



Ulysses Owens Jr.

Drummer Producer Educator

Heralded as a “powerhouse of a showman” (*Glide Magazine*), a “legitimate jazz triple threat” (*Critical Jazz*) and a drummer who “take[s] a back seat to no one” (*The New York Times*), performer, producer and educator Ulysses Owens Jr. goes the limit in the jazz world and beyond.

One of the most sought-after drummers of his generation, Owens sets the mark. From GRAMMY award-winning performances with Christian McBride’s acclaimed Trio and Big Band to world tours with Kurt Elling and Joey Alexander, Owens’s artistic command of percussion has earned him positions in some of the most successful jazz ensembles of the 21st century. Owens’s reverence for tradition distinctly manifests in his straight-away playing style, but it is the versatility of his talent— his unique ability to manipulate texture and create penetrating musical shapes— that attracts the attention of jazz’s heavy hitters. His performance catalog includes collaborations with Nicholas Payton, Wynton Marsalis, Monty Alexander, Dianne Schurr, Russell Malone, Renee Fleming and Mulgrew Miller, just to name a few.

A burgeoning force in the industry, Owens has been named a Rising Star by DownBeat’s Critics Poll for five years straight. He is a recipient of the 2013 ASCAP Plus Award, a gold medal winner of the 2014 Global Music Awards and a 2015 Jazz at Lincoln Center *Swing!* Awards honoree. Still, most notable of Owens’s accomplishments are his performances on the 2010 GRAMMY award-winning Kurt Elling live album, *Dedicated to You*, and the 2012 GRAMMY award-winning Christian McBride Big Band album, *The Good Feeling*. His work with Joey Alexander and the Christian McBride Trio has also received recognition by the Academy, garnering GRAMMY nominations for *My Favorite Things*, *Out Here*, and *Live at the Village Vanguard*.

At the heart of Owens’s work is a passion for creation and the desire to reach new audiences. On and off stage, music emanates from every inch of his being, and no performance goes unmarked by Owens’s signature smile. Owens is a gifted bandleader, claiming three successful albums of his own (*It’s Time for U*, *Unanimous*, and *Onward and Upward*) and three self-produced albums with the New Century Jazz

Quintet (*Time is Now*, *In Case You Missed Us*, and *Arise*), a skillful group he co-leads with pianist Takeshi Ohbayashi. Owens's band-first philosophy ensures that all conversations with an audience remain fluid and focused, another stamp of his seasoned expertise and professional sophistication.

Amidst touring, Owens is regularly involved in special projects. In 2015, he served as Artist-in-Residence at the Park Avenue Armory Conservancy where he presented *Ulysses in 3*. This multi-disciplinary performance piece showcased the literary masterpiece *Ulysses* by James Joyce, the work of celebrated choreographer Ulysses Dove and Owens's own original compositions, weaved together through the mediums of music, dance, spoken word and visual art. That same year, Owens was commissioned by Jazz at Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art to compose a work for the Museum's Summergarden Series. The final result was a seven-movement suite entitled *Stages of Us* reflecting on the African American experience. A strong believer in community engagement, Owens has ardently supported cultural institutions. From 2012 to 2015, Owens served as the Jazz Vesper Series Artistic Director at the world-renowned Abyssinian Baptist Church. He was also appointed Artistic Music Curator for the legendary Minton's Playhouse, at the request of restaurateur Alexander Smalls, producing over 85 shows for the jazz club during its 2015 fall season. His first major production as Music Director came the following year with *Songs of Freedom*, which debuted in the Appel Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center. The tribute piece honored musical greats Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone, and Joni Mitchell and featured vocalists Alicia Olatuja, Theo Bleckmann and jazz royalty Dee Dee Bridgewater. The success of *Songs of Freedom*, which was highlighted for its message of "hope and progress" by *The New York Times*, only further certifies Owens's years of experience music directing on smaller stages for creations of his own and other artists alike.

Owens is also making a name for himself in production circles, having accumulated over 30 producer credits in just a few short years. His production of Olivia Foschi's *Perennial Dreamer* was described by *JazzTimes* as "fresh, innovative, and refreshingly uplifting...appealing to a new generation of listeners, while still honoring jazz as a tradition." The Owens-produced Abiah album, *Life as A Ballad*, debuted at #20 on the Billboard charts, and his production of Candice Hoyes's album, *On a Turquoise Cloud*, was named one of the best albums of 2015 by SoulTrain.com.

Owens's steadfast belief that "music is a universal language with the ability to heal the soul," coupled with his commitment to disseminating art, is encapsulated no greater than in his lifelong career educating music's next generation of leaders. Owen's C.V. includes positions at music schools across New York City and countless speaking engagements hosted domestically and abroad. In 2016, Owens was invited by Wynton Marsalis and Aaron Flagg of the Juilliard School's Jazz Studies Program, Owens's alma mater, to join the institution's esteemed faculty as an instructor for

small ensembles. Despite spending the greater part of his calendar year on the road, Owens also remains tightly connected to his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida where his family founded Don't Miss a Beat, Inc., a non-profit organization empowering young people to dream big and give back to their communities through a blend of musical, artistic, academic, and civic engagement programming. As DMAB Artistic Director, Owens has created programs for over 200 children and teens, including a cross-cultural exchange that gives students the opportunity to experience art and culture abroad. Having had the fortune of dedicated mentors throughout his career, Owens's interest in investing in young people's education and self-esteem is a deeply personal cause and one essential to his vision of pushing art forward.

2017 will see the continued emergence of Owens as a dexterous leader in music. *FALLING FORWARD*, Owens's forthcoming album featuring his new group THREE with bassist Reuben Rogers and vibraphonist Joel Ross, is queued for release in August for the Spice of Life Record Label. Touring for this album, along with *Songs of Freedom* and a fourth studio album in-the-making by *New Century Jazz Quintet*, will take place this Fall. There is hardly a quiet moment in the life of Ulysses Owens Jr., but as long as audiences keep turning to music to fuel hearts and souls, this performer, producer and educator will continue sharing his talents as fully and graciously as he always does.