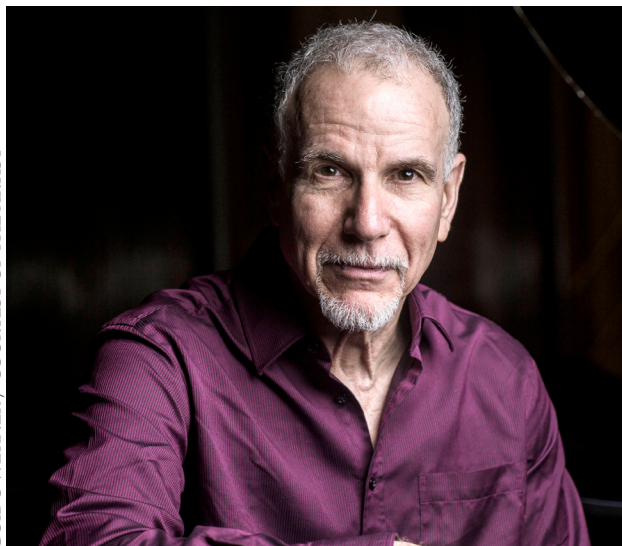


GUIDO WERNER / COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



# MARC COPLAND

BY ROBERT BUSH

*Marc Copland has been creating vital music for more than 40 years and the pianist is arguably at the very top of his game. He is most well known for his long associations with bassist Gary Peacock and guitarist John Abercrombie, issuing several game-changing albums on ECM. Copland is a consummate small-group ally in the duo, trio and quartet formats. His long-running trio with bassist Drew Gress and Joey Baron was consistently delightful and he is hitting the post-COVID landscape with aplomb, releasing Someday, a new quartet session on InnerVoice Jazz.*

**The New York City Jazz Record:** Can we talk about the new record and what your immediate plans are?

**Marc Copland:** It is a project that I'm really happy with. It features a great young sax player, Robin Verheyen, with whom I've been playing for several years; Drew Gress, of course, who I've been playing with for a few decades; and Mark Ferber, a great young drummer who was doing a lot of Gary Peacock's trio work towards the end of Gary's life. We're going to Europe at the end of the month for 10 days and we're looking to do some more over there next year. There will be a 2023 European tour with another quartet with Mark Feldman on violin and Drew and my trio is now Drew and Billy Drummond. The trio has done a couple of gigs and is planning Europe in May and we'll be at Mezzrow on Jan. 6th-7th.

**TNYCJR:** What do you look for in a drummer?

**MC:** I don't look for anything, I go by feel. For example, I had some work coming up and Joey wasn't available. Drew and I got together and played with Billy Drummond and it just felt really good. That means that there's all kinds of technical things that are going right, but it is kind of hard to verbalize all of them. I mean all these guys are great drummers, right? Like Joey, Billy's a great listener and I really dig his time feel. He brings something that's kind of earthy.

**TNYCJR:** What about choosing a bass player?

**MC:** Again, it is what feels right. I've been very lucky with bassists: Gary and Drew, playing with both for decades. The guys I like to play with can cover the whole instrument. They can lay it down on the floor, which is important, but also play loose and hang with some of the harmonic things I do. There's a good amount of bass players who can do all of that today, but it wasn't always like that.

**TNYCJR:** You are one of the premier accompanists in jazz. How did you get there?

**MC:** I started out as a saxophonist, from the age of 10 until I was 25. I think that gave me a unique perspective on what a soloist doesn't want to hear from a piano player. The switch to piano felt really comfortable

to me. One of the things I liked about it is approaching the instrument as a part of the rhythm section, which is a real team, or should be. There's also the sense of orchestration. As an orchestrator, I'm trying to support everything going on around me, not only the soloist—whether it is a horn player or the bassist or the drummer—but also the vibe of the entire band. This has always been my first concern. I focus on the feel and sound of the whole group. Of course, soloing is important, but setting the sound and vibe is first priority.

**TNYCJR:** I'd like to return to the subject of your history with Peacock. How did your great chemistry develop?

**MC:** It was kind of instantaneous. I went out to Seattle to play a week and he was the quote-unquote "local bass player". I was 30-something, had never met him and was absolutely petrified. While listening to him warm up—and he was playing all of this incredible stuff—I waited until he paused and then played a chord. Then he played a note with that chord and I looked up. He was grinning from ear to ear. We just hooked up immediately and it carried on like that for 40 years. Our concepts were very close in terms of orchestration. When he stopped warming up for a second and I played a particular chord voicing, he just said, "Oh, let me put a note under that", you know? So right away he was listening, even though I was just playing a chord to get the sound of the piano. When he did that, I reacted and he reacted in turn. And we both looked up and thought, "Whoa, this is real." We shared that aesthetic and it made making music with him just wonderful. I've been fortunate to be able to pick and choose situations and play with like-minded musicians, which makes it fun.

**TNYCJR:** Another longtime associate was guitarist John Abercrombie. Can you reflect on that relationship?

**MC:** It was very similar. John and I met in Chico Hamilton's band when I was still playing saxophone. We had a different kind of dynamic then. We were both young and into burning out and all that. But we were also trying to do things that we felt were exploratory with harmony, tunes and ways to play. Then I switched to piano and left town for 10 years. When I got back, we were hanging, but not really playing together. Then one day it happened and the connection was immediate, but it wasn't two young guys burning out, it was two guys really listening to each other. We were both a little older and there was this magic between guitar and piano. That was what was on the menu and we were both totally into it. Our longstanding friendship made it that much easier.

**TNYCJR:** Those albums you did with Gary's trio on ECM. Do you think they were an accurate representation of that band?

**MC:** Yes and no. They certainly captured the experimental and freewheeling side. We also enjoyed playing standards and most of that is not captured on the recordings, but you can't do everything on one record. So, they're a very accurate picture of a big piece of what we did, but certainly not all of it.

**TNYCJR:** Will any of that standards stuff ever surface?

**MC:** When I'm playing with Drew Gress and Billy Drummond, it is pretty much the same aesthetic. Different cats, but the same kind of approach. So, I do believe it is happening, just with two different players.

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(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

**TNYCJR:** Let's return, for a moment, to your connection with Drew. What can you say about that relationship?

**MC:** First of all, he is a great player. He really tries to fit in any situation and you know, I encourage him, like to just go for the jugular. In addition to being a guy who can play all kinds of complex, wonderful stuff, he has got this big, fat sound and can make you really feel comfortable on the bottom. He is also a terrific composer. We play some of his tunes with the trio. They're challenging but rewarding. Not all challenging tunes have that reward. What inspires me is to see a cool idea in somebody else's tune and wonder, "why didn't I think of that?" Nothing to do but jump in and learn how to play on the tune. That helps the music grow and I want to keep growing.

**TNYCJR:** Do you ever look back on your earlier work?

**MC:** I generally don't, but it can be instructive. It is similar to baseball players who go back and look at videotapes of their swing when they were doing really well, because they're trying to maximize their performance. I've had that happen in a masterclass situation. I'll find an older recording of mine on YouTube, which I'll play for the class to demonstrate a certain concept. While we're listening I'm thinking, "Wow, this guy sounds pretty good, I better get to practicing." ❖

For more information, visit [marccopland.com](http://marccopland.com). Copland is at Bar Bayeux Dec. 28th. See Calendar.

**Recommended Listening:**

- Marc Copland—*All Blues At Night* (Jazz City, 1990)
- Marc Copland Trio—*Paradiso* (Soul Note, 1995)
- Marc Copland/David Liebman Duo—*Bookends* (hatOLOGY, 2002)
- Gary Peacock/Marc Copland—*Insight* (Pirouet, 2005-7)
- Gary Peacock—*Now This* (ECM, 2014)
- Marc Copland—*Gary* (Piano Solo) (Illusions, 2018)

(ENCORE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

Urbie Green's *Big Beautiful Band* (Project 3, 1974) again included Stamm and he has high praise, "It is a marvelous album that displays Urbie's talents brilliantly. But then all of Urbie's albums did this... over maybe 20 years, I came to know Urbie as both a friend and working colleague...the best of the best." In semi-retirement, Green's yearly appearances at the Delaware Water Gap, PA Celebration of the Arts Jazz Festival were highly anticipated. Green passed away on Dec. 31st, 2018, leaving a legacy that lives on in trombonists like virtuoso John Fedchock and Michael Dease, winner of *DownBeat's* 2022 Critic's poll.

Dease had this to say, "Urbie Green had the best of it all; sound, tone, technique, range and a soulful sense of musicality that was inviting, exciting and mature all at once...Whenever I need a jumpstart to my practice regimen, I listen to any of his recordings, particularly *21 Trombones* and *The Persuasive Trombone*... and I am inspired by the possibilities Urbie has unlocked for us all. I love the reactions on my students' faces to their first Urbie Green recording! It is a mix of wonder, admiration, a little shock and an overwhelming sense of joy that guarantees Urbie's artistry will be honored by generations to come."

Fedchock reveres Green and declares he, "...was one of the most complete trombone players to ever live. I discovered his playing at age 16 and he became my hero for life...an ultimate technician with flawless execution, effortless range and amazing accuracy. His music carried an emotional element that was unparalleled... A master of the ballad, Urbie could also improvise in a variety of styles from blues to bebop and

could hang with any tempo...over the years performing with him was a complete thrill. I was fortunate to be one of the few trombonists chosen to play one of his solo parts in a recreation of his legendary *21 Trombones*, performing 'Stardust' at the International Trombone Festival in 2016 with Urbie sitting on stage listening. It was the last time I saw him and I had him autograph my copy of the music. It sits in a prominent location in my home and I will cherish it forever. There was only one Urbie Green and I feel so lucky to have known him." ❖

For more information, visit [urbiegreen.com](http://urbiegreen.com)

**Recommended Listening:**

- Urbie Green Septet—*New Faces—New Sounds* (Blue Note, 1953)
- Urbie Green Quintet—*Blues and Other Shades Of Green* (ABC Paramount, 1955)
- Urbie Green—*Green Power* (Project3 Total Sound, 1971)
- John Bunch—*John's Bunch* (Famous Door—Progressive, 1975)
- Urbie Green—*Just Friends* (E.J., 1981)
- Urbie Green Quintet—*Sea Jam Blues* (Chiaroscuro, 1995)

(BRIC CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

buffalo-fringe dress and heeled silver boots, let her feet do the drumming over a mic'd wooden platform, executing rolls, cross-beat patterns, two-heel stomps and other percussive punctuations, whirling her arms like a windmill, sounding like a conguera on a mambo, a trap drummer on a jazz waltz, all buoyed by pianist Mathis Picard's deft light touches. Last was Lizz Wright, a southern songstress in the vein of Odetta or Tracy Chapman, who wrapped her deep warm alto around hymns, spirituals and folk songs, new and old, anthems of spirituality and empowerment. Her cover of Neil Young's "Old Man" featured a dynamic cameo by Hutchinson, k.d. lang's "Wash Me Clean" had a tastefully inventive organ solo by David Cook and her unadorned rendition of "Walk with Me, Lord" inspired some of the most swingfully syncopated clapping you could expect from an audience.

The second night commenced with Cuban singer/pianist Melvis Santa's Jazz Orishas quintet with drummer Marcus Gilmore playing rumba, bolero and other AfroCuban styles, Santa stepping forward at one point to chant in Yoruba while beating three double-headed batá drums. The most theatrical set of the festival was singer/multi-instrumentalist Angel Bat Dawid and movement/spoken word artist Viktor le Given's *suite harriet*, inspired by their trip to the home of underground railroad conductor Harriet Tubman. Focusing on the theme of "freedom", le Given jiggled his spine, sampled myriad instruments strewn across the stage, rapped 'off the dome' and riffed on the spirituals "Go Down Moses" and "Wade in the Water" as he explored various musical/metaphorical paths to his goal. Dawid soon joined, resplendent in gold lamé robe and long green braids hanging over her face, briefly experimenting with various clarinets, keyboards and percussion instruments. A little later le Given recruited singers, dancers and musicians from the floor—those who felt they had "personal audacity from the inside"—the stage soon swelling to capacity with volunteers, a circus of celebration. As the collective ecstasy began to peak, Dawid suddenly collapsed, prostrate on the floor, pounding it with fists and feet like a prophetess possessed, rolling on to her side, lips quivering, finally rising back to her feet, freedom triumphant. Pianist Julius Rodriguez displayed lightning fast technique and limber neo-soul vocals on his quartet set, showing similar panache accompanying singer José James later that night. Tenor saxophonist Chelsea Baratz' all-female sextet HERA (vocalist Andromeda Turre, flutist Anne Drummond, keyboardist Alexis Lombre, bassist Endea Owens and drummer Shirazette Tinnin) 'passed the

mic' around to every musician, each contributing an original, Owens' "Where the Nubians Grow" earning warm response. Solo keyboardist/saxophonist/vocalist Sen Morimoto used looping machines and a vocal harmonizer to concoct gentle swirling soundscapes, a respite from some of the more hyped up groups. James' set of Erykah Badu covers was another standout, the singer/rapper strolling onstage in shades and striped shepherd's coat with matching slacks, ritualistically rubbing a prayer gong before busting into "On and On", his smoky nasal voice equally at home on soulful ballads and raps. The most exciting aspect of his performance was its rhythmic flexibility, bassist Ben Williams and drummer Jharis Yokley maintaining a slippery but firm beat for James' break-beat scatting, jerking and scratching his voice like a turntablist. He began the encore with an a cappella rap, tapping his foot, clutching and pulling ideas out of the air with his right-hand fingers as the audience chanted "Flashlight", throwing in a bit of Freddie Hubbard's "Red Clay".

The final night started with Ajoyo, a sextet blending Moroccan and Cameroonian grooves and dancehall electronica with jazz harmonies and melodies, supported by fine solos from guitarist Michael Valeanu and keyboard player Jesse Fischer. For his dazzlingly acrobatic set, blind piano prodigy Matthew Whitaker played (among other things) a swunky reading of Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk", left hand on piano, right on synth; a gospel-tinged take on Dr. Lonnie Smith's "Pilgrimage" on Hammond B3 organ; Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On"; and several originals, quoting Charlie Parker's "Ornithology" and George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" along the way. Tenor/alto saxophonist Fefer's set with guitarist Brandon Ross, bassist Gregg August and drummer Chad Taylor overcame sound imbalances to deliver an affecting set, especially on "Bedouin Dream", based on a hypnotic beat structure of 6+7. Trumpeter Brown, another alchemist of jazz and hip-hop, pumped the crowd with his soloing and rapping, switching between a glistening open tone and a harmonized electronic tone, referencing both genres: Coltrane's "A Love Supreme", Wayne Shorter's "Nefertiti", Badu's "On and On" (inspired by James' set the previous night?) and Drake's "Hotline Bling" (the crowd singing lyrics along with Brown's processed trumpet tone). His guests included tenor saxophonists Tomaki Sanders and Baratz and guitarist Angie Swan while bassist Burniss Travis and drummer Gilmore kept the beats real. The final gallery set presented South London tuba phenom Theon Cross, dressed for battle in army fatigues and combat boots, his face breaking out in a glossy sheen of sweat as he pumped his horn full of warm air, evoking the love-bellow of an amorous water buffalo, his quartet's swelling electronic drones finally erupting into high-speed danceclub workouts. Closing the ballroom, delayed due to a non-booting laptop, was the much-hyped Gen-Z duo of French keyboardist DOMi and American trap drummer JD Beck: she playing synth bass in the left hand (supplemented by foot pedals) in support of quirky nebulous chords and lightning fast run-on phrases in the right; he reeling out jittery, similar-sounding 'punk-hop' grooves with stuttered snare strokes and tetchy high-hat; together navigating a series of erratic but cohesive musical mood swings. Covering everything from Jaco Pastorius and Wayne Shorter to Thundercat and Madvillain, along with originals "NOT TIGHT", "SMiLE", "TWO SHRiMPS" and "DUKE/SPACE MOUNTAiN", the pair were one of a kind.

Something the fest made clear: if jazz hopes to regain its street smarts and reach a broader, more diverse audience, it doesn't need to dumb down, sell out or otherwise compromise core values. It will however require a newer, younger generation to lead the way. Judging by local crowd responses to these youthful innovators, that is already starting to happen. ❖

For more information, visit [bricartsmedia.org/bric-jazzfest](http://bricartsmedia.org/bric-jazzfest)