

About

Nathan Tokunaga

“What we play is life.”

- Louis Armstrong

Nathan Tokunaga is a clarinetist and saxophonist from the San Francisco Bay Area, known for his soulful sound and joyful virtuosity. Inspired by early jazz and constantly exploring new musical horizons, he brings energy and artistry to every performance.

Nathan began playing clarinet at age 9 under the tutelage of Scott Dailey at Clock Tower Music in San Carlos. Within two years, he earned a Superior rating at the CMEA Solos and Ensembles contest. His passion for jazz clarinet was sparked during morning car rides to middle school, listening to Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Johnny Dodds, and Sidney Bechet. In late 2020, multi-instrumentalist, jazz historian, and KCSM radio host Clint Baker became his mentor, guiding him into the world of early jazz. A couple of years later, New Orleans clarinet virtuoso Evan Christopher also took Nathan under his wing. Since then, numerous professional musicians have contributed to his growth, shaping him as both a sideman and a bandleader.

Nathan started performing jazz professionally in 2021 at age 14 and has since played hundreds of concerts across the San Francisco Bay Area, New York, and North Carolina. He has captivated audiences in dance halls, festivals, jazz



clubs, live streams, and private events, performing at venues ranging from the intimate Mr. Tipple’s Jazz Club in San Francisco to the legendary Birdland Theatre in New York City. Recently, he played five consecutive nights with the Jonathan Stout Orchestra for nearly a thousand swing dancers at Lindy Focus, one of the world’s largest swing dance festivals. A versatile multi-instrumentalist, he performs on clarinet, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, and soprano saxophone, often switching seamlessly between them mid-song.

Classically, Nathan has performed with various orchestras and chamber ensembles, serving as Principal Clarinet of the Peninsula Youth Orchestra and Carlmont High School’s Symphony Orchestra, as well as the clarinetist for the Woodwind Quintet.

This year, Nathan is excited to lead two special projects: The Benny Goodman Project and The Saxophone & Strings Project, both set for release in 2025.
