



Mike Downes

mike@mikedownes.com • www.mikedownes.com

Bio

Multiple JUNO award winner Mike Downes has been a prominent fixture both within the Canadian music scene and abroad, praised for his limitless versatility, seemingly effortless technique and uniquely melodic approach to the bass. Mike is not only an award-winning jazz bassist, but is recognized as a complete musician, equally masterful as a composer, arranger and educator.

Mike has performed worldwide for over 4 decades with virtually all of Canada's top jazz musicians, including Officer of the Order of Canada Molly Johnson (as musical director), PJ Perry, Lorne Lofsky, Don Thompson, Kirk MacDonald, Robi Botos and Pat LaBarbera. He has performed with international artists Pat Metheny, Chris Potter, Michael Brecker, John Abercrombie, Peter Erskine, Kenny Wheeler, John Taylor, Dave Liebman and many others. Mike's extensive and award-winning discography includes 7 albums as a leader (with his 8th to be released in March 2024), over 70 albums as a side musician and even more as a composer, arranger and producer.

Mike began playing bass at the age of eight, encouraged by his bass-playing father. He also studied trombone and piano and was quickly recognized as an upcoming talent. He began performing as a teenager in Winnipeg, Canada, playing in diverse settings from rock bands to big bands and from corporate functions to television and radio shows. After being named "Jazz Musician of the Year" in Silver Heights Collegiate, a high school reputed for its music program, he was offered a full scholarship to study bass and trombone at St. F. X. University in Nova Scotia. He then completed a Bachelor of Music degree at McGill University in Montreal. Already balancing a professional career with his studies, he was awarded a Canada Council Grant to study with bassists Dave Holland and John Clayton shortly after graduating. Mike moved to Toronto in 1990, and later completed a Masters' degree in Music Composition at York University.

In 1994 Mike formed the Mike Downes Quartet, featuring saxophonist Phil Dwyer, pianist Dave Restivo and drummer Ted Warren. That group performed regularly and in 1995 recorded Mike's first album as a leader, entitled **Forces**. The same group recorded his second album **Then** while on a cross-Canada tour. In 2004 Mike released **The Winds of Change**, followed by **Ripple Effect**, featuring pianist Robi Botos and drummer Ethan Ardelli. *Ripple Effect* won the 2014 JUNO Award for Traditional Jazz Album of the Year. Following that Mike ventured into large-ensemble writing and released **In the Current** featuring an 11-piece chamber jazz group. Mike's recording **Root Structure**, featuring his quartet with celebrated musicians Robi Botos, Ted Quinlan and Larnell Lewis won Jazz Album of the Year: Solo at the 2018 JUNO Awards.

In 2022, Mike embarked on an ambitious solo bass project, releasing his album **Mind Mirrors**. Other recent projects have included writing and performing arrangements for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra featuring Molly Johnson, composing, arranging, performing and co-producing

Billy Newton Davis's upcoming album and performing shows in Europe, Canada and the US. In 2024, Mike will release his newest recording ***The Way In***, featuring longtime collaborators Robi Botos (piano and keyboards) and Ted Quinlan (electric and acoustic guitars), along with guest percussionists Joaquin Nunez Hidalgo and Davide Di Renzo on several of the tracks. The album sees Mike exploring the compositional and orchestration aesthetics of large ensemble writing distilled down to a trio format in which the nuances are front and centre. The drummer-less group, inspired by the early Ahmad Jamal Trio (*Chamber Music of the New Jazz*), the Oscar Peterson Trio with Ray Brown and Herb Ellis and others highlights a chamber music perspective while showcasing the improvisational brilliance of each musician.

Helping to mentor and inspire young musicians has been an important part of Mike's career. He is the author of *The Jazz Bass Line Book*, receiving world-wide acclaim as one of the most informative books available on the subject. He was the bass department head at Humber College in Toronto for over 20 years and has been featured as a Yamaha artist/clinician throughout Canada and beyond, from South Korea to the infamous Paris Conservatory.

"One of my favorite bass players" - Pat Metheny

"This bass ace is incapable of letting you down" - Midwest Record

"Downes' playing is marked by an unerring and versatile technique, the kind of bass playing that's never static yet nevertheless establishes a firm foundation" Textura

"Mike's time playing is delightfully inventive...his lines are clear, hip, and agile. His technique and intonation are extraordinary" Kim Richmond, Jazz Player Magazine

Emotionally direct, profoundly lyrical bass work" - The Whole Note

"As gifted a composer as he is a bassist" - International Society of Bassists

"Root Structure" explores lyrical compositions with a deep underlying structural integrity. "5/5 - This album is as close to perfect as it is possible to get and fully warrants its rating here. Buy it!" Alan Musson, UK Vibe

"(Root Structure) - one of the most intriguing and innovative small group jazz recordings of the year" Lesley Mitchell-Clarke, theWholeNote.

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