



## Kurt Elling

Saturday, May 28, 2005, 8 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

Featuring

**Laurence Hobgood Trio**

Laurence Hobgood, *piano*  
Rob Amster, *bass*  
Frank Parker, Jr., *drums*

*Songs for tonight's performance will be announced from the stage. The concert will be approximately 90 minutes in length, and performed without intermission.*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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**Kurt Elling** (*vocals*) knows that being a jazz singer in the truest sense requires mastery in a number of interrelated roles. For *Man In The Air*, Elling's sixth release for Blue Note records, the 35-year-old Chicagoan has focused our attention on his skill as a uniquely expressive lyricist. By "textualizing" instrumental compositions by modern masters like John Coltrane, Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays, Herbie Hancock and Joe Zawinul, Elling simultaneously reminds us of the ingenuity and beauty of the original versions and opens us to his own fresh vision.

A seven-time Grammy nominee, Elling has already earned a reputation as *the* contemporary writer of *vocalese*, the art that tailors poetry to the rhythms and melodies of modern instrumental solos. Elling is the natural heir to the legacy of Eddie Jefferson, King Pleasure, and Jon Hendricks. As early as his debut recording, *Close Your Eyes* (1995), his texts have assumed central focus, and at times have grown to epic proportions. Over time, Elling has ambitiously applied his literary work to the music of challenging improvisers such as Wayne Shorter, Dexter Gordon, and Freddie Hubbard. *Man In The Air* is the product of a mature and expanding artist.

By now, much has been written about Kurt Elling's transformation from graduate student at the University of Chicago's Divinity School to groundbreaking jazz vocalist. Although his lyrics often reflect his heavy philosophical training, they do not always speak directly to philosophical questions, and grow from organic inspiration.

Of course, the marriage of language and melody would fail if not for Elling's awesome command of rhythm, texture, phrasing, and dynamics. It is a skill-set honed over 30 years. Elling's rich baritone encompasses four octaves and grows more and more rich with the passage of time. On hearing *Man In The Air*, one realizes that only an expert singer could handle the complexities of jazz's modern masters with such technical precision. What's more, Elling's complicated narratives and psychological descriptions themselves demand extraordinary phrasing and articulation. Only a vocal artist could overcome such technical challenges while also communicating such emotional depth.

Kurt Elling has been called "an omniscient artist" (*The Guardian*, UK), "the thinking man's jazz singer" (*JazzTimes*), an "utterly creative genius" (*The Jazz Educators' Journal*), and "vital to

the evolving art of . . . jazz singing" (*The Chicago Tribune*). He has won the *DownBeat* Critics' Poll four times, the *JazzTimes* Reader's Poll three times, the Jazz Journalists' Association award for Best Male Vocalist twice, and the Prix Billie Holiday from the Academie du Jazz in Paris.

In 2002 Elling produced a vocal summit entitled "Four Brothers" at Chicago's Park West Theater, which also featured Jon Hendricks, Mark Murphy, and Kevin Mahogany. "Four Brothers" toured Europe in the summer of 2003 to broad acclaim, and plans are in the works for a US tour.

Always exploring new creative avenues, Elling has gone beyond jazz performance to write, direct and star in more broadly based literary and artistic events – most notably in works commissioned by Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater and The City of Chicago. He has remounted such events at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the Annenberg Center in Philadelphia, and at the Galway Festival in Ireland. *The Chicago Sun-Times* has written that, "Having risen as a jazz singer on the wings of modern poetry, including his own, (Elling) is in full thrall of art's interactive possibilities."

In addition to his work as an artist, Kurt Elling has been elected Vice Chair of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. The 17,000-member service organization annually produces The Grammy Awards. In addition, the Academy oversees ongoing philanthropic and educational endeavors, and has a music industry-oriented advocacy program based in Washington, DC. Elling is one of the youngest national leaders in the 50-year history of the Academy.

**Laurence Hobgood** (*piano*) began formal piano study at age 6 in the preparatory program of the Southern Methodist University School of Music in Dallas, Texas. As he entered his teens he had the opportunity, through his family's church, to discover blues music; it was not until moving to Illinois, however, that he encountered instruction in jazz. While attending Urbana High School he began private study, learning the rudiments of jazz theory. By the time he entered the University of Illinois School of Music, his attention had been captured by small ensemble jazz, although his continued classical study with Ian Hobson proved pivotal in his technical development. He enjoyed a three-year tenure in the No. 1 band led by John Garvey.

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Hobgood moved to Chicago in 1988. In 1990 he formed a quintet to perform his original work; it received critical acclaim from the *Chicago Reader's* Neil Tesser, describing Hobgood's compositions as "witty, driving, richly textured and highly original . . . It's what a jazz band is supposed to sound like."

In 1993 he began collaboration with vocalist Kurt Elling. In 1994 Hobgood produced, composed and arranged for, and played on, Elling's demo, released by Blue Note as *Close Your Eyes*, the first of Elling's Grammy-nominated albums. Since then the Laurence Hobgood Trio has performed with Elling in Europe, Scandinavia, South America, Japan, Australia, Canada, Israel, and the US, including two concerts at Carnegie Hall, multiple performances at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, appearances at major festivals like Newport, Spoleto (US), Mount Hood, Ravinia, and the Chicago Jazz Festival.

Hobgood was recognized by the *Chicago Tribune* as a 1995 Chicagoan of the Year in the Arts. In a feature story *Tribune* arts critic Howard Reich called Hobgood a "powerhouse, an imaginative improviser with a Herculean technique," and wrote "Hobgood addresses the instrument with a muscular power, a hard-driving sense of swing and a tonal imagination that instantly excite an audience."

In 1996 Hobgood formed a new trio, Union, with Wertico and Brian Torff (bassist for George Shearing, Marian Macpartland, Stéphane Grappelli). In the next three years they released two recordings on the Naim audiophile label, each of which won spots on both the *Chicago Tribune's* and *Sun-Times's* listings of the top 10 jazz recordings of their respective years (1997 and '99). Union also performed concerts at the Kennedy Center and Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater.

On May 1, 1999, Hobgood debuted an original work, *In Your Own Way Suite*, dedicated to Dave Brubeck, with the chamber orchestra Sinfonia da Camera, conducted by Ian Hobson. Hobgood was subsequently commissioned to compose original works for Chicago's millennium celebration and to arrange music for a New York Shakespeare Festival production of *Measure for Measure*. His ongoing collaboration with Elling has resulted in Grammy nominations for each of the singer's Blue Note releases.

In 2001 Hobgood received his own Grammy nomination for Best Instrumental Arrangement

Accompanying a Vocal Performance for his work on the singer's fifth record, *Flirting With Twilight*.

In 2002 Hobgood joined the faculty of the music conservatory of Chicago's Roosevelt University/Chicago College of the Performing Arts. Hobgood serves on the board of governors of the Chicago chapter of NARAS (the recording academy).

**Rob Amster** (*bass*) began playing electric bass while attending Barrington High School, where he quickly became a devotee of fusion jazz. At the time, Barrington, Illinois was home to a nationally recognized high school jazz program. "I was very fortunate that my band director (David Hans) turned me on to all the right stuff at a young age. I was checking out Dexter Gordon, 'Trane,' Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, 'P.C.,' all the hard swinging cats," says Rob.

Following high school, he spent time at Berklee College in Boston, and the University of Miami. At the age of 20 he was recruited from the college ranks to join the band of legendary drummer Buddy Rich. Rob played with the band until the drummer's passing. Afterward, he returned to Chicago to begin freelancing. Between 1987 and 1994 Rob performed with many artists, including Dizzy Gillespie, Joe Lovano, Paquito D'Rivera, Milt Jackson, and Jon Hendricks. He also began playing regularly with guitarist Fareed Haque's group, performing on two of his critically acclaimed recordings.

By 1994, Rob had begun playing and recording with Blue Note recording artist Kurt Elling. Music recorded at a series of demo sessions became the basis for Kurt's first release *Close Your Eyes*, which was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1995. He also began touring with Maynard Ferguson's band from 1994 through 1995, both in America and abroad. Between tours, Rob played with artists such as jazz guitar great Larry Coryell and vocalist Rebecca Paris. Since 1995, Rob has based himself in Chicago, while touring worldwide and recording with Kurt Elling. He performed on all three of Elling's Grammy-nominated recordings, and has played at many of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals.

In addition, he keeps busy at home with a variety of projects. He is the choice of tenor sax legend "Von" Freeman, and is a member of the "Ravinia Jazz Mentors," a group formed by the board of the prestigious Ravinia Festival in suburban Chicago.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Rob also plays sessions, freelance jazz gigs, gives clinics, and teaches, both privately and through his association with Ravinia.

**Frank Parker** (*drums*) joined the Kurt Elling Quartet in December 2000 and also performs with The Chicago Jazz Ensemble, rhythm and blues singer Jerry Butler, the jazz-funk-dance-based group Seance Divine, and as a leader with his own ensembles. He is the drummer for several dance ensembles, the Cerqua-Rivera Art Experience, and the Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, and freelances with a number of performing ensembles and recording artists.

He attended Gwendolyn Brooks Jr. High School in Harvey, Illinois, and Thornridge High School in Dolton, Illinois, under the direction of John Weber and David Eanes, respectively. After completing high school, Frank received a music scholarship to attend Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois. Under the direction of Dale Hopper, he performed with the top jazz ensemble at the university, where he recorded two CDs with

the band: *Jazz At The Crossroads* (1992), which was nominated for a Grammy award, and *The Third Degree* (1994).

After graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in music business, Frank returned to the Chicago music scene in 1995 and began working with a number of bands and quickly became recognized for his playing feel and versatility in different genres such as jazz, funk, blues, rock, dance, hip-hop, fusion, samba, etc. He continues to perform in the Chicago area and has toured the US, Italy, Europe, Canada, South America, and Asia. He has recorded with Ryan Cohan, Orbert Davis, The Chicago Jazz Ensemble, Bobbi Wilsyn, Joan Callaso/Larry Hanks, and Charles Matthews.

Frank also composes and performs his own compositions in a number of music styles. He is currently the drum set and percussion instructor at Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois, where he conducts private sessions, and he continues to conduct his own drum set and percussion clinics at various schools and universities nationally and internationally.

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