



## Joe Lovano “On This Day” Nonet

Saturday, April 24, 2004, 8 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

Joe Lovano, *saxophones*  
Steve Slagle, *saxophones*  
Ralph Lalama, *saxophones*  
Gary Smulyan, *baritone saxophone*  
Barry Ries, *trumpet*  
Larry Farrell, *trombone*  
James Weidman, *piano*  
Dennis Irwin, *bass*  
Billy Drummond, *drums*

*This performance has been made possible, in part, by the Friends of Cal Performances.*

*Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,  
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FOR PROGRAM MAGAZINE

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

You might think by glancing over the list of accolades garnered by saxophonist/composer **Joe Lovano**, that this renowned musician has found a tried-and-true formula for success—and that he has. Unlike with lesser artists, who will take what seems to work for them and keep coming back with more of the same, the secret to Lovano's success is his fearless ability to always challenge and push the conceptual and thematic choices he makes in a quest for new modes of artistic expression and new takes on what defines the jazz idiom.

Spring of 2004 will find Lovano moving into waters he has not previously explored with his first all-ballads recording. *I'm All For You: Ballad Songbook* finds the ever-searching saxophonist in the company of long-time collaborators George Mraz (bass) and Paul Motian (drums). Rounding out the impeccable line-up is the legendary Hank Jones on piano. This rich program of emotionally resonant music is one of the highlights of Lovano's storied career. The stellar Mr. Jones brings his famous harmonic sensibility to an array of compositions that Lovano has chosen for their timeless beauty and melodic strength.

Last summer, Lovano released a dynamic live recording by his Grammy-winning Nonet (Blue Note). *On This Day at the Vanguard* features incendiary charts by Joe, Willie "Face" Smith, and Steve Slagle, and the hip improvisations of the ensemble. Some of Lovano's most swinging and accessible charts are featured on this album, which also shows off masterful improvisations from the acclaimed cast of jazz heavyweights.

One of the most anticipated jazz projects of the last year hit the streets in January of 2003—*Oh!* by ScoLoHoFo. The dynamic all-star co-op finds Joe Lovano in cahoots with John Scofield, Dave Holland, and Al Foster in a program of original compositions from each of the leaders' pens. This impressive line-up of some of the most acclaimed musicians of the past 25 years is a natural. They have all performed together in a variety of situations but never all at once until the formation of this group for a date at the Montreal Jazz Festival. Together, they create a new jazz alchemy out of the symbiotic relationship between four of the most distinctive improvisational voices in the jazz world.

As if that wasn't enough, Lovano has recently accepted a new position as artistic director at the acclaimed Caramoor Jazz Festival in New York. In addition, his self-released DVD/VHS instructional video, *Jazz Standards: Solo Interpretations & Expressions*, features an intimate recital by the master.

Joe Lovano was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1952, and began playing alto sax as a child. A prophetic early family photo shows the infant Joe, cradled in his mother's arms, holding a sax. His father, tenor saxophonist Tony "Big T" Lovano, schooled Joe not only in the basics but in dynamics and interpretation, and regularly exposed him to jazz artists traveling through the area, such as Sonny Stitt, James Moody, Dizzy Gillespie, Gene Ammons, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk. While still a teenager, Lovano immersed himself in the jam-session culture of Cleveland, where organ trios were common and Texas tenor throw-downs a rite of passage. In high school, he began to absorb the free jazz experiments of Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Jimmy Giuffrè, and was greatly affected by the interaction that occurred between the musicians.

Upon graduation from high school, Lovano attended the famed Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he met and began playing with such future collaborators as John Scofield, Bill Frisell, and Kenny Werner. He had been searching for a way to incorporate the fire and spirituality of late-period John Coltrane into more traditional settings. At Berklee, he discovered modal harmony: "My training was all be-bop, and suddenly there were these open forms with deceptive resolutions. That turned me on, the combination of that sound and what I came in there with. I knew what I wanted to work on after that." Joe was honored with the prestigious Distinguished Alumni Award from Berklee in 1994, and received an honorary doctorate in 1998. Berklee also named Joe the first Gary Burton Chair for Jazz Performance in 2001.

Joe's first professional job after Berklee was, not surprisingly (given his roots), with organist Lonnie Smith, which brought him to New York for his recording debut, followed by a stint with Brother Jack McDuff. This segued into a three-year tour with the Woody Herman Thundering Herd from 1976 to 1979, culminating in "The

40th Anniversary Concert” at Carnegie Hall, which also featured some of Joe’s heroes and fellow saxophonists Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Flip Phillips, Al Cohn, and Jimmy Giuffrè.

After leaving the Herman Herd, Joe settled in New York City, where he continues to live today. His early years there were filled with jam sessions and rent gigs, but eventually he joined the Mel Lewis Orchestra for its regular Monday night concert at the Village Vanguard, playing there from 1980 to 1992 and recording six albums with the Orchestra. In addition, he joined the Paul Motian Band in 1981, where he worked with John Scofield, Herbie Hancock, Elvin Jones, Charlie Haden, Carla Bley, Bobby Hutcherson, Billy Higgins, Dave Holland, Ed Blackwell, Michel Petrucciani, Lee Konitz, Abbey Lincoln, Tom Harrell, McCoy Tyner, Jim Hall, Bob Brookmeyer, and many more.

His first high-profile gig was with guitarist John Scofield’s quartet, with whom he recorded and toured for three years. Of Lovano’s playing, Scofield says, “He’s very sonically aware—he thinks about the effect different instruments and different personalities will have. He was perfect for what I was doing—his sense of swing and his tone reminded me of the older guys, in a really positive way.” Lovano soon gained further exposure and renown, particularly in Europe, through his work in the trailblazing Paul Motian Trio, which also featured a former Berklee classmate, guitarist Bill Frisell.

Lovano’s debut Blue Note release, *Landmarks* (Blue Note 96108), was released in 1991 and featured guitarist John Abercrombie. Joe’s first engagement as a leader (at the Village Vanguard) coincided with the release of that record. The critically acclaimed *From the Soul* (Blue Note 98636) followed with Michel Petrucciani, Dave Holland, and the legendary Ed Blackwell. Recently, readers of AllAboutJazz.com voted *From the Soul* Number 34 in their all-time Top 100 Jazz CDs poll. Joe has long experimented with different ensembles, which reflects his searching and dynamic musical personality. As much a composer as a player, Joe is constantly seeking new ways to express himself.

His third Blue Note album, *Universal Language* (Blue Note 99830), features the soprano voice of Judi Silvano, whose wordless vocals mesh beautifully in both ensemble and impro-

vised passages with Joe, as well as with trumpeter Tim Hagans and pianist Kenny Werner. His next album, the 1994 *Tenor Legacy* (Blue Note 27014), features tenor saxophonist Josh Redman, and received wide critical acclaim, culminating in a Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Small Group Recording.

Predictably unpredictable, Joe’s *Rush Hour* (Blue Note 29629), released in early 1995, reflects his restless searching and desire to expand his musical palette. It features his tenor saxophone with voice and string and woodwind ensembles arranged and conducted by the legendary Gunther Schuller, in compositions by Lovano, Schuller, Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman, Thelonious Monk, and Duke Ellington. Joe and Schuller subsequently collaborated on the score for a Showtime movie, *Face Down*, which starred Joe Montegna.

Joe Lovano ended 1996 with *Joe Lovano Quartets at the Village Vanguard* (Blue Note 29125), winning Jazz Album of the Year in the 1996 *Down Beat* Readers’ Poll. Recorded at two separate engagements at the historic Village Vanguard in New York City, the special set features Joe with Mulgrew Miller, Christian McBride, and Lewis Nash on one CD, and with Tom Harrell, Anthony Cox, and Billy Hart on the other. *Down Beat* magazine’s 5-star review says simply, “The Vanguard sessions are extraordinary.”

Joe began 1997 with two Grammy nominations for the *Village Vanguard* recording and the release of his anticipated *Joe Lovano Celebrating Sinatra* (Blue Note CDP 37718), with Joe’s tenor sax surrounded by string quartet, woodwind quintet, voice, and rhythm section in arrangements by Manny Albam. As Peter Watrous in *The New York Times* observed, “This is a perfectly balanced piece of work, quiet chamber jazz at its best, with Mr. Lovano’s odd phrasing, with its halts and velocity, taking the music somewhere new.”

Joe Lovano rolled into 1998 with another Grammy nomination, for the *Sinatra* recording, and the release of yet another completely different CD, *Flying Colors* (Blue Note CDP 56092), a duo album with the great Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. In a four-star review, the *Los Angeles Times* said, “Each piece reveals yet another perspective on the talent of two extraordinary

players, clearly inspired by the setting and each other, creating some of the finest jazz in recent memory.”

Joe followed *Flying Colors* with the fiery release *Trio Fascination: Edition One* (Blue Note CDP 33114), which features what is arguably the finest rhythm section in jazz, drummer Elvin Jones and bassist Dave Holland. In 1999, Lovano’s collaboration with fellow Blue Note recording artist alto saxophonist Greg Osby, *Friendly Fire* (Blue Note CDP 99125), garnered more critical acclaim. Featuring Joe’s touring rhythm section—Cameron Brown on bass and Idris Muhammad on drums, along with Greg and his frequent pianist Jason Moran—the music on this release is an exciting blend of Lovano’s passionate soulfulness and Osby’s angular precision.

Joe followed *Friendly Fire* with his busiest and most creative year yet. He jumped into the new millennium with the gorgeous *52nd Street Themes* (Blue Note CDP 96667). Recorded with a stellar cast of musicians, the charts penned by Joe and legendary Cleveland arranger Willie “Face” Smith are jazz classics recast for ensembles as large as nonet. The acclaimed session features compositions by some of the art form’s greatest composers. Winner of a Grammy Award for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album, *52nd Street Themes* can be found on many critics’ “Best of 2000” lists.

In 2001, Joe received “Jazz Artist of the Year” honors for the third time in both critics’ and readers’ polls in *Down Beat* magazine, spurred by his acclaimed return to the trio format on

*Flights of Fancy: Trio Fascination, Edition Two* (Blue Note CDP 27618). Here, Joe gathers four unique ensembles of some of his favorite collaborators for a distinctively varied take on the jazz trio. Joe, who is featured on not only a panoply of woodwinds but also drums, gongs, and percussion, is joined by trio mates Cameron Brown (bass) and Idris Muhammad (drums); Billy Drewes (soprano, alto flute, percussion) and Joey Baron (drums); Toots Thielemans (harmonica) and Kenny Werner (piano); and Mark Dresser (bass) and Dave Douglas (trumpet).

In his 2002 Blue Note release, *Viva Caruso* (Blue Note CDP 35986), Lovano explores the music of one of the greatest musical figures of all time. Featuring both an “opera house ensemble” (up to 12 pieces) and a “street band” (comprised of stellar improvisers such as Gil Goldstein, Ed Schuller, Billy Drewes, Joey Baron, and Judi Silvano), the album finds Lovano investigating many of the popular melodies made famous by the great Italian tenor. With arranger/orchestrator Byron Olson, Lovano utilizes a variety of settings to bring this project to fruition. “The idea was to try and interpret this music in a way that’s free and organic,” he says, “and to put myself into Caruso’s world.” *Viva Caruso* is a decidedly unique and forward-looking homage to one of the greatest of musical talents by one of today’s most acclaimed jazz artists. As the *Village Voice* proclaimed, “Move over Pavarotti, the great Italian tenor around today isn’t Luciano, but Lovano.”

For more information on Joe Lovano, please visit [www.bluenote.com](http://www.bluenote.com).