

ANDREW RATHBUN

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FULL BIO

Toronto native Andrew Rathbun is widely esteemed as one of the most creative and accomplished saxophonists, composers and bandleaders of his generation. On tenor and soprano saxophones he has achieved a rare depth of lyricism, authoritative swing and compositional intelligence. Recording steadily as a leader since the late 1990s, he has documented his stirring original music with an array of extraordinary lineups, featuring the talents of such greats as Kenny Wheeler, Billy Hart, George Garzone, Phil Markowitz and Bill Stewart. "Rathbun's lines dance and glide," writes David Whiteis of *JazzTimes*, "reflecting both childlike wonder and well-honed artistry."

Rooted in the fiery improvisatory legacy of post-bop jazz, Rathbun's music is also deeply informed by classical composition. His works include song cycles, suites, and chamber and orchestral pieces for a wide range of ensembles. His 2005 duo release with pianist George Colligan, *Renderings*, features adaptations of Maurice Ravel and Federico Mompou, as well as an original seven-movement "Suite for Soprano Saxophone and Piano" inspired by the great Wayne Shorter. His 2010 release *The Idea of North*, inspired by the radio documentaries of Glenn Gould, includes a sextet arrangement of Christoph Glück's "Minuet and Dance of the Blessed Spirits."

Rathbun has also written big band commissions for the Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, the Metropole Orkest and other ensembles, and performed and composed commercial music for roughly 10 years as well.

Another of Rathbun's inspirations is poetry: his 1998 recording *Jade* set to music the verse of Cathy Song, while his 2000 follow-up *True Stories* focused on the work of fellow Canadian Margaret Atwood. On both these recordings, acclaimed Brazilian vocalist Luciana Souza captured the imagery and deep emotion of the poems while meeting every technical challenge posed by Rathbun's involved orchestrations. Trumpeter Taylor Haskins played a major role on these early releases, not to mention Rathbun's debut, *Scatter Some Stones*; he would later appear on *Affairs of*

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State, The Idea of North and two tracks from *Numbers & Letters*, Rathbun's exploratory 2014 quartet session.

Rathbun's 2002 release *Sculptures* (co-produced by Haskins) found him leading a quintet with trumpet legend and Toronto native Kenny Wheeler. *JazzTimes* declared of *Sculptures*: "[The music] cloaks subtle avant-garde proclivities in soft light and open air." After the album release, Rathbun collaborated with Wheeler in a live large-ensemble setting at Birdland in New York, performing classic Wheeler compositions as well as new Rathbun works including the "Power Politics Suite." After Wheeler's death in 2014 at age 84, Rathbun led his own large ensemble at the Jazz Gallery for a performance in the trumpeter's honor.

The "Power Politics Suite" is but one example of Rathbun's interest in social and political change, a theme running throughout his 2007 quintet session *Affairs of State*, released as the Bush years were coming to a close. *Where We Are Now* (2009), Rathbun's quintet session with Billy Hart on drums, had a more implied political thrust, as Taylor Haskins wrote in his liner notes (the release date came just weeks before the inauguration of Barack Obama). *Shadow Forms*, from 2006, was more open-ended in its meanings, sparser in instrumentation — Rathbun played tenor, soprano, clarinet and even keyboard in a bracingly open trio setting, with mentor George Garzone adding raw and brilliant tenor sax on five of the 12 tracks. Kenny Wheeler's "Onmo" closed the album in rousing form.

Fellow saxophonist and Torontonion Pat LaBarbera produced *Days Before and After* (2004), Rathbun's co-led session with drummer and Edmonton native Owen Howard. The "outstanding set" (allaboutjazz.com) featured original music driven by the unorthodox two-guitar team of Ben Monder and Geoff Young.

Rathbun earned a Masters in Performance from Boston's New England Conservatory, where he studied with George Garzone, Jimmy Giuffre and George Russell. After moving to Brooklyn in 1997 he became a fixture on the New York jazz scene, helping to shape the sound of the music in the new millennium as he earned a

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Doctorate in Jazz Arts from Manhattan School of Music. He has secured recognition and support from the Ontario Council for the Arts, the Canada Council and the American Music Center. He has also served as a fellow at the Aspen Music Festival and an artist at the Banff Center for the Arts.

Following teaching stints at the University of Maine, Kingsborough College and the Amadeus Conservatory in northern Westchester County, New York, Rathbun took a position in 2012 as Professor of Saxophone and Jazz Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, where he now lives with his family. He continues to perform in New York and internationally. He is also a member of the Western Jazz Quartet, WMU's resident faculty band, featuring fellow professors Jeremy Siskind (piano), Tom Knific (bass) and Keith Hall (drums). The quartet's latest release is *Free Fall* (2014).

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SHORT BIO

Saxophonist, composer, bandleader and Toronto native Andrew Rathbun has achieved a rare depth of lyricism, authoritative swing and compositional intelligence in nearly 20 years as a recording artist. His work is rooted in modern jazz but also deeply informed by classical composition — his recordings have included adaptations of Ravel, Mompou and Glück, among others. He has written big band commissions for the Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, the Metropole Orkest and other ensembles, and performed and composed commercial music for roughly 10 years as well.

Another of Rathbun's inspirations is poetry: his recordings *Jade* and *True Stories* set to music the verse of Cathy Song and Margaret Atwood, respectively (both albums featured acclaimed Brazilian vocalist Luciana Souza). His 2002 release *Sculptures* featured trumpet legend and Toronto native Kenny Wheeler in a set that "cloak[s] subtle avant-garde proclivities in soft light and open air" (*JazzTimes*).

Rathbun has also tackled political subjects with his large-ensemble work "Power Politics Suite" and his 2007 quintet session *Affairs of State*. His other recordings of note are *Renderings* (duo with pianist George Colligan), *Days Before and After* (co-led with drummer Owen Howard), *Shadow Forms* (featuring George Garzone), *Where We Are Now* (featuring Billy Hart), *The Idea of North* and *Numbers & Letters*.

Rathbun earned a Masters in Performance from Boston's New England Conservatory, where he studied with George Garzone, Jimmy Giuffre and George Russell. He became a fixture on the New York jazz scene during his years in Brooklyn, helping to shape the sound of the music in the new millennium as he earned a Doctorate in Jazz Arts from Manhattan School of Music. He is currently Professor of Saxophone and Jazz Studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, where he lives with his family. He continues to perform in New York and internationally.

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PRESS QUOTES

An industrious saxophonist and imaginative composer-arranger.

– The New York Times

A crafty saxophonist and composer whose ambitious work over the past decade has eluded the wider recognition it deserves.

– The New Yorker

Toronto native Andrew Rathbun is one of the most thoughtful and curious saxophonists to emerge in New York over the past decade.

– The Chicago Reader

The Canadian saxophonist/composer is a gifted performer who writes challenging and complex pieces.

– The Irish Times

Andrew Rathbun is an artist who takes chances with his recordings. You don't hear any paint-by-the-numbers jazz discs from him.

– All About Jazz