

LAKECIA BENJAMIN

Micro Bio

Five-time GRAMMY nominee Lakecia Benjamin is an alto saxophonist, MC, and bandleader known for her captivating live performances. Her acclaimed albums *Phoenix* and *Pursuance: The Coltranes* have firmly established her among jazz's foremost artists, with praise from *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *DownBeat*.

Phoenix earned her three GRAMMY nominations and an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Jazz Album. Named Alto Saxophonist of the Year by the Jazz Journalist Association and Jazz Scholar by the Library of Congress, Benjamin's prominence continues to rise. In 2024, she released *Phoenix Reimagined (Live)* on *Ropeadope*, featuring collaborations with John Scofield, Randy Brecker, and JeU "Tain" Watts. Her performance was highlighted on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* and received exceptional reviews during her debut on NPR's *Tiny Desk*, further showcasing her exceptional talent. *Phoenix Reimagined* also received 2 GRAMMY nominations.

Short Bio

To witness a live performance by the alto saxophonist, MC, and bandleader Lakecia Benjamin is to never forget it.

The success of her most recent releases, 2023's *Phoenix* and 2020's *Pursuance: The Coltranes*, positioned Benjamin among jazz's most celebrated recording artists: In addition to absolute raves in outlets like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *DownBeat*, she received three Grammy nominations for *Phoenix*, as well as an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Jazz Album. Earlier this year, she was named Alto Saxophonist of the Year by prestigious Jazz Journalist Association.

And yet — the ever-rising star from Washington Heights remains, at her core, an improviser best experienced in her soul-stirring concerts. Each and every time she hits the bandstand, she takes her repertoire, and her wide-ranging audience, to sublime new planes. And her message — of spiritual uplift, of social and political liberation — soars higher still.

Given Benjamin's personal story over the last few years, her live dates are nothing short of life-affirming. In 2021, she was involved in a car accident that resulted in more than one potentially career-ending injury: Benjamin broke her jaw, shoulder blade and ribs, and ruptured an eardrum, among other wounds. Today, she's regained her confidence and physical strength, and embraces whatever limitations her accident may have engendered. She also realizes she has decades more music and travel to go. "I don't think about the accident anymore. Some people might see my shows now as a victory lap, because inspiration comes in multiple forms," Benjamin says, "but I really feel I'm still learning. I'm trying to get uncomfortable. I'm trying to grow. I'm trying to play better."

Benjamin's new album, *Phoenix Reimagined*, focuses on the music from her acclaimed *Phoenix* project and adds three new songs. It was captured live-in-studio at Brooklyn's the Bunker — a great-sounding space whose alumni include everyone from Brad Mehldau to *Bang on a Can* to the Black Keys. Combining the spontaneous magic of a live LP with the crisp, crystalline audio that only a world-class studio can deliver, *Phoenix Reimagined* illustrates that vibrant togetherness between Benjamin and her live listeners. In the case of the Bunker show, that meant pretty much anyone who adores music as much as she does. "I was like, you know what? Let's celebrate life. Let's celebrate everything. I'm going to invite everybody to this studio," Benjamin recalls with a chuckle. "The studio personnel were lucky I didn't just open the door!" The atmosphere took the saxophonist back to her earliest years hitting the

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NYC jam-session scene: the heat, the camaraderie, the competition, the hard-earned lessons. “It just reminded me why I love music,” she says.

Long Bio

Lakecia is endorsed by Vandoren, Yanagisawa, Key Leaves, Sennheiser, and Conn & Selmer.

Lakecia Benjamin is a 5x GRAMMY nominated New York-based saxophonist, arranger, composer, and educator. Her music offers a unique meld of R&B, several strains of jazz, and funk. Her warm, resonant tone — that has been compared to Johnny Hodges — lends itself to any form of music she chooses to play. In addition to honing her chops early with Clark Terry and later Terri Lyne Carrington, she is also a noted accompanist for vocalists — among them Gregory Porter and Theo Croker. Retox, her 2012 leader debut, offered a beat-conscious set of soul and funk covers and originals produced by Ben Kane. Benjamin played on “Right on Brotha,” the closing track from Robert Glasper’s *Everything’s Beautiful* in 2018, a collection of reimagined Miles Davis tracks. Her sophomore date, *Rise Up for Ropeadope*, contained a Prince-inspired series of original jazz-funk jams. In 2020, she released *Pursuance: The Coltranes*. The widely acclaimed set contained six tunes each by Alice and John Coltrane, with Benjamin leading a large cast that included former Coltrane sideman Reggie Workman. In 2023 she returned with the star-studded *Phoenix*. Produced by Carrington, it wed jazz, funky soul, R&B, and hip-hop with an all-star cast. The album brought upon three GRAMMY nominations and universal praise.

Benjamin was born in New York City and raised in Manhattan’s predominantly Dominican Washington Heights neighborhood. She played recorder in grade school and junior high where she also began writing songs and lyrics. She won admission to the Fiorello LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts. It was there she began playing saxophone in earnest. She picked it up quickly and after graduating joined the renowned jazz program at New York’s New School University.

At New School she studied with jazz veterans including Billy Harper, Workman, Buster Williams, and Gary Bartz. Bartz proved an important mentor. He introduced her to training technical exercise techniques while facilitating her interest in the music of jazz saxophonists including Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Jackie McLean. She also played in and performed with Clark Terry’s *Young Titans of Jazz*, and some of Workman’s ensembles. While struggling to make ends meet, she won paying gigs with Missy Elliott and Alicia Keys, widening her approach. These influences made their presence known on Benjamin’s *Motema* leader debut, *Retox*, in 2010. The unusual set included Benjamin’s *Soul Squad* band backing a number of singers and rappers in a host of originals and covers, some of which didn’t feature her horn at all. She explained in an interview that she didn’t want to be heard as merely an instrumentalist and soloist, but as an arranger and bandleader, too. She also won opportunities to play and tour with a wide array of artists including former Coltrane drummer Rashied Ali, the David Murray Big Band, vocalist Vanessa Rubin, and guitarist James Blood Ulmer. Her deep jazz roots and reputation for hard yet innovative work, made her a first-call sidewoman, arranger, and horn section leader, and she landed a touring gig with Anita Baker.

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In 2015, she was part of the star-studded cast that played on vocalist and arranger Charenee Wade's *Offering: The Music of Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson*. In addition to Benjamin, some of its other participants included Marcus Miller, Christian McBride, Malcolm Jamal-Warner, and Lonnie Plaxico. The following year she was invited by pianist Robert Glasper to participate in the sessions for his Miles Davis tribute, *Everything's Beautiful*; she appeared with Stevie Wonder and DJ Spinna on the set's closing track, "Right on Brotha."

In 2018, Benjamin issued her Ropeadope debut album, *Rise Up*, leading a large ensemble in a savvy jazz-funk update for the 21st century that included not only players but singers and rappers. In the aftermath, she played dates in and around New York, joined Porter's road band, worked with Carrington, and was a featured musician and arranger for comedy star Craig Robinson. In addition to performing, Benjamin also became an educator, teaching at Jazz at Lincoln Center and at Jazz House Kids.

Benjamin turned heads with her third album — and second from Ropeadope — by leaving R&B and funk by the wayside. May 2020's *Pursuance: The Coltranes* is unlike any other tribute project. Its 13 tunes were equally divided between compositions by Alice and John and offered sometimes radical reinterpretations. The outlier was "Going Home." Composed by Benjamin, its lineup included bass clarinetist Marcus Strickland and string group Rootstock Republic. In addition to Benjamin's alto were the selectively featured horns of Bartz, Steve Wilson, Greg Osby, and Bruce Williams, harpist Brandee Younger, violinist Regina Carter, bassists Workman, Plaxico, and Me'Shell Ndegéocello, and vocalists Dee Dee Bridgewater, Jazzmeia Horn, Zakiyyah Modeste, and Dudley Perkins. The set was greeted with global acclaim by critics upon release, and subsequently charted at streaming.

In January 2023, Benjamin released *Phoenix* on Whirlwind Recordings. The 12-track, mostly original set was performed by her septet and produced by Terri Lyne Carrington. *Phoenix* featured many guests including Dianne Reeves, Georgia Ann Muldrow, Patrice Rushen, Wayne Shorter, Wallace Roney, Sonia Sanchez, and Angela Davis. The album led to three GRAMMY nominations, and universal praise.

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