

# MICHAEL WEISS

Since arriving in New York in 1982, pianist, composer, arranger and educator **Michael Weiss** has forged a formidable career working in the bands of jazz legends Johnny Griffin, Art Farmer, The Jazztet, Slide Hampton, Jimmy Heath and the Heath Brothers, Frank Wess, Charles McPherson, Jon Hendricks, Lou Donaldson, Junior Cook/Bill Hardman, as well as the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra and Mingus Epitaph Orchestra. Weiss' fifteen year association with Griffin yielded four recordings and annual tours in the USA and around the world. He has also performed with Joe Henderson, George Coleman, Woody Shaw, Clark Terry, Clifford Jordan, Gary Bartz, Phil Woods, Pepper Adams, Joe Lovano, Ron Carter, David Newman, Gerry Mulligan, Randy Brecker, Tom Harrell, Wynton Marsalis, and other high profile jazz recording artists.

As a band leader, Weiss has headlined at the Village Vanguard, Detroit Jazz Festival, Detroit Symphony Hall, Smithsonian Institution, and major New York venues such as Merkin Concert Hall, the Blue Note, Jazz Standard, Birdland, Bradley's, Iridium and Sweet Basil. Reviewing his Vanguard debut, the New York Times wrote that Weiss *"demonstrated a strong sense of leadership and organization" exhibiting "sensitivity and logic, along with crisp control."* Television appearances include CBS-TV's Nightwatch with Charlie Rose and PBS' Live From Lincoln Center: The City of Jazz. NPR radio appearances include PianoJazz with Marion McPartland, Making the Music with Wynton Marsalis, Jazzset, and the Jazz Piano Christmas Special. Weiss was a 1989 prizewinner in the Thelonious Monk Institute's International Piano Competition.

As a composer Weiss is a two-time Doris Duke/Chamber Music America New Works grant recipient and was the grand prize winner of the 2000 BMI/Thelonious Monk Institute's Composition Competition presented to him by Wayne Shorter. Weiss' compositions reveal eclectic influences from the worlds of jazz, 20th Century classical and even rock -- from Wayne Shorter to Alexander Scriabin to Led Zeppelin. Weiss focuses on extended forms, thematic development and attention to detail. "A greater percentage of composition in the mix is crucial to keeping Jazz moving forward," explains Weiss. "The solo after solo bit on the same chord changes is becoming a worn out model. This doesn't mean giving up on jazz's foundations. I'm interested in incorporating improvised solos within a piece like characters in a play or perhaps as the narrator between scenes. I'm always looking for fresh ways to expand my material."

Weiss' four recordings as a leader on the CrissCross, SteepleChase, DIW and Sintra labels have been hailed by the critics. His 1987 debut, Presenting Michael Weiss was Stereo Review's "Best of the Month." His latest, Soul Journey features a collection of nine original compositions for septet:

*"Weiss' shrewd writing and arranging skills are as clearly in view as his sleek piano work"* – **The New Yorker**

*"Weiss has a rich palette of composing devices at his command"* – **Downbeat**

*"Warmth, integrity and above all, originality"* – **JazzTimes**

*"the song simply smoke"* – **Detroit Free Press**

*"About as close to perfection as a recording can get...If there is truly justice in our world, this should be a Grammy nominee."* – **Jazz Improv**

As a sideman Weiss appears on recordings of Johnny Griffin, Frank Wess, Charles McPherson, Steve Grossman, the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Ronnie Cuber, Louis Smith, Dick Oatts and others.

Weiss maintains a longstanding commitment to jazz education, presenting jazz workshops and master classes in universities and high schools. He has also held faculty positions at Indiana University, Hartt School of Music and Queens College. Weiss aims to relay his bandstand experience through his master classes with a host of clinic topics that directly address the standards and performance practices required of a professional jazz musician.

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## Reviews of SOUL JOURNEY

“Weiss is able to mesh simple, airy phrasing and intricate melodies to create a rich, full-bodied, expressive jazz statement. His timeless playing reflects - but does not pander to - a rich history of legendary pianists. Weiss' playing is warm and earthy and, as a result, "Soul Journey" is downright terrific. You do not have to be a jazz fan to appreciate this exceptional disc.” – **Boston Herald**

“*Soul Journey* is about as close to perfection as a recording can get. These nine compositions stand up to the quality of Wayne Shorter (probably the greatest composer of our generation). Beyond the great tunes is execution. This sextet has a *sound*. The interpretations are so CLEAN. Through clever and sophisticated arranging, each tune on this CD sounds fresh and unlike the previous. Michael Weiss clearly sees the need to go beyond the “head-solos-head” routine. You will not encounter any easy old standard changes with a new head grafted on. Michael is a fleet-fingered pianist who demonstrates an encyclopedic knowledge of all the masters who have come before him, without consciously emulating any one. You really have to hear this cat. Just to add icing on the cake, the production is superb. If there is truly justice in our world, this should be a Grammy nominee.” – **Jazz Improv**

“...considerable talent as a writer and arranger. Weiss has a rich palette of composing devices at his command, and his ebullient piano constantly buoys this recording. – **Downbeat**

“His ambitious “Soul Journey,” keeps Weiss’ shrewd writing and arranging skills as clearly in view as his sleek piano work, honed with the likes of Art Farmer and Johnny Griffin.” – **New Yorker**

“...the songs simply smoke.” – **Detroit Free Press**

“This music lives and breathes freshness and exhilarating originality. The individual selections are strong and attractive enough, to make me think that some, if not all of them, will stand the test of time and still be played as jazz vehicles in 10, 20, or even 50 year’s time.” – **Jazz Journal**

“Weiss gives us, in his fourth album, perfectly constructed music, well thought out from beginning to end. Nine originals span a wide aesthetic spectrum, while rooted in the great tradition of postbop and latin jazz. They show a maturity of writing, superbly executed by the musicians, as well as a perfect osmosis between the different styles that coexist in jazz. Firmly in control of this roaring machine, Michael Weiss imposes himself, discreetly but effectively, as one of the most interesting pianists in the mainstream. Here, complexity and swing get along. A delight.” – **Jazz Hot**

“*Soul Journey* shows contemporary writers and players can play, for lack of a better term, mainstream jazz that’s forceful, distinctive and exciting. The music on *Soul Journey* has warmth, integrity and above all, originality.” – **JazzTimes**

“This is refreshing music...a five-star recording.” – **Portland Skanner**

“For a fresh, imaginative listening experience, please take a listen to *Soul Journey*. Each of the nine selections is unusual and entertaining. *The Cheshire Cat* is one of the most joyful and original jazz compositions to come along in years.” – **Jazzreview.com**

“Polished arrangements combined with shipshape soloing is the modus operandi behind *Soul Journey*.” – **New Music Box**

“A first-rate improviser who can swing his audience into surprising places....The music on *Soul Journey* is diverse, melodic and swinging.” – **Jazziz**

“It’s not often that you find jazz compositions of the caliber that Michael Weiss offers up on *Soul Journey*. This is a very special jazz recording that goes far beyond your typical mainstream fare. Michael Weiss is a vital talent with something important to say...and you’d do well to listen.”  
– **All About Jazz**

“Leading a superb band, the harmonically daring, lyrical pianist offers a series of brilliantly conceived, masterfully drawn, sonic canvases. It’s a fine band and some wise conceptions pulled beyond brilliant technique by daring improvisations and the music’s deeply sewn swing. It’s yet another current mainstream jazz masterwork. Highly recommended.” – **Victoria Times Colonist**

“The most striking aspect of this disc, apart from the skill of the individual players, is the writing, which integrates the solos and ensembles so that each piece comes across as a composition rather than just a quick statement followed by a series of solos. All in all, this is an excellent and very satisfying outing, both in its ensemble and solo work. It’s especially good to hear the music presented with such thought and care for the overall effect.” – **Schenectady Gazette**

“This kind of balance between innovation and accessibility is unusual in jazz, and it makes for an extremely interesting and enjoyable listening experience. It is hard to imagine any serious jazz lover not being captivated by this album. Highly recommended.” – **All Music Guide**

“Leading a superb band, the harmonically daring, lyrical pianist offers a series of brilliantly conceived, masterfully drawn, sonic canvases. It’s yet another current mainstream jazz masterwork. Highly recommended.” – **Victoria Times Colonist**

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– **Washington Post**

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## REVIEWS

**BMI Music World** – “one of the most fluent and flexible pianists of his generation”

**All About Jazz** – “a multi-talented player capable of undertaking any style or genre”

**Downbeat** – “consistently picks choice notes for his percolating solos”

**JazzTimes** – “an excellent pianist who plays with elegance and precision. He has a deft touch and swinging rhythmic sense, with the right dollop of funk and soul.”

**Jazz Journal** – “has the technical skills to meet the most demanding musical situations”

**Village Voice** - “He’s a designer: Years of resourceful comping behind Johnny Griffin often revealed who governed the flow of ideas on the stand. Whether soloing or writing, the pianist’s heart is usually available for comment.”

**New York Times** – “has the charging, heavily rhythmic side of bebop playing under his fingers, and he can focus the intensity in a tune as well as any pianist in mainstream jazz.”

**Fanfare** – “*Power Station* contains some of the best jazz I’ve heard of late. Weiss’ consummate command of the piano shines throughout the album.”

**Washington Post** – “Weiss’ compositions take on different shapes, great complexity and fresh perspectives...elegantly designed and full of unexpected harmonic twists....fluid improvisations and multifaceted designs.”

**Chicago Reader** – “Rather than reveling in the idiom’s urgency, he steps back to make greater use of the colors and reflect upon the poetry lurking within bop’s distinctive language. Weiss has a strong, clean technique that serves his mastery of bebop phrasing and dynamics, and a complete command of the idiom’s conventions and idiosyncrasies. Pay attention and you’ll start to hear the separate, subtle, and sometimes spectacular virtues of Weiss’ playing.”

**Chicago Tribune** – “Pianist Michael Weiss ranks among the five or ten best young pianists in jazz. He leads a quartet brimming over with confidence and optimism. Weiss is a nimble and inventive keyboard artist who couldn’t play an inelegant note if he wanted to. Even at full tilt, his sound is sleek, his lines lucid, his textures virtually transparent....his characteristically crystalline sound, seamless right-hand lines and meticulously contoured phrases.”

**The New Yorker** – “one of the most dependable bebop pianists on the scene”

**Minneapolis City Pages** – "one of New York City's finest pianists"

**Chicago Sun Times** - April 25, 1991: "Weiss has developed from a sharp and impressive bebop player to a wide-ranging pianist of understated elegance. There are no wasted notes or gestures in his playing, an approach that adds considerable power and emotion to those moments when he reaches for something extra."

**Atlanta Journal-Constitution** – “an exciting technically brilliant, yet sensitive pianist”