

**Don Byron** has been a singular voice in an astounding range of musical contexts, exploring widely divergent traditions while continually striving for what he calls "a sound above genre." As clarinetist, saxophonist, composer, arranger, and social critic, he redefines every genre of music he plays, be it classical, salsa, hip-hop, funk, rhythm & blues, klezmer, or any jazz style from swing and bop to cutting-edge downtown improvisation. He has been consistently voted best clarinetist by critics and readers alike in leading international music journals since being named "Jazz Artist of the Year" by *Down Beat* in 1992. Acclaimed as much for his restless creativity as for his unsurpassed virtuosity as a player, Byron has presented a multitude of projects at major music festivals around the world, including recent performances in Vienna, San Francisco, Hong Kong, London, Monterey, New Zealand, and on New York's Broadway.

**BEGINNINGS:** Born and raised in the Bronx, Byron was exposed to a wide variety of music by his father, who played bass in calypso bands, and his mother, a pianist. His taste was further refined by trips to the symphony and ballet and by many hours spent listening to Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Machito recordings. He formalized his music education by studying classical clarinet with Joe Allard while playing and arranging salsa numbers for high school bands on the side. He later studied with George Russell in the Third Stream Department of the New England Conservatory of Music and, while in Boston, also performed with Latin and jazz ensembles.

**COLLABORATIONS:** His artistic collaborations include performances and recordings with Mario Bauza, the Duke Ellington Orchestra, John Hicks, Tom Cora, Bill Frisell, Vernon Reid, Marc Ribot, Cassandra Wilson, Hamiet Bluiett, Anthony Braxton, Geri Allen, Hal Willner, Marilyn Crispell, Reggie Workman, Craig Harris, David Murray, Leroy Jenkins, Bobby Previte, Gerry Hemingway, DD Jackson, Douglas Ewart, Brandon Ross, Ed Neumeister, Tom Pierson, Steve Coleman, Living Colour, Ralph Peterson, Uri Caine, Mandy Patinkin, Steve Lacy, the Kansas City All-Stars, the Bang On A Can All-Stars, Medeski Martin & Wood, Angelique Kidjo, Carole King, Daniel Barenboim, Salif Keita, the Atlanta Symphony, Klangforum Wien, Joe Henry, Paul Auster, Meshell Ndegeocello, and many others.

**PROJECTS:** An integral member of New York's cultural community for almost two decades, Byron has taken part in an extraordinarily wide range of projects. From 1996-99, he served as Artistic Director of Jazz at the Brooklyn Academy of Music where he curated a concert series for the Next Wave Festival and premiered his children's show, *Bug Music for Juniors* (formerly *Tunes and 'Toons*). From 2000-05, he was Artist-in-Residence at New York's Symphony Space, where he established *Adventurers Orchestra* through another concert series titled *Contrasting Brilliance*, featuring his takes on music as diverse as Henry Mancini, Sly Stone, the pioneering hip-hop label Sugar Hill Records, Igor Stravinsky, Raymond Scott, Herb Alpert and Earth, Wind and Fire.

Other projects include arrangements of Stephen Sondheim's Broadway musicals; *There Goes the Neighborhood*, a piece commissioned and performed by the Kronos Quartet; and original scores for the silent film *Scar of Shame* and a 1961 television episode by comedy pioneer Ernie Kovacs. He wrote and performed music for the dance companies of Donald Byrd, Bebe Miller, Mark Dendy, and Ellen Sinopoli, and was featured in Robert Altman's movie *Kansas City* and the Paul Auster film *Lulu on the Bridge*. He also composed and recorded the score for Joel Katz's film *Strange Fruit*, a documentary about the 1930s protest song made famous by Billie Holiday. Composing commissions include "Spin", a duet for violin and piano premiered at the Library of Congress; "Red", a big band suite premiered at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 2002, and a new string quartet piece for Ethel.

**RECORDINGS:** Don Byron has released a diverse array of recordings. Since his ground-breaking debut album, *Tuskegee Experiments* (Nonesuch, 1992), he has recorded prolifically: *Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz* (Nonesuch, 1993), a tribute to the sly and biting humorous works of the neglected 1950's klezmer band leader; *Music for Six Musicians* (Nonesuch, 1995) which explores a significant side of his musical identity, the Afro-Caribbean heritage of his family and the neighborhood where he grew up; *No-Vibe Zone* (Knitting Factory Works, 1996), a

vibrant live recording featuring his quintet; and *Bug Music* (Nonesuch, 1996), his spirited showcase of the nascent Swing Era music of Raymond Scott, John Kirby and the young Duke Ellington.

His 1998 Blue Note debut, *Nu Blaxploitation*, is a funk and hip-hop inspired and "genre-bending" musical meditation with his band Existential Dred, with poet Sadiq and rap icon Biz Markie in performances reminiscent of the spoken-word pieces of Gil Scott-Heron, Amiri Baraka and Henry Rollins; *Romance With The Unseen* (1999), features a quartet consisting of guitarist Bill Frisell, bassist Drew Gress and drummer Jack DeJohnette playing a wide-ranging repertory, from obscure Ellington ("A Mural from Two Perspectives") to popular Beatles ("I'll Follow the Sun") to Byron originals loaded with socio-political commentary ("Bernhard Goetz, James Ramseur and Me", a reference to the notorious 1984 New York City subway shooting).

With 2000's *A Fine Line: Arias & Lieder*, Byron continued to blur stylistic borders by exploring and expanding the definition of the modern art song from Robert Schumann and Giacomo Puccini to Roy Orbison and Stevie Wonder. His 2001 release, *You Are #6*, once again finds him in the company of his longest-standing group, Music for Six Musicians, paying tribute to the Latin and Afro-Caribbean rhythms at his musical roots. His latest Blue Note release, *Ivey-Divey*, inspired by Lester Young's classic trio recording with Nat King Cole and Buddy Rich, features pianist Jason Moran and Jack DeJohnette and is also his recording debut on tenor saxophone. *Ivey-Divey* received a Grammy nomination for best instrumental solo and was voted Album of the Year 2004 by Jazz Times Magazine.

Additional CD releases are *A Ballad for Many*, an album of his compositions performed by the Bang On A Can All-Stars (Cantaloupe Music) and *Do the Boomerang*, his interpretations of the music of saxophonist, singer, and soul/R&B legend Junior Walker (Blue Note, October 2006).

Don Byron is also an experienced and gifted teacher, who has led residencies at the University of California San Diego, the University of Nevada Reno, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Columbia University. He was an Associate Professor at The State University of New York (Albany), and an Associate Professor of Jazz Studies at Metropolitan University, Denver, CO.