

Tara Buzash  
*Biography*

Since her stunning May 2011 performance at Washington, DC's Kennedy Center, jazz pianist Tara Buzash has caught the eyes and ears of the global jazz community. Praised by Toshiko Akiyoshi as "fantastic" and by Grammy-nominated composer Laurie Altman as "ingenious," Buzash is now setting her sights on intimate solo concerts as well as inventive composing. As one of eight young female jazz pianists from around the world chosen to participate in the 2011 Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Emerging Artist Workshop, held May 18th-21st at the Kennedy Center, Buzash has made her mark as one of today's up-and-coming young stars.

Buzash's unique two-handed approach delivers the melody of "Round Midnight," while flights of joy and infectious grooves propel her blues playing. Although she counts Oscar Peterson, Jessica Williams, Chick Corea, and Kenny Barron among her major influences, Buzash is also inspired by a diversity of artists including Allman Brothers keyboardist Chuck Leavell and Native American jazz saxophonist Jim Pepper (Flying Eagle). Buzash is currently learning under Stanley Cowell and Conrad Herwig in the Master's program in Jazz Piano Performance at Rutgers University, where she is a Pee Wee Russell Jazz Scholarship winner. She has also studied with Kenny Barron, Charles Tolliver, Bill O'Connell, Ralph Peterson Jr., Connie Crothers, Laurie Altman, Bevan Manson, and John Harmon.

Buzash is the 2012 Grand Prize Winner of the New Jersey Arts Collective's annual student composition contest. As a composer, Buzash has earned the notice of New York Drama Desk Award winner Peter Link and his wife, the international singing star Julia Wade. Their company, Watchfire Music, has signed Buzash as a composer of church solos with flavors of jazz and gospel music. In the community, she is now bringing her dedication and talents to the Greater Princeton Steinway Society, where she serves on their Board of Directors.

Buzash began piano lessons at age five, composed her first blues at age seven, performed for 200 people at her eighth-grade graduation, and played her first gig at age 14 at a Princeton, New Jersey art gallery. At The Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey, her natural drive and leadership compelled her to form the school's first jazz band in modern history. She directed, scheduled rehearsals and concerts, chose the music, arranged, and played the piano and keyboard. On weekends, she played the piano for her church, developing a love for hymns and learning to accompany singers.

Buzash's childhood was also filled with sports under her father's demanding tutelage. Starring in both basketball and softball, she set the girls' basketball all-time scoring record at Peddie, and at the Westfield, N.J. softball complex, she became the first high school player in the 12-year history of the park to hit a ball over the fence. She went on to play softball for Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, graduating with a degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures.

It was her interest in Chinese language and culture that led her to China for two years after college. Here she gathered priceless global experience night after night, sitting in on piano with local Chinese jazz musicians at bars and clubs. Buzash is fluent in Mandarin Chinese and spent her time in China teaching piano and jazz history in this language to young Chinese music students.

When she returned to the United States, the list of appearances and concerts began to grow. Buzash has performed on piano at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage in Washington, D.C.; Ortlieb's Jazzhaus and World Cafe Live in Philadelphia; the Waldorf, The Carlyle, and the National Arts Club in Manhattan; New Jersey's PNC Bank Arena; the Trenton, NJ Women in Jazz Festival; and the New Jersey Independent Music Festival among many others.

In addition to piano performance, Buzash has experience in various accompaniment settings. She has accompanied Broadway tap dancer Maurice Chestnut, musical theater at the Hopewell (NJ) Off-Broadstreet Theatre, and ballet classes taught by the American Ballet Theatre's retired principal ballerina, Susan Jaffe. Buzash has also worked with the world-class Manhattan vocalist Margaret Dorn. And, she often performs for church services of various denominations.

Buzash's compositions include jazz instrumentals, original songs, Christmas music, and modern jazz-influenced hymn settings. She takes varied approaches to composition: sometimes conceiving of a beautiful melody and then supporting it with chords, or finding a compelling chord progression and building a melody over it. Groove is paramount to her concept of music. As an example, she cites her setting of the favorite hymn "I'm a Pilgrim, I'm a Stranger": "It's a jam built over only two chords, driven onward by the groove and the soulfulness of the lyrics."

Coming from a family of educators -- both of Buzash's parents received degrees in education and taught full-time -- Buzash learned the value of real teaching and learning. She has taught music since her graduation from college, and her teaching experience now includes private lessons, jazz ensemble coaching, jazz history lectures, and serving as director for summer jazz camps. She has also taught Sunday School.

Buzash draws from this rich diversity of experiences and talents to inform her art. "It's all connected through what I feel," she says. "When I'm on stage playing for people, I'm sharing all that I am. I want the audience to come away feeling new and inspired, like they have just experienced something rare and special."

With a talent as rare as this, it's sure to happen.