

# Tommaso Starace



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Tommaso Starace was born in Milan in 1975 from an Italian father and Australian mother. He started playing the alto saxophone at the age of 18. In 1994 he took part in a weekly jazz seminar organized by Berklee College of Music, taking place in Perugia as part of the 'Umbria Jazz Festival' and in that same year he was accepted at the Birmingham Conservatoire where he graduated with a BMus 1st class honours degree. During those 4 years of college he studied with saxophonists Andrew Tweed, Chris Gumbley and Nigel Wood both classical and jazz repertoire. In the summer of 1996 he took part in the Jamey Aebersold Summer Camp in Kentucky and had the chance of performing and studying with saxophonist Don Braden and Jazz Educators David Baker.

Between the years 1999/2000 he completed the Postgraduate Jazz course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. While attending the course he studied with ex-Jazz Messengers saxophonist Jean Toussaint, and saxophonists Stan Sulzman and Martin Hathaway; he performed in small combos and big bands with Billy Cobham, David Liebman, Kenny Wheeler and Norma Winstone. He also took part in several master classes some of which with renowned jazz musicians such as saxophonist Tim Garland and bass virtuoso John Patitucci. Across the years, since successfully completing his Postgraduate course, Tommaso has gained a considerable reputation in the UK jazz scene appearing at many jazz clubs and Festivals with his Quintet. Some of the venues/Festivals include:

*London Jazz festival, Brecon Jazz festival, Purcell Room - Queen Elizabeth Hall, Pizza Express Dean Street, The 'Vortex' Jazz Club, The 100 Club, Pizza on the Park, Royal Festival Hall Foyer, Boxford Fleece Jazz Club, Plymouth Jazz Club, Bonington Theatre Nottingham, Jazz in the Streets Festival (concert in Trafalgar Square), Bexley Heath Jazz Club, National Theatre, Jazz at The Green Man, Derenham Jazz Club, Quay arts Centre, Milestone Jazz Club, Gumbles Jazz Club, National Portrait Gallery, Capital Gardens Jazz Festival, Chelsea Festival, Windsor Festival, St Ives jazz Club, St Davids hall - Cardiff, Drill Hall - Lincoln, Swanage Jazz Festival, Southampton Jazz club, Swansea Jazzland, Royal Parks Summer jazz concert series, Grimsby Jazz Club, Schmazz Jazz at the Cluny, Norwich Arts Centre, Colchester Arts Centre, Restormel arts Jazz series - Cornwall, Chichester Jazz Club, Brighton Jazz Club, Three Players Theatre Thame, The Crypt jazz Club - London, Derby Jazz Club, Birmingham Symphony Hall Jazz Foyer, Posk Jazz Cafe', Royal Albert hall Jazz Ignite, Shrewsbury Jazz Club, Lichfield Arts Centre, Lichfield Festival, Oxford Jazz Festival, Wake eld Jazz Club, Derby Jazz Club.*

He has performed with some of the most respected UK and Italian jazz musicians including: Paolo Fresu, Dave Liebman, Billy Cobham, Tino Tracanna, Jean Toussaint, Stan Sulzman, Kenny Wheeler, Norma Winstone, Fabrizio Bosso, Tommaso Bradascio, Michele Di Toro, Tino Tracanna, Laurence Cottle, Liam Noble, Roger Beaujolais and others.

In the year 2003 Tommaso and pianist Joan Taylor started a new project called 'Jazz Meets Classical' performing repertoire of 'classical composers' from the 20th Century who influenced and were influenced by

the Jazz idiom ( M. Ravel; C. Debussy; J. Ibert; A. Piazzolla to name a few). The duo across the years had the chance of performing in many churches and music clubs in London and frequently appeared at the Victoria and Albert Museum as part of the 'Late View Program' concert series.

In the year 2004 he collaborated with award winning oscar lm composer Dario Marianelli ('Pride and Prejudice' and 'The Atonement') recording music for 'This Little Life', a BBC drama for Channel Four.

In December 2005 Tommaso produced and recorded his second album - 'Tommaso Starace plays the photos of Elliott Erwitt' with a new fresh and exciting quintet line-up including Roger Beaujolais on vibraphone, Liam Noble on piano, Julian Bury on bass and Jim Hart on drums. The CD launch took place at the Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall on December 21st and was followed by a favourable review in the Evening Standard by jazz critic Jack Massarick:

***"Signor Starace is a shrewd operator. He plays alto and soprano sax with impressive post- Parkerian felicity and Italian air"***

Some of the exciting concerts for the 'Elliott Erwitt Project' include a performance at the Photographers' Gallery for Magnum Photos annual meeting in June 2006 and a winter tour with the quintet across the UK in that same year, sponsored by Jazz Services.

In May 2006 Tommaso was accepted in the finals of the prestigious International Massimo Urbani Award competition in Camerino, Italy and was awarded a Bursary to attend the Nuoro Jazz Seminars organized by trumpeter Paolo Fresu.

At the end of the course the Nuoro Jazz faculty awarded a bursary to the seven most promising musicians that could form a band to take part in the prestigious Sardinian Festivals of 2007, 'Time In Jazz' taking place in Berchidda and 'Nuoro Jazz', both of which Paolo Fresu is artistic director. The concerts were recorded and a CD was produced out of it.

In the year 2007 Tommaso put together a new exciting Italian quartet made up of young talented pianist Michele Di Toro, Attilio Zanchi on bass ( part of Paolo Fresu's Quintet for many years), and the hard swinging drums of Tommy Bradascio. Together they have been performing across the years in some of the most respected jazz venues across Italy and switzerland including : *Blue Note Milano, Brianza Open Jazz Festival, Biella Jazz Festival, Avezano Jazz Festival, Le Scimmie Jazz Club, La Salumeria della Musica; Genova-Torino-Piacenza-Biella Jazz Clubs; Art Blakey Jazz Club - Busto Arsizio; Schighera jazz concert series - Milano; 'Time in Jazz Festival' - Berchidda; 'Nuoro Jazz Festival'; 'Luzern Jazz Club'; 'Chur Jazz Club'; 'Mendrisiotto Jazz Club.*

In June 2008 Birmingham Conservatoire awarded Tommaso with an Honorary Membership which is an acknowledgement given to past students who made a significant contribution within the various branches of the music profession.

In July of 2008 and 2009 he was accepted together with a few other students to take part in the yearly prestigious Master Class lead by saxophonist Dave Liebman which consists of 6 intense days of workshops dealing with the saxophone, jazz harmony/improvisation and ways of improving ones playing to the highest level through his notorious book 'Chromatic Approach to jazz harmony and melody'. Saxophonist/ flautist Steve Wilson was guest speaker and joined the event as well.

'Tommaso Starace Quartet - Don't Forget' marked a new exciting musical time for saxophonist Tommaso in the year 2009. This CD was recorded with his Italian quartet. Renowned jazz author and critic Vittorio Franchini says of Tommaso's new recording:

***"The sax is filled with voices, it sings gaiety.....I like the way he follows joyful paths, I imagine him playing around with rhythms, playing with the other instruments, opening up to new feelings and inventing new***

*ways...”*

The launch of this new recording took place as a sold out concert at the Blue Note in Milano in January 2010. The quartet undertook a UK tour in April and an Italian Tour in May 2010.

In May 2010 Tommaso releases his fourth and latest album ‘Blood & Champagne’ recorded with a new all star UK quartet comprising: Frank Harrison on piano; Laurence Cottle on electric bass and Chris Nickolls on drums. The band recorded music by Michel Petrucciani, Billy Strayhorn, Ennio Morricone, Henry Mancini plus some original material by the band leader. This new CD allowed the young saxophonist to tour for his fourth time in the UK and visit Jazz Clubs and Festivals around Europe. A second memorable performance took place to a sold out Blue Note concert in Milano in April 2011. The Album was well received by critics and was followed by a couple of radio interviews which included Jazz Fm with Helen Mayhew. The critics said of the CD:

*-‘An exciting talent, Starace is developing a seriously impressive body of work’* - Bruce Lindsay - (www.allaboutjazz.com)

*-‘He soars assertively when needed, cajoles and caresses with ‘molto’ lyricism on the ballads and demonstrates unequivocally that it is possible for contemporary jazz to be accessible’* . Lance Liddle - (Bebop Spoken Here)

*-‘Blood & Champagne’ unveils a bandleader possessing a air for creative interpretation’*. Robbie Gerson - (audaud.com)

*‘..the title Blood & Champagne, conjuring up as it does life’s intoxicating intensity, is well chosen: this is a heady, exuberant but affecting album’*. Chris Parker

*‘La sezione ritmica che lo accompagna lo fa in modo egregio e moderno. oscillante fra neoclassicismi ed uno swing ispirato ai modelli americani, dando così all’album nel suo complesso una sua precisa individualità che lo distingue da altre produzioni simili’*. Vittorio Lo Conte - (italia.allaboutjazz.com)

In August 2011 Tommaso and his Italian quartet got in the studio and recorded their new album and fifth album - ‘Celebrating the Music of Michel Petrucciani’ dedicated to the great French pianist well known for his charismatic, exuberant, and virtuoso playing. The quartet performs in concert some of his most notorious compositions which made his worldwide performances memorable.

As guests the quartet invited Italian trumpet star Fabrizio Bosso and UK’s vibraphone virtuoso Roger Beaujolais to perform on a few tracks. The CD is on the Universal/Emarcy Label.

In 2012 the Tommaso Starace Quartet won the prestigious Barga Jazz Contest (based in Barga, Italy) amongst 15 bands taking part.

Tommaso was invited to visit with his Italian Quartet the 2013 International Jazz Festival de Providencia de Santiago del Chile sharing the stage with Paolo Fresu and Daniele Di Bonaventura.

In 2013 Tommaso and his Italian Quartet went back in the studio for their third album together: ‘Italian Short Stories - playing the photos of Gianni Berengo Gardin’. Tommaso has decided with this sixth recording as a band leader to go back to the photograph/jazz project which originally started in 2005 with an album dedicated to photographers Elliott Erwitt. On this album the quartet was honoured by the presence of trumpeter Paolo Fresu who appeared on several tracks as a guest. This project gave the group the chance to perform on the national Italian radio and national TV (Radio Rai 3 and Rai 3 Telegiornale) plus several radio interviews, jazz magazine interviews (Jazzit and Musica Jazz) and many jazz clubs and festivals across Italy.

In the year 2015 Tommaso teams up with his long time musical companion Michele Di Toro to record an album in duo: 'From a Distant Past'. All original compositions plus arrangements of tunes by Chick Corea and Randy Newman. This new recording as the previous one 'Italian Short Stories' continues to explore a melodic and cinematic approach to jazz this time bringing to life a world that belongs to a remote past made of fables and surreal stories. The recording marks the third collaboration with the Universal label.

Tommaso's aim through composition and the production of his CD's is to write tunes with a strong melodic component exploring traditional and more contemporary harmony and always maintaining the sense of swing and groove. Not surprisingly some of Tommaso's influences are Cannonball Adderley, Clifford Brown, Joshua Redman, Brandford Marsalis, Ennio Morricone, Stevie Wonder, Maurice Ravel. But his passion for black and white photography, painting and cinema are also a continuous inspiration to his writing and music.

Tommaso is currently busy performing concerts all over Europe. He's also busy performing as a side man in various bands and projects.