

FRANCK AMSALLEM'S BIO

Franck Amsallem was born in 1961 in Oran, Algeria and then grew up in Nice, France. His parents, having repatriated the family piano, started him on classical piano at age seven. He gave it up a few years later: the large family, the cramped apartment weren't at all propitious surroundings for the old teacher's stale lessons. Still, however, the family owned a large collection of 45 records where Ray Charles mixed with Glenn Miller and the Four Tops. In all logic then, he was seduced in adolescence by the sound of the blues and swing, and, at age 14, started taking music lessons at the Nice Conservatory where, considered too old for the piano (!), he signed up for classical saxophone and soon earned a first prize.

But the piano remained his first love. The news of his talent spread on the Cote d'Azur, and he worked a lot in Monte Carlo, learning hundreds or maybe thousands of jazz standards, "I have always, above all, loved all American music," and at 17, John Lewis chose him to be his student for the French documentary, "La leçon de musique." Having jammed offstage at the Nice jazz festival with Jerry Bergonzi, Mike Brecker and Richie Cole, he was then encouraged to move to the USA to hone his skills and learn. He made the move without a blink and started undergrad at Berklee College in 1981. "At 19, I did not see myself backing up pop singers in Paris and playing jazz on the side, which was what everyone was doing then. Like the song says, it was All or Nothing at All."

In Boston, Franck quickly faced the limits of any school system but, seduced by Herb Pomeroy's big band and his composition and arranging classes, he stayed at Berklee for three years and earned numerous awards. Still, the longing for more excitement was always there. At the beginning of 1986, Franck moved to New York City.

"There are many good pianists out there, but good pianists who are equally good composers — that is what makes the difference". He then took, with Bob Brookmeyer at the Manhattan School of Music, lessons in composition for jazz orchestra and in classical piano with Phil Kawin. Their influence stayed with him for a long time. And the experience added up, the true New York Jazz Experience, as an accompanist, and then as a leader. To learn the art form of jazz like the greatest have done it before you. To confront your skills with the best musicians of their time. 2nd price at Jacksonville's Great American Jazz competition. 3rd prize goes to Brad Mehldau.

"All that was great, but a career as a leader was just too tempting". In 1990, at 28 years of age with the help of the Fondation de la Vocation and of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, Franck records "Out A Day" a trio with Gary Peacock and Bill Stewart. Critics are laudatory; "There is every reason to expect excellence from this young pianist, still in his twenties, who prepared with such discipline for his first recording opportunity. The promise of good things to come is based on the considerable appeal of this recommended CD (Cadence)". "We are in danger of gushing and embarrassing ourselves. Sample this wonderful recording at all costs (Penguin guide to jazz on CDS)". Next, Franck participates in the famous all-stars gathering "New York Stories" with Joshua Redman, Bobby Watson, Roy Hargrove and Danny Gattton. Then came a long collaboration with saxophonist Tim Ries. "Regards" earned four stars in Down beat, and JazzTimes found the CD "compelling". "Is That So", a duo reinforced by the equal participation of Leon Parker, is noted by the Inrockuptibles, "Years Gone By", with Daniel Humair, earned rare praise in the French press. Finally, "On Second Thought" is unanimously heralded as a CD of rare intensity, a live recording from a working band where everything comes together successfully without a hitch.

Franck has performed in many of the big festivals, from Juan les Pins to Pori, Nice to Molde. He has traveled to faraway countries such as Uruguay, Mexico, Sweden, the Czech Republic (2004), Croatia, the Ukraine, Norway, Palestine, Switzerland, Belgium, etc., has also backed Gerry Mulligan, Charles Lloyd and Harry Belafonte, recorded with Bobby Watson, Roy Hargrove or Joshua Redman, and performed in the bands of Maria Schneider, Rick Margitza, Jerry Bergonzi and Joe Chambers, has composed numerous pieces for big band, for strings and for chamber orchestra. His suite "Nuits" for jazz quartet and string orchestra has been performed in Romania, Bulgaria, France and in Los Angeles. "I love the variety of situations, learning as you go along, challenging every solution, nothing ever preset."

In the fall of 2003, Franck returned to the trio with "Summer Times" (Nocturne/Sunnyside) featuring Johannes Weidenmuller on bass and Joe Chambers on drums. Jazzman ("This recording aims for a perfect balance in every sense of the word"), Telerama, JazzTimes ("...laid-back yet brash, simple yet complex, unassuming yet confident and above all original") all praise the new effort. Nocturne then re-released "Out A Day", and signed Franck to a three-year contract

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In the fall of 2005, Nocturne released "A Week In Paris", a Billy Strayhorn tribute featuring Elisabeth Kontomanou, Rick Margitza and Stephane Belmondo (It earned 4 stars in Jazzman, and a Disque d'Emoi in Jazzmagazine).

In the last few years, Franck has performed in the US (Washington D.C., Chicago, Houston, Dallas, NYC), Canada, a nine-city tour of South Africa and neighboring countries, Israel, China, Holland, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain, Armenia, Lebanon, Mexico, Algeria and a five-country tour of Central America. From solo to symphony orchestras, as well as big and small bands, and more frequently, collaborations with local musicians.