

Gary Bartz

Visiting Professor of Jazz Saxophone

Multi-Grammy Award-winning Gary Bartz is Visiting Professor of Jazz Saxophone in the jazz studies program at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. As with almost all of the Conservatory's legendary jazz educators, Bartz continues to perform on tour and record. He is an alto and soprano saxophonist, clarinetist, singer, and actor.

A native of Baltimore, Bartz grew up in a family of nightclub owners. He ventured to New York City in 1958 to attend the Juilliard School. It was an exciting time to live and perform in the city, which was headlining the likes of Thelonius Monk, Ornette Coleman, and Miles Davis, among scores of talented musicians. Bartz says he often snuck into the famed Birdland club, named after Charlie Parker, to help carry in the musicians' instruments when he was broke. In the 1960s, Bartz began performing throughout New York City with the Max Roach/Abbey Lincoln Group and quickly earned the reputation of being the next great alto saxophonist since Cannonball Adderley. He also joined Charles Mingus' Workshop and began practicing regularly with Eric Dolphy. Through his parents' connections (they owned the North End Lounge in Baltimore and hired scores of groups and musicians), Bartz joined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in 1965 and made his recording debut on the bandleader's album, *Soulfinger*. He also began working with McCoy Tyner—a relationship that has lasted for decades—who strongly influenced him because of Tyner's connection with John Coltrane.

In 1970, Miles Davis called Bartz to perform with him at the historic Isle of Wight Festival. Bartz formed his own group, Ntu Troop (*Ntu* is the Bantu word for "unity"), which blended soul, funk, African folk music, hard bop, and avant-garde jazz. They released such important albums as *I've Known Rivers and Other Bodies* (recently re-issued), based on the poetry of Langston Hughes, and *Music Is My Sanctuary, Love Affair, Another Earth, and Home*.

In the late 1980s, Bartz resumed recording other albums, and, in 1995, released *The Red and Orange Poems*, a musical mystery "novel." He also won a Grammy Award that year for playing on McCoy Tyner's album *Illuminations*.

On his own OYO label, Bartz has released *Live at the Jazz Standard, Volumes 1 and 2*, and *Soprano Stories*, performing soprano saxophone in a studio quartet setting. Bartz has made more than 40 solo recordings and has performed as a guest artist on more than 200 recordings. He continues to perform with Tyner in such cities as Tokyo and Los Angeles.

In 2007, Bartz collaborated with other Oberlin jazz studies faculty members on the jazz recording *Beauty Surrounds Us*, which was produced for the Oberlin Conservatory's new music label, Oberlin Music. One of Bartz's compositions, *GM3*, can be heard on the recording.

In the January 2008 edition of *Down Beat*, Bartz was spotlighted in the "Blindfold Test" section, in which musicians are asked to discuss, identify, and rate the music and musicians who perform on recordings selected by the editors.