



SENIOR RECITAL SERIES | SPRING 2025

Friday, May 2nd, 2025, 5:00 PM

Taplin Auditorium

Thomas Verrill

Trombone

Introspection

**A musical conversation with myself and those around me,
expressed in the jazz tradition.**

Featuring:

Milan Sastry '26 (Alto Saxophone)

Alex MacArthur '25 (Drums)

Ari Freedman '20 (Bass)

Sebastian Castro '25 (Piano)

About the Department of Music:

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PROGRAM

CEDAR WALTON

Bolivia

Milan Sastry, Alto Saxophone
Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

CHARLIE PARKER

Yardbird Suite

Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

THOMAS VERRILL

Monkian

Milan Sastry, Alto Saxophone
Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

WAYNE SHORTER

Iris

Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

EDDIE VINSON / JOHN COLTRANE

Tune Up / Countdown

Milan Sastry, Alto Saxophone
Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

THELONIOUS MONK

Introspection

Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

JOE HENDERSON

Inner Urge

Alex MacArthur, Drums
Ari Freedman, Bass
Sebastian Castro, Piano

The use of photographic, video, or audio equipment is strictly prohibited. Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Thomas Verrill

Bolivia was released in 1976 by pianist Cedar Walton on a record called “Eastern Rebellion”, which was also the name of his group at the time. Eastern Rebellion featured himself, George Coleman on Tenor Saxophone, Sam Jones on Bass, and Billy Higgins on drums. I was drawn to “Bolivia” for several reasons, the biggest one being its harmonically rich melody. The melody begins with descending major 3rds and floats over many different harmonic centers without a clear “key”. The song is also full of contrast, alternating between a long vamp (i.e. repeated section) on one chord and the dynamic melody section, which has its own Afro-Cuban groove in the middle. On the Eastern Rebellion recording, George Coleman is able to weave all these variations together, at some points arpeggiating to create a “wall of sound” that John Coltrane was also known for. For the recital, I chose to play the tune up a minor 3rd for it to lay better on trombone (This isn’t cheating! J.J. Johnson did it all the time). Overall, this jazz standard is dynamic, cheerful, and complex, and I thought it would be a great way to start off the performance.

Yardbird Suite is a famous 1946 standard from Charles “Yardbird” Parker, who is also known to jazz musicians as “Bird”. The origin of this nickname has been dispute, but an agreed upon story comes from when Parker suggested they go back and eat a chicken that was hit by a tour bus. Parker, in general, was one of the most (if not *the* most) important jazz musicians of the 20th century. Known for his blazing virtuosity, intricate melodies, Parker led the bebop era of jazz in the mid-1940s, which was said to end in 1955 – the year of his death. Parker was also known for his interest in the music of Igor Stravinsky, which included “The Rite of Spring” and, notably, “Firebird Suite”; a likely influence on the name of this jazz standard. “Yardbird Suite” stood out to me because of its melody, which was both catchy and harmonically sophisticated, much like Parker’s solos (and other compositions). In preparation for this tune, I transcribed Parker’s solo over it by ear, which not only paid dividends for my soloing on this tune but my soloing in general. I am certain the melody and solo will stick in my head for the rest of my life, and I am all the happier for it!

Monkian is a 2025 original composition by yours truly. The piece had several different influences, the most notable being Thelonious Monk – the tune’s namesake. Monk was known for his usage of the whole tone scale, a symmetric scale where all notes are separated by a whole step. The scale has a unnatural, almost dream-like quality to it, and I wanted to see if I could make it work as a harmonic center. Additionally, as an avid enjoyer of Monk and his angular, unexpected approach to rhythm, harmony, and melody (check out his song “Evidence”), I wanted to pay him homage. After much exploration on the piano, “Monkian” was born. “Monkian” is a “whole tone blues”, which uses both whole tone scales (there are only two!) over a 12-bar blues form. Another key influence on this song was “Our Man Higgins” by Lee Morgan, a song titled in reference to drummer Billy Higgins and the 1962 TV Show of the same name. “Our Man Higgins” was shared with me by my trombone teacher Dave Miller for its whole tone blues melody. The soloing form alternates between whole tone blues chord changes and regular blues chord changes – a soloing form that I used for this song. Lastly, I am particularly fond of melodies that are able to hit all 12 notes in a non-obvious way (e.g. “Yardbird Suite” and “Introspection”), and this song is no exception.

Iris is one of my favorite songs from someone who mastered the art of the jazz ballad: the late tenor saxophonist and composer, Wayne Shorter. Originally on the 1965 Miles Davis album, “E.S.P.”, “Iris” features an ethereal melody over unexpected chord changes in $\frac{3}{4}$ time – a kind of waltz. The first time I heard this tune, I was struck by the beauty of the melody. Not once does the melody feature the bass note / root of its corresponding chord. This is rare for other standards and melodies, but not at all unexpected for Shorter, who had a meticulous and innovative approach to harmony coming out of the hard bop era of jazz. The melody and solo from Shorter on the E.S.P. recording is extremely expressive, and it resonated with me deeply. In my Jazz History class, I learned about how Miles Davis chose Wayne Shorter to be in his band after John Coltrane left partly because Shorter’s sound was the closest thing that Davis could get to Coltrane. When I hear “Iris”, I am not only reminded of the quality of Shorter’s sound, but I feel that this ballad demonstrated Shorter’s ability to innovate, compose, and ultimately push himself beyond Coltrane’s shadow.

Tune Up was originally written by alto saxophonist and singer Eddie Vinson, but Miles Davis is often credited with the song, having released the first recording in 1953 on his album “Blue Haze”. Vinson, a blues singer at the time, is recorded as saying he had “no use for the tune”, but there were disputes about songwriting credit as it’s popularity grew. “Tune Up” has a relatively simple melody and modulates through three different keys, making it a popular standard for jam sessions. The variety of keys drew me to the song initially as a way to practice improvisation over the ii-V-I progression, a common chord progression in jazz standards. However, when I returned to the song, I found a deep appreciation for the tune. Not only did it have a singable melody, but the key modulation provided for interesting idea development and improvisation opportunities. As I dug deeper, I discovered that **Countdown** by John Coltrane was a contrafact, or the use of the same chord structure for a different melody, of “Tune Up”. “Countdown”, released on Coltrane’s seminal 1960 “Giant Steps” album, is a 2:25 minute whirlwind of notes over modified Tune Up chord changes. The changes were edited to incorporate “Coltrane Changes”, a progression that modifies a ii-V-i progression to modulate to 3 different keys separated by major 3rds. My love for aspects of both of these standards – the relaxed yet sophisticated melody of “Tune Up” and the harmonic complexity of “Countdown” – made me want to play the songs together. To prepare, I studied Coltrane’s way of navigating through these chord changes and discovered “cellular” playing, or the use of small melodic shapes to outline a desired harmony. This type of cellular playing has had a massive impact on my improvisation, and I have John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Eddie Vinson to thank!

Introspection by Thelonious Monk was released on his 1956 album: “Genius Of Modern Music Volume One”. The song is indeed genius, from its chromatic yet tonal ascents to its the beautiful resolutions over powerful chords in the low register. The track, in its 36-bar journey of dynamic contrast and delayed resolutions, does feel like a glimpse into Monk’s mind: the anxiety, the humor, the beauty, and the unexpected. I’ve named the recital after this song because I hope the performance can offer a similar glimpse into my own personal expression through music. Because of the song’s long form and dynamic melody, I have decided to minimize the improvisation on this song and let the melody speak for itself. Enjoy!

Inner Urge by Joe Henderson was released in 1966 on the album of the same name, and is by far one of Henderson's most popular tunes to play. This is for good reason! There is so much tension and energy built into this song, as well as ample room to develop ideas. An arc is built into the melody, starting with simple repetition of a small set of pitches and ramping up to a busy melody at the end. I first learned about Joe Henderson from my 2022-2023 Small Group X and current 2024-2025 Small Group A leader, Matthew Parrish, when we played the song "Black Narcissus". The song had unusual harmonic changes – a sequence of Major7#11 chords – which I now know to be a signature of Henderson's songs. I soon fell in love with the sound of those progressions with Henderson over them. In regards to "Inner Urge", Henderson describes the song as a reflection of a time in his life when he was "coping with the anger and frustration that can come of trying to find your way in the maze of New York, and of trying to adjust the pace you have to set in hacking your way in that city in order to just exist." I believe deep struggle like this was present to some degree for all of the artists in this recital: Thelonious Monk struggled with mental illness; Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane all notably struggled with heroin addiction; and all of these composers certainly struggled with racism. Their inner drive to make art despite their troubles made this recital, and more broadly, the state of music today, possible. I am grateful to be in a position where I can continue in the tradition that they worked so hard to innovate.

ABOUT

Thomas Verrill is a senior studying Electrical and Computer Engineering and pursuing minors in Music Performance, Music, and Computer Science. His main academic interest is quantum computing hardware--a field he will continue to do research in as a Master's student at Princeton. In music, he plays in the Creative Large Ensemble as Lead Trombone, Small Group A, and is a radio DJ for WPRB Princeton. In his free time, he plays guitar and is currently reading the Game of Thrones series.

Milan Sastry is a junior in the Computer Science department. He plays the alto saxophone in the Creative Large Ensemble and Small Group 1. Outside of music, he is the Investments Principal for Princeton Student Ventures and the co-founder of m-ed, a startup focused on connecting underrepresented students with industry professionals in the medical field.

Alex MacArthur is a senior studying History with minors in French and European Cultural Studies. Outside of classes, he is President of the Human Values Forum, a co-chair for the Princeton University Concerts Student Board, and plays drums for Small Group 1. He is also proficient in three other languages: French, Portuguese and Spanish.

Ari Freedman is a graduate student in the ecology and evolutionary biology program, focusing on disease modeling and epidemiology. In his undergrad, he studied math and ecology / evolution. He also plays bass in the Creative Large Ensemble and Small Group 1. Outside of work and music, he can usually be found rock climbing.

Sebastian Castro is a Music Composition major from Guam. He started playing classical piano at 6 years old but started learning jazz at Princeton. He has been part of Small Group A for 2 years (along with Thomas!). After graduation, he will be attending medical school at the University of Pennsylvania.
