

Armen Donelian Trio
Oasis

“A pianist with a crystalline touch and a penchant for avant gardism.”
New York Times

“Donelian has quietly created a body of work that at the very least is consistent, at best exhilarating.”
All About Jazz

“For me music is an oasis, a place of refuge, healing, joy and inspiration.”
Armen Donelian – from the CD liner notes

For three decades, the New York/Armenian pianist, composer, bandleader, educator, and author **Armen Donelian** has provided welcome relief from the clichés of jazz pianism plaguing our era. Indeed, Donelian’s piano playing reveals a masterful command rooted in classical and jazz studies, clean articulation, a deft, swinging touch, access to a broad dynamic spectrum, a virtuosic harmonic vocabulary and a boundless source of creative ideas. Along with his all-encompassing compositional genius, Donelian spans American and European improvisational, classical and folk idioms. Without force or persuasion, he invites the listeners to join him in personal and reflective explorations. Donelian’s gifts are on full display on **Oasis**, his latest **Sunnyside** release and his 11th as a leader, with bassist **David Clark** and **George Schuller**, his band-mates for four years.

On the CD’s eight tracks, Donelian swings and sings on his instrument with authority and clarity. Six compositions were composed by the leader: The mid-tempo title selection which opens the CD; “Spree,” a jump-tune that slyly navigates between waltz-time and reggae; the pedal point-propelled basslines of “Waiting for Flora”; the Latin-lilted “Easy Does It”; the misty and mystical “Lady of Ghent,” dedicated to his wife; and “San Souci,” another waltz tune. Two standards round out this delightful and dynamic disc: John Lewis’ immortal elegy, “Django,” written for the brilliant Gypsy guitarist **Django Reinhardt**, recast with Donelian’s ingenious melodic reconfiguration; and “Sunrise, Sunset,” from the Broadway musical **Fiddler on the Roof**, performed with new horizons.

Donelian’s aural alchemy stems from his eclectic cultural and musical biography. Born in 1950 in New York City to Armenian immigrant parents who listened to Armenian, Turkish and Greek music at social gatherings when he was a child, Donelian studied classical piano with **Michael Pollon** for 12 years at the Westchester Conservatory of Music in suburban White Plains. In 1968 he played Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and Prokofiev at his senior recital, but not before joining a jazz group in his early teens led by guitarist **Arthur Ryerson, Sr.** and immersing himself in the music of Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea.

After graduating from **Columbia University** in 1972, Donelian studied with pianist **Richie Beirach**. Three years later, he scored his first major gig as a sideman with percussionist **Mongo Santamaria** (1975-77) that included a Grammy-nominated performance on **Sofrito** (1976, Fania) containing three Donelian compositions, followed by **Sonny Rollins** (1977-8), **Chet Baker** (1977 and 1983-5), **Billy Harper** (1979-83), **Paquito D’Rivera** (1984-5), **Jackie Paris** and **Anne-Marie Moss** (1979-2004) and many others. He released his debut recording, **Stargazer** (Atlas), in 1981, a trio with **Eddie Gomez** and **Billy Hart**. In 1984, he studied with Schoenberg-

influenced composer **Harold Seletsky**. His other critically-acclaimed recordings include **A Reverie** (1984, Sunnyside), **Trio '87** (Odin), **Secrets** (1988, Sunnyside), **The Wayfarer** (1990, Sunnyside), **Grand Ideas Vol. 1: Wave** (2000, Sunnyside) **Grand Ideas Vol. 2: Mystic Heights** (2002, Sunnyside), **Quartet Language** (2002, Playscape), **Grand Ideas Vol. 3: Full Moon Music** (2005, Sunnyside) and **All Or Nothing At All** (2006, Sunnyside).

Donelian is also an experienced educator. He joined the faculty of the **New School Jazz Program** in 1986, and **William Paterson University** in New Jersey in 1993. With the help of six Jazz Fellowships from the **National Endowment for the Arts**, Donelian led (1990-96) the acclaimed the **Rhythm Section Plus One** master class series, presenting over 55 prominent Jazz masters including **Dewey Redman**, **Jim Hall** and **David Liebman** with Donelian as host and pianist. Donelian's books, **Training the Ear, Volume 1** (Advance Music/English, 1992, ATN, Inc./Japanese, 2001) and **Volume 2** (Advance Music, 2005), grew out of his classroom work and has been called "The most clearly organized and comprehensive package of its type" (**Rutgers Annual Review of Jazz Studies**, 1994-5). Donelian's articles on ear training and chord voicings have been published in **Downbeat** and **Keyboard** magazines.

Donelian is also a cultural ambassador. In 1998, he traveled for the first time to Yerevan, Armenia to perform in the first **Yerevan International Jazz Festival**, and to present several first-ever Jazz master classes at the **Yerevan State Conservatory**. He performed and recorded with the Middle Eastern Jazz group **Night Ark**, and accompanied Armenian Jazz vocalist **Datevik Hovanesian**, in performances here and abroad. With support from grants from **CEC International Partners** and private assistance from the **Hovnanian Armenian School** in New Milford, NJ, Donelian initiated the **Jazz in Armenia Project**, an artistic, educational and intercultural initiative. As **Visiting Professor of Jazz** at the Yerevan Conservatory, Donelian directed (1999-2005) a yearly program of master classes, impromptu workshops, solo piano concerts, appearances at local venues with resident musicians and concerts honoring humanitarian efforts in rural areas of Armenia.

In 2002, Donelian received a **Fulbright Senior Scholar Award** in recognition and support of his ongoing work in Armenia. As a participant in **Jazz Appreciation Month** (a US State Department-sponsored program hosted by the American Embassy in Armenia), Donelian performed in major venues including Yerevan Philharmonic Hall, Yerevan Chamber Music Hall, Khatchaturyan Museum Hall and the Vanadzor Music College. Donelian has also presented Fulbright projects in Finland (Jyväskylä Conservatory), Switzerland (Zurich Hochschule for Music) and Sweden (Ingesund College of Music), and taught master classes at major conservatories in St. Petersburg, Tblisi, and Paris. With additional grants from the State Department and the Romanian Fulbright Commission, Donelian appeared as a featured solo pianist in the Kannon Jazz and Modern Dance Festival (Russia), the Richard Oshantzsky Jazz Festival (Romania), and in a command performance for the American Ambassador to Georgia.

David Clark is an experienced professor of bass at **Berklee College of Music** in Boston. George Schuller, the son of noted composer **Gunther Schuller**, is a New York City-based bandleader and record producer with a pedigree musical upbringing.

Armen Donelian's world of music converges on **Oasis**, a haven for the pure power of jazz piano.