

Geoffrey Keezer BIO (Long Version)

"...not only a superb technician and improviser, but also above and beyond this, a composer and conceptualist who can maintain the overall line and the DNA of the song in everything he plays. A musician's musician."-- Sting

With his highly regarded discography, unique compositions, and acclaimed performances in a variety of configurations, multiple GRAMMY®-nominated pianist Geoffrey Keezer commands the attention typically reserved for the living legends of jazz. Whether recording with jazzy chanteuses Diana Krall or Dianne Reeves, touring with trumpet king Chris Botti, or collaborating with pop icon Sting, sax legend Wayne Shorter, guitar wizard Jim Hall, star bassist Christian McBride or vibes master Joe Locke, Geoffrey "has more than enough virtuosity and sheer musical wit and intelligence to weave all of his apparently disparate strands of influence into an original and compelling whole" (*Time Magazine*).

A native of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Keezer grew up surrounded by music – both parents taught music, and his dad Ron taught percussion in the acclaimed jazz program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Young Geoffrey displayed prodigious talent, starting on piano at age three, performing in Midwest jazz clubs at 15, and winning the National Association of Jazz Educators Young Talent Award at 17, where he caught the ear of the late piano master, James Williams. During Keezer's first year at the Berklee College of Music, Williams brought him to the attention of Sunnyside Records, and soon he had two recordings to his credit, *Waiting in the Wings* (1989) and *Curveball* (1990). At only 18, Keezer traded college for the last edition of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, appearing on Blakey's 1990 release, *One for All*.

Other hallmarks of Geoffrey's early career included touring in the 1990s with veteran pianists James Williams, Mulgrew Miller, Donald Brown, and Harold Mabern in the Contemporary Piano Ensemble, and as a member of the "Three Musicians" with saxophonist Joshua Redman and bassist Christian McBride; he composed a commissioned work for the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band ("Palm Reader") and, in 1992, performed Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. As his career matured, Keezer added to his list of recordings and collaborations with equal speed, releasing *Here and Now* (Blue Note 1991); *World Music* (DIW/Columbia, 1992); *Other Spheres* (DIW, 1993); *Trio* (Sackville, 1993); *Turn Up the Quiet* (Columbia, 1998) with Diana Krall, Joshua Redman and Christian McBride; and the solo *Zero One* (Dreyfus, 1999).

Throughout the 90s, Geoffrey played and recorded with the likes of Art Farmer, Benny Golson, Gerry Mulligan, Roy Hargrove, Terence Blanchard, J. J. Johnson, George Coleman, Donald Harrison, Bobby Watson, and The Mingus Dynasty. One of his most significant employers in the late 90s was the great jazz bassist Ray Brown.

Geoffrey Keezer's work in the new century has underscored his diverse and global interests, working across jazz, classical, rock and world music traditions, living a while in Japan before relocating to Southern California. His *Sublime* (MaxJazz, 2003), a series of duets with Kenny Barron, Chick Corea, Benny Green and Mulgrew Miller, included compositions honoring keyboard hero Hank Jones; *Wildcrafted* (MaxJazz, 2005) was recorded live at the Dakota Jazz Club with Keezer's trio featuring Matt Clohesy and Terreon Gully. But Geoffrey has also turned his attention beyond American jazz idioms with projects based on the folk roots of Hawai'i (*Falling Up*, MaxJazz, 2003, with slack-key guitarist Keola Beamer), Okinawa's Ryukyu Islands (*Yasukatsu Oshima with Geoffrey Keezer*, JVC Victor 2007), and Afro-Peruvian influences for the original music of his Grammy-nominated (Best Latin Jazz Album) *Aurea* (ArtistShare, 2009).

Collaborations with David Sanborn, Joe Locke (The Joe Locke/Geoffrey Keezer Group), and with Locke and Tim Garland (*Storms/Nocturnes*) have yielded additional tours and recordings. And further expanding his artistic palette, Keezer has worked in duo with guitarist Jim Hall (*Free Association*, ArtistShare 2006) and with Canadian electronica composer Mary Ancheta as Montre Echo (*The Near Forever*, 2009).

One of Keezer's most recent collaborations has been with vocalist Denise Donatelli, with whom he has had a hand in three GRAMMY® nominations – two in 2010 from Donatelli's album, *When Lights Are Low*, for Best Arrangement Accompanying a Vocalist ("Don't Explain") and as producer for Best Jazz Vocal Album, and a third nomination (Best Jazz Vocal Album) for Donatelli in 2012,

when Geoffrey produced and arranged her follow-up recording, *Soul Shadows*. In addition to the GRAMMY® nominations, Keezer has accumulated other awards and grants, including Chamber Music America's "New Jazz Works: Commissioning and Ensemble Development" grant in 2007.

Perhaps the most exciting turn in Geoffrey's career is his recent focus on solo piano and his first solo release in thirteen years, *Heart of the Piano* (2013, Motema Records). On a mission to redefine solo jazz piano as a personal and interactive showcase of melody, energy and groove, Keezer brings to *Heart of the Piano* his most direct and focused artistry to date. And after more than 20 years leading his various ensembles and collaborating with artists from Blakey to Botti, he says, "Now it's time for me to be me." Geoffrey titled this album *Heart of the Piano* because "this is home base for me—where my heart is, where I find the most freedom." The end result is an album of ten divergent choices, including less familiar pop and jazz covers, a traditional Scottish melody, and two original pieces of spontaneous improvisation in the studio. Rather than the self-indulgent, intellectual exercise that characterizes too many solo piano projects, there's an inherent sense of partnership between pianist and listener. "I try to keep it light and fun," says Geoffrey. "Part of a musician's responsibility to the audience is to entertain. Every song has a story and there's a reason that I play every song. I want to ensure that the audience knows where I am coming from, that whatever I am trying to say makes sense."

Geoffrey Keezer's singular style of intellectually abstract lyricism woven over exotically complex rhythms and harmonies makes him one of the most sought-after artists on the modern jazz scene. Regardless of the nature of his projects, from solo to duo to quartet, from bandleader to big band, from post bop jazz to electronica to global fusion, from composer to arranger, Geoffrey delivers music from the heart of the piano to the ear--and heart--of the listener.

"Regardless of context or style, Geoffrey Keezer is equally comfortable in all-acoustic settings and those requiring more contemporary use of electronics. Consistently inventive and virtuosic, Keezer is, above all, unfailingly musical." - John Kelman (All About Jazz)