



Mellon Foundation and Jazz Foundation of America Announce 2026 Cohort of Jazz Legacies Fellows

*Twelve Jazz Luminaries Receive \$100,000 Unrestricted Awards
Honoring Lifetime Achievement*

2026 Fellows Include Dee Alexander, Kenny Barron, Gary Bartz, William Cepeda, Marilyn Crispell, Donald Harrison, Oliver Lake, Benny Maupin, Charles McPherson, Archie Shepp, Mary Stallings, and Buster Williams

February 17, 2026 (NEW YORK, NY) - The Mellon Foundation and the Jazz Foundation of America (JFA) today announced the second cohort of **Jazz Legacies Fellows**, honoring twelve legendary artists whose work has shaped and continues to impact the evolution of jazz in the United States and abroad. The 2026 fellows represent towering achievement across generations and styles, spanning avant-garde and free jazz to hard bop, fusion and vocal traditions. Collectively, they embody more than six decades of artistic excellence across alto saxophone, bass, flute, piano, trombone, vocals, and other reed instruments.

Founded as the centerpiece of [Mellon's \\$35 million, multifaceted national initiative](#) to support the cultural preservation of jazz, the Jazz Legacies Fellowship reflects the Foundation's long-term commitment to championing the artists who have played a pivotal role in shaping the art form and strengthening the broader jazz ecosystem.

Established in 2025 through a partnership funded by Mellon and implemented by JFA, the Jazz Legacies Fellowship was created to celebrate seasoned jazz musicians while addressing the economic precarity that too often accompanies a lifetime of creative contribution. Each fellow receives a \$100,000 unrestricted award, along with access to tailored professional and personal resources, including performance and master class opportunities, production support, and legal and financial counsel, as needed.

Now in its second cycle, the fellowship continues to honor artists not only for their historical impact, but for their ongoing creative vitality and leadership. The 2026 fellows were selected by a distinguished panel of artists, scholars, and jazz professionals including: **James Carter, Kris Davis, Kate Dumbleton, Stefon Harris, Willie Jones III, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Samora Pinderhughes, Rio Saikari, Magdelys Savigne, and Amina Scott.**

The 2026 Jazz Legacies Fellows are:

- **Dee Alexander, 70, Vocals (Chicago, IL)**

Community cornerstone and defining voice of Chicago jazz, from classic to the avant-garde

- **Kenny Barron, 82, Piano (Brooklyn, NY)**

Paragon of keyboard elegance who framed solos of past legends and nurtured voices of future stars

- **Gary Bartz, 85, Saxophone (Oakland, CA)**

Era-spanning saxophone guru and innovator of socially conscious musical concepts

- **William Cepeda, 65, Trombone (Loiza, PR)**

World-renowned pioneer of "Afro-Rican jazz" fusing folkloric roots and global influences

- **Marilyn Crispell, 78, Piano (Woodstock, NY)**

Avant-garde powerhouse who combines elemental force with tender lyricism

- **Donald Harrison, 65, Saxophone (New Orleans, LA)**

Big Chief and culture bearer of New Orleans jazz, and architect of "Nouveau Swing"

- **Oliver Lake, 83, Alto Saxophone and Flute (Montclair, NJ)**

Black Artists Group and World Saxophone Quartet co-founder, and interdisciplinary trailblazer

- **Bennie Maupin, 84, Multi-Reeds (Los Angeles, CA)**

Multi-reed marvel who catalyzed cutting-edge jazz hybrids in iconic bands of his day

- **Charles McPherson, 85, Saxophone (San Diego, CA)**

Bebop torchbearer with a direct connection to the bedrock of modern jazz

- **Archie Shepp, 88, Saxophone (Amherst, MA)**

"Fire Music" forebear and academic pioneer who fearlessly chronicled the Black experience

- **Mary Stallings, 86, Vocals (San Francisco, CA)**

Preeminent jazz storyteller who recaptured her early glory and then surpassed it

- **Buster Williams, 83, Bass (Camden, NJ)**

Universally lauded giant of his instrument and lifelong spiritual seeker

"The Jazz Legacies Fellowship is a rare and meaningful investment in the artists who have carried this music forward for decades," **said acclaimed pianist, composer, and Jazz Legacies selection committee member, Kris Davis.** "It recognizes lifetime achievement while affirming that these musicians' voices remain essential to the future of jazz."

"Receiving a Jazz Legacies Fellowship award brings light at this stage of the road, on my musical journey," **said celebrated cellist and 2025 Jazz Legacies fellow, Akua Dixon.** "Creative Artists tread a path that only they can see. Being acknowledged for the difficult path that I've travelled and having assistance to continue creating on my own terms has been truly fulfilling."

Designed in close collaboration with celebrated musician advisors **Terri Lyne Carrington, Jason Moran, Arturo O’Farrill, esperanza spalding**, and presenter **Sunny Sumter**, the Jazz Legacies Fellowship aims to foster intergenerational dialogue, honor lifelong artistic contributions, and ensure the integrity of jazz’s multivocal historical record.

“Illuminating the power and possibilities of jazz throughout their many years as extraordinary artists, these 12 new fellows continue to inspire us with their ever-expanding visions and creative innovation,” **said Elizabeth Alexander, president of the Mellon Foundation**. “As we honor them and their leadership, we are proud to reaffirm our commitment to the American performing arts, to continue expanding robust, holistic support for American artists, and to join in lifting up jazz itself – a fundamentally American art form that celebrates and expresses freedom.”

“On a fundamental level, the fellowship provides financial support and addresses the countless workaday challenges that bedevil great artists who operate without a safety net,” **said Joe Petrucelli, Executive Director of the Jazz Foundation of America**. “But more than gain and reward, this program enshrines the profound esteem and affection in which the recipients are held in the jazz community. This makes the honor deeply meaningful not only for the individual fellows but everyone who cares about the traditions and legacies of this transcendent music.”

“Jazz is one of the most significant cultural contributions of the United States, born from Black creative innovation and collective storytelling. **The Jazz Legacies Fellowship** honors artists who have shaped this music across generations and reminds us that legacy isn’t behind us, it is living, and these musicians continue to carry it forward,” **says Veronika Châtelain, JFA’s Program Director of the Jazz Legacies Fellowship**.

To learn more about the Jazz Legacies Fellows and their work please visit: jazzfoundation.org/jazz-legacies-fellowship/. To stay informed of additional funding for Mellon’s jazz initiative, subscribe to the Mellon Foundation newsletter at mellon.org/newsletter.

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