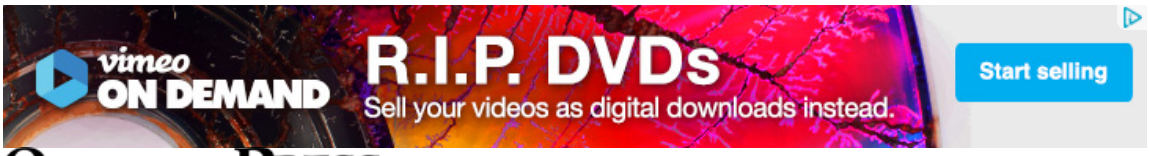

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Sound Check: Jazz great Kenny Barron driven by others playing his work

Jazz pianist Kenny Barron performs with Michigan State University Jazz Students in both East Lansing and Detroit this weekend. Photo by Eddie Michel Azoulay

By Gary Graff, The Oakland Press

Posted: 02/10/16, 2:15 PM EST | Updated: 1 week, 1 day ago

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if you go

• Kenny Barron with the MSU Jazz Octects

• 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 12, at MSU College of Music's Cook Recital Hall, 313 W. Circle Drive, East Lansing.

• Tickets: $10 adults, $8 seniors, free for students.

• Visit music.msu.edu for details.

• Also, 7 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 14, at Carr Center, 311 E. Grand River Ave., Detroit.

• Tickets $25 general, $10 for students.

• Call 313-965-8430 or visit thecarrcenter.org.

Turning over one's music to groups of students may be a brave move for an established artist in any genre — but not for veteran jazz pianist Kenny Barron.

Barron, 72, will wrap up his weeklong tenure as an Artist In Residence at Michigan State University's College of Music with three performances of his music by student octets. And he's far more excited than apprehensive.

"It's important because it helps to perpetuate the music, No. 1, and it exposes a lot of people who otherwise wouldn't be exposed to the music," Barron says by phone from East Lansing. "What keeps me going is being able to hear your music played well. And I enjoy playing with younger people, too. There's an energy level that's different.

"When you play with people my age or around my age, there's another thing that happens, a certain type of finesse and polish that young people don't have. There's a trade-off, energy and polish. Both are great things to have."

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Barron, meanwhile, continues to show his own kind of energy as he maintains his career. An NEA Jazz Master who's been dubbed "the most lyrical piano player of our time" by Jazz Weekly, he played on two Grammy Award-nominated recordings during the past year, for vocalist Karrin Allyson and for saxophonist Jimmy Greene (whose "Beautiful Life" is on Detroit's Mack Avenue label).

Meanwhile, Barron will release his own new album, "Book of Intuition," on March 4. It features his current trio, including bassist Kiyshi Kitagawa and drummer Johnathan Blake, and mixes new material with fresh renditions of some of Barron's older favorites.

"I've had this trio together for a while. We've just never made a record," Barron says. "We recorded about 20 songs in two days; obviously not all of them will be on there, but it was great fun. And some of the older material has been in the vault over the years; we wrote them and evolved them and never played them again. So it's nice to pull those out after so many years and see what this (trio) can do.

"And we've actually got enough material for another CD, so we'll see what happens."

About the Author

Gary Graff is a longtime Detroit-area music critic and rock and roll reporter. Reach the author at gary.graff@oakpress.com or follow Gary on Twitter: @GraffonMusic.

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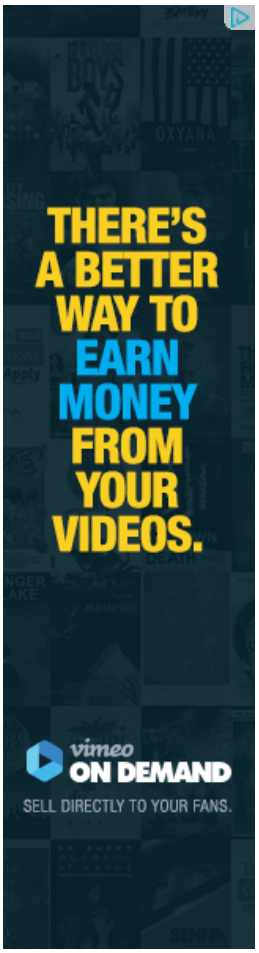
- 

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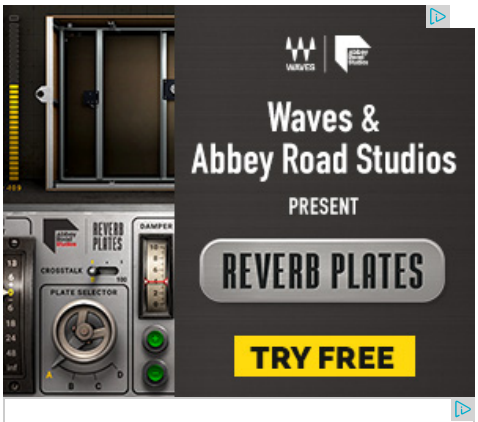

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