



# NEWS & INFO

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 15, 2011

**PIANIST/COMPOSER ARMEN DONELIAN'S NEW CD**  
**"LEAPFROG"**

**TO BE RELEASED SEPTEMBER 13**

**DONELIAN'S 9TH CD FOR THE SUNNYSIDE LABEL**  
**FEATURES MARC MOMMAAS, MIKE MORENO,**  
**DEAN JOHNSON, & TYSHAWN SOREY**

**CD RELEASE SHOWS SCHEDULED FOR**  
**FIREHOUSE 12, NEW HAVEN 9/23 &**  
**CORNELIA STREET CAFÉ, NYC 9/24**

Pianist, composer, bandleader, and educator **Armen Donelian** has carved out an enviable career spanning four decades, including seminal stints with Sonny Rollins, Billy Harper, Chet Baker, and Mongo Santamaria. His new album *Leapfrog*, his ninth release for Sunnyside, due for release September 13, should go a long way in rectifying his relatively unsung status as an improvising artist of the highest order.

Working with an exceptional band comprised of Dutch tenor saxophonist **Marc Mommaas**, guitarist **Mike Moreno**, veteran bassist **Dean Johnson**, and drummer **Tyshawn Sorey**, Donelian focuses on his spacious, lyrically charged compositions.

"The inspiration for this music came from my reflections on where the world is going these days," Donelian says. "There's so much regurgitation of older styles in jazz today, I feel the need to carry the ball a little further. As Diz once said, it's about keeping one foot in the tradition, and one in the future."

Determined to distill each composition to its essentials, Donelian has honed a group concept that flows from his belief that less is indeed more. "I like stating an idea and leaving space for listeners to absorb it," Donelian says. "It's especially important for band members to be mindful of space, so they can really hear each other. When there's too much happening there's not much listening going on."

One explanation for the band's profound affinity for Donelian's music is that he shares significant history with these players, and often helped shape them during their formative years. His collaboration with **Dean**

**Johnson** stretches back to the 1980s, when Johnson was establishing himself as an in-demand accompanist through his work with Gerry Mulligan. Donelian met **Marc Mommaas** while teaching at the Manhattan School of Music shortly after the saxophonist arrived in New York City from the Netherlands; they've developed potent bandstand chemistry over the past decade.

Donelian first met **Mike Moreno** while teaching in the New School's jazz program about ten years ago, just as Moreno was starting his ascent to his current status as one of the most esteemed young guitarists in New York. And he encountered **Tyshawn Sorey** as a standout high school student in the mid-1990s, a relationship that continued when the drummer enrolled in William Paterson University, where Donelian is also on faculty.

Born in Queens, NY in 1950 to Armenian parents, **Armen Donelian** grew up in a multicultural household, surrounded by classical and Armenian music. His first exposure to jazz came at age 12, and as a Columbia University undergrad he studied music history, theory, and composition; but his jazz studies commenced in earnest after his graduation, when he fell under the sway of pianist **Richie Beirach**.

During that time Donelian apprenticed with a series of jazz giants, starting in 1975 with **Mongo Santamaria**, where he presided over the piano chair once filled by Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea. "I learned so much about time, professionalism, and stamina," he says of his time with Santamaria. "It was one of the greatest experiences of my life, to investigate Latin music from the inside."

In the midst of his four-year tenure with **Billy Harper**'s band, he made his recording debut with 1981's *Stargazer* (Atlas), a trio date with Billy Hart and Eddie Gomez featuring his original compositions. Through the 1980s, Donelian led a series of outstanding bands, culminating in his quintet with Dick Oatts at the end of the decade, when he feels that his music really came into its own.

Donelian has consistently explored his Armenian roots in his music, and recorded for several labels with the Middle Eastern jazz ensemble **Night Ark**; he also co-produced (with legendary jazz producer George Avakian) *Listen to My Heart*, a collection of jazz interpretations of Armenian folk songs. Donelian has frequently traveled to Armenia to perform, and taught at the Yerevan State Conservatory as a 2002 Fulbright Senior Scholar.

An invaluable educator and international clinician, Donelian has written several authoritative texts, including two volumes of *Training the Ear* and the forthcoming *Whole Notes*, a new book about piano playing. "Over the years I discovered I had a knack for teaching and later a talent," he says, "and beyond that a responsibility."

**Armen Donelian**'s quintet will be performing the music from *Leapfrog* at two CD release shows in September: **9/23** Firehouse 12, New Haven, CT, 8:30pm & 10pm; and **9/24** Cornelia Street Café, NYC, 9pm & 10:30pm. •

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