

Fred Hersch – piano, composition

A select member of jazz's piano pantheon, Fred Hersch is a pervasively influential creative force who has shaped the music's course over more than three decades as an improviser, composer, educator, bandleader, collaborator and recording artist.

He has been proclaimed "the most arrestingly innovative pianist in jazz over the last decade" by *Vanity Fair*, "an elegant force of musical invention" by *The L.A. Times*, and "a living legend" by *The New Yorker*.

A fifteen-time Grammy nominee, Hersch has regularly garnered jazz's most prestigious awards, including recent distinctions as a 2016 Doris Duke Artist, 2016 and 2018 Jazz Pianist of the Year from the Jazz Journalists Association, and the 2017 Prix in Honorem Jazz from L'Académie Charles Cros for the totality of his career.

If good things happen slowly, as the title of Hersch's 2017 memoir attests, such good fortune has nonetheless accrued to the point where the pianist can enjoy the accolades and adulation of peers, critics and audiences alike. He has long set the standard for expressive interpretation and inventive creativity in a stunning variety of settings, whether through his exquisite solo performances, as the leader of one of jazz's era-defining trios, or in eloquent dialogue with his deeply attuned duo partners.

With more than three-dozen albums to his credit as a leader or co-leader, Hersch consistently receives lavish critical praise and numerous international awards for each highly anticipated new release. His latest album with his long-standing trio, 2018's *Live In Europe* (Palmetto), documents one remarkable evening in Brussels and has been hailed as its best to date – considerable praise for an ensemble that consistently plays at such a staggeringly high level.

The trio, in which Hersch has been joined by bassist John Hébert and drummer Eric McPherson for the last decade, was voted the #2 Jazz Group in the 2018 *DownBeat* Critics Poll, recognizing its unique ability to traverse a wide range of styles and approaches while maintaining profound depths of emotion and the exhilarating spark of invention. Its previous two Palmetto releases, 2016's *Sunday Night at the Vanguard* and 2014's *Floating*, were both nominated for Grammy Awards in the categories of Best Jazz Solo and Best Jazz Album.

Also in 2014, Hersch garnered his sixth Grammy nomination for his solo on "Duet" from *Free Flying*, a duo album with guitarist Julian Lage that received a rare 5-star rating from *DownBeat*. An exceptionally responsive and intuitive collaborator, Hersch has engaged in duo partnerships with a number of spirited artists, including Anat Cohen, Bill Frisell, Esperanza Spalding, Julian Lage and Miguel Zenon; and vocalists Kurt Elling, Kate McGarry and Renée Fleming.

As versatile and exploratory as his trio and duo excursions can be, nowhere is the boundless range and emotional diversity of Hersch's artistry as evident as in his breathtaking solo performances. *JazzTimes* has hailed his unaccompanied playing as "a complete, self-sufficient, uniquely pure art form," while *All About Jazz* has remarked that "when it comes to the art of solo piano in jazz, there are two classes of performers: Fred Hersch and everybody else."

In 2006, Hersch became the first artist in the 75-year history of New York's legendary Village Vanguard to play a weeklong engagement as a solo pianist. His second solo run there was documented on the Grammy-nominated *Alone at the Vanguard*, one of five recordings he's made at the iconic New York City club. His 2017 Palmetto album *Open Book* was, as the title implies, his most revealing and intimate solo outing, and was nominated for two 2018 Grammy Awards.

The album's release coincided with the publication of his acclaimed memoir, *Good Things Happen Slowly* (Crown Archetype Books/Random House). The book compellingly reveals the story of his life in music along with a frank recounting of his struggles and triumphs as the first openly gay, HIV-positive jazz musician. It was featured in the *Sunday New York Times* and on NPR's "Fresh Air," named one of 2017's Five Best Memoirs by the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, and acclaimed as 2018's Book on Jazz of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association. His story has also been told via the feature documentary *The Ballad of Fred Hersch*, which premiered to a sold-out house at the prestigious Full Frame Film Festival in March 2016 and is now streaming on Vimeo.

While widely renowned for his playing, Hersch has earned similar distinction with his writing, garnering a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition among other awards. The same year he created *Leaves of Grass*, a large-scale setting of Walt Whitman's poetry for two voices (Kurt Elling and Kate McGarry) and an instrumental octet. *Leaves of Grass* was selected to open the 2017 Jazz at Lincoln Center season at the Appel Room.

Hersch's visionary 2010 theatrical project, *My Coma Dreams*, prompted the New York Times Sunday Magazine to describe the composer as "singular among the trailblazers of their art, a largely unsung innovator of this borderless, individualistic jazz—a jazz for the 21st century." Based on visions Hersch experienced during a two-month coma in 2008, the evening-length multimedia collaboration with writer/director Herschel Garfein for 11 instrumentalists and an actor/singer was captured on video at Columbia University and released by Palmetto on a 2014 DVD.

For two decades Hersch has been a passionate spokesman and fund-raiser for AIDS services and education agencies. He has produced and performed on four benefit recordings and in numerous concerts for charities including Classical Action: Performing Arts Against AIDS and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. To date, his efforts have raised more than \$300,000. He has also been a keynote speaker and performer at international medical conferences in the U.S. and Europe.

A committed educator, Hersch has taught at New England Conservatory, The Juilliard School, The New School and The Manhattan School of Music. He is currently a Visiting Artist at Rutgers University. He holds honorary doctorate degrees from Grinnell College and Northern Kentucky University. Hersch's influence has been widely felt on a new generation of jazz pianists, from former students Brad Mehldau and Ethan Iverson to his colleague Jason Moran, who has said, "Fred at the piano is like LeBron James on the basketball court. He's perfection."