

EARSHOT JAZZ

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Chris Stover

Photo by Daniel Sheehan



Chris Stover: Trombonist and Theorist



CHRIS STOVER PHOTO BY DANIEL SHEEHAN.

By *Danielle Bias*

“There are certainly a lot of us here,” jokes trombonist Chris Stover about the number of musicians from Seattle currently living in New York. Sitting in New York’s Union Square for the interview, he recounts a recent conversation with Andy Clausen, another trombonist from Seattle now studying at the Juilliard School, about putting together a band in the Big Apple that would play the music of Seattle-based composer Jim Knapp. “That really got me to thinking that I bet we could put together a big band comprised solely of musicians from Seattle.”

Stover is also a composer and theorist with a particular interest in Cu-

ban and Brazilian music, though he is certainly well acquainted with creative improvisation and new music. After spending most of his life in and around Seattle, he relocated to New York about two years ago to join the faculty at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. Prior to arriving at the New School, he also taught at the University of Puget Sound and the University of Washington.

Many in Seattle know Stover from his active performing and recording career with his own modern jazz quartet featuring Byron Vannoy, Chris Symer, Victor Noriega; the pan-Latin trio QED with Ben Thomas and Alex Chadsey; and the band More Zero

with Stuart MacDonald, John Silverman, Thomas and Vannoy. He also has a long-standing relationship with the Latin music community in Seattle, including especially Jovino Santos Neto. Santos Neto speaks fondly of Stover. He says, “Chris is an excellent musician and educator. I have learned a lot from him. His knowledge of subtle details of Afro-Cuban rhythms is very impressive.”

Stover seems to have been able to forge a happy marriage between his activities as a performer-composer and scholar-educator. “Early on, I reached out to Chris Washburne, who serves on the faculty in the ethnomusicology department at Columbia University

and who also happens to be a trombonist like myself,” he explains. “I asked him about how he was able to keep a high-level playing career as well as a high-level scholarly career going at the same time. And he said: ‘It’s very easy, I just write about the same music that I play.’ And I really took that to heart.”

Stover’s dissertation at the University of Washington explored folkloric Cuban music as well as Cuban jazz. About five to six years ago, he started to really bring together his role as a composer and performer with his academic pursuits “in a very serious way,”

he says. That statement almost seems modest when one considers that Stover holds both a Ph.D. in Music Theory and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Trombone Performance from the UW.

While maintaining an incredibly active performing career, he has managed to keep all his academic chops. He has presented at numerous academic conferences, including the national Society for Ethnomusicology, the American Musicological Society and the Society for Music Theory conferences. His critical writing and research has also been published by Cambridge Scholars Press, the *ITA*

Journal and *Latin American Music Review*.

“My interest in Cuban music started out very innocently,” he recalls. “One of the main reasons being that salsa uses a lot of horn players, and it provided a lot of opportunities for me to play out, starting in the mid-90s in groups like Orquesta Nueva Era, Latin Expression and Fred Hoadley’s Latin jazz group Sonando. And eventually from playing the music so much, my interests and curiosity really grew and I started to really study Cuban music.”


Stover has spent time in Cuba studying with some of the great progenitors of music, especially in the cities where the music still thrives today, particularly in Havana, Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba. “I am especially drawn to folkloric rumba, which is sort of ironic because there is no trombone in folkloric rumba,” he explains. “But the rhythmic aspects of it and the micro-rhythms, as well as the call and response, the relationship between music and dance, and the social-cultural context is really fascinating. And although I don’t really play folkloric music, I have been able to use what I have learned to inform my own music.”

Stover’s own music can be at once pan-Latin and modern, though it often embraces a certain sophisticated simplicity. “When I am writing music, I use what I have learned as a base to create within my own musical syntax. My music is definitely not rumba, but the same sort of processes that happen in rumba often inform my compositional style,” according to Stover. “Aside from my interest in process with regard to rumba, another kind of music that I am fascinated by, also in terms of process, is minimalist music.”

Not surprisingly, then, he cites musician and performers like Steve Reich, Cachao and Caetano Veloso as major influences. He has performed with an eclectic mix of musicians, includ-

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ing Eddie Palmieri, Charlie Hunter, Wayne Horvitz, Robin Holcomb, Tom Varner and Michael Spiro.

He points especially to a recent recording, *Between Two Conclusions*, with the band More Zero. "Some of the music on this record has a minimalist kind of vibe, introducing ostinatos that develop and transform very slowly over time," he notes. More Zero has been a signature band for Stover for quite a few years, along with QED, and another band, Frieze of Life, that he co-leads with Greg Sinibaldi.

Stover returns to Seattle in July for a few performances and to teach a camp on Latin jazz at the Cornish College of Music alongside Jovino Santos Neto and Ben Thomas. "My commitment to educating youth about Latin music is sort of what spurred the camp that I have been teaching at Cornish with Jovino," he notes. "We explore not just Cuban music or Brazilian music, but look at the music from several different

cultures in a pan-Latin American way. There is such an incredible wealth of music throughout Latin America that is waiting to be explored."

And then what's next? Not long after wrapping up the semester at the New School, Stover left for a tour in Brazil, playing shows with a stellar cast of Brazilian musicians, including Vitor Gonçalves, Sérgio Galvão and Amanda Ruzza. Stover certainly does not seem to have time for boredom. After his time in Seattle, he takes off for a week-long visiting scholar residency at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, and trips to Denmark, Argentina, and a research project in Cuba are slated before the year is out. He is also working on mixing a new quartet CD with Danish bass player Niels Praestholm along with Michael Gregory on guitar, and another Seattle native, Andrew Drury, on drums.

To learn even more about Chris Stover, visit his website at www.morezero.com.

Shows in Seattle

While Chris Stover is here in Seattle, you can catch him at these three shows in the Seattle area:

Tuesday, July 24, 8pm

Chapel Performance Space
Chris Stover Big Band

Wednesday, July 25, 8pm

Royal Room
Jovino Santos Neto Quinteto featuring
Chris Stover

Friday, July 27, 8:30pm

Jazz in the Valley, J.J.'s Main, Ellensburg, WA
QED Trio

Summer Intensive Workshop

Monday, July 23-Friday, July 27, 10am-4:30pm

Cornish College of the Arts
ABCs of Latin Jazz: Argentina, Brazil and Cuba
With Jovino Santos Neto and Ben Thomas

Selected Discography

Stover was an active and vital part of Seattle for over fifteen years, before moving to New York in 2010, and he appears on over sixty recordings. Below are some highlights:

More Zero, *Between Two Conclusions* (2012)

Chris Stover, *Circle by Night* (2012)

Amanda Ruzza, *This Is What Happened* (2012)

Elsbeth Savani, *Pensamientos en vuelo* (2011)

QED, *Yet What Is Any Ocean...* (2011)

Jesse Canterbury, *Vertigo* (2010)

Tom Varner Tentet, *Heaven and Hell* (2009)

Andrew Boscardin, *Four Color Heroes* (2009)

Elsbeth Savani, *Galla Que Canta* (2007)

More Zero, *More Zero* (2006)

Sonando, *Trés* (2006)

Tom Baker, *The Gospel of Red Hot Stars* (2006)

Frieze of Life, *Nuclear Frog Pond* (2005)

Quasinada, *Interrupt This Broadcast* (2004)

Charlie Smith Circle, *Charlie Smith Circle* (2003)

Frieze of Life, *Frieze of Life* (2003)

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