

JIMMY OWENS
2012 NEA Jazz Master
2012 A. B. Spellman Jazz Masters Award for Jazz Advocacy

JIMMY OWENS (trumpet, flugelhorn) was born in New York City (9 December 1943). He began his trumpet studies at the age of fourteen with Donald Byrd and later studied composition with Henry Brant. He graduated from the High School of Music and Art and received a Master of Education degree from the University of Massachusetts. At age fifteen, Jimmy played with the Newport Youth Jazz Band and later played with Lionel Hampton, Hank Crawford, Charles Mingus, Max Roach, Duke Ellington, and Billy Taylor among others. He has over forty-five years of experience as a Jazz trumpeter, composer, arranger, lecturer, and music education consultant. His experience covers a wide range of international musical achievement, which includes extensive work as a studio musician, soloist, bandleader, and composer of orchestral compositions, movie scores, and ballets.

In January 2012, Jimmy was the recipient of the A. B. Spellman Jazz Award for Advocacy from the National Endowment for the Arts. In January 2008, Jimmy was the recipient of the Benny Golson Jazz Master Award at Howard University. In 2007, he produced and released a new CD on his own label Jay-Oh Jazz Recordings, a division of Jay-Oh Productions, Inc., called *Peaceful Walking* with a fine rhythm section from Italy. As one reviewer said: "This terrific quartet is a platform for Jimmy Owens to display his writing, arranging, and playing prowess – which he does with precision." He also appeared on Gerald Wilson's CD *Monterey Moods* [2007]. This was his third appearance on a Wilson CD in recent years. He was a sideman in the critically acclaimed *In My Time* [2005] and *New York New Sound*, Gerald Wilson's 2003 Grammy nominated CD. In 2004, he also appeared on *One More – Music of Thad Jones* (2004).

Jimmy is an active and important member of the Jazz education community. He sits on the boards of the Jazz Foundation and was on the Board of Local 802 AFM from 1998 through 2009. His expertise and knowledge is often called upon for issues relating to health and pension benefits for Jazz artists or to share his first-hand experiences about being in the bands of several Jazz Masters. Jimmy is one of the few trumpeters of his generation who played as a sideman with such extraordinary Jazz leaders as Lionel Hampton, Hank Crawford, Charles Mingus, Max Roach, Duke Ellington, Billy Taylor, and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Band, among others. As a result, he can share unique musical and personal recollections of performing in some of the most exciting bands in the history of Jazz music. His anecdotes are priceless: being chosen by Willie Ruff to play a trumpet tribute to Cootie Williams, Sweets Edison, Roy Eldridge and Dizzy Gillespie at the historic 1972 inaugural Ellington Fellowship Concert at Yale; sitting in with Miles Davis at the age of fifteen; participating in the 20th anniversary musical celebration of Senegal's independence in 1980. In addition to all of this, he's also led his own group, Jimmy Owens Plus ... since the 1970s playing at festivals and in concert halls all over the world.

While Jimmy is known as a hard bop player, and it's true, it hardly covers the breadth and scope of his musical skills. Throughout his long career, Jimmy has consistently emphasized in both his performances and recordings a deep understanding of the blues as well as beautiful and articulate emotional projection on ballads. As a reviewer stated in *All About Jazz* regarding Jimmy's performance on *One More: The Summary – Music of Thad Jones, Vol 2* (2006), an all-star recording on which Jimmy appeared – “Jimmy Owens ... proves that he's better than ever, whether employing a breathy, vocal quality (*Little Pixie*), a smooth flugelhorn sound (*Three in One*), or brilliant and elliptical Jones-like melodic ideas (*Rejoice*).”

Most recently, Jimmy recorded *Jimmy Owens The Monk Project* choosing a stellar group of musicians, including Kenny Barron, Kenny Davis, Winard Harper, Wycliffe Gordon, Marcus Strickland, and Howard Johnson, which was released in January 2012 to critical acclaim. As Rob Young wrote in *Urban Flux*:

“Owens intelligently approaches each composition with stamina and respect to these ten daunting masterpieces. On the opener, *Bright Mississippi*, it is evident Owens tonality is clearly poignant as his horn vibrates through and through the intricate passage with precision. This explosive gem sets the tempo to remind us that he [Owens] is more than capable to form this collection of standards in a way that hasn't been done before.”