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School of Music

**25
26**

**PERFORMANCE
SEASON**





MSM JAZZ ORCHESTRA

This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters

Mike Holober, Director

Jim Saltzman (DMA '18), Dean of Jazz Arts

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2026 | 7:30 PM
NEIDORFF-KARPATI HALL

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This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters

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PROGRAM

Mike Holober

Lay of the Land

On This Rock (Imaginary Letter from Wendell Berry)

*Another Summer (Imaginary Letter from Rachel Carson
to Dorothy Freeman)*

Boundary Waters (for Sigurd Olson)

*Another Summer Epilogue (Imaginary Letter from
Dorothy Freeman to Rachel Carson)*

*Refuge (Imaginary Letter from Castleton Tower to
Terry Tempest Williams)*

Tower Pulse (for Castleton Tower)

Erosion (for Terry Tempest Williams)

*To Virginia (Poem by Ansel Adams for
Virginia Best Adams)*

Domes (for Ansel Adams)

Earth Mother (for Robin Wall Kimmerer)

This Rock We're On (Imaginary Letter from a Child)

MSM JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Mike Holober, Director

VOCALS

Liam Ryan

Weston, Florida

Marit Buffington,

San Diego, California

Keya Upadhyaya*

New York, New York

Emma Moreau*

New York, New York

CELLO

Sam Chung

(BM '21, MM '23, PPD '25)

SAXOPHONE

Tess Overmyer,

Alto Saxophone

Newcastle, Australia

Cameron Sewell-Snyder,

Alto Saxophone

Redding, California

Coleman Rose,

Tenor Saxophone

Boston, Massachusetts

Cameron Suber,

Tenor Saxophone

Atlanta, Georgia

Duke Baur,

Baritone Saxophone

Glencoe, Illinois

TRUMPET

Jordan Guldman

Truckee, California

Kal Ferretti

Staten Island, New York

Cam Shave

Boston, Massachusetts

Jonah Hieb

Seattle, Washington

TROMBONE

Vito Cakaroglu,

Tenor Trombone

Staten Island, New York

Theodore Stone,

Tenor Trombone

Houston, Texas

Nanami Haruta,

Tenor Trombone

Sapporo, Japan

Chase Bautista,

Bass Trombone

San Jose, California

RHYTHM

Jonah Ferguson,

Guitar

Cleveland, Ohio

João Rosa,

Vibraphone,

Percussion, Synthesizer

Fiães, Portugal

Scott Robert,

Piano

Ridgefield, Connecticut

Wilson Woods,

Piano

Boise, Idaho

Theodore Olsen,

Double Bass

St. Paul, Minnesota

Zachary Walgren,

Double Bass

Rochester, New York

Matthew Fu,

Drums

Houston, Texas

Magnus Løkken,

Drums

Stange, Norway

* GUEST PERFORMER, MSM PRECOLLEGE

Scholarships for students performing with the MSM Jazz Orchestra are made possible by generous supporters, including the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation.

TEXTS AND LYRICS

On This Rock (Imaginary letter from Wendell Berry) Mike Holober

On this rock
we hang our hopes
from passing clouds
on breaking waves
in golden dusks
to gentle winds

In this place
we chase our dreams
to build a life
to fall in love
to search for peace

By calmest lake
'neath proudest tree
on richest earth
under bluest sky
The wisest voice
to guide our choice
to share this home

In quiet thought
in private prayer
with purest heart
here is this place

Through star-shot nights
to rosy dawns
through summer swoons
on the cleanest line
The wisest voice
to guide out choice
to share this home

In quiet thought
in private prayer
with purest heart
here is this place

this place
our rock

Another Summer (Imaginary letter from Rachel Carson to Dorothy Freeman)

Mike Holober

Summer is the island we've washed up upon
two drifting souls in no need of rescue
offshore spirit, renewing tides
cold toes, warm breath
a thrumming pool of us
gifted from this beating deep blue heart

Salty memories
of living stars holding equal fascination
with diatoms

There will always be another summer,
another summer

And until then
I'll count the tides
I will write to you
I will write to you
as I am always,

Always,
Rachel

Another Summer Epilogue (Imaginary letter from Dorothy Freeman to Rachel Carson)

Mike Holober

Two drifting souls
there's no need
is there need, of rescue?

There will always be another summer

until tides flood
and you are gone
with you my hope
broken beyond all repair
no more a home
where we just breath
a heart that beats a dance that ends

the tide is in forever now

Refuge (Imaginary letter from Castleton Tower to Terry Tempest Williams)

Mike Holober

Tell them, about my pulse
tell them, about my skin
tell them, about my song
that they may dance
in our sun or in my shade

Lift your pen
write me a better story

Tell them, that I breathe
about my dreams
to touch the sky
that stone can cry

Lift your pen and write
I'll be here
when they are gone
be kind to me now
they'll be dust before I am sand

no monolith I
just a finger
pointing to the stars we share

Hold me in the refuge of your words

To Virginia (From Ansel Adams to Virginia Best Adams)

Poem by Ansel Adams

I would write you my love
in a myriad shining lines
verse upon verse fresh as swaying pines
upon a snowy hill

And yet I know
I have no power
to sound the deeps below
the world of vision and of flesh and voice

Wherein we wander
you my heart's first choice

as the flowing winds upon the lea
and as ageless earth and shimmering sea
So I shall sing with silence and will gaze
through all the beauty of the gathering days
to the dim mountain and the quiet haze

Marking the final hours that you shall guess
that all the years have only served to bless
the wind and the earth and sea

To Virginia, dear Virginia
all words are less

—(© *The Ansel Adams Trust*)

This Rock We're On (Imaginary letter from a child)

Mike Hober

This Rock We're On
the air we breathe
this is our home
be good to her please

birds in the sky
fish in the sea
take care of them
and me

the holes we dig
the hills we climb
the hands we hold
this rock we're on

The vows we take
the friends we trust
the lips we kiss
the laughs we share

the tears we shed
the care we give
the love we crave

the clouds above
the earth below
the endless waves
the home we know

The road we walk
the life we lead
the hope we hold
the love we need

the hearts we touch the
ones we break
the gifts we give the ones
we take
the roads we walk the life
we lead
the hope we hold the love
we need

the hearts we touch the
ones we break
the gifts we give the ones
we take
the roads we walk the life
we lead
the hope we hold the love
we need

it has a pulse
it sweats and breathes
the grace we seek
the love she needs

the holes we dig
the hills we climb
the hearts we touch
it's all too much

this rock we're on

THIS ROCK WE'RE ON: IMAGINARY LETTERS

A meditation on the beauty of nature and the fate of the planet, *This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters* is a multi-movement work that features art songs set for chamber ensemble that take the form of imaginary letters to or from selected “protagonists”—

naturalist authors, artists, and activists who dedicated their lives to appreciating and protecting the earth we inhabit. Each of the vocal works is paired with an instrumental jazz orchestra piece that reflects upon the text of the letter.

THE PROTAGONISTS *Works programmed on tonight's concert:*

Rachel Carson

Rachel Carson was a marine biologist and nature writer who is best known for her publication *Silent Spring* (1962), which is widely credited with launching the environmental movement in the U.S. The vocal works for this protagonist are titled *Another Summer*, set as a letter to Dorothy Freeman, who Carson met in 1953 (their deep friendship is preserved in a published collection of their correspondence), and *Another Summer; Epilogue* that is set as a letter from Dorothy Freeman to Rachel Carson.

Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry is a novelist, poet, essayist, and environmental activist, who maintains a small farm in rural Kentucky. The vocal work for this protagonist is titled *On This Rock*, reflecting the author's effort to cultivate a sense of community and place in an increasingly industrialized and globalized world.

Ansel Adams

Photographer Ansel Adams is best known for his iconic images of the American West and was a life-long advocate for environmental conservation. The vocal work for this protagonist is titled *To Virginia*, and is set to a poem Adams wrote for his wife Virginia. The jazz orchestra piece for this protagonist is titled *Domes*, referring to the unique geology of Yosemite Valley, and the subject of some of Adams' most memorable photographs.

Terry Tempest Williams

Terry Tempest Williams is an author, naturalist, and activist whose wide-ranging works of creative non-fiction address issues of social and environmental justice. The jazz orchestra piece for this protagonist is titled *Erosion*, referencing her powerful collection of essays on the theme of climate change. A second jazz orchestra piece for this protagonist is titled *Tower Pulse*, and was inspired by the audio recordings made

of the sounds produced by Castleton Tower, one of the largest free-standing towers in the world. The vocal work for this protagonist is called *Refuge*, and is conceived as a letter from Castleton Tower to Terry Tempest Williams.

Sigurd Olson

Sigurd Olson was a nature writer and conservationist, best known for his books about the North Woods wilderness of Minnesota. The jazz orchestra piece for this protagonist is titled *Boundary Waters*, referring to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Olson worked as a guide in this region for more than 30 years and was instrumental in its establishment as a designated wilderness.

Lay of the Land serves as an overture for the entire work, and *This Rock We're On* brings together an imaginary letter from a child with the jazz orchestra as the closing work.

Also included in *This Rock We're On*, but not represented in tonight's program is the protagonist Robin Wall Kimmerer, environmental scientist, member of the Potawatomi Nation, and author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Rock We're On: Imaginary Letters was launched with generous support from the inaugural endowment of the Stuart Z. Katz Professorship in the Humanities and Arts at the City College of New York. It was written during artist residencies at the Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts, Ucross Foundation for the Arts, and MacDowell. The PSC-CUNY Research Foundation provided funding for the premiere performances. Special thanks to The Ansel Adams Trust for permission to use *To Virginia* as lyrics.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Mike Holober, Composer, Director

Described by *DownBeat Magazine* as “one of the finest modern composer/arrangers of our time,” Mike Holober was awarded the 2022 American Academy of Arts and Letters Andrew Imbrie Award in Music. His 2019 release *Mike Holober and the Gotham Jazz Orchestra: Hiding Out* was nominated for a GRAMMY® (“Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album) and his subsequent jazz orchestra project *This Rock We’re On: Imaginary Letters* (Palmetto, 2024) was described as a “grand-scale masterpiece” and “a jazz orchestra composition masterclass.”

In addition to leading his own band, Mike has served at the helm of some of the world’s most renowned large ensembles as composer, arranger, and conductor. He was Artistic Director of the critically acclaimed Westchester Jazz Orchestra, and has worked extensively overseas, writing and conducting for the hr-Big Band (Frankfurt, Germany), the WDR Big Band (Cologne, Germany), and other renowned groups such as the Stockholm Jazz Orchestra, the Bohuslan Big Band and the RTV Big Band in Slovenia. During these engagements he has written and conducted concerts for artists such as Kurt Rosenwinkel, Avishai Cohen, Miguel Zenon, Al Foster, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Randy Brecker, Paquito D’Rivera, and Joe Lovano. Recent engagements include residencies at the Jazzcampus in Basel, Switzerland, and the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts (in cooperation with the hr-Big Band). In November 2024 he arranged the music for the Frankfurt Jazz Festival for vocalist Becca Stevens and the hr-Big Band, and in July 2025 he wrote a project for the WDR Big Band and saxophonist Chris Potter which included an original suite titled *Random Moves*.

Mike has released nine recordings as a leader and can be heard on over 80 recordings as a sideman. His small group projects include The Mike Holober Quintet, Balancing Act (a jazz octet with voice), and most recently The Marvin Stamm/Mike Holober Quartet and the Marvin Stamm/Mike Holober duo project.

Amongst his honors, Mike is the recipient of a prestigious Chamber Music America New Jazz Works commission for *Don’t Let Go*, a song-cycle written for “Balancing Act,” his jazz octet with voice. He was named the inaugural Stuart Z. Katz Professor in the Humanities and the Arts at The City College of New York in 2017, and he has enjoyed multiple artist residencies at MacDowell (2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2020), The Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts (2019), The Ucross Foundation (2007; 2019), and Yaddo (2005).

Mike is a full Professor at The City College of New York and teaches composing and arranging at Manhattan School of Music. He was Associate Director of the BMI Jazz Composer’s Workshop from 2007–2015, where he taught with Director Jim McNeely, and he is an active member of the International Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers (ISJAC) and a frequent contributor to Jazz Composers Present (JCP).

ABOUT THE MSM JAZZ ARTS PROGRAM

Manhattan School of Music was one of the first conservatories in the United States to acknowledge the importance of jazz as an art form by establishing undergraduate and graduate degree programs in jazz. The program, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2024–25, is one of the richest of its kind, combining systematic and rigorous conservatory training with a myriad of performance and networking opportunities in New York City. In addition to a wide variety of more than 20 small combos, student ensembles include the Jazz Orchestra, the Jazz Composers' Big Band, and the Studio Orchestra. The program is under the leadership of Dean of Jazz Arts Jim Saltzman (DMA '18).

Students study with a faculty drawn from the highest ranks of the jazz world and are provided opportunities to play for and observe world-renowned guest artists. Master classes in recent years have been presented by Terence Blanchard (trumpet), Billy Childs (piano, composition), Buster Williams (bass), Ron Carter (bass), Christian Scott (trumpet), Barry Harris (piano), Stefon Harris (BM '95, MM '97) (vibraphone), Maria Schneider (composition), Vijay Iyer (piano), Jason Moran (MM '97) (piano), Christian McBride (bass), Jimmy Heath (tenor saxophone), Gary Burton (vibraphone), and Wyycliffe Gordon (trombone).

Every concert season, prominent guest artists are featured with our large ensembles, providing enriched performance experiences for students. Guest artists have included Omar Thomas, Jim McNeely, Jane Monheit (BM '99), Candido, Dave Liebman, Randy Weston, Joe Lovano, Bob Mintzer, Randy Brecker, Paquito D'Rivera, and Miguel Zenón (MM '01).

Jim Saltzman, Dean of Jazz Arts

Edward Gavitt, Assistant Dean for Artistic Operations



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ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 1,000 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege Division is a professionally oriented Saturday music program dedicated to the musical and personal growth of talented young musicians ages 8 to 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

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We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.



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For further information and to join our Galaxy Society, which honors those who have committed to making a planned gift to the School, **please contact Susan Madden, Vice President for Philanthropy**, at 917-493-4115, or visit: msmnyc.edu/galaxy-society.

Help a young artist reach for the stars!

