

Leigh Pilzer

Saxophonist • Arranger • Educator

Leigh Pilzer originally planned on a career as a cellist but was inspired, upon hearing the music of the Count Basie Orchestra at the age of eighteen, to begin saxophone lessons. She soon found her true voice on the baritone saxophone, switched from cello to saxophone completely, and enrolled at the Berklee College of Music. After graduating from Berklee with a Bachelor of Music in Jazz Composition and Arranging she returned to her hometown of Washington, DC where she has been an active bandleader and freelancer since. She has led her small group in performance at many of DC's top jazz venues such as Blues Alley, Twins Jazz, Westminster Presbyterian, the Atlas Performing Arts Center, Jazz at the Garden, the Mansion at Strathmore, and the Takoma Park JazzFest, to name just a few. She has toured both nationally and internationally as a member of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and The DIVA Jazz Orchestra, and often performs with the National Symphony Orchestra in concert at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and on the orchestra's nationally televised PBS holiday specials.

Leigh is a gifted arranger whose work is in the libraries of the SJMO, DIVA, the Bohemian Caverns Jazz Orchestra, the DC-area premier military jazz ensembles, and college and professional jazz ensembles and brass quintets throughout the country. Her arrangement of her original composition "East Coast Andy" is the opening track on *The DIVA Jazz Orchestra 25th Anniversary Project* (2018). Two more of Leigh's arrangements were recorded by DIVA for *Special Kay* (2016) and another two for *A Swingin' Life* (2014). Other arranging credits include horn section writing for recordings by Chuck Brown and Eva Cassidy and orchestrations for the critically acclaimed show *Maurice Hines Tappin' Thru Life*.

Leigh is also an avid researcher. She has presented repertory concerts including "Collaboration in Jazz, Featuring the Music of Gerry Mulligan," and "The Music of The International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Mary Lou Williams, and Melba Liston," (Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Ensemble); "Introduction to the Great Women of Jazz," "The Music of Melba Liston," and "Tribute to Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker," (Washington Women in Jazz Festival); "Tribute to the Jazz Baritone Greats" and "Gerry Mulligan Meets Johnny Hodges and Ben Webster" (United States Navy Band Saxophone Symposium). Clinic presentations include "Writing Thaddish: Evolution of a Big Band Arrangement" (8th Annual Jazz Education Network Conference), "Doing Musical Detective Work: Finding and Editing Jazz Repertory Source Material" (Beyond the Notes Musicology lecture series, George Mason University), "Soloing in the Big Band: Strategies for Success" (The DIVA Jazz Orchestra, Beaver Creek (OH) Weekend of Jazz, and "Music Theory & Score Interpretation: East Coast Andy" (The DIVA Jazz Orchestra, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA).

In addition to her bachelor's degree from Berklee Leigh holds Master's degrees in both Jazz Studies and Saxophone Performance from The University of Maryland, College Park and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Saxophone Performance with a jazz emphasis from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Leigh has served on faculty at the University of Maryland, Towson University, and George Mason University, teaching Jazz Theory; Jazz Arranging; Jazz History; and Fundamentals of Rock, Blues, and Jazz.

Leigh's debut CD *Strunkin'* was released in late 2016 to critical acclaim. *Strunkin'* was recorded live at the Washington Women in Jazz Festival and features six of Leigh's compositions.

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