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MUSIC GROUP

Joey Alexander
Continuance

On His New Album, the 20-Year-Old Jazz Pianist Firmly Establishes Himself as Gifted Jazz Composer, This Time With his Road-Tested Band and Special Guest, Trumpeter Theo Croker

On ***Continuance*** *,* his seventh album as a leader, the Bali, Indonesia-born pianist, composer, and bandleader **Joey Alexander** has far surpassed his earlier incarnations: he's now comfortable in his new identity as a composer-pianist of fertile imagination and emotional depth.

Since a tender age, Joey has been widely regarded as one of the most highly skilled pianists and thoughtful improvisers in jazz. *Continuance,* however, presents him primarily as a composer of haunting chamber jazz who leads an ensemble with its own point of view. *Continuance* shows his writing and playing have continued to deepen.

Talking about his growth as a composer, Joey cites inspirations from outside the jazz world, including Ennio Morricone, John Mayer, Burt Bacharach, and, perhaps surprisingly, even Bonnie Raitt.

"I learn from all these artists about the different genres I can bring into my music," Joey says. "I still love hearing jazz, of course. But all these influences help me to be a better composer. I'm always thinking 'How can I connect with a broader audience.' In my pursuit of being a better improviser and composer, I always strive to bring fresh, creative ideas to the table, both melodically and harmonically."

Continuance finds him once again concentrating on his own tunes. It is also the first album he has recorded with his regular touring trio of **Kris Funn** on upright bass and **John Davis** on drums, a group with whom he has played hundreds of gigs over the past four years. They are augmented on four tracks by Grammy-nominated trumpet player **Theo Croker**.

The trio's road-tested chops show in their effortless synchrony, near-telepathic communication, and the grace with which they support each other's musical expression. It all results in an album that is anything but a soloist doing a star turn, backed by a rhythm section; rather, it's a finely calibrated machine, a crack ensemble stretching out.

Joey was delighted to work with the gifted trumpeter Croker. "I love hearing Theo play my melodies with such sensitivity," he says. "I always wanted to work with a trumpet player, and I wanted a quartet format for this album. Before the recording, I

knew of Theo but hadn't met him. I loved his sound and stylistic range. He brings a *lot*. He has a great command of the instrument." Another thing that endears him to Joey: "He's not flashy. Like Chris and John, he's a team player."

The album, which contains five new originals and two memorable covers, firmly establishes the young maestro's compositional approach, based on modern jazz riffs and genreless grooves, with moody, hooky melodies and dazzling solos.

"*Origin* was my first album of all originals. This is a *continuation* of that, as I continue to compose," Joey explains. "To me the heart of the album is the compositions themselves."

He explains his process, saying "I try to be loose and spontaneous when I'm practicing or writing." So, he says, when an idea arrives, "I'll record it on the spot and have somebody notate it for me later. I never know when inspiration will strike, so I want to be open to it at all times.

"Jazz is a personal thing," he adds. "And improvisation is the most honest way a musician can express himself. And I think that the more I write, the better I become as an improviser."

Speaking of his trio-mates, Funn and Davis, Joey says, "They have the voice and the interpretation that I need to express these compositions. I wanted to capture the groove we have on the road. Everything falls into the right place with them. That's what makes a great band."

Continuance starts with a bang with "Blue," one of the five originals. Says Joey, "The blues inspired the song...the composition and the solos both have blues elements. But I named it 'Blue' for another reason. Blue is a tranquil color — it's calming. At the same time, I wanted this song to have high energy. So it has both qualities at the same time." On other tracks, he continues his sonic exploration of other keyboard sounds and textures besides acoustic piano, playing an astonishing Fender Rhodes solo on "Zealousy" and playing Mellotron flute on "Aliceanna." The other originals, both with memorable melodies, are "Why Don't We" and "Hear Me Now."

The two covers are both iconic in their own way: Raitt's unforgettable "I Can't Make You Love Me," and the touching gospel standard "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

Joey explains how the former song came to his attention: "I didn't know about Bonnie Raitt before, but when I first heard the song, I felt moved and thought I should try a jazz version, with my own twists and personality. It's such a beautiful tune. I always look for songs that are a good match for my sound and our group sound, and this works so well with a trio. It's a great piano song; the original recording is centered around the piano playing first. I always get a great response when I play it. It has become one of my favorite songs to perform."

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness” is, even without words, a highly affecting declaration of faith. Says Joey, “When I play a cover song, I try to internalize it like I’m a singer. I didn’t know this one growing up, but I heard it in church. When I play it, I think about my gratitude for this gift, which is a calling from God. I feel like I’m giving back to God.”

Born in Bali, Indonesia, Joey Alexander has been performing professionally since 2013 when Wynton Marsalis invited him to perform at the Jazz at Lincoln Center Gala. Alexander subsequently moved to New York City and released his debut album, *My Favorite Things*, in 2015 on Motéma Music, followed by three more on the label, a fifth on Verve as well as his Mack Avenue debut album, *Origin*, in 2022. Alexander’s albums have netted three GRAMMY® Award nominations: one for Best Jazz Instrumental Album (*My Favorite Things*) and two for Best Improvised Jazz Solo (“Giant Steps,” from *My Favorite Things*, and “Countdown” from the album of the same name), with *My Favorite Things* and *Countdown* securing the No. 1 spot on the Billboard jazz charts and *Eclipse* coming at No. 3.

Over the course of his astonishing career, Alexander has performed with Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spalding at the Obama White House, for President Bill Clinton at the Arthur Ashe Learning Center Gala, at the Grand Ole Opry, the Apollo Theater, Carnegie Hall, and at major jazz festivals and nightclubs around the world with top-shelf collaborators like Larry Grenadier, Kendrick Scott, Chris Potter and many others. He has also been the subject of profiles on *60 Minutes* and *The New York Times*.