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"From her first album in 1991, it was clear that this pianist and composer would stay around," the New York Times said of Myra Melford. Melford has not only stuck around but she has flourished. She has appeared on more than 20 recordings, including nine as a leader, performed in more than 30 countries, won major awards for composition and piano performance, received a Fulbright Scholarship to study harmonium in India, and worked with some of the world's most innovative musicians. Melford's staying power is the product of ceaseless musical travels; she's always going somewhere. As Francis Davis noted, "Myra Melford is the genuine article, the most gifted pianist/composer to emerge from jazz since Anthony Davis."

At the keyboard, Melford recasts the blues and boogie-woogie of her Chicago hometown, folds in elements of the music of Eastern Europe and India, and blends them with the rangy, percussive avant-garde stylings she cultivated in studies with Don Pullen and Henry Threadgill. This personal musical vocabulary is further enriched by a lush lyricism and organized by an architectural sense of composition that she derived from classical training.

Melford's remarkable breadth is ordered by a thoughtful, expressive sensibility, evocatively described by Coda Magazine: *"Myra Melford is at once a dancer, a romantic and a savage suckerpuncher at the bench . . . beating all hell out of the piano and making it beautiful."*

In the early '90s Melford toured and recorded extensively with her acclaimed **trio** featuring Lindsey Horner on bass and Reggie Nicholson on drums. Their third album, the 1993 recording Alive in the House of Saints, reissued with previously unreleased tracks by hat Art in 2001, is again receiving rave reviews. The Penguin Guide to Jazz praises the trio for its *"absorbing blend of methods. . . . Melford relishes her tunes, and Horner and Nicholson swing them off the bandstand."*

In the late '90s, her projects included the stellar **The Same River, Twice** an acoustic improvising chamber ensemble with Dave Douglas or Cuong Vu on trumpet, Chris Speed on reeds, cellist Erik Friedlander and drummer Michael Sarin. The band *"bursts with invention and a joy in musicmaking that's palpable,"* said Billboard magazine. *"One can hear in the pianist's colorful compositions jazz influences such as Ornette Coleman, Henry Threadgill, and Don Pullen, but her themes are also informed by 'non-jazz' sources such as klezmer, tango, and chamber music,"* wrote Jon Andrews in Down Beat. **Crush** an electro-acoustic trio/quartet, that featured electric bassist Stomu Takeishi, drummer Kenny

Wolleson, and trumpeter Vu, released the critically acclaimed Dance Beyond the Color in 2000. *"Spare and baroque, mournful and exhilarated, Melford and her trio keep up an emotional intensity that wrings you out with its beauty,"* wrote Mark Fefer in Seattle Weekly.

Melford's strong inner drive for innovation and her ongoing search for new sounds and new directions in her music led her to the harmonium, a small hand-pump organ traditionally used in Indian and Pakistani classical and devotional music. Melford was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study North Indian music on the instrument with Sohanlal Sharma in Calcutta, where she was in residency from September 2000 through May 2001.

After her return from India, she turned her attention in the fall of 2001 to **The Tent**, a quintet of players drawn from Crush and The Same River, Twice. The band toured both as a quintet in Europe and as a drummerless trio of piano/harmonium, bass, trumpet and electronics, in the U.S. and Canada. The quintet released its first CD, Where the Two Worlds Touch, for Arabesque in April 2004. *"The album is...remarkably orchestral in scope, with shifting rhythms, textures and musical shapes. As cerebral as it sometimes gets, it is an album to be experienced on the most visceral of levels,"* wrote John Kelman in All About Jazz.

Her newest project, **Be Bread** is a quartet featuring Brandon Ross on electric guitar and banjo or Cuong Vu on trumpet and electronics, Stomu Takeishi on electric and acoustic bass guitar and Elliot Humberto Kavee on drums. The band is the first to draw extensively on her experiences in India, although she has written individual pieces for **The Tent** and the collective **Equal Interest** trio. *"I was waiting to see what would emerge naturally from my experience as opposed to trying to make something happen,"* Melford says. *"One of the things I notice about this music is the layers of simultaneous activity, not unlike life in modern-day India: a continual bombardment of the senses and a mingling of the peace of the ancient with the hustle of the present. . . . I first played this music on the melodica and as a result, much of it is based on melody. It's conceived as quartet music, but what's important here is not the instrumentation but rather individual musical personality."*

In addition to leading her own ensembles for more than 15 years, Melford is a member of two collective ensembles, a **duo with reedist Marty Ehrlich** that released Yet Can Spring on Arabesque in 2001, and **Equal Interest** a trio with Leroy Jenkins and Joseph Jarman that released its self-titled debut on OmniTone in 1999. In 1995 she was featured on Marian McPartland's "Piano Jazz" broadcast on National Public Radio. As a guest artist, Melford appears on violinist Jenny Scheinman's CD Shaligaster (Tzadik), Joseph Jarman's Lifetime Visions and Jarman's and Leroy Jenkins' Out of the Mist (Ocean Records); Butch Morris' Testament (New World Records); Henry Threadgill's Makin' a Move (Sony) and Songs Out of My Trees (Soul Note); and Leroy Jenkins' Themes and Improvisations on the Blues (CRI).

Melford is also active in music education. She is currently Assistant Professor of Improvisation and Jazz in the Music Department at the University of California at Berkeley. Her course, "Current Trends in Jazz and Improvisation-based Musics—A Performance Workshop," allows students to explore the role of improvisation in contemporary jazz and creative music through performance. The course emphasizes developing the tools of an improviser as well as an aesthetic and critical knowledge of current practices. She earned a B.A. from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash. She completed her studies with Art Lande and Gary Peacock at the Cornish Institute in Seattle, and in private study with Henry Threadgill and Don Pullen in New York City.

As Melford continues to turn musical corners with new instruments, inventive compositions, and further ensembles, you get the feeling that her artistry could still go anywhere. As *Jazziz* magazine noted, "The confidence to go so far into uncharted territory and the ability to carry listeners along—then bring them back—attest to Melford's vision."

Myra Melford Awards

As a composer, Melford has received numerous commissions, including the Chamber Music America New Works Presentation Grant for new music for quintet (2003), and a British Arts Council commission (1999) for a nonet comprised of Equal Interest and 6 British musicians. She received a commission from Steirische Kulturinitiative (2000) for the multimedia project, "Knock on the Sky" a work for three musicians, butoh dancers, architect and videographer. She received a Harvestworks Project Residency in 2003–4 and a University of California at Berkeley Junior Faculty Research Grant in 2004–5 to develop an interactive computer system using MAX/MSP for the multi-media project, as well an NPN touring/residency grant to present the work in 2005.

Other commissions include the dance-theater score "My House Was Collapsing to One Side," premiered at Dance Theater Workshop New York City in 1996; and "D Train," an evening-length score for the Fay Simpson Dance Theater. Melford is also the recipient of three Arts International Grants to perform at foreign festivals, three Composition Fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, as well as commissioning grants from the Mary Flager Cary Charitable Trust and Meet the Composer.

Melford's piano playing and composing have earned her wide critical recognition. Melford was nominated for the Jazz Journalist Association Awards as "composer of the year" in 2004. Down Beat Critics' polls honored Melford as "talent-deserving-wider-recognition" as a pianist in 1995, '94, '92, and '91, and as a composer as well as a pianist in 2001, 2000, '99, '98 and '97.

Myra Melford - short bio

Myra Melford is "the genuine article, the most gifted pianist/composer to emerge from jazz since Anthony Davis," according to critic Francis Davis. A composer and bandleader with a "commitment to refreshing, often surprising uses of melody, harmony and ensemble playing," according to NPR's Reuben Jackson, Melford currently leads or co-leads four groups: the electro-acoustic quartet, **Be Bread; The Tent**, a flexible group of five musicians whom she employs in settings ranging from electro-acoustic quintet to drummerless trio of trumpet, bass guitar, and piano/harmonium; a cooperative **duo with reedist Marty Ehrlich**; and **Equal Interest**, a collaborative trio with reedist Joseph Jarman and violinist Leroy Jenkins. She also performs solo concerts and has recorded and performed with composer-saxophonist Henry Threadgill, conductor Butch Morris, and violinist Jenny Scheinman. Early in her career she led the **Myra Melford Trio**; the quintet **The Same River, Twice**; and the electro-acoustic trio/quartet **Crush**. Since 1991, she has appeared on more than 20 recordings, including nine as a leader. As *Jazziz* magazine noted, "The confidence to go so far into uncharted territory and the ability to carry listeners along—then bring them back—attest to Melford's vision."

PRESS ON MYRA MELFORD

"...a strikingly facile technique with a passionate, imaginative improvisational ability." (Don Heckman, *Los Angeles Times*)

"In the next millennium, jazz will be based on personal vocabularies like Melford's, drawing on, but also radically adapting, blues, swing, and a breadth of other 'traditional' qualities. It will still be 'jazz' if its players interact as they do here, closely and for singular effect, with expressive intent behind their virtuosic performances." (Howard Mandel, *Jazziz*)

"Melford can be rhythmic, romantic, stoic, wry, and lusty but most of all daring - all in one tune. More importantly she's reconnected music to motion, leaving today's straightlaced young men in suits, who have dominated recent jazz in her wake." (Stuart Nicholson, *The London Observer*)

"Myra Melford is a virtuoso pianist who comprehends the breadth and depth of the jazz tradition." (David Rubien, *SonicNet*)

"Myra Melford is the genuine article, the most gifted pianist-composer to emerge from jazz since Anthony Davis." (Francis Davis, *Stereo Review*)

"Myra Melford's marriage of electronics, post-Cecil Taylor barrel-house piano, and East Indian devotional music made for an entertaining hour of experimental sounds Sunday night at On the Boards... Melford, a spirited performer whose limbs flew out in four directions during some of her more liberated passages, spent some time on the floor singing and playing the harmonium...One of her most intriguing pieces was "My Face of Us All," a piece she composed for butoh dance. It shared a structural similarity with John Coltrane's "Meditations," but Melford took the listener on a journey through communal, rather than individual, suffering and deliverance." (Music Review Earshot Jazz Festival, by Bill White, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*)

Melford's voice is firmly individual, with flashes of everyone from Red Garland to Cecil Taylor, Bud Powell and Igor Stravinsky, ... but she has taken all these disparate influences ... and fashioned her own distinctively brisk, commonsensical, and eloquently persuasive approach." (AllAboutJazz.com)

Press on recent recordings:

THE TENT, "Where the Two Worlds Touch" (Arabesque Records, 2004)

"Myra Melford's first recording with her quintet The Tent is among the best of her 14 years as a leader." (James Hale, *Coda*).

"...an album to be experienced on the most visceral of levels." (John Kellman, AllAboutJazz.com)

"Melford tantalizes with her exploration of form and sound." (Jerry D'Souza, AllAboutJazz.com)

"This quintet—an amalgamation of pianist Melford's Crush trio and her quintet The Same River, Twice—beautifully captures both the lyric melancholy and spiritual grandeur of her multifaceted compositions. Melford's improvising and composing is rich in allusions to the music of India and Eastern Europe, as well as gospel and the blues, but places them in an utterly contemporary and idiosyncratic context." (Ed Hazell, *Jazziz*)

"Myra Melford's advanced pianism and the exquisitely deployed harmonies in her playing and arrangements are the main sources of fascination on 'Where The Two Worlds Touch.' ['Everything Today'] ... is an impressive display of tightly controlled writing." (Doug Ramsey, *JazzTimes*)

"Myra Melford's music sounds like the soundtrack for a mystical quest—not in any New Age or abstract way, but in the truest sense of engaging the world as a manner of seeking insight into its soul." (Dave Dupont, *onefinalnote.com*)

MYRA MELFORD/MARTY EHRLICH DUO, "Yet Can Spring" (Arabesque, 2001)

"Together Melford and Ehrlich have made the ultimate duet recording with *Yet Can Spring*. The CD features sizzling individual moments, thoughtful unison segments and eight thoroughly delightful numbers—three each from Melford and Ehrlich and one from Robin Holcomb, plus an unusual cover of blues great Otis Spann's 'Don't You Know.'" (Ron Wynn, *JazzTimes*)

"Both Melford, a pianist, and Ehrlich, a reedist, are well-versed in musical innuendo—the art of making subtle, fragmentary proposals add up to strong statements. Theirs is a meeting of minds and moods. In this first duet recording, Melford and Ehrlich share a studied, lyrical approach to freedom, and find as much exhilaration in simple melodies as they do in bold harmonic leaps. (Michelle Mercer, *Jazziz*)

"Even with the music's open-ended nature, the concert was a richly inclusive program of strong melody and heartfelt moods." (Bob Blumenthal, *Boston Globe*)

CRUSH, "Dance Beyond the Color" (Arabesque Records, 2000)

"The songs on *Dance Beyond the Color* are an arresting marriage of subtlety and strength. They reflect Melford's continuing commitment to refreshing, often surprising uses of melody, harmony and ensemble playing. They also highlight her career-long knack of choosing players who make smaller ensembles sound full and intricate as an orchestra." (Reuben Jackson, NPR's *All Things Considered*)

"Spare and baroque, mournful and exhilarated, Melford and her trio keep up an emotional intensity that wrings you out with its beauty." (Mark Fefer, *Seattle Weekly*)

EQUAL INTEREST, "Equal Interest" (Omnitone, 2000)

"Take three distinctive, acclaimed composer/ improviser/bandleaders with multifaceted musical personalities, let their imaginations run wild and you've got Equal Interest. Whether floating pastel melodies atop Asian-flavored modes or tossing taut thematic motives around with aplomb, they create a unique perspective on improvisational chamber music with a World Music feel." (Art Lange, *Pulse!*)

"Overall, this is one of the most poetically conceived, wide-ranging and thoroughly integrated recordings of American avant-garde jazz that I have heard in quite some time..." (Michael Tucker, *Jazz Journal International*)

"...interaction between the three is never less than extraordinary. This is music you can hear breathing...music that defies categorization beyond the beauty and humanity that suffuse all of it" (James Hale, *Down Beat*)

"Rarely has the phrase 'sum of its parts' applied so accurately to an all-star jazz gathering...the range delivered by Equal Interest is stunning...equally beautiful, hearty and fragile all at once" (Peter Margasak, *JazzTimes*)

THE SAME RIVER, TWICE, "Above Blue" (Arabesque Records, 1999)

"One can hear in the pianist's colorful compositions jazz influences such as Ornette Coleman, Henry Threadgill and Don Pullen, but her themes are also informed by 'non-jazz' sources such as klezmer, tango and chamber music. Her quintet, *The Same River, Twice*, unpacks these themes and develops them through improvisation often in smaller units.... True to Melford's ideal of constant flow, the setting can change quickly in the course of a single track... *Above Blue* argues that Melford has entered her prime as both a pianist and a composer." (Jon Andrews, *Down Beat*)

"*Above Blue* bursts with invention and a joy in musicmaking that's palpable." (*Billboard*)

"Myra Melford's second outing with her quintet *The Same River, Twice* is an impressive statement of both her stylistic range and her generosity as a bandleader. The pianist embraces the jazz avant-garde, but she also knows the value of a catchy tune." (Bill Meyer, *Amazon.com*)

**MYRA MELFORD EXTENDED ENSEMBLE, "Even the Sounds Shine"
(hatOLOGY, 1994, reissued 2003)**

The Myra Melford Extended Ensemble puts jazz roots into free flight and the music soars. ... This is one joyous, life-affirming album. (*Boston Phoenix*)

Even the Sounds Shine remains one of Myra Melford's most fully satisfying recordings. It's a quintet session from the midst of a 1994 tour, with the usual trio with Lindsay Horner and Reggie Nicholson expanded with Dave Douglas and Marty Ehrlich. The horns raise the energy level of Melford's playing substantially at the same time that they enrich her compositions. The title track is a brilliant recasting of bop and blues, while the extended "La Mesquita Suite" is well sustained, often haunting work." (Stuart Broomer, *Coda*)

"...it's the group's—and Melford's—ability to slip effortlessly between abstract and more formally structured music that impresses. Great album. Big talent." (Duncan Heining *Jazzwise*)

MYRA MELFORD TRIO, "Alive in the House of Saints" (hatOLOGY, 1993, reissued 2001)

"A double-disc reissue of the outstanding 1993 single disc, with four additional tracks that live up in every respect to the quality of the original release. Myra Melford's is a muscular, ringing attack that sounds as true as a sledgehammer hitting a rail peg. Hers also is a diaphanous delicacy that breathes deeply within the music and creates an atmosphere fruitful for meditation. Lindsey Horner (bass) and Reggie Nicholson (drums) are apposite accompanists and much more, providing strong alternate voices to create a positive dialogue." (AllAboutJazz.com)