

The John Kalleen Group

“The John Kalleen Group: Musicians Bios”



John Kalleen - Trumpet

Trumpeter John Kalleen assembled the John Kalleen Group in 2004, inspired to create an ensemble based on the full-sounding style of the 50s and 60s classic jazz quintets, as exemplified by the great Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter groups, going back as far as the bebop era Clifford Brown bands. He traces his own passion for jazz, and the trumpet, to witnessing a Freddie Hubbard performance at a very young age. Kalleen was hooked, and he stayed that way.

Kalleen is no stranger to band leading, having directed the popular San Francisco-based modern jazz group Tout va Bien for several years. In fact, he formed his first group, a Dixieland jazz combo, when he was only sixteen. And he served as trumpeter and leader of the High Society Jazz Band for over a decade. He's studied with local trumpet masters John Coppola, Bill Ortiz and John Worley.

And despite his time performing traditional jazz, Kalleen's first love has always been those progressive 50s and 60s sounds, as personified by musicians like Hubbard.

As a leader, he is keen to allow each band member to make robust artistic contributes, with compositions, arrangements or even just with stylistic ideas to help enhance each number during the bands regular rehearsals. Kalleen has contributed many such arrangements himself.

And then, of course, there's his own bright and spirited trumpet playing that so admirably compliments Michael Bello's fiery saxophone work in the JKG's front line. Kalleen offers the spare beauty of Chet Baker and the melodic musings of Miles Davis as his chief musical influences.

"I took my time finding just the right musicians," Kalleen explains. "What I expected was that we were going to be a bebop/hard bop quintet that essentially cover the classic tunes of that era, with some imaginative new arrangements. But the musicians who joined the band really clicked. Soon the guys started bringing in new compositions to play. With those original tunes in our repertoire, the band has taken on its own unique sound and style. So the band has taken off in ways that I originally hadn't imagined. It's terrific."

Kalleen is excited about the potential clearly shown by the JKG. A CD is in the works for 2008, and for now the plan is to expand the ensemble's performance experience and fan base in the San Francisco Bay Area. But for the future, the sky's the limit.

"Eventually we'd love to tour the U.S. and even Europe," Kalleen says. "But for right now, we're playing a lot here at home, and having a lot of fun. There's a lot of vitality, and lot of excitement and a lot of enthusiasm."



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Michael Bello - Tenor Saxophone

One half of the John Kalleen Group's shimmering horn section, saxophonist Michael Bello provides the band both searing and soulful reed work and intriguing compositions. In both his playing and his writing, Bello impresses immediately as an artist of unique vision. It's no surprise that he considers his greatest musical influences to be individualists like Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk. And Bello finds the make-up and philosophy of the John Kalleen Group to be complimentary to his artistic aspirations.

Along with his enthusiasm, Bello brings an impressive array of experience and virtuosity to the JKG. In addition to his work with Kalleen and crew, Bello performs with Albino, a hugely popular and fiery Afro-Beat ensemble with whom Bello has toured across the U.S. He's also played with high-profile groups including Lee Press-on and the Nails, the Mel Graves Quartet and the Johnny Otis Band, and he's in constant demand as an on-call sideman.

Bello includes among his major musical influences cutting edge players like Jimi Hendrix, Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk. It's clear that he's drawn to artists who are ground breakers.

"Yes," Bello agrees. "I've always felt that way, and it's definitely affected my own playing. There are two main ways of looking at playing music. You're either copying somebody or you're doing what you want to do. From the very beginning, I didn't want to be doing anybody else's thing. I wanted to figure out what I wanted to do, and then I wanted make that happen."

Bello appreciates being in an ensemble of like-minded and equally adventurous yet generous musicians.

"The John Kalleen Group is truly collaborative," he says, "which is refreshing for me. I'm given a lot of space to write and arrange the way I want to. And because we rehearse regularly, we can work on things that are more involved, instead of just preparing basic arrangements. And it really helps to have such a close connection with the guys in the group. I know them well enough now so that I can write specifically for each one, and on stage I know I can rely on everyone."

James Mitchell - Piano

Jimi Mitchell is not just a fine pianist, but is one of the group's principal composers.

"Music is my life," he says, "and I enjoy playing jazz so much because of the expressive freedom it allows me."

A Napa Valley native, Mitchell has been playing professionally since he was fifteen, when he began performing throughout the California wine country with the Nick Webster Quartet. Originally strongly influenced by Chick Corea, Mitchell has also turned an ear toward many of the younger pianists. Brad Mehldau, Geoffrey Keezer and Jason Moran are among his current influences. A graduate of Sonoma State University in Jazz Studies, Mitchell has recorded several successful CDs under his own name, and played venues across California and in England as well.

Mitchell observes that getting a serious hearing for his written works is one of his prime sources of satisfaction in being a member of the JKG.

"There's an incredible amount of creative energy invested in making compositions come alive in this band," Mitchell says.

"There's much more attention given to compositional detail than any other band I've been in. Michael, John, Michael and Piro all keep coming up with new ideas for making my songs sound better, and the feel with which they play my songs is so often the kind of feel I was looking for when I wrote them. All the energy is a big reason this group is going in exciting directions."

John Kalleen observes of Mitchell, "Jimi is a wonderful piano player, and he's especially impressive from a rhythmic standpoint. Piro and Michael, on bass and drums, really gravitate towards him while we're playing because his rhythm is just so good."



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Piro Patton - Bass

Piro Patton is a young veteran who has studied and performed extensively on both coasts. He's earned his reputation as an extremely melodic bass player, with the willingness-and ability-to stretch his role within an ensemble. That creativity helps give the John Kalleen Group its singular sound. Patton began his musical life as a vibes player, and his early talent landed him at Berklee School of Music, where he studied with Gary Burton. Moving to Los Angeles, Patton enrolled at the California Institute of the Arts, where he studied alongside classmates including Ravi Coltrane and Otmaro Ruiz.

While at Cal Arts, Patton became inspired by Charlie Haden, and took up the bass, and received a direct and invaluable tutelage from Haden. In LA, Patton also performed with David Ralike's Latin Flavors ensemble, and led a busy trio of his own.

Patton moved to New York in 1995 and plied his trade on the New York City jazz scene for seven years, playing with a wide range of musicians, before moving to San Francisco in 2002. He's played with ground-breaking artists like Paul McCandless, Art Lande and Andre Bush, and he's in constant demand for performance and session work.

For Patton, it's the quality of the ensemble playing that makes his membership in the John Kalleen Band so rewarding.

"This band is extraordinary because of the group dynamic," he says. "The interplay is really lovely, and the musical conversations that we have. When we're on the bandstand, people are really with each other. That's what I enjoy. I particularly like the original material we do. I play a lot of trio music, so it's also a real pleasure to be in a band with a quality horn section. You can play the bass in a different way."

And the bottom line for Patton?

"I love being involved in this band," he concludes.

"The musicians are all pushing hard to make something great, and the ears in this band are really big."

Michael Pinkham - Drums

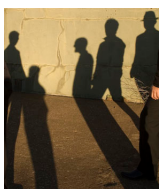
Along with bassist Piro Patton and pianist Jimi Mitchell, drummer Michael Pinkham provides the John Kalleen Group with its seamless yet adventurous rhythmic core. The most recent addition to the band, Pinkham has been an active member of the San Francisco Music scene, performing with the Tony Award winning San Francisco Mime Troupe and SF Weekly's "Best World Beat Band" Albino. A versatile musician, Pinkham was drawn towards the rhythms of Africa, Cuba, Brazil and India. He studied tabla at the Ali Akbar College with Tim Witter and Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri.

Michael began playing drums at sixteen and started gigging shortly thereafter. He has studied privately with bay area greats including Colin Bailey, Alan Hall, Robert Kaufman and Atma Anur. Throughout his musical journey, Michael has always played and studied jazz. His first jazz influences, Art Blakey and Elvin Jones attest to his affinity to the 50s and 60s quintet sound that is at the root of the JKG's sound.

"As a drummer," he says, "jazz is one of the more interesting styles of music to play, because you get to have more interplay with the other musicians. I enjoy playing a back beat, but it's really satisfying to truly express something on the drums."

Like his band mates, Michael is enjoying the cohesive nature of the John Kalleen Group.

"I really enjoy playing the original material," he says. "The guys are writing a lot of interesting tunes that combine freedom of expression with tight ensemble playing. We've also been incorporating some very interesting new arrangements of standards. I enjoy that a lot."



The John Kalleen Group is available to play at clubs, festivals and corporate events.

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