

*For immediate release*



**Trombonist Nick Finzer celebrates jazz legend JJ Johnson’s centennial with “Legacy”, an album that honors the icon’s past and commemorates his still-living legacy, brought to life by Johnson’s own longstanding band members**

NEW YORK, N.Y. - The year 2024 marks something special for many jazz musicians and trombonists alike: the **centennial of JJ Johnson**, one of the genre’s profound luminaries and all-time most influential trombonists. In honor of this magnanimous moment in jazz history, **trombonist, composer, educator, and Outside in Music label CEO Nick Finzer** has programmed a **series of festivities over the course of the year**. Ranging from masterclasses and seminars to tours and concerts with modern trombone masters, these celebrations will **culminate in the release of Finzer’s newest album, Legacy on April 5th, 2024**. The album reunited **Johnson’s own legendary band members Renee Rosnes (piano), Rufus Reid (bass), and Lewis Nash (drums)** in the **Rudy Van Gelder studios** in Englewood, NJ - the very **same location in which Johnson himself recorded many of his classic albums**. Featuring a host of arrangements of Johnson’s compositions, pieces from Johnson’s regular songbook, and Finzer’s own originals that exemplify Johnson’s distinctive style, *Legacy* is not merely a tribute

album, but stands as a **testament to the ever-present and transformative influence Johnson still has today.**

For Nick Finzer, since he first began jazz trombone in 2003, JJ Johnson has been a stalwart and guiding light throughout his career. With 2024 marking Johnson's centennial, Finzer has taken up the mantle not only of highlighting the mastery and lasting impact of Johnson's playing, but his substantial **impact as a prolific arranger, educator, and pioneer** within the genre of jazz trombone. Finzer summarizes the importance of Johnson succinctly: "Sometimes it is the nature of our industry to overlook the Trombone, but as my mentor, Steve Turre has said many times, '**JJ Johnson did for the trombone what Charlie Parker did for the saxophone.**' He was a true innovator of his time, and his innovations have lasted throughout his lifetime and beyond." The full scope of Finzer's *Legacy* project and **the centennial celebration will unfold over the course of the entire year**, and will pay direct homage to Johnson's roles as performer, arranger, and education.

One of the ways Finzer sought to honor and vitalize the *Legacy* project was to work with greats who had themselves been staple members of Johnson's bands. "When I first conceived of wanting to celebrate this milestone of jazz history, **I wanted to involve as many alumni of JJ Johnson's bands as I could,**" Finzer says. "This led me to calling **Renee Rosnes, Rufus Reid and Lewis Nash**, all of whom were **active members of JJ's touring groups in the 1980s and 1990s.**"

The collaboration between the group on *Legacy* was profound and relatively unique, as it was a **project that stretched across different generations.** Finzer points out the honor and magnitude of such an opportunity to work with living legends who themselves worked with a substantial forerunner who came before them. "It was a new experience for me to develop relationships with jazz legends like these and to work with them on music that holds such a special place in their past," Finzer says. "It's **amazing being able to experience the level of musicianship of musicians who have played with your heroes**, who not only give you respect, but who are dedicated to bringing your musical vision to life, without sacrificing the deep understanding and commitment to the legacy of this music." With Finzer's leadership and expertise, coupled with the rhythm trio's depth of knowledge and experience with Johnson, they brought to life with utmost authenticity the music that makes up his legacy, and the music that pays respect to the Johnson's work.

*Legacy* features a host of compositions by Johnson, originals by Finzer in the style of Johnson, and a composition by Rosnes that Johnson readily adopted as a staple part of his songbook during his lifetime. Of Johnson's work, Finzer found that **the ballads are some of the most profound musical experiences** on the album. In particular, Johnson's beloved piece "**Lament**" is highlighted. Finzer's arrangement preserves the **beauty of the original melody, but frames it with new presentations of the main theme** and adding interludes to emphasize the emotion of the ballad. "**Malaga Moon**" is an **original by Rosnes that she wrote for Johnson** during her time in his band that became a cornerstone of his repertoire during his life. It was first recorded by Johnson with a studio orchestra, and so the band on *Legacy* adapted the energy

and spirit of that recording for quartet. “Johnson’s sound from that recording has been permanently imprinted in my brain,” Finzer says. “It’s a beautiful composition and a wonderful tribute to JJ’s musicianship. It was very **special to be able to play it with the composer, on a project for the person who she wrote it for.**” The album also includes, as its second bonus track, an **arrangement of the jazz standard “Blue Bossa” that was created by Johnson himself and taught to the band by bassist Rufus Reid from his days touring with the trombone innovator.**

The impact and influence of Johnson’s original band members on this album and on Finzer’s creative process is profound, and enabled *Legacy* to be steeped in nothing short of the legacy the album’s title seeks to evoke. Of the band, Finzer has nothing but praise to give. “**Lewis Nash might be the most swinging drummer on the face of the planet**, everything that he does brings the perfect balance of energy, swing, and taste!” Finzer says. “It has been an amazing opportunity to be able to work with him and learn from him about JJ and his legacy as a musician and bandleader.” Finzer acknowledges the generous donation of time and skill of pianist Renee Rosnes in particular, as she has been earning accolades for her own band, Artemis. “**Rosnes is extremely melodically inventive, and an amazing accompanist when she isn’t soloing,**” Finzer boasts. “**I can see why JJ was so fond of having her in the band!**” Rufus Reid has been on countless records, many of which were highly influential favorites of Finzer’s as he was a developing musician. “I heard Reid on so many records growing up; it was really amazing to have that sound in the room,” says Finzer. “**Having the sound that he brings to JJ’s rhythm section on some of his later recordings, and to be playing with it live was just incredible.**”

The festivities for JJ Johnson’s centennial is prolific and multifaceted. A notable highlight is at the **University of North Texas**, which will be hosting a **week of artists in residence** starting March 21st, 2024, featuring **Nick Finzer alongside Steve Davis, Rufus Reid, Billy Childs, and Steve Turre**. Finzer will also be taking the *Legacy* band on the road for concerts and masterclasses at locations and festivals in Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, California, and Indiana.

The full celebration itinerary for 2024 is as follows, and is ongoing:

***January 19th - Say When - Debut Project Single***

January 19 & 20 - Nick Finzer Guest Artist at the Purdue University Jazz Festival - West Lafayette, IN

**JJ Johnson’s Centennial Birthday Week Celebrations:**

January 22nd - JJ Johnson 100th Birthday Celebration/Livestream at University of Central Oklahoma Jazz Lab

January 25th Monks Jazz Club - Austin, TX

January 26th - Steve’s Wine Bar, Denton, TX

***March 1st, 2024 - Lament - Digital Single***

March 4th, 2024 - Nick at Cameron University Jazz Festival Guest Artist - Lawton, OK

March 21st, 2024 - ***University of North Texas JJ Johnson Centennial Celebration*** Concert ft: Nick Finzer, Steve Davis, Rufus Reid, Billy Childs, and the One O’Clock Lab Band

March 23rd, 2024 - JJ Johnson Centennial at the University of North Texas Jazz Trombone Day featuring (Legendary Jazz Trombonist and SNL Band Member) Steve Turre

**April 5th, 2024 - "Legacy: A Centennial Celebration of JJ Johnson" Album Release**

April 8th, 2024 - Radio Add Date

April 10th - Sam First - Los Angeles, CA

April 11th - University of Arizona Masterclass, Tucson, AZ

April 11th - Century Room - Tucson, AZ

April 13, 2024 - The Nash - Phoenix, AZ

with Lewis Nash, Renee Rosnes, Rufus Reid

May 24th - Digital Single Release - Judy (Bonus Track 1)

July 12th - Digital Single Release - Blue Bossa (Bonus Track 2)

With *Legacy*, Nick Finzer has successfully demonstrated his depth of understanding of and respect for the tradition and history of jazz and its masters. By encapsulating JJ Johnson's spirit through monuments to both his compositional mark and testaments to his influence over the continuation of jazz composers and performers, *Legacy* shows that what has passed in jazz past will remain present and powerful into the future.

**Legacy: a Centennial Celebration of JJ Johnson** releases on **Outside in Music** on **April 5th, 2024**.

