

PIANO RECITAL SERIES



CHRIS PATTISHALL, PIANO

SAT, NOV 21
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

DUKE PERFORMANCES

PIANO RECITAL SERIES

**CHRIS
PATTISHALL**
PIANO

SAT, NOV 21
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

CHRIS PATTISHALL

Like many of his favorite things, there is much more to **Chris Pattishall** than meets the eye, and it gets stranger the deeper you dig. Most know him as a pianist with a “forthright relationship to the jazz tradition” (*New York Times*) and a hard-earned endorsement from the music’s traditional establishment—Wynton Marsalis once shortlisted Pattishall among his favorite young improvisers, and he’s also worked with Jimmy Heath, Jon Hendricks, and Wycliffe Gordon.

But that’s just upon first glance. With his debut album **Zodiac**—a phantasmagorical interpretation of Mary Lou Williams’ *Zodiac Suite*—Pattishall unveils himself as an erudite surrealist, following in the footsteps of his wide-reaching influences: Roberto Bolaño, Luis Buñuel, Madlib, and Thelonious Monk. He shares their dedication to the quietly inexplicable, and continues their pursuit of the kinds of otherworldly resonances that defy the way we rationalize experience. His obsession with history is borne of a crate-digger’s mentality, not stuffy conservatism: he’s fascinated with how bizarre and defiant early jazz actually was within the context of its time.

Though he makes his living moonlighting as a besuited scholar of Earl Hines and Erroll Garner, you’re more likely to find Pattishall in a wolf sweatshirt when he’s off the clock, passing through the Gladstone Gallery to experience the latest from Wangechi Mutu or heading to the Armory to check out Oneohtrix Point Never. With *Zodiac*, Pattishall takes a step towards unifying his interests. In collaboration with producer Rafiq Bhatia (of Son Lux) and an ensemble of close allies—Jamison Ross (drums), Riley Mulherkar (trumpet), Reuben Fox (saxophone), and Marty Jaffe (bass)—Pattishall renders Williams’ futuristic early jazz compositions with both understated melodicism and Fellini-esque unreality.

Pattishall traces his fascination with the surreal to his childhood in Durham, North Carolina. His father, who once wrote a Masters’ thesis on the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, kept a keenly-curated collections of LPs, films, and books that served as an important early influence. But it was at a friend’s house that Pattishall first encountered Buñuel’s *The Exterminating Angel*, a watershed moment that was matched only by his first exposure to Monk’s pianism. “There’s something about the way that Monk plays—part of it you recognize, but the other part of you can’t tell if he broke the piano; you can’t tell how the sound is created. I felt

that in this particular film, and that opened me up to experiencing other things.”

It was within this broader context that Pattishall's relationship to the piano developed. His parents had brought him a Casio keyboard at age eight, imposing what he describes as a “five-year prison sentence” where he was forced to take lessons. But it wasn't until his teens that Pattishall's interest in the instrument truly flourished. He quickly became one of the most in-demand pianists in the region, often working multiple nights a week and going on his first tour before he could legally drive. A pivotal shift came when Chris began studying with Marcus Roberts, a process which led him to a deep affinity for pre-bebop jazz. “I started to notice all of this idiosyncrasy in the early music that I wasn't hearing in later stuff which also connected rhythmically to what I was drawn to in hip-hop—the emphasis on the beat and the way the rhythm had a little more weight to it. You also start realizing as you dig into the details that the way these things get reduced in pedagogy and criticism totally fails to pay homage to how wild and irregular and personal all of these artists were.”

Along the way, Pattishall discovered the work of Mary Lou Williams, a pioneering yet under-appreciated pianist who reached for the cosmic with the *Zodiac Suite*. He was immediately drawn to Williams' sound (he later learned that she had taught and influenced Monk) and her willingness as a composer to turn on a dime. “It almost feels like you've got a remote and you're changing channels,” Pattishall explains. “That's a way of hearing music that I associate with Madlib and I've never really heard anyone play music like that, acoustically. There's a kaleidoscopic aspect to the way that those quick changes accumulate on a larger scale. But by contrast, there are a lot of subtle things in the music that tie everything together—little gestures that keep reappearing that you won't even notice if you're not paying attention.”

As Pattishall began to transcribe Williams' movements, he started imagining them with an expanded instrumentation in mind. “She was such a brilliant arranger, and yet this piece that's so important to me is mostly her playing solo piano. In a way I saw it as honoring this other aspect of her musicianship.” Pattishall was equally enamored with the sound of the original recording; the harmonic saturation that comes from recording to tape is a stark departure from today's more sterilized jazz recordings. “There's a residue that exists that is the result of the performance, but it ends up having its own hue,” he explains. Rather than attempting some sort of

historical re-creation, Pattishall enlisted the help of a longtime friend in Bhatia, who brings a creative, meticulously-detailed approach to sound that builds on the innovations of ambient and experimental electronic artists. Bhatia's production amplifies the intimacy of the performances, while his subliminal layers of sound-design fuel the dreamlike feeling of the arrangements.

Through this deep dive into history, Pattishall has taken an important step towards finding the common thread that binds his broad interests. "The thing I've learned that I've been slow to implement is that you just have to 100% do your own thing. You don't need affirmation from other people. If you believe in something, you gotta just keep hammering away at it."



Alsarah talking to students at Durham School of the Arts.

Last season, **Duke Performances** held over 100 residency events with visiting artists, reaching over 2,000 Duke students and 2,000 members of the Durham community through class visits, public conversations, master classes, workshops, and pop-up concerts, as well as K-12 engagement with Durham Public Schools.

We bring diverse and virtuosic artists to classrooms and public forums in ways that enrich our vibrant campus and community and foster conversation around the themes, traditions, and perspectives embodied in the work of these visiting artists.

Your contribution to Duke Performances ensures that we can continue to make these meaningful and memorable opportunities available at no cost to the community.

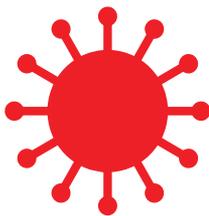
Thank you for your support.

For a list of our donors, or to give a gift to Duke Performances, visit www.supportdukeperformances.org

DUKE PERFORMANCES



**DON'T WORRY,
WE'LL HOLD
HANDS AGAIN.**



**RESIST
COVID**
A SOCIAL STUDIES 101 PROJECT
TAKE 6!
RESISTCOVIDTAKE6.ORG

**THE SHOW
MUST GO
ONLINE!**



CHRISTINA & MICHELLE NAUGHTON, DUO PIANO

SAT, DEC 5

TICKETS ON SALE NOW! | [DUKEPERFORMANCES.ORG](https://www.dukeperformances.org)

DUKE PERFORMANCES