

ANTONIO CIACCA

Pianist, Composer, Arranger, Producer, Educator

"At the heart of any true jazzman is the ability to tell his own musical stories in his own way, and hopefully touch a few hearts along the way. Down in his heart, there's a song he can feel, something that no one can steal. It's his own tune, all and in part. Pianist Antonio Ciacca dances to the unique songs in his heart."

Todd Barkan, Jazz at Lincoln Center and Record Producer

"Ciacca plays with a rare blend of earthiness, fire and intellect, with elements of Wynton Kelly, Red Garland and Bobby Timmons that recall the most creatively vital and yet oddly neglected schools of jazz."
- Graham Barker, Music Producer

Born in Germany, raised in Italy and educated in the United States, Ciacca is able to move as fluidly among those varied cultural environments as he does between his life as a performer, composer, father of five, and top-tie arts presenter. Notably, Ciacca has served as Artistic Director for the Italian cultural agency, C-Jam, and in 2007, landed a plum job as the Director of Programming for Jazz at Lincoln Center, the impetus for his move that year from Bologna, Italy to New York City.

Ciacca began his career as a sideman for such acclaimed jazz artists as Art Farmer, James Moody, Lee Konitz, Jonny Griffin, Mark Murphy, Dave Liebman, and Steve Grossman, who he cites as his mentor, and with whom he studied for three years beginning in 1990. In 1993, he moved to Detroit to study at Wayne State University with Kenny Barron, after which he studied privately with Mingus' pianist Jackie Byard in New York. While living in Detroit, he was first exposed to gospel music, which so impressed him with its passion and energy that he soon integrated it into his own developing style as a composer and performer; he eventually went on to produce a CD for the Detroit Gospel Singers.

One of the most important events in Ciacca's career was an invitation to join the legendary saxophonist Steve Lacy's quartet in 1997; he continued to perform with Lacy for seven years. Another key encounter that would have long lasting musical and professional repercussions for Ciacca took place in 1997. "Wynton Marsalis was performing in Italy with Elvin Jones, who is my son's godfather. I'd first seen him at the Bologna Jazz Festival in 1989, and he really first opened my eyes to jazz then. But when I first saw him, I had no idea we'd ever work together." Ciacca first performed with Wynton in Wess Anderson's sextet at New York's Village Vanguard in 2004.

In 1998 he also began to perform with saxophonist Benny Golson, with whom he continues to collaborate. In 1995, Ciacca recorded his first CD as a leader, Driemoty, which was released on the label C-Jam. In 1999 he recorded in New York City Hollis Avenue for the German label YVP. In 2002, he recorded Autumn in New York for the Italian label Splash.

After returning to Italy, Ciacca performed throughout Europe, including an intense series of performances in London in 2003, which included appearances at Ronnie Scott's, the Royal Festival Hall Foyer, the National Theatre and the London Jazz Festival, with "The Monk Liberation Front" project, a six hour-long performance that involved thirteen musicians alternately playing Monk's unedited music—The Guardian called out Ciacca's performance as "terrific." After opening for Wynton Marsalis' concerts in Italy, in 2004 Ciacca returned to New York to again perform at the Village Vanguard with his own quartet, featuring renowned saxophonist Wess Anderson, subsequently touring with them throughout the US, UK, and Italy until 2005.

In Italy in 2004, Ciacca recorded a trio project, Ugly Beauty with the late Dennis Irwin and Detroit mate Ali Jackson for the legendary Italian label Soul Note which he supported with a European tour.

In 2007, Ciacca's extensive music industry experience and comprehensive artistic vision led to his being tapped to take on the position of Director of Programming at Jazz at Lincoln Center, where he worked closely with JALC Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis until June 2011.

That same year, he met Jana Herzen, founder of Motéma Music, at a performance at the Historic Langston Hughes House in Harlem, an intimate brownstone parlor performance space that is sponsored in part by the label. Herzen offered use of the Fazioli piano at the Hughes House to Ciacca for his rehearsal needs, and over the next few weeks she took so well to Ciacca's playing and compositions that the current recording deal was initiated.

The release of Rush Life, coincides with many changes at Motéma and in the jazz industry in general. The CD will represent the label's first digital only release in the US; the project will be available at download services throughout the world as well as via Motéma's own jazz portal in the US, www.motema.com. It will also be one of the first Motéma projects to be sold Europe-wide through Motéma's new distribution partner, the German-based Membran. Nancy Ann-Lee, writing in the Jazz & Blues Report, observed, "This superb recording demonstrates Ciacca's immersion in the language of jazz".

In 2009 Ciacca turned 40. His year long celebrations included: an appearance at New York Blue Note, one week engagement at Dizzy's, performances at the Rochester and Detroit International Jazz Festivals, European Tour with special guests George Garzone and Joe Locke, release of his first Music Book, "The Music of Antonio Ciacca Vol. 1" and his first year teaching the course "Business of Jazz" at Julliard.

And performing at the Detroit International Jazz Festival was the climax of a fantastic journey started in Detroit in 1993 when Antonio first touched US soil. In the same year Antonio was invited to celebrate Art Tatum's Centennial and John Hendrix joined him as special guest.

In 2010 Ciacca released Lagos Blues, his second recording with Motéma. In two months this album became a rare gift to the jazz world, documenting for the first time the pure joy of be-bop, gospel, and blues-influenced pianist/composer Antonio Ciacca's deep long-term musical relationship with sax legend Steve Grossman. Grossman, who rose to fame in the 1970s through incendiary and groundbreaking sessions with Miles Davis, joined Ciacca's deft ensemble (Stacy Dillard, Kengo Nakamura & Ulysses Owens) to swing with impeccable style on this historic disc. Greg Barbrick writing in Blogcritics.org commented "Lagos Blues makes an excellent introduction to the music of Antonio Ciacca, and the addition of Steve Grossman makes it even better. If you are looking for something with the traditional fire of old, tempered with some lovely, modern-day piano work, this is a disc to look into."

In September 2010 The Antonio Ciacca Trio performed in a special tribute to Bud Powell, which also featured The Jacky Terrason Trio, Barry Harris and Bertha Hope. In the autumn of 2010, Antonio Ciacca with TwinsMusic Enterprises curated the second annual Italian Jazz Days 2010 New York, showcasing the rich jazz heritage of Italy through a series of concerts featuring American and Italian Jazz artists, including among others, Joe Lovano with the Antonio Ciacca Quintet.

From 2009 to 2012 Ciacca worked as an instructor at Julliard School in New York teaching Business of Jazz.

In 2013, Ciacca performed at Carnegie Hall where he performed with his trio (Paul Gill on bass and Peter Van Nostrand on drums) and the New York Pops Orchestra playing his music. In the fall of 2015 Antonio Ciacca has been appointed Artist in Residence at the Pierre Hotel in NYC and Composer in Residence at Shiloh Baptist Church in New Rochelle, NY.

In May 2016, the Youth Orchestra Of the Theater Garibaldi in Lucera (Italy) premiered his Symphony n. 1 in G minor. In December 2016 Ciacca embarked on his first tour as conductor/composer and arranger with the Orchestra ICO Della Magna Grecia featuring Nate Brown and One Voice on a Christmas/Gospel tour in Italy.

In 2018, Ciacca worked with students in the Department of Theatre and Speech at City College in New York City to perform MLK Suite which was directed and produced by Antonio Ciacca to honor the memory of Martin Luther King. MLK Suite premiered in 2018 at La Spezia Jazz Festival in Italy.

In 2019, Antonio Ciacca - artistic director of the La Spezia Jazz Festival – composed "Pulses", an original jazz ballet with 8 movements that has been choreographed and performed by former students of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company in New York. The ballet is a journey through 8 different rhythmic pulses and 8 different choreographies. The piece is inspired and dedicated to Antonio's daughter Dora Ciacca, a professional dancer who studied at Alvin Ailey Dance Company in New York, among other schools.

He composed more than 150 songs that can be found in the book: "The Music of Antonio Ciacca – Real Book". Other compositions : Chocolate Suite for Jazz quartet (2011), Stabat Mater for soprano, alto two violins, viola, cello bass and continuo (2011), Aria for String Orchestra (2012), Orsara Suite for 7 instruments (2012), Settimino (2013), String Quartet in F (2014), Magnificat for soprano, alto , tenor and orchestra (2015), Symphony n.1 in G minor (2015), Piano and Violin Sonata n.1 (2015), MLK Suite, for Choir and Orchestra (2018), Pulses- Ballet in 8 movements (2019), Westchester Concert N.1 and the String Quartet n. 2 (2020)

He has been active as a Catholic church organist since he was 7 years old and has composed several settings of Masses in Italian, Spanish, and English. His sacred works catalog includes Magnificat, Stabat Mater, Ave Maria, Chorales and a Requiem for orchestra, solo and choir.