

Chuck Owen Biography (Full Version)

Chuck Owen is Distinguished University Professor of Jazz Studies at the University of South Florida where he also serves as founding and Artistic Director of the USF Center for Jazz Composition. A committed, passionate, and nationally respected educator for over 25 years; he is recognized these days, however, just as readily for his unique compositional voice and creative, colorful approach to arranging/orchestration. While steeped thoroughly in the jazz tradition; Owen does not hesitate to draw from a diverse array of additional influences - ranging from contemporary classical and American folk/blues to Latin styles, funk/hip-hop, and even country (and western!). The result is an evocative, thoughtful, and very frequently playful body of work. Recently honored as a 2009 Guggenheim Fellow (which will lead to the creation of Owen's first large scale work for orchestra) and with the release of his most recent CD, ***A Comet's Tail*** due out in August, there is clearly much more on the horizon for this artist whose stature continues to rise.

Owen's primary creative outlet is the ***Jazz Surge***. While definitely "NOT your mother's big band!" (*All About Jazz*) the Surge blends some of Florida's finest professional jazz musicians with "ambitious, forward-thinking compositions" (*Downbeat*). In addition to founding the 17-piece ensemble in 1995, Owen conducted, composed, and/or arranged all of the music on their first three CDs, which featured guest stints from the likes of John Abercrombie, Nat Adderley, Benny Golson, and Ingrid Jensen amongst others. These recordings served to introduce the ensemble and Owen to an international audience - garnering critical attention as well as prominent radio play. JazzTimes critic, David Franklin, included their first release on his list of the 5 best jazz CDs of 1996 while Herb Wong observed "***Owen paints with intriguing hues... refreshes with lyrical lines ... (and) is suffused with some of the tastiest contemporary sounds around.***", *Jazz Educators Journal*

The Surge has performed at a wide range of festivals, conferences, and clubs; serving, since 2005, as the resident orchestra for Central Florida's *Jazz Masterworks Series* as well as the *International Jazz Composer's Symposium*. These events, produced by Owen in conjunction with the USF Center for Jazz Composition (CJC), have resulted in a steady stream of performances with noted jazz composers including: Bob Brookmeyer, John Clayton, Chick Corea, Dave Douglas, Slide Hampton, Bill Holman, Jim McNeely, Bob Mintzer, and Gerald Wilson along with many, many others.

The Surge's most recent recording, *The Comet's Tail*, slated for an August '09 debut on Summit Records, is a departure from previous efforts as it focuses not on Owen's original works but celebrates the compositional output of the late jazz icon, Michael Brecker. An outgrowth of Owen's vision for the CJC,

this project pays tribute to Brecker's compositions by re-envisioning them through the eyes of various arrangers including frequent Brecker collaborators, Gil Goldstein & Vince Mendoza, Vancouver composer Fred Stride (winner of the CJC's International Jazz Arranging Competition), Dave Stamps, and, of course, Owen himself. Joining the Surge are a host of special guests (Randy Brecker, Dave Liebman, Joe Lovano, Mike Mainieri, Adam Nussbaum, & Mike Stern) all of whom shared the bandstand on numerous occasions with Brecker.

In addition to his work with Surge, Owen has undertaken a fairly diverse body of commissions and projects. Collaborations with the Netherlands' Metropole Orchestra, the U.S. Army Jazz Ambassadors, Confluences, and tenor saxophonist Jack Wilkins have all resulted in significant contributions to recent recordings. Other performances include the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orch., the Tonight Show Orch., and the Cincinnati Symphony Pops Orch. among others. In addition to his recent Guggenheim fellowship, Owen is the recipient of the prestigious 2000 IAJE/ASCAP commission in honor of Louis Armstrong and two Florida DCA Individual Artist Fellowships. He has over 50 published compositions for jazz ensemble and is a frequent guest artist and clinician at universities throughout the country.

Born in Norfolk, VA, Owen spent his elementary school days in Omaha, NE before moving to Cincinnati which remains home for his father and his brother, Jim. Following a year at the College of Wooster (OH), Owen matriculated to the University of North Texas where he received a BM in Music Education (trombone concentration). There, a host of mentors and friends, along with a dozen jazz "lab" bands all hungry for new music, proved the perfect incubator for a budding composer/arranger. He went on to earn his MA in Orchestral Conducting (!) at California State University, Northridge before spending another couple of years in Los Angeles free-lancing and apprenticing with film composer, Patrick Williams, via an NEA Study Grant.

In 1981 Owen moved (along with his wife and 3 mos. old daughter) to Tampa to accept the first dedicated jazz faculty post at the University of South Florida. With the enviable and exhilarating opportunity to build a program from scratch - designing virtually every facet of the curriculum/degrees - Owen immersed himself in teaching. With the arrival of Jack Wilkins on the USF faculty roughly a dozen years later, however, it was simply a matter of time before the reins of this now nationally recognized program could be handed over - freeing Owen up to refocus his energies on composing & further developing the jazz composition program at USF.

In 2004, a long held vision, the USF Center for Jazz Composition, was green-lighted . . . with Owen as its Director. Espousing a mission that seeks not only to illuminate the role of the composer in jazz but also to play a role in its continuing development, the CJC has launched several prominent programs to date:

the Jazz Composers' Symposium, the International Jazz Arranging Competition, the Jazz Masterworks Series, & the Michael Brecker Tribute Project - leading to the publication of the Center's first CD with Owen as producer/arranger/conductor. Along the way, several works have been commissioned, others transcribed, and dozens have been premiered.

Owen has been honored with several awards for teaching including a "President's Award for Faculty Excellence" in 2003. Owen has served the profession as President of the International Association for Jazz Education, as "governor" for the Florida Chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, and as a grants panelist for national, regional, and local arts organizations. He is the author of several articles on jazz composition and for years routinely reviewed new music for the Jazz Educators Journal. He is a frequent guest conductor/composer in residence for university and high school all-state programs throughout the country.