

# ALBUM REVIEW

## Christopher Burnett: The Standards, Vol. 1

- - -

By Kyle Simpler, All About Jazz  
April 2021

Modern jazz can certainly take a variety of different forms, but standards still remain the foundation for many players. With **The Standards Vol. 1**, **Christopher Burnett** brings modern and traditional elements together in an excellent meeting. His approach is to bring a traditional approach to each song, whether it's a well-loved favorite or an original composition.

Burnett is a Kansas City native with an impressive professional background. After serving 22 years in the Army, where he was able to advance both his musical and administrative skills, he cofounded the Artists Recording Collective (ARC) label. He has also had an active role in the operation and management of Kansas City's American Jazz Museum, along with establishing the nonprofit Burnett Music Foundation as well as the publication, Jazz Artistry Now.

For **The Standards Vol. 1**, Burnett has assembled a diverse group of musicians. The album features his core ensemble, **The Christopher Burnett Quintet**, with Burnett on alto saxophone, pianist **Roger Wilder**, **Bill McKemy** on bass, **Clarence Smith** on drums, and guitarist **Charles Gatschet**. Also include are **Stanton Kessler** on flugelhorn, **Terri Anderson Burnett** and **Freda Proctor** on flute, **Samantha Batchelor** clarinet and **Aryana Nemati** on baritone saxophone. Burnett describes his collection of musicians. "I purposely wanted to have both male and female musicians, as well as representatives from all adult generations, lending their voices to the music and arrangements."



The ensemble works together well, and the overall sound has something of a contemporary-retro quality to it. In other words, the music sounds fresh and modern with hints of classic recordings from the 1950s and 1960s mixed in. While Burnett's presence is unmistakable, the recording also has a sound reminiscent of classic recordings by producers and arrangers such as Gil Evans or Creed Taylor.

Each of the selections included has a special significance for Burnett. The opening track, Herbie Hancock's "**Dolphin Dance**," for example, was a song he first heard during his high school years. The liner notes discuss how the song's complexity, beauty, and freedom reflects certain aspects of the African-American experience during the 1960s. "On one hand society was saying black people were inferior, but at the same time, Herbie was afforded this wide artistic freedom that was so optimistic."

# ALBUM REVIEW

## Christopher Burnett: The Standards, Vol. 1

- - -

Other selections such as the classic standards “**Corcovado**” and “**All The Things You Are**” also have personal connections for Burnett. Along with these are less common selections such as “**Boplicity**” from Miles Davis’ Birth of the Cool and Chick Corea’s “**Windows**.” All of these songs serve as something of a musical scrapbook bringing his musical history together with fresh, new arrangements.

Burnett also recognizes musicians who influenced his own style. He recognizes alto players such as Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Stitt, Lee Konitz, and Charlie Parker as having an impact on his playing. He describes how he spent hours transcribing solos by each of these players while he was studying at the Armed Forces School of Music.

The album closes with the Burnett original, “**Freedom Flight**,” which is a tribute to his son, Seth, who is a pilot in the US Air Force. This rhythm and uplifting melody give this selection a quality much like traditional jazz standards. As Burnett explains, “I enjoy when something I compose connects with people. Like the standards do.”

With **The Standards Vol. 1**, Burnett shows how songs continue to evolve and allow players to express their own unique style. The level of musicianship is exceptional here, and Burnett definitely gives each song a refreshing vitality.



### Album Information

Title: The Standards, Vol. 1 | Year Released: 2021 | Record Label: Artists Recording Collective (ARC)  
Produced, recorded, mix and mastered by Bill Crain and William Crain at BRC Audio Productions.  
Album artwork - David Terrill; Session photography - WM Thornton; Liner notes - David R. Adler.