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MUSIC GROUP

Emmet Cohen
Universal Truth

From the outset of his remarkable career, pianist, composer and bandleader **Emmet Cohen** has become one of the touchstone artists of contemporary jazz by tapping into currents much greater than himself. That includes his reverence for the music's storied tradition, to which he forged a direct link via his *Masters Legacy Series* of recordings with legends like Ron Carter, George Coleman, Jimmy Cobb, Benny Golson, Albert "Tootie" Heath and Houston Person.

Cohen has paired those torch-carrying connections with a dedication to innovation and community, most notably in the form of *Live From Emmet's Place*, the pioneering live streaming series that shined a light for live music through the darkness of the pandemic, directly from his New York City apartment. But that passion is abundant throughout Cohen's work, which thrives on his gifts for emotional connection and joyous collaboration, between musicians, between generations, and most profoundly between artist and audience.

2026 marks the centennial year of two of jazz's most iconic figures - Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Cohen felt compelled to celebrate these foundational artists, both of whom count among his most formative influences. But he also had no interest in adding just another homage to what is sure to be a litany of tribute projects, and he realized that his unique trajectory provided him with a singular insight into what made these legends such towering figures.

The result is ***Universal Truth***, Cohen's fourth release for **Mack Avenue Records**; an album that honors the pianist's forebears by carrying forward their spirit of personal and spiritual discovery in his own distinctive style.

"In all my research and study into John Coltrane, one phrase always stuck out," Cohen explains. "*Universal Truth*. When Trane talked about his artistry and his calling, his intention was always to seek that universal truth. I interpret that to mean his higher power, his version of God, his connection to the source that connects and calls to every living thing on Earth."

In meditating on this concept, Cohen found its mirror image in the music of Miles Davis, where the questing was no less visceral for being inwardly directed. "When I analyzed Miles through that lens," he continues, "the universal truth that you find is much more introspective. It's more unspoken and focused on beauty - a silent meditation. Miles is always known for the silences between the notes, so maybe that's the space for prayer."

Tracing this common reverberation binding the work of Miles and Coltrane, Cohen discovered its echoes in his own creative search. “It's been a journey seeing myself through the lens of these great artists,” he says. “I realized that celebrating such innovators means celebrating your own artistry, finding your own voice.”

Thus, the centerpiece of *Universal Truth* is Cohen’s titular suite, an ambitious three-part composition that is as deeply personal and revelatory as anything that he has conjured to date. The piece opens with the jubilant “Eternal Glimpse,” which responds to the vastness of life and the universe not by recoiling but by embracing all that human existence has to offer.

“It's about asking questions,” Cohen describes. “‘Why are we here? Why do we do what we do, to ourselves and each other? What does it all mean - and where can we find meaning?’ On rare occasions - usually through connection with another human being - you get a peek into how massive everything is but how microscopic it can be at the same time.”

The suite continues with “Compassion,” a title that speaks volumes in one deceptively simple word. “Compassion is humanizing,” Cohen shrugs. “We're all imperfect, but we are all equally allowed to inhabit this earth, and we should respect that.” The piece concludes with the title track, which ventures into the spiritual realm, both inner and outer, taking its explorative cues from both Miles and Coltrane.

“The Universal Truth Suite” is surrounded by classic tunes associated with the album’s twin inspirations, though carefully curated through Cohen’s personal connection with the repertoire. Undoubtedly, the most moving is the perennial “My Funny Valentine” - but not primarily for the emotional resonance of the song itself. More than six decades after recording the Miles Davis album of the same name together at Lincoln Center’s Philharmonic Hall, bassist **Ron Carter** and tenor saxophonist **George Coleman** are brought together for a poignant reunion.

Despite the infamous tales of friction between the two, at 88 (Carter) and 91 (Coleman) years of age, the two craft rich, gorgeous music together - both on and off mic, as Cohen recalls. “There was one moment in the studio where George and Ron expressed their love for each other. It made it very clear to me that humanity comes first and love wins.”

The rhythm section for the album is Cohen’s trio with bassist **Yasushi Nakamura** and drummer **Joe Farnsworth**, who kick off the proceedings with a taut reduction of Davis and Bud Powell’s “Budo” from *The Birth of the Cool*. Carter takes over the bass duties for a brisk dash through Monk’s “Well You Needn’t,” with **Jeremy Pelt** contributing a blistering trumpet solo. Pelt and Carter are also featured on “Gingerbread Boy,” the classic composition by Jimmy Heath, who also would have celebrated his 100th this year. The album concludes with Coltrane’s “Blue Trane,” with the twin tenors of Coleman and **Tivon Pennicott** joining Pelt and the trio for a rollicking excursion through the landmark tune.

“I've been listening to Miles Davis and John Coltrane since I was ten years old,” Cohen reflects. “They're an indelible part of my sound. My goal now is to attach a personal meaning to those

sounds and bring that to the community of musicians and fans that come to this music for something greater than sheer enjoyment. Every musician learns that the music is a holy place; the bandstand is sacred; an audience is like a congregation. There is a spiritual aspect to musicians coming together and creating in the moment. The notes and rhythms can be really complex, but the message is always simple: It's about love. It's about compassion. It's about beauty."

With *Universal Truth*, Emmet Cohen celebrates the great discoveries of past masters by making his own search for the endless revelations contained within those simple, profound, vast universal truths.

Emmet Cohen
Emmet Cohen is widely regarded as a leading jazz pianist of his generation and a defining force in the evolution of the art form. A virtuoso musician, producer, and bandleader, he combines deep respect for jazz tradition with a singular ability to create connection, community, and momentum in the modern era. Cohen has released 12 albums as a leader and is the producer and creative force behind *Live From Emmet's Place*, a landmark series comprising over 140 two-hour livestream performances featuring hundreds of musicians spanning generations and reaching more than 100 million views worldwide. A Mack Avenue recording artist, Cohen has performed in over 40 countries, serves as host of The Jazz Cruise and a member of its programming team, and he has been chosen as Artistic Partner of the 2027 American Piano Awards. He was named *DownBeat* Readers Poll Pianist of the Year (2025) and, in 2023, received both Pianist of the Year and Livestream Producer of the Year honors from the Jazz Journalists Association.