazzling form, equally adept at scintillating jazz, breathtaking beauty and radiant pop.

Pizzarelli had long wanted to record an album dedicated to Bennett, adding the tribute to the list of great songwriters and musicians that he’s honored in the past: Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Sir Paul McCartney, Richard Rodgers, and Duke Ellington among them. In Bennett, he has a subject who was not only one of the greatest singers of the last century, but a friendly and accessible presence who might be encountered on the streets of New York City as easily as on a concert stage.

“In Manhattan, you’d run into him on the street,” Pizzarelli recalls with a chuckle. “He was always showing up at people’s gigs, which was very sweet. He was such a New Yorker, and he was just a very open and kind person.”

John Pizzarelli

Guitarist and singer John Pizzarelli has been hailed by the Boston Globe for “reinvigorating the Great American Songbook and re-popularizing jazz.” Established as one of the prime contemporary interpreters of the Great American Songbook, Pizzarelli has expanded that repertoire by including the music of Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Tom Waits, Antônio Carlos Jobim and the Beatles. In addition to being a bandleader and solo performer, Pizzarelli has been a special guest on recordings for major pop names such as Natalie Cole, Kristin Chenoweth, Rickie Lee Jones and Dave Van Ronk, as well as leading jazz artists such as Rosemary Clooney, Ray Brown, Ruby Braff, Johnny Frigo, Buddy DeFranco, Harry Allen and, of course, his father Bucky Pizzarelli. He won a Grammy Award in the Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album category as co-producer of James Taylor’s *American Standard* in 2021. A radio personality who got his start in the medium in 1984, Pizzarelli is co-host, alongside wife Jessica Molaskey, of *Radio Deluxe with John Pizzarelli*. He has performed on America’s most popular national television shows such as *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, *Conan*, and *Great Performances*, as well as the talk shows of Jay Leno, David Letterman, Regis Philbin and the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.