

# JONATHAN SARAGA

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## CAREER NARRATIVE

My professional music career technically began in 2002, when I was cast as an orchestral trumpeter on the set of Paramount Pictures' *Changing Lanes*, held inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Before entering high school, I had already performed at Carnegie Hall, and had the experience and poise of maintaining a 1st-trumpet section-leader chair for 3 consecutive years. I grew more and more interested in maintaining a disciplined and regimented trumpet practice, became familiar with jazz vernacular, and started to develop my own voice on the instrument. With a new-found understanding of the commitment and sacrifice required in order to become a truly proficient musician, over the next four years I would champion auditions for the All City Jazz Orchestra, The Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra, and New York Youth's Jazz Band Classic. I helped the bands I played in score highly in country-wide competitions, including the Berklee College of Music Jazz Competition, and the Duke Ellington Jazz Competition. Prior to starting college, I had performed at the Rose Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the National Arts Club, at a New York Governor's inauguration, and at the Jazz Standard for three consecutive years with the Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra.

In 2005, upon entering the Conservatory of Music at SUNY Purchase to begin my undergraduate studies, I received the Fred Mazart Music Award and recorded on my first album as a sideman. Two years later, I competed in and received 1<sup>st</sup> Place in the 2007 International Trumpet Guild Jazz Solo Competition, held at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Shortly before receiving my Bachelor of Music degree in Jazz Studies, I competed again, this time as one of five finalists in the 2009 Carmine Caruso International Jazz Trumpet Competition also presented by the International Trumpet Guild. Upon starting the pursuit of my master's degree in 2010, I travelled to Kuala-Lumpur Malaysia to perform at the Anugerah Industri Muzik (AIM) awards, with Malaysian pop-sensation, Zee Avi, and once back in NYC, at the Blue Note Jazz Festival. After receiving my Master of Music degree in 2011, I became one of two trumpeters selected from an international pool to participate in the School for Improvisational Music summer intensive program.

In 2012, I self-released my debut album, *First Vision*, at Smalls Jazz Club in New York, which was hailed as "a skillfully conceived and exquisitely realized debut that brings to mind the edgy, envelope-pushing hard bop

of many a Blue Note record in the early 1960s" by *All About Jazz*. They even hailed it as a "stand up and take notice musical offering," and spoke of its "rare blend of individuality and maturity." World-renowned trumpeter Jim Rotondi deemed my playing on the album as "unique" and "inventive", and said that it breathes "soul, intelligence, great technique and acute musical awareness." The album received air-play throughout the east-coast on stations like 90.3 FM the Core, Weaa 88.9, BreakThru Radio's show the Jazz Hole, [www.jamcityamerica.net](http://www.jamcityamerica.net), and Pulin4Jazz. A few years later, in 2014, it was re-released on the Blue Truffle Music record label.

That same year, I toured the U.S. with Way Off Broadway's production of *Damn Yankees*, and after working as lead and solo trumpeter for Princess cruise lines, I was awarded an audition for the Artist Diploma program at Juilliard, having been one of two trumpeters even considered. A year later, in 2015, I was selected as one of five trumpeters invited to participate in the Banff Summer Intensive Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music in Alberta, Canada, and in 2016, received an ASCAP Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Award for my composition, "Uprising", featured on my second album, *Journey to a New World* (Fresh Sound Records/2017). That sophomore release, which has been called "inventive" and "assertive" by *JazzWise*, (U.K.) has also been said to feature "astonishing maturity" by *Jazz Magazine*, France, as well as "a deft compositional approach and some first-rate musicianship" by *All About Jazz*. Several of my original compositions on that album received a total of four semi-finalist nominations and one Finalist/Honorable Mention nomination in the 2016 and 2017 International Songwriting Competitions, the latter award being received by only 1% of the original 16,000+ entries from 140 countries. The album has aired on radio stations around the world, and has been featured on Kansas Public Radio's Top 10 Jazz CD list 2 weeks in a row, amongst albums by Esperanza Spaulding, Dr. Lonnie Smith, and Christian McBride. The album has also received three 4-star reviews in *JazzWise* (U.K) and *All About Jazz* (U.S.) and has earned me multiple interviews and features with Debbie Burke, Ruth Fischer, Friday Night Jazz w/ Ray Vega on Vermont Public Radio, KUVO-Denver, CO w/ Arturo Gomez and Eric Troe, Hawai'i Public Radio w/ Charles Husson, and Public Radio International w/ Jeff Hanley.

I began a Doctor of Musical Arts degree with full scholarship as a Graduate Part-Time Instructor for the Thompson Jazz Studies program in 2016, and over the next three years, I would teach three semesters of a History of Jazz lecture class for non-majors (averaging 100 students), as well as two semesters of Jazz Orchestra and Jazz Combo for both majors and non-majors. I also completed some of my more treasured scholarly works,

such as a 48-page jazz solo transcription, a 50-minute chamber jazz suite, as well as 300 pages supported by 150+ sources of essay featuring topics such as: jazz's relationship with black-American music from the perspective of current-day black artists; spiritual philosophies, texts, disciplines and practices as they appear within the personal lives of jazz musicians; compositional devices and improvisational vehicles shared between specific sub-genres of jazz; adaptation and re-imagination of music across genre and time period; and in-depth analysis of extended jazz solo content and transcription processes. *Spirituality: A Jazz Musicians Guide*—the topic of my thesis is a work that is still in progress, which synthesizes a multitude of spiritual philosophies, texts, disciplines and practices, as they appear within the personal lives of jazz musicians who have incorporated them, for the purpose of providing the modern-day jazz artist with a hands-on resource toward his or her own spiritual studies and development. This text would be the first of its kind and could offer musicians of all backgrounds and perspectives a relatable introduction or unique supplement to their studies of meditation, Yoga, prayer, religious/spiritual faith, health-conscious lifestyle, and a variety of practices.

During the D.M.A., I headlined the first ever Caribbean International Jazz Festival in Les Cayes, Haiti, performing in front of thousands, and was also selected for a residency in the 2019 Early Fall Musicians in Residence program at the Banff Center. In 2020, post-doctorate, I made it to the finals in the New Jazz Works grant presented by Chamber Music America, and received a Downbeat Student Music Award for my participation in the recording of the winning composition for the “Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances” category. I was also one of three trumpeters to make it to the final round of auditions for the GRAMMY-winning Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra's 4th trumpet chair, and was one of sixteen to receive a commission from the International Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers. I selected to present at the International Society for Improvised Music conference at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in Melbourne, Australia as well as at the Association for Popular Music Education conference at Edinburgh Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland. In 2021, I was selected to participate in the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop, was accepted into the chaNorth Artist in Residence program, made it the finals in the Haleakala National Park Artist in Residence program, made the waitlist for the Millay Colony of the Arts Core Residency program, received a Downbeat Student Music Award for my trumpet playing in the Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Category for Small Ensemble. and achieved semi-finalist in the Unsigned Only Music Competition (12% of 10,000 entries). I also received grants from United States Artists, the University of

Colorado Boulder Music Advisory Board, the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation, the Actors Fund/Local 802 Musicians Union, the Jazz Foundation of America, the Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance, and the Recording Academy/MusiCares, which totaled nearly \$10,000. I also competed as one of two finalists in the U.S. Air Force Academy Band jazz/commercial trumpet vacancy audition and in the U.S. Navy Band Commodores jazz trumpet vacancy auditions held in Washington DC, Washington.

Since 2011, I've performed and/or recorded with an abundance of jazz artists and organizations, most notably the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra, Darcy James Argue's Secret Society, The Mingus Big Band, the Birdland Big Band, Orrin Evans's Captain Black Big Band, the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra, Remy Le Boeuf's Assembly of Shadows Orchestra, the Jason Marshall Big Band, the Jihye Lee Jazz Orchestra, the Erica Seguire/Shannon Baker Jazz Orchestra, Migiwa Miyajima's Jazz Orchestra, Manuel Valera's New Cuban Express Big Band, the Eco-Music Big Band, the Steven Feifke Big Band, the Josh Evans' Big Band, the Jimmy Greene Big Band, as well as in various ensembles led by Tyshawn Sorey, Steve Coleman and Henry Cole.

Besides professing a passion and skillset for music within the 'jazz' idiom, my usage of sound draws from and contributes to many other forms of art. I've composed and arranged music for lyricists, and have provided musical accompaniment for dance classes, workshops, and performances presented by the Martha Graham Dance Academy and the Jeoffrey Ballet School and have even played for Marc Jacobs fashion run-way shows. My musicianship also reaches the health and wellness crowd, as I have served as a regular performer at the New Life Expo, and as a musical aid for art exhibitions (including a Syrian-post war realist art exhibition presented by ChaShaMa), Yoga classes at Jivamukti and the Three Jewels, meditation classes for WeWork, poetry readings at the Firehouse Space, reaching audiences at St. Peter's Church at the Citicorp Center, The Tibet House, Triskelion Arts the Firehouse Space, the Jewish Community Center, the New York Insight Meditation Center, and the NYU Skirball Theater. I also regularly work as a trumpeter with several acclaimed entertainment corporations such as Element Music, 45 Riots, and Elan Artists.