

Grammy-Winning Trumpeter Terence Blanchard Performs in Houston

Hear the legendary musician and film composer blare his trumpet at the Wortham Center this Saturday.

By [Chris Becker](#) 4/18/2017 at 4:00pm

THROUGHOUT THE '60S AND '70S, many jazz musicians started incorporating elements of funk, R&B and psychedelic rock into their music to reflect the social and political changes of the times. The result was a new form of jazz fusion that inspired successful bands like Herbie Hancock's Headhunters, Weather Report, Chicago, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Today, New Orleans-born trumpeter Terence Blanchard's new band, The E-Collective, is performing its own hybrid of serious '70s funk, contemporary R&B and hard rock that speaks to the social and political turmoil of our time.

Led by 55-year-old Blanchard, the band's current lineup features Charles Altura (guitar), Fabian Almazan (piano, keyboards), David Ginyard Jr. (bass), Oscar Seaton (drums) and Tondrae Kemp (vocals). Soaring above this groove-centric ensemble is Blanchard's trumpet, a custom-designed, full-weight RAJA made by Monette, sometimes augmented with harmonized delay to create wild, otherworldly textures, but never at the cost of his rich, expressive tone. This Saturday, Blanchard and The E-Collective take the stage at the Wortham Center's Cullen Theater, and will no doubt set the roof on fire (figuratively speaking).

For those who only know Blanchard as a skilled master of classic jazz, The E-Collective may sound like a departure. Whether tearing it up on the Mary J. Blige-esque ballad "Shutting Down," which was sung on the album by singer and Maroon 5 keyboardist PJ Morton, or channeling his inner Star Child on the majestic "Cosmic Warrior," Blanchard's performance is perfectly suited to the music's amplified, electric atmosphere. His jaw-dropping technique heightens the emotional content and sometimes political subtext of the music, as the spoken word lyrics of the album's title track references the last words of Eric Garner—"I Can't Breathe"—which in turn became a protest chant for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Like many jazz musicians who came up in the '80s, Blanchard has never avoided matching his music with challenging subject matter. A prolific composer with a discography of more than 50 film scores, Blanchard has lent his composing gifts to many of Spike Lee's most powerful films, including *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, a four-hour documentary about New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Blanchard's opera *Champion*, which had its third production last March by the Washington National Opera, is based on the life of prizefighter Emile Griffith, a bisexual man who suffered years of guilt and nightmares after killing fellow welterweight boxer Benny Paret in the ring in 1962. But there are moments of relative calm and inner peace to be found in The E-Collective's repertoire. The epic song "Everglades" features several extended passages of shimmering ambience, like pools of water nourishing a scorched landscape. And the album's closing track "Midnight" is anchored by a steady, four-on-the-floor House beat, evoking the feeling of relaxing after a long night on the dance floor.

Once a member of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, an ensemble where such masters as Wayne Shorter and Wynton Marsalis first cut their teeth as improvisers, Blanchard has mentored several young musicians, including E-Collective members Almazan, a former student of Houston's own Jason Moran, and Altrua, who has performed with Chick Corea. In his capacity as an educator and role model for young, up-and-coming players, Blanchard visited the University of Houston in 2013 to rehearse and perform with the UH Moores School Jazz Orchestra. His appearance made a big impression on students, as well as fellow trumpeter and UH Director of Jazz Studies Noe Marmolejo.

"He is absolutely one of the great present day jazz musicians," says Marmolejo, who leads the MSJ orchestra, "and a great mentor who is very aware of his pay-it-forward responsibility. And his trumpet playing is fresh, creative, powerful and unique. He's fearless!"

April 22 at 8 p.m. \$42.50–72.50. Wortham Theater Center, Cullen Theater, 501 Texas Ave. 713-524-5050. dacamera.com

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