

SIDE CABLES

BY GUY ARSENEAU



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Local in origin, international in appeal and universal in the themes it addresses, jazz is a life long passion for George Cables of Laurelton, Queens. Defining this uniquely American musical style as “an all encompassing art form directly based on my experience as a black man,” Cables is a sought after performer throughout the United States and Europe.

Fluent in Italian, English and French, he tours throughout Western Europe for several months out of the year. His musical skill and improvisational technique as a pianist attracts enthusiastic crowds of jazz lovers in Milan, Florence, Bologna, Rome and Paris, as well as in cities throughout Ireland, Scotland and England.

Throughout the United States, Cables enjoys a well-deserved reputation, particularly among jazz aficionados in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Jazz lovers in New York City and out of town visitors alike eagerly anticipate his frequent appearances at the west side jazz club, Dizzie’s Club Coca Cola, located on the upper west side near Lincoln Center. “By its very nature,” he says, “jazz is a musical form that must keep its own identity.” For Cables, the unique identity of jazz comes from his experience in the streets of New York City. “This is a city defined by contrasts,” he notes. “I often walk from Central Park to the downtown section of Manhattan and marvel at how the city changes abruptly, dramatically from block to block. These changes and contradictions give me an inner tempo or beat that inspires my music. As a musical art form, jazz provides a lot of room for my personal expression.”

Raised as an only child, George Cables credits his mother for his early interest in music. “My mother was a teacher,” Cables states, “and when I was growing up she use to play the piano in church on Sunday mornings, so in regard to music it’s fair to say that from a very young age I was nurtured by her and a piano keyboard.” A one-time student at the High School of Performing Arts, which served as the backdrop for the movie, Fame, and later Mannes College of Music, Cables states that his interest in jazz began during his high school years. Over the years, his seminal interest in the uniquely urban American art form of jazz has allowed him to become a major figure on the contemporary musical scene.

“I’ve been able to play with some of the greatest jazz musicians in the world,” Cables notes. A brief review of his professional history gives this statement an additional impetus and credibility. Over the course of his career, Cables has shared the stage with such iconic figures in the world of jazz as Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson, Lenny White, Art Blakey, Sonny Rollins and Billy Cobham. A pianist of considerable talent and virtuoso technique, he acknowledges his debt to the jazz legends that came before him through his recordings. “I’ve done tributes to giants in the jazz world such as Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk,” he states.

In addition to his professional work on stage, Cables also maintains a busy schedule in the academic world. Along with serving as a part time faculty member at New York City’s New School, George also finds time to head up the school’s eight-member Herbie Hancock Ensemble, which provides public recitals over the course of the school year. Always on the look out for new talent in the field of jazz, Cables also holds seminars and hosts workshops in Washington D.C. at the Kennedy Center. He finds this particular project especially engaging. “Through this program,” he states, “not only do I get to see but also work with young people from around the country and the world that represent the new and evolving voices and faces of jazz in this country. It’s a rare opportunity that allows me to teach and learn at the same time.”

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– George Cables

In evaluating his own role in the world of jazz, Cables defines his on stage pianist skills succinctly. “I’m a sideman with the best seat in the house, I’m not a bandleader. Whenever you play in a group, all the guys who improvise their music have an influence on you, just as you do on them and their style of musical presentation. I guess in a very real sense you can say I follow the lead of the late Duke Ellington, ‘It don’t mean a thing if it ain’t got that swing.’ Rhythm is what moves jazz, and therefore it moves me.”

A prolific recording artist who has earned the respect of the public and his peers, George has recorded over 25 records and CDs in his career. In the process, he has established himself as one of the most important voices in modern jazz for this generation. His latest CD release, *My Muse*, is an eponymous nickname for his late companion, Helen Wray, a woman he describes as having the ability “to turn a black and white day into color.” Cables gives his listeners access to a collection of 11 lush musical works that demonstrate his complex style as a musician, and gives his fans an opportunity to hear his interpretation of such varied works as the jazz version of *The Way We Were*, *You Taught My Heart To Sing* and *Lullaby*. In this work, romance morphs into poignancy and back again with the stroke of a key and the improvisation of a note. For jazz lovers and musical buffs of all persuasion, this CD is a rare opportunity that invites his audience to share the feelings and perspectives Cables is so well noted for in the rarefied world of jazz music.

For more information concerning George Cables and a listing of his scheduled performance locations and dates, please visit his website: www.georgecables.com

AROUND
TOWN

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