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HUB SESSIONS



ROBERT GLASPER TRIO

Monday 10 August, 10.30pm | The Hub

The performance lasts approximately
2 hours with no interval

ROBERT GLASPER TRIO

'Black music is the house that has many rooms. Black people have invented so many dope genres that everyone loves: jazz, blues, gospel, R&B, rock, hip hop, and the list goes on. I'm just visiting all those rooms. It's my mansion; it's our mansion.'

There are few musicians who blend jazz, R&B, soul and hip hop as seamlessly as US pianist and producer Robert Glasper. Twice Grammy-winner, the Houston-born artist creates contemporary reimaginings of both jazz standards and new material, all with a distinctively urban edge, unashamedly crossing boundaries back and forth between genres.

He works with two contrasting ensembles. The Robert Glasper Experiment is an electric ensemble of keyboards, drums, sax, vocoder and bass, focused on fusions of jazz, R&B and hip hop. The acoustic Robert Glasper Trio, which you'll hear tonight, is a more conventional jazz threesome of piano, bass and drums. Alongside jazz standards, however, Glasper has also reinterpreted songs by Radiohead, David Bowie, Nirvana and Soundgarden, among many other contemporary artists. He sees little difference between the two repertoires, calling these more recent songs 'new standards' – since traditional jazz standards are simply songs that jazz musicians have played a lot, why shouldn't more recent songs equally become standards?

He's unafraid of pushing boundaries, whether in his ensembles, his material or his musical styles. Glasper has been outspoken about the dangers of jazz potentially becoming a museum culture, with an over-emphasis on celebrating the great names of the past and sticking to established rules. Critics have sometimes concluded that Glasper wants to move on or away from jazz, but in fact he's more concerned with fighting to expand and add to its reach – and to reach new listeners. He acknowledges that he's bringing a new audience to jazz – especially to his more traditional jazz performances, such as the one you'll hear tonight – through his collaborations with hip hop and R&B artists: his live gigs attract astonishingly broad audiences, from black teenagers to veteran jazz aficionados. He's far from the first to introduce hip hop elements into jazz – Miles Davis dabbled late in his career, and 1980s bands Guru, A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul were already making jazz-informed hip hop. But Glasper takes it to another level entirely.

It's because those different styles have always been part of Glasper's musical make-up. He grew up listening to his mother, Kim Yvette Glasper, performing gospel in Houston's East Wind Baptist Church, then singing jazz and blues in local clubs, alongside a constant soundtrack of Motown and R&B in the family home. By the age of 12 he was playing piano for his mother both in church and clubs, and he credits his particular sound to this early mix of styles.

He later studied at New York's New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, and he puts his interest in hip hop down to his move to NY in 1997 – he'd been aware of it in Texas, but it hadn't been a music he'd necessarily wanted to create. Now, though, he actively immersed himself in it. It was also at New York's New School that he first met soul singer Bilal, who became a close friend and frequent collaborator across many projects.

Glasper made his debut album in 2004 (*Mood* on Fresh Sound Records), and was quickly signed to iconic jazz label Blue Note, which released *Canvas* (2005), *In My Element* (2007) and *Double-Booked* (2009) – Glasper's first album to feature both his eclectic Experiment ensemble and acoustic Trio, and gaining a Grammy nomination as a result.

His 2012 *Black Radio*, however, was the album that really put Glasper on the map. Created across a series of informal jam sessions, it features artists including Erykah Badu, Bilal, Lupe Fiasco, Musiq Soulchild and Meshell Ndegeocello, who each worked with Glasper's Experiment musicians on fresh rethinks of music by Nirvana, David Bowie, Sade and others. It was greeted with enormous critical acclaim and won the 2013 Grammy for best R&B album. Glasper followed it up with *Black Radio 2* in 2013, featuring collaborations with Emeli Sandé, Luke James, Snoop Dogg, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and others.

For his most recent disc, however, Glasper turns away from the electric experimentation of *Black Radio* and reverts to the acoustic trio of his first two Blue Note albums, *Canvas* and *In My Element*. For *Covered*, released in June, Glasper was concerned with making a jazz trio album that everyone, not just jazz aficionados, would understand. Recorded live in front of an invited audience at Hollywood's famous Capitol Studios, it features covers of Radiohead's 'Reckoner', Joni Mitchell's 'Barangrill', John Legend's 'Good Morning', Kendrick Lamar's 'I'm Dying of Thirst' and several other songs, with even a traditional jazz standard – 'Stella by Starlight' – thrown in. And on *Covered*, Glasper is joined again by the musicians heard on those early Blue Note albums. Woodstock-born bassist Vicente Archer studied jazz at Boston's New England Conservatory and Northeastern University before working with artists including Wynton Marsalis, Nicholas Payton, Kenny Garrett and Stefon Harris, while Californian drummer and fellow NEC alumnus Damion Reid has performed with Lauryn Hill, Cassandra Wilson, Ravi Coltrane, Jason Moran and Meshell Ndegeocello, among many others.

For tonight's performance, Glasper, Archer and Reid perform songs from *Covered*, plus Glasper's boundary-crossing arrangements of other material.

© **David Kettle** is a freelance writer and editor