

## *Vita*

### EDUCATION

B.A., Jazz Composition and Performance/Aesthetic Theory (1979) — University of California at Santa Cruz

B.A., Classical Music (1979) — University of California at Santa Cruz

Level 1 — Orff-Schulwerk (1996)

#### *Principle Teachers: Music*

Jazz Piano and Composition — Art Lande (*ECM Records*), Kenny Werner (*BMG Records*), Bevan Manson (UC Berkeley),  
Allaudin Mathieu (Mills College), Randy Masters (*Inner City Records*)

Arranging — Bob Bauer, Bevan Manson

Classical Piano — Marc Steiner & Robert Durso (Taubman Institute, Amherst, MA), Marilyn Thompson (*S.F. Trio*)

Western Classical Voice — Jane Sharp, Freyda Epstein (Hyperion Records), Jane Boothroyd (*Theatre of Voices*, Harmonia  
Mundi Records), Maeve Udell (Seth Riggs Method)

Jazz Voice — Mark Murphy (award-winning *Inner City* artist)

North Indian Classical Raga — Pandit Pran Nath (*Grammavision Records*), Terry Riley (*Columbia Records*)

Percussion — Abdulai Diakute (Senegalese and Malian *jun juns*), Andy Barnett (African tone drum/mallets), Vince del Gado  
& Mark Helm (dumbeck), and Kim Atkinson (Brazilian)

Rhythm Education — Reinhard Flatischler (*Ta Ke Ti Na* technique)

Balinese Gamelan — *Gamelan Sekar Jaya*

Literature & Analysis — Grovesnor Cooper (Harvard Dictionary of Music contributor)

Early Music Performance Practice — Philip Brett (U.C. Berkeley), Bruce Wetmore (student of Gustav Leonhardt)

Baroque Flute — Kathleen Kraft (*American Bach Soloists*)

Childhood Education — Doug Goodkin (Senior Orff-Schulwerk Trainer)

#### *Principle Teachers: Related Arts*

Theatre Improvisation — Sue Walden & Co.

Alexander Movement Technique — Gayle Felbain, Freyda Epstein

Creativity Development — Consulting Services (San Francisco)

### TEACHING (see accompanying Workshop Topics sheet for group instruction)

Continuity and Musical Consultant for the film documentary "The Cost of Construction" by Jordan Erlich (2009)

Adjudicator for the West Coast Semi-Final for the International Championship of Collegiate A Cappella (ICCA) — 3/15/08.

Studio Instructor and Creativity Development Lecturer — Sonoma State University (2002-present).

Jazz Piano Lab Group Instructor — Sonoma State University (2003).

Creativity Development Facilitator — FIRE DANCE, SpiritFireFestival, Phoenix Fire arts organizations (2003-present).

Music Mentor — John F. Kennedy University (Arts and Consciousness Graduate Program, ongoing), Orinda, CA.

Private and Group Instructor — For adults and children since 1974 on piano and voice covering: jazz, classical, latin, gospel, blues,  
pop, and free improvisation styles. Also: synthesizer, percussion, flute, songwriting, composition, arranging, theory, ear-training,  
body awareness techniques, creative process work, career development, and ensemble coaching.

Instrumental Jazz Coordinator and Instructor — *East Bay Center for the Performing Arts* (1989) and *The Horus School of Performing Arts*  
(1987).

Vocal Improvisation Clinician — *SoVoSo* (formally Bobby McFerrin's *Voicestra*), A Cappella Summit, San Francisco City College, Marin  
School District, Sue Walden Theatre Improvisation Company (1993-8), the West Coast Jazz Orff Workshop, FIRE DANCE,  
SpiritFireFestival, Phoenix Fire, and May Moon arts organizations (2003-present).

Public School — Orff-based classroom instruction: Canyon Elementary School (1996-7) and Coleman Elementary School (1997).

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## COMMISSIONS / ARRANGEMENTS

### *Commissions*

- 2006 *Meet the Composer - Creative Connections.*
- 2002 *Bernard Osher Foundation Audience Development Grant.*
- 2002 Awarded grant from See's Candy to record and broadcast a major concert of original works on the KCSM-91.1 FM's *Sunday Night Series*.
- 1995 *Meet The Composer/California* grant to create five new works for the *Mirabai Ensemble*.
- 1991 Awarded grant from See's Candy to record and broadcast a major concert of original works on the KJAZ-91.7 FM's *Sunday Night Series*. Each half was broadcast on June 14 and November 15, 1992.
- 1985 *Dream Suite for Rocking*, a 14-minute piece commissioned by New York sculptor Rita Blitt; premiered in Long Island, NY.
- 1975,'76,'79 Three 6-10 minute piano/percussion compositions for UCSC Dance productions; Ruth Solomon, director.

### *Arranging*

- 2008 Arrangements of Jazz and Pop standards "Witchcraft", "Satisfaction", "Blue Skies", "It Might As Well Be Spring" for vocalist Paula Bradman.
- 2008 Arrangement of "Cinque Terre" and "Doin' The Best I Can" for vocalist D.J. Hamouris.
- 1992-2004 Jazz compositions by John Abercrombie, McCoy Tyner, Phil Markowitz, Kurt Nurock, and Chris Lee.
- 2003 Traditional spiritual "Over My Head" by John Thomas, appearing on his CD "Living Room."
- 2002 *A Leader's Prayer* (rock gospel work with chamber interlude). Premiered by the Michael Smolens' Septet with lyricist Sparkle Tu-Rhan as vocalist.
- 2001-5 Contemporary Christian Songs by: Beckwith/Byars (Agape Church), Karen Drucker, Deborah Rae Thomson, Mark Pendergrass, and Kaori Honda.
- 2001-5 Christian and Jewish Holiday Songs.
- 2000 Three works for the *Bill Hunter Project* CD: *Authenticity* (ballad), *Prosthetic Muse* (swing), *Sweet Glory* (jazz waltz).
- 1999 String quartet *Capacity for Intensity* and solo piano piece *Intrauterine Cannibals* for Alan Tower's *10,000 Thunderstorms* CD.
- 1996-8 Solo piano works of Chopin, Schumann, and Satie.
- 1991-3 Composed, arranged, performed, and recorded with the *Occidental Community Choir*. Featured instrumentally on percussion, drums, keyboards, and vocally as a jazz improviser and classical soloist.
- 1991 Three works for Biaja Solomon's "Woman In The Moon" CD: "Theo's Song" (waltz), "I Get Scared" (jazz ballad), and "Woman In The Moon" (Klezmer).
- 1985-present Jazz standards by Styne/Cahn, Rodgers/Hart, Gross/Lawrence, Dennis/Brent, Kern/Hammerstein, Carmichael/Mercer, and Mancini.
- 1985-present Pop songs by: Lennon/McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Fox/Gimbel, and Pamela Williams.
- 1982-present Sufi Zikhrs by: Hazrat Inayat Khan and Murshida Rabia Ana Perez-Chisti.

## RECORDINGS

- 2008 *Essentions*, KRIYA Jazz Octet (original compositions ranging from swung, modal and European jazz to Latin and West African strains).
- 2008 *Rasa and Her Moods*, earPlay Jazzquintet (original electro-acoustic world music/spoken word).
- 2007 *Michael Smolens Piano Instructional Series* Vol. 1
- 2005-7 *Michael Smolens Vocal Instructional Series* Vol. 1, Vol. 2
- 2003 *Live at Yosbi's*, KRIYA Jazz Septet (live recording for worldwide broadcast).
- 2002 *Live Series*, Michael Smolens/Sheldon Brown Duo (free improvisations/repertoire, 18 instruments).  
Vol. 1 - *Limbo Eruption*  
Vol. 2 - *Hib Abduction*  
Vol. 3 - *Astringent Assumption*
- 1997 *Train to Tourmaline*, Michael Smolens/Sheldon Brown Duo (twelve free improvisations in duo settings on piano, saxophones, flutes, clarinet, percussion, voice).

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- 1992 *The Last Rendezvous* (eight original chamber works for settings ranging from solo piano to large-scale ensemble, featuring world-renowned tabla player Zakir Hussain and *Oregon* reedman, Paul McCandless).
- 1992 *VQS*, co-arranged (directed and performed in the jazz/chamber works of the film composer, Vivian Sayles).

## PRODUCING

- 2007 Produced and orchestrated three songs by Donald G. Gillis, “Songs of Faith.”
- 2001 Co-produced *10,000 Thunderstorms*, fifth recording by Alan Tower and *Octave Alliance*.
- 1997 *Marc Steiner In Recital*, USC graduate performing the works of Mozart, Chopin, Brahms, Berg, and Rachmaninoff.

## INTERVIEWS

- On Stage Old First Concerts 2002, San Francisco (Mike Greensill, host)
- KCSM-FM Feature interviews 2004, 2002, 2000, 1992 (Chris Cortez, George Hughes, Clifford Brown Jr., hosts)
- KPFA-FM Interviewed 18 times between 1984-2006 (Doug Edwards, Derk Richardson, Dean Suzuki, hosts)
- KKUP-FM Interviewed 2004, 2002, 2000 (Afrikahn Dayvs, host)
- KMWR-FM Interviewed 2004, 2002, 1999 (Chris Breyer, host)
- KUSP-FM Interviewed 2004, 2000 (Larry Blood, host)
- KZSZ-FM Interviewed 2000 (Nick Gyorkos, host)
- KAZU-FM Interviewed 2000 (Melanie Walker, host)
- KALW-FM Interviewed 1999 “Perspectives - Jazz Profiles” — Christian Science Monitor Radio (Reese Erlich, producer)
- KUSF-FM Interviewed 1992 (Susan Potter, host)
- KCSM-FM Retrospective of compositions produced by KCSM-FM and aired on October 7, 1989 (Alissa Clancy, producer)

## PERFORMANCE

*Founder/Director/Performer* (piano, synthesizer, voice, balafon, hand and mallet percussion, and alto flute)

### *Secular*

- 1980-1992/  
2001-present Contemporary jazz octet **KRIYA**. Yoshi’s Jazz House (Oakland — six times), Bach Dynamite and Dancing Society (Half Moon Bay), Pacifica Jazz Series (Pacifica — three times), Noe Valley Jazz Series (San Francisco), Kimball’s West (San Francisco), Kuumbwa Jazz Center (Santa Cruz), U.C. Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and numerous house concerts and benefits.
- 1993-8/  
2005-present **The Mirabai Ensemble**, a ground-breaking 18 person vocal/instrumental ensemble, drawing members from the jazz, ethnic music, and opera communities. Arranged, composed and performed. Bach Dynamite and Dancing Society (Half Moon Bay). City College (San Francisco), College of Marin (Kentfield), Acappella Summit (San Rafael), The San Francisco School (San Francisco).
- 1999-present **earPlay Jazzquintet**. Yoshi’s Jazz House (Oakland), Old First Church Concert Series (San Francisco), West Coast Orff-Schulwerk Jazz Conference (San Francisco), Point Reyes Dance Palace, Ernie Shelton House Concert Series & Coffee Catz (Sebastopol), Stanley Middle School (Lafayette).
- 2006-present **Bal-du-Kor** West African trio that fuses traditional instruments with alto flute and vocals.
- 2003-4 *John Thomas/Michael Smolens Duo*. Jazz Vespers at Old First Church (San Francisco).
- 1999-2000 *Michael Smolens/Sheldon Brown Duo*. New Performance Gallery (San Francisco), Julia Morgan Theater (Berkeley), Freight and Salvage Coffee House (Berkeley), Point Reyes Dance Palace.
- 1991-2 Jazz Theater Trio *Second Sight*. Julia Morgan Theater (Berkeley), Concepts Cultural Gallery (Oakland)
- 1992 Co-produced an evening of music by film composer Vivian Sayles at Yoshi’s Jazz House. Featured both chamber and jazz works in settings ranging from duo to octet. Appeared as bandleader, co-arranger, and performer.
- 1989-1990 Produced four concerts featuring original works for Breakthrough Foundation’s “Youths at Risk” program.
- 1975-present Various theatre and ethnic performances.
- 1975-present Solo and small ensemble performances in ‘casual settings’ i.e. restaurants, clubs, weddings, etc.

### ***Sacred***

- 2007-8 Accompanist at Spiritual Illuminata, Milpitas; Unity, San Ramon; Alameda Spiritual Living Center, Alameda, CA.  
2006 Accompanist/Guest Choral Director at Unity In Marin, and Home of Truth, Alameda, CA.  
2005 Accompanist at New Thought Unity Church, Sunnyvale, CA.  
2001-5 Music Director/Accompanist at New Thought Unity Church, Berkeley, CA.  
1997 Music and Choral Director/Accompanist at Unity Church, Richmond, CA.  
1995 Music Director/Accompanist at Church of Religious Science, San Rafael, CA.  
1982-present Accompanist for Sufi Teachers for Zikhr (movement meditation) and Dances of Universal Peace.  
1999-present Principle Accompanist for Sufi Masters Jelalludin Lorcas and Rabia Murshida Ana Perez-Chisti.

### ***Dance Accompaniment***

- 1975-1991 Modern and Jazz Dance Accompaniment — Dance classes at U.C. Berkeley, U.C. Santa Cruz, University of San Francisco, Footworks Dance Studio, and Vicki Salmon (UCLA), Jo Krieter, Tandy Beal, Beth Harris, Aaron Osborn, and Rod Rodgers (New York).

## **PUBLISHED ARTICLES**

- How To Develop Your Music Away From Your Instrument, Part II* — *Open Exchange*, April 2007  
*Practical Steps to Performance Freedom* — *Open Exchange*, September, 2006  
*How To Develop Your Music Away From Your Instrument, Part I* — *Open Exchange*, April 2006  
*How to Survive as an Artist* — *Open Exchange*, May 2001  
*Musical Creativity in Action* — *Open Exchange*, January 2000  
*Notes on Arranging - A Case Study "Old Doc Jones"* — *The Orffion* (American Orff-Schulwerk Assoc., Fall 1998)  
*Intentionality and Free Improvisation* — *Open Exchange*, September, 1997  
*Musical Creativity and the Art of Practicing* — *Open Exchange*, July 1993  
*Listening and Feeling in Music* — *Open Exchange*, January 1985

## **TRANSCRIPTION & CALLIGRAPHY**

Transcribed and edited hundreds of jazz, popular, and non-Western works.

Music Calligraphy covering all periods of Western classical literature for Alan Curtis (musicologist, U.C. Berkeley), the *Kronos String Quartet*, Terry Riley, *University of California Press*, and others.

Calligraphed the landmark *The New Legal Real Book Vol. 1* (1988) and *World's Greatest Fakebook* (1983) — the first legal anthologies of contemporary jazz works.

## **REVIEWS & QUOTES**

### **Composer**

*"Smolens is a highly skilled writer whose works recall Miles' 'ESP' period, as well as the exoticism of groups like 'Oregon'..."*

— Jessie Hamlin, *San Francisco Examiner*

*"No ordinary composer... Smolens gives a broad palette from which to paint luminous ECM-like textures for his jazz Septet."*

— Lee Hildebrand, *East Bay Express Critic's Choice*

*"A creative figure on the Bay Area jazz scene for the past two decades, Smolens' music is marked by spaciousness and carefully calibrated instrumental voicings."*

— Andrew Gilbert, *Contra Costa Times Critic's Choice*

*"One of the premiere Bay Area composers and educators."*

— Doug Edwards, veteran KPFA "Airtime" and  
"BAJABA Showcase" showhost

*"A treasure-trove of musical riches."*

— Bud Spangler, producer and host of *See's Sunday Nights Sweets*

### **KRIYA Jazz Octet**

*"The musicianship throughout the ensemble is on the highest level. Smolens' writing for his four-born band "KRIYA" is compelling and innovative, while remaining audience friendly. His music blends Jazz and World Music to create a sound that is uniquely his own."*

—Larry Dunlap, producer of the jazz concerts for Pacifica Performances and "Four Directions" recording artist, composer, pianist

*"KRIYA's music walks a blazer's trail of Brazilian Carnival and contemporary cool... 'Essentions' is a bit of spontaneous combustion with Smolens reaching in to his compositional grab bag and pulling out bursts of energy... 'Lavalava' was a West-African approach to seven different moods of polished gems... Smolens' arrangement of 'For No One' (Lennon/McCartney) would have had Lennon whistling in admiration..."*

—Jean Bartlett, arts correspondent of the *Pacifica Tribune*

*"Smolens' pieces are notable for their originality and beautifully spacious arrangements... we recommend keeping an eye out for live performances by 'KRIYA' or one of his other line-ups."*

— Tony Brooke, *Critics' Choice SF Weekly*

*"The music of 'Kriya' is truly original with overarching themes and arrangements that are epic in scope — jazz for the new millenium!"*

— Alan Tower, *composer, recording artist, Octave Alliance founder*

### **The Mirabai Ensemble**

*"Bravo! That was a spectacular performance of unique music and vocal improvisation.*

*Our college audience was the perfect showcase of your extraordinary talent."*

— Brenda Chinn, Director of Concert Lecture Series  
at City College of San Francisco

*"They make beautiful music over an awesome range of styles, such as jazz, plainchant, North Indian Classical, Western Classical, and theater improvisation. We were amazed by their cheerful explanations and demonstrations, and their willingness to assist my students in experimentations. Since I've adjudicated many artistic competitions, such as California Arts Council Presenters and also grants to Touring Artists, I can compare the Mirabai Ensemble to the best in California."*

— Dr. Helen Dilworth, Instructor: City College  
of San Francisco and College of Marin

### earPlay Jazzquintet

*"This seriously talented Quintet is lead by Michael Smolens and includes Alex Murzyn, Michael Hatfield, Fred Randolph, Brian Rice. These names may mean little to you, but after you have the opportunity to listen, you will be enlightened, as I was."*

— D.S., Nitevise

*"Michael returned to my jazz course to present his 'earPlay Jazzquintet' ensemble and was enthusiastically received."*

— Doug Goodkin (Orff Method pioneer & author, composer / arranger, multi-instrumentalist)

*"As the world gets increasingly smaller from a cultural standpoint, the 'earPlay Jazzquintet' is helping to foster greater understanding while heightening students' aesthetic awareness and creativity."*

— Bob Athayde (Stanley Middle School Music Chair, arranger, pianist)

### Michael Smolens/Sheldon Brown Duo

*"Both musicians have an exceptional command of their instruments... patient, thoughtful, and inventive... a duo of great promise."*

— Jason Bivins, *Cadence* magazine,  
on *Train to Tourmaline* duo CD

*"Their music has a warm spirit and an appealing sense of lyricism— Definitely worth looking for."*

— Stewart Kremsky, *LAJRC Journal*,  
on *Train to Tourmaline* duo CD

*"The music of Michael Smolens and Sheldon Brown boasts the eclecticism and expansiveness of the spacious ECM sound of the '70s and world fusion bands, but their classical, African, Indian and other influences put their improvised sessions in original realms beyond any identifiable genres."*

— Derk Richardson, *East Bay Express Critic's Choice*

### Calligrapher

*"The cleanest, clearest, and most comprehensive [book] of its kind... Calligrapher Michael Smolens has done a masterful job of rendering each chart in a consistently clear and artistic manner..."*

— *Contemporary Keyboard* magazine