

TERENCE BLANCHARD

Terence Blanchard has been a consistent artistic force for making powerful musical statements concerning painful American tragedies – past and present. He stands tall as one of jazz’s most-esteemed trumpeters and defies expectations by creating a spectrum of artistic pursuits.

A five-time Grammy Winner and twice Oscar-nominated film composer, Blanchard becomes only the second African-American composer to be nominated twice in the original score category at the 2022 Academy Awards, duplicating Quincy Jones’ feat from 1967’s *In Cold Blood* and 1985’s *The Color Purple*.

Blanchard is also heralded as a two-time opera composer whose *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, is based on the memoir of celebrated writer and New York Times columnist Charles Blow. The Metropolitan Opera premiered *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* on September 27, 2021, to open their 2021-22 season in New York, making it the first opera composed by an African-American composer to premiere at the Met. The recording of those performances just received a Grammy nomination for “Best Opera Recording.” The New York Times labeled Blanchard’s opera “inspiring,” “subtly powerful” and “a bold affecting adaptation of Charles Blow’s work.” Of the historical moment, Blanchard said, “I don’t want to be a token, but a turnkey.”

Blanchard’s first opera, *Champion* also premiered to critical acclaim in 2013 and starred Denyce Graves with a libretto from Pulitzer Prize Winner, Michael Cristofer. *Champion* will be coming to the Met in April 2023.

But there is a center of gravity. It’s Blanchard’s beautiful, provocative, inspiring jazz recordings that undergird all these projects. The same holds true now as it did early in his career in 1994 when he told *DownBeat*: “Writing for film is fun, but nothing can beat being a jazz musician, playing a club, playing a concert.”

From his expansive work composing the scores for over 20 Spike Lee projects over three decades, ranging from the documentary *When the Levees Broke* to the latest Lee film, *Da 5 Bloods*, Blanchard has interwoven beautiful melodies that created strong backdrops to human stories like Regina King’s *One Night in Miami*; Kasi Lemmons’ *Eve’s Bayou and Harriet*; George Lucas’ *Red Tails*; the critically

acclaimed drama series *Perry Mason*; the National Geographic limited series *Genius: Aretha*; Apple TV's docuseries *They Call Me Magic* (for which Blanchard received his second Emmy nomination) and in theaters now, Gina Prince Bythewood and Viola Davis' *The Woman King*.

In his thirtieth year as a recording leader, Blanchard delivers *Absence*, a collaboration with his longtime E-Collective band and the acclaimed Turtle Island Quartet which received Grammy nominations in November 2021 for Best Instrumental Jazz Album and Best Improvised Jazz Solo for Blanchard. Recorded in February 2020 just before the Covid-19 lockdowns, *Absence* started out as a project to show gratitude to Wayne Shorter. "I knew that Wayne wasn't feeling well at the time, so I wanted to honor him to let him know how much he has meant to me," says Blanchard who today lives in Los Angeles as well as in his native New Orleans. "When you look at my own writing, you can see how much I've learned from Wayne. He mastered writing compositions starting with a simple melody and then juxtaposing it against the harmonies that come from a different place to make it come alive in a different light."

Regarding his consistent attachment to artistic works of conscience, Blanchard confesses, "You get to a certain age when you ask, 'Who's going to stand up and speak out for us?' Then you look around and realize that the James Baldwins, Muhammad Alis and Dr. Kings are no longer here...and begin to understand that it falls on you. I'm not trying to say I'm here to try to correct the whole thing, I'm just trying to speak the truth." In that regard, he cites unimpeachable inspirations. "Max Roach with his *Freedom Now Suite*, John Coltrane playing *Alabama*, even Louis Armstrong talking about what was going on with his people any time he was interviewed. Herbie Hancock & Wayne Shorter who live by their Buddhist philosophy and try to expand the conscience of their communities. I'm standing on all their shoulders. How dare I come through this life having had the blessing of meeting those men and not take away any of that? Like anybody else, I'd like to play feel good party music but sometimes my music is about the reality of where we are."

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