

Nathan Tokunaga

Clarinet & Saxophone

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*N*athan Tokunaga, an old soul at heart, is a 16-year-old San Francisco Bay Area clarinetist specializing in classic jazz from the 1920s-40s. “I’ve been doing this for almost 50 years professionally, and... Nathan is playing at a level I’ve seldom heard the depth of understanding of New Orleans Jazz as I’ve heard coming out of that horn of anybody.” acclaimed Steve Pistorius, a renowned New Orleans jazz pianist, after sharing a stage with Nathan in 2022¹.

Nathan picked up the clarinet at age 9. His first clarinet teacher was Mr. Scott Dailey, who taught piano and clarinet at the Clock Tower music store in San Carlos. Nathan made fast gains with Mr. Dailey and earned a Superior rating in the CMEA Solos and Ensembles contest² two years later.

On the morning drives to middle school, while listening to music in the car, Nathan became fascinated with Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, and early jazz where clarinets have a prominent role in the small combo format. Clint Baker, multi-instrumentalist, jazz historian, and radio host at KCSM 91.1 FM, became Nathan’s mentor in late 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. A few months later, Clint took the then-14-year-old Nathan on the stage for the first time on June 18, 2021, at the Healdsburg Jazz Festival. Nathan gave an astonishingly competent performance³ that marked the beginning of a unique learning path by working with and being mentored by professional musicians. New Orleans-inspired clarinet virtuoso, Evan Christopher, took over from Clint as Nathan’s mentor and teacher in April 2022. Marc Caparone (trumpet), Patrick Wolff (saxophone), and Nick Rossi (guitar) have also been instrumental in Nathan’s musical growth both as a thoughtful side man and as a skillful bandleader⁴.

“Nathan quickly showed himself an adult in every conceivable way except the number on his birth certificate.” wrote Michael Steinman at Jazz Lives⁵. “The musicians who were meeting and hearing him for the first time were, shall we say, blown away.”

1. [Blue Clarinet Stomp](#), Evelyn & Friends with Steve Pistorius, September 2022

2. [Rose Etude #3](#), CMEA Bay Section, February 2019

3. [Weary Blues](#), Healdsburg Jazz Festival, June 2021

4. [Nathan Tokunaga Quartet](#), Regiis Ova Lounge, October 2023

5. [No Generation Gap: Nathan Tokunaga...](#) at the Jazz Bash by the Bay, Monterey, March 2023

Awards

Stanford Jazz Workshop's Shape of Jazz to Come Award
Stanford Jazz Workshop's Outstanding Soloist Award
Jazz at the Ballroom Scholarship
CMEA Solos and Ensembles, Superior

Worked with

Benny Amon, Kyle Athayde, Clint Baker, Jeff Barnhart, Dan Barret, Joseph Boga, Hunter Burgamy, Katie Cavera, Marc Caparone, Adrian Cunningham, Bob Draga, Neil Fontano, Jeff Hamilton, Brian Holland, Mikiya Matsuda, Konrad Paszkudzki, Rob Reich, Sam Rocha, Nick Rossi, Andy Schumm, Ray Skjelbred, Adam Shulman, Hal Smith, Vic Wong, Patrick Wolff, and many more.

Big Bands & Orchestra

Stanford Jazz Workshop's Miles Ahead Big Band, lead alto sax
College of San Mateo Big Band, 2nd tenor sax
Peninsula Youth Orchestra, principal clarinet

Bandleader of

Nathan's Fearless Five
Nathan Tokunaga Quartet/Quintet

Band Member of

Cafe Borrone All-Stars
Clint Baker's New Orleans Jazz Band
Nick Rossi's Jazzopatens, an Ellington Unit
Sierra Stompers
Katie and the Lost Boys
Advanced Funk Ensemble, CJC
College of San Mateo's Little Big Band
Backdraft Jazz Band
Yerba Buena Strutters

As a Sideman

Joe Boga & the Scranton Ramblers
Benny Amon Quartet
Quintet with Kyle Athayde and Sophie Powers
Evelyn & Her Vintage Ties
Stanford Jazz Orchestra
Curiosities Jazz Band
Dave Stuckey and the Hot House Gang
The Little Croquettes
Konrad Paszkudzki Trio
Skyline Hot Club
The Hot Club of San Francisco
Cheryl's Vintage Jazz Band