

arts
education
njpac



stefon

harris

the david g. berger
master class series



about stefon harris

With 28 years of industry experience, Stefon Harris has developed a unique perspective to music educators worldwide, defining music as a qualitative science that relies on emotion and empathy rather than hitting marks. Born on March 23, 1973 and raised in Albany, New York, Harris lives a full life as a musician, educator and thought leader in the jazz community. He displayed an aptitude for music after teaching himself to play piano at age six. While in Albany, Harris studied under the tutelage of percussionist Richard Albagli with the Empire State Youth Orchestra, which is where Harris's love of the vibraphone began.

Harris was set to follow in the footsteps of classical musicians until he heard the music of jazz legend Charlie Parker. He is now a successful improvisational multi-instrumentalist known for his skills on the marimba and vibraphone. After obtaining a Bachelor of Music degree in classical styles in 1995 and a Master of Music degree in jazz in 1997, Harris released his debut album *A Cloud of Red Dust* in 1998. Since then, he has accumulated an impressive discography and made a name for himself as a passionate educator.

In 2017, Harris returned to his alma mater, the Manhattan School of Music, to serve as the Associate Dean and Director of Jazz Arts after joining the school's advisory council in 2015. Harris has taught at universities throughout the world, both in-person and virtually

via his distance learning studio. He has led curriculum development at the Brubeck Institute, served on the New York University jazz faculty for 10 years and serves as the Artistic Director of Jazz Education at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Additionally, he served on the board for Chamber Music America, WBGO-FM and the Percussive Arts Society. Harris is also the co-founder of the Melodic Progression Institute, an organization that aims to revolutionize music education and make ear training accessible to all artists. He is currently a professor at Rutgers University-Newark in the Arts, Culture and Media department, where he leads transformative presentations on leadership and empowerment.

Harris's influence reaches far beyond the music world. He has worked as a thought leader, using jazz as a powerful metaphor for teamwork, improvising in stressful situations and questioning our definition of the word "mistake." He expanded on this philosophy to Fortune 500 companies, in TED Talks and in his time serving on various committees. Harris has been a guest at distinguished concert halls such as Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, Herbst Theater, Royce Hall, Chicago's Symphony Center, Detroit's Orchestra Hall and The Sydney Opera House, with tours from South Africa to Istanbul. He continues performing with his band, Blackout, while fulfilling his educator and board member duties.

accolades

- *The Art of Listening* — a series of documentaries focusing on Harris's work in arts education in Kalamazoo (winner of three Gold Camera awards and three Michigan Emmy nominations)
- 2003 Martin E. Segal Award
- 2018 Doris Duke Artist Award
- Released seven albums as a bandleader
- Eight-time Jazz Journalists Association award winner
- Four-time GRAMMY® Award nominee

Technology and music have always been Stefon Harris's passions. In his 2012 TED Talk, "There Are No Mistakes on the Bandstand," Harris explains, "The only mistake lies in that we are not able to perceive what it is that someone else did. Every 'mistake' is an opportunity. In the world of information technology, always remember the adage, 'If at first you don't succeed, try again.'"

In 2013, Harris co-founded The Melodic Progression Institute (MPI) with Clif Swiggett to design innovative products to help musicians learn and grow. MPI's first ear training app, Harmony Cloud, is a tool that musicians across genres use and is an innovation in progressive music composition.

Stefon Harris & Blackout is a quintet that blends jazz, hip hop, improvisation and composition. No show is alike — allowing the audience an up-close-and-personal look at how the musicians work. The group also incorporates poetry and AI technology to create a truly unique experience. Harris utilizes AI as a tool to assist in music creation instead of mimicking the skill of a human musician. The collaborative nature of jazz relies on a call and response from musicians in real time. Harris's Harmony Cloud helps to improve the ease of sound in one place, and train the human ear to hear and write music.



I think of [musicians] as a type of emotional engineer. **We essentially take these sound waves, this sound, and we organize it into emotion. That's how we connect with our audiences.**

— Stefon Harris

seed questions to consider

1. How does Stefon Harris's approach to jazz serve as a metaphor for all human collaboration?
2. What is Harris's philosophy on making "mistakes" while playing?
3. Is jazz different from other genres of music?

vocabulary

Ametric

Translates to “without meter” and describes music that has no clear beat and no time signature

Chord Substitution

Playing a different chord than what is written to add more color or interest to a piece, or to create a different effect

Common Chord

A chord included in two different keys that fits in the key signature and harmonic vocabulary of both keys (i.e., an F major triad is common to the keys of both C major and A minor)

Ear Training

Working to improve one’s musical perception through solfège, sight reading and musical dictation

First Inversion

Playing a chord with the third in the bass, rather than the root (i.e., E, G, C as opposed to C, E, G)

Improvisation

The practice of spontaneously creating melodies through chords, time signatures and harmonies that are determined in the moment by artists

Low Interval Limits

The lowest recommended octaves for every interval before two notes start sounding muddy and blurry (from minor second to major 10th)

Root Note

A pitch that establishes the tonality of a musical key, chord or scale. It is oftentimes, but not always, the same as the bass note

Second Inversion

Playing a chord with the fifth in the bass (i.e., G, C, E as opposed to C, E, G)

Triad

A three-note chord composed of a root, third and fifth

resources

Websites

Stefon Harris
stefonharris.com

Wikipedia | Stefon Harris
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefon_Harris

LA Phil | About Stefon Harris
laphil.com/musicdb/artists/2325/stefon-harris

Harmony Cloud
stefonharris.com/harmony-cloud

Stefon Harris – Rutgers Faculty
acm.newark.rutgers.edu/acm_faculty/stefon-harris/

Times Union | Albany Native Stefon Harris Wins prestigious Jazz Award
timesunion.com/theater/article/Albany-native-Stefon-Harris-wins-prestigious-jazz-13033920.php

Stefon Harris Music Bio
allmusic.com/artist/stefon-harris-mn0000019334

NPR | Interview: Jazz Vibraphonist Stefon Harris On Education And Empathy In Music
npr.org/2020/03/30/822024071/stefon-harris-vibraphonist-educator-thinker-teaches-empathy-from-the-bandstand

All About Jazz | Stefon Harris Musician
allaboutjazz.com/musicians/stefon-harris

Downbeat | Stefon Harris’ Diverse Ambitions
downbeat.com/news/detail/stefon-harris-diverse-ambitions

Videos

Stefon Harris’s TED talk
ted.com/speakers/stefon_harris

Stefon Harris – Live from the Jazz & Heritage Center
youtube.com/watch?v=uO9cGif9-7c

“Until” by Stefon Harris
youtube.com/watch?v=szx1oss0xJc&t=100s

njpac staff

Charles F. Lowrey & Carmen S. Villar
Co-Chairs, NJPAC Board of Directors

John Schreiber
President & CEO

Jennifer Tsukayama
Vice President, Arts Education

Shannon Pulusan
Special Assistant to Vice President,
Arts Education

Mark Gross
Director, Jazz Instruction

Rosa Hyde
Senior Director, Performances &
Special Events Operations

Victoria Revesz
Senior Director, Arts Education Operations

Natalie Dreyer
Director of Curriculum &
Collaborative Learning

Roe Bell
Director of Program Operations
& Advancement

Kristine Marrone
Director, CRM & Business Operations

Ashley Mandaglio
Assoc. Director,
Professional Learning & Programs

Treasure Borde
Senior Manager,
Programming & Performances

Daniel Silverstein
Senior Manager, Onsite Programs

Randal Croudy
Manager, Youth & Emerging
Artist Development

Steven Hayet
Manager, CRM & Business Operations

Alonzo Blalock
Manager, In-School Programs

Angela Peletier
Manager,
Professional Learning & Training

Justin DePaul
Office and Facilities Manager

April Jeffries
Outreach & Sales Manager

Antonella Sanchez
Senior Coordinator, Program Operations

Demetria Hart
Coordinator of Faculty Relations

Kendall Lipham
Coordinator,
Programming & Performances

Lucas Jeron
Coordinator, Youth & Emerging
Artist Development

Josef Woodson
Creative Lead, On-Site Programs

the arts in your school

In-School Residencies: NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

Professional Development: Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at artseducation@njpac.org. Or visit njpac.org/education

Major support for the David G. Berger Master Class Series is provided by the Berger Family Foundation



Made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

NJPAC Arts Education programs are made possible by the generosity of our endowment donors: The Arts Education Endowment Fund in honor of Raymond C. Chambers, The Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund, Toby and Leon Cooperman, Albert+ and Katharine Merck+, The Sagner Companies/The Sagner Family Foundation, Wells Fargo Foundation

Generous annual support for NJPAC Arts Education programs is provided by Judith Bernhaut, Broadridge Financial Solutions, Inc., The Office of U.S. Senator Cory Booker, Jennifer A. Chalsty, Mimi and Edwin Feliciano, Don Katz & Leslie Larson, M&T Bank, McCrane Foundation, Inc., care of Margrit McCrane, The MCJ Amelior Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, NJ Advance Media, NJM Insurance Group, Panasonic Foundation, PNC, Richmond County Savings Foundation, David & Marian Rocker, Turrell Fund, and an anonymous donor

study the arts at njpac

Saturday Programs: NJPAC's Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level — from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, theater, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.