

What I Love About...

Chris Potter

By Austin Vickrey

Chris Potter Overview

- Born January 1st, 1971, Chicago, IL (49 years old)
- His family moved to Columbia, SC, when he was 3 years old and where he spent most of his formative years.
- Started on piano and guitar before starting on the alto saxophone at the age of 10. He played his first gig at 13.
- 1989 - At the age of 18, Chris moved to NYC and studied at the New School and Manhattan School of Music and began immersing himself into the New York jazz scene. He still lives in New York today.
- Became known in the scene after joining Red Rodney (Red played alongside Charlie Parker as a young man). Potter was considered a prodigy and through the 90's gained bandstand experience by playing with many jazz greats as a sideman and as a bandleader, composer, and arranger.

Chris Potter Overview

- Potter's main influences on the saxophone: Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Sonny Rollins, and other tenor giants, though he was inspired to start on saxophone after hearing Paul Desmond and Johnny Hodges
- His experience through the 90's includes appearances and recordings with: Red Rodney, Marian McPartland, Paul Motian, Mingus Big Band, John Scofield, Dave Holland, Jack DeJonette, Steely Dan, and many others. At the same time, he was recording his own albums and touring as a band leader.

Chris Potter - Impact on me as a musician

- When I first heard of Chris Potter, I was in college and I wasn't all that into him. I heard him on a recording with Red Rodney and thought, "Oh, just another Charlie Parker clone."
- It wasn't until I heard Potter live that I was completely blown away. I heard him at UC Blue Ash on his "Underground" tour. After that, I went back and revisited as much of him as I could.

Chris Potter - What grabs me about his music

- What DOESN'T grab me about his music?! I became obsessed with listening to him ever since I heard him live.
- His sound. There is an ethereal quality to it. And what I love is that his sound continues to develop with each new album I hear.
- His approach. He seems to be free to play anything and everything that is "possible."
- His technique and virtuosity. In my opinion, he's probably one of the most accomplished saxophonists that has ever played the instrument (next to Bird, Sonny Rollins, and Brecker).
- His melodies and compositions. Always interesting, exciting, moving, and challenging including everything from polyrhythmic ideas to complex time signatures and reharmonizing simple melodies and songs.

Chris Potter - Recordings

- Red Rodney - “Then and Now” (1992) - Potter is 22 years old on this recording
 - “Confirmation” - <https://youtu.be/-I8wWND3ARY>
 - Bird influence is clear but also you can hear how many “chances” he takes in his improvisation
- “Presenting Chris Potter” - (1993) - Debut album as a leader
 - “Juggernaut” - <https://youtu.be/syXsULemM-c>
- Dave Holland - “Prime Directive” (1999)
 - “Looking Up” Live recording from 2002

Chris Potter - Recordings

- Nnenna Freelon - “Button Up Your Overcoat” from “Better Than Anything: The Quintessential Nnenna Freelon” (2000)
 - https://youtu.be/avOyPAT_obk?t=150
- “Gratitude” (2001) - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXIq4LVUyCx7VeJL6PNVsEBUmbykUUeDD>
- “Traveling Mercies” (2002) - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXIq4LVUyCx6O2N2jbSwbeQYaRf1WxZnB>

Chris Potter - Recordings

- “Underground” (2006) - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_INRgANPyDFb714kCRioBEb9Isff8pD0Sk
 - Next Best Western, Morning Bell (Radiohead), Yesterday (Beatles), The Wheel
- “Follow The Red Line: Live at the Village Vanguard” (2007) - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVqGtvvklMfSYNHECP_xqhiWA4Li0gSJv
 - Probably my favorite Chris Potter album so far
 - Every track is phenomenal
- “Ultrahang” - 2009 - Full album - <https://youtu.be/iugqQ2x-MAA>
 - Live at the Jazz Open Stuttgart - https://youtu.be/2xLG9I_cpuk

Chris Potter - Recordings

- “Circuits” (2019) - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWfB7VeEXCukeWCWJaXvQcT8XK_N8uO4G
 - Live at A Vaulx Jazz (Lyon) - <https://youtu.be/AluJK3Bf-As>
- “There is a Tide” - (2020) - Recording during quarantine and Chris plays all the instruments: piano, keyboards, electric and acoustic guitars, bass guitar, drums, clarinet, bass clarinet, flute, alto flute, percussion, samples, and saxophones.
 - “Rising Over You” - <https://youtu.be/XG-evfyiTEM>

Chris Potter - The Take Away

- Chris Potter is one of the most incredible, virtuosic, and progressive saxophone players of the 20th and 21st century. He is my favorite currently living saxophonist.
- He's rooted in the history of jazz saxophone but also has been a champion of new and exciting approaches to music as a composer, arranger, and band leader.
- Support Chris Potter by visiting his website, buying albums and supporting his projects.
 - www.chrispottermusic.com