



## STEVEN BANKS

### Saxophone

As a performer and composer, saxophonist Steven Banks is striving to bring his instrument to the heart of the classical music world. He is driven to program and write music that directly addresses aspects of the human experience and is an active and intentional supporter of diverse voices in the future of concert music. Rick Perdian of Seen and Heard International has said “one senses that Banks has the potential to be one of the transformational musicians of the twenty-first century.”

Banks is establishing himself as a compelling and charismatic soloist and in 2022, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was a chosen artist for WQXR’s Artist Propulsion Lab. He was the first saxophonist to be awarded First Prize at the Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth International Auditions. Critics have consistently recognized Banks for his warm yet glowing tone, well-crafted and communicative musical expression, and deft technical abilities.

Banks has appeared with The Cleveland Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, Utah Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and Aspen Festival Orchestra and has enjoyed working with such conductors as Franz Welser-Most, Xian Zhang, Nicholas McGegan, Rafael Payare, John Adams, Peter Oundjian, Jahja Ling, Matthias Pintscher, Alain Altinoglu and Roderick Cox.

In recital, he has appeared across the USA at the San Francisco Symphony’s Spotlight Series at Davies Hall, Merkin Hall, The Kennedy Center, The Kravis Center and Festival Napa Valley with his collaborative partner, pianist Xak Bjerken. A keen chamber musician, Banks has appeared at Spoleto Festival USA, Chamber Music Chicago and the Aspen Music Festival, and will be the first artist-in-residence of the Skaneateles Festival in the 2023-2024 season. He has collaborated with the Borromeo and St. Lawrence string quartets and will work with the Dover and Verona quartets in the coming seasons. He is a founding member of the Kenari Quartet, an all-saxophone ensemble that performs regularly together offering inspiring and uplifting compositions and arrangements. As baritone saxophonist of Kenari, Steven won First Prize at the inaugural M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition and has garnered two silver medals from the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. Their album, *French Saxophone Quartets*, was released in 2016 on the Naxos label.

In 2023 and 2024 Banks will premiere and tour with a commissioned concerto from Grammy-winning composer Billy Childs. The nine co-commissioning orchestras are the Kansas City Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival, Chautauqua Institution, New World Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra and San Diego Symphony with Young Concert Artists being the tenth partner in the consortium. The three movement, 20-minute concerto will explore aspects of the African American experience in America and takes inspiration from such poets as Nayyirah Waheed, Claude McKay and Maya Angelou.

As a composer, Banks has been commissioned by such organizations as Young Concert Artists, WQXR’s Artist Propulsion Lab, Latitude 49, Yale University’s Project 14 Initiative and Northwestern University’s Saxophone Ensemble. Jarrett Hoffman of Cleveland Classical has said that his music showcases “a unique and ambitious blend of feelings and sounds” and portrays “a deep intimacy” and “a sense of vulnerability.” His work for alto saxophone and string quartet, *Cries, Sighs and Dreams*, was premiered in May 2022 at Carnegie Hall with the Borromeo Quartet. His work for solo piano, *Fantasy on Recurring Daydreams*, will be premiered by Zhu Wang in April 2023. Banks’ works are published by Murphy Music Press.

An advocate for diversity and inclusion in music education and performance, Banks was part of the TEDx NorthwesternU 2017 conference presenting his dynamic approach to overcoming institutionalised prejudices



against women and people of colour. In addition, he has written about and given lectures on the history of black classical composers. In collaboration with Anthony Trionfo and Randall Goosby, the *Learning to Listen* roundtable was created to discuss the nuances of the Black experience in classical music and beyond. In partnership with the Sphinx Organisation, they also created the *Illuminate!* series, which opened three essential conversations on the subject of music education, artist activism and the LGBTQIA+ community in classical music.

Banks serves as a visiting faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music and holds the Jackie McLean Fellowship at the University of Hartford. He was previously Assistant Professor of Saxophone at both Ithaca College and the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory. His own primary saxophone teachers have been Taimur Sullivan, Otis Murphy Jr. and Galvin Crisp. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, as well as a Master of Music degree from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music.

Banks is an endorsing artist for Conn-Selmer instruments, D'Addario Woodwinds, IefreQue Sound Solutions and Key Leaves.