



Media Release - embargoed until 6.00am, Wednesday 19 August

## Wellington Jazz Festival unveils spectacular programme of global stars and exclusive Aotearoa debuts

From 14-18 October, the Wellington Jazz Festival returns to the capital for its 30th anniversary year, with an electrifying programme of international artists making their Aotearoa debuts, acclaimed New Zealand musicians, new works, and unforgettable live performances.

Across five days, more than 100 performances will fill Te Whanganui-a-Tara with music. From intimate late-night club sessions to major theatre shows, audiences can experience jazz, soul, funk, brass, blues and bold contemporary sounds across venues, streets, and unexpected spaces throughout the city.

Festival Co-Director **Dolina Wehipeihana** says the 2026 programme celebrates the remarkable breadth of jazz.

"This year's Festival is a rich abundance of jazz in all its splendour. From iconic international artists to Aotearoa favourites, jazz takes over the capital once more with grit, depth, brilliance and uplift."

The Festival opens at **The Opera House** as triple GRAMMY-nominated pianist, composer and bandleader Joey Alexander makes his Aotearoa debut with the **Joey Alexander Trio (USA)**. At just 23, Alexander is widely regarded as one of the most extraordinary talents in contemporary jazz, renowned for his lyrical improvisation and melodic depth. Performing music from his acclaimed latest album ***Celestial Keeper***, alongside career highlights, Alexander will be joined by bassist Alon Near and drummer Tyson Jackson. Since being invited by jazz legend Wynton Marsalis to perform at the prestigious Jazz at Lincoln Center Gala in 2013 at just nine years old, his career has taken him to the world's greatest stages, including Carnegie Hall, the Apollo Theater, and collaborations with jazz icons including Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spalding. **(Wednesday 14 October, 7.30pm)**.

Festival audiences can also experience the Aotearoa debut of the GRAMMY Award-winning **Rebirth Brass Band (USA)** at **Meow Nui**, presented in association with TEG Live.

For more than four decades, Rebirth Brass Band has redefined the brass band tradition with an explosive mix of funk, soul, R&B, and jazz. Founded by brothers Phil and Keith Frazier, the

legendary ensemble rose from New Orleans' famed French Quarter to become one of the city's most celebrated musical institutions, performing alongside artists including James Brown, U2 and Trombone Shorty. More than a concert, this promises to be a New Orleans street party bursting with energy (**Thursday 15 October, 9.30pm**).

Friday night belongs to one of Aotearoa's brightest musical stars as Silver Scroll-nominated vocalist **Zoe Moon (Mahal)** returns to the Festival with ***Real Black for Me***, a stunning celebration of the music of soul legend Roberta Flack, at **Tāwhiri Warehouse**.

Born in Hawai'i and raised in Aotearoa, Moon has established herself as one of the country's most compelling new voices, blending jazz, soul, blues, gospel and intimate storytelling. Together with acclaimed Wellington composer and bandleader Seth Boy, she has created fresh orchestral arrangements that breathe new life into Flack's timeless catalogue, performed alongside her outstanding band and a live string section (**Friday 16 October, 8.30pm**).

"Zoe is such an exciting artist, and ***Real Black for Me*** celebrates the enduring influence of Roberta Flack through Zoe's unique artistic lens," says Festival Co-Director **Tama Waipara**.

Mercury Prize-winning **Benjamin Clementine** will make his first-ever New Zealand performance at **The Opera House**. Hailed as one of contemporary music's most singular artists, the British singer, pianist, composer and actor has forged a creative language of his own, bringing together contemporary classical composition, experimental songwriting, theatrical performance and poetic lyricism.

His **Back to Basics Tour** returns to the essence of his artistry: one piano, one voice and songs presented without distraction, allowing the music to take centre stage. Since the release of his acclaimed debut album, ***At Least For Now***, Clementine has performed on many of the world's most celebrated stages, including the Montreux and North Sea Jazz Festivals and major concert halls globally (**Saturday 17 October, 7.30pm**).

The Festival will also premiere fresh new music from its **2026 commissioned artist**, acclaimed Ruawaipu and Ngāti Porou drummer and composer **Hikurangi Schaverien-Kaa (Aotearoa)**. Joined by jazz quintet **The Unknot**, experimental collective **Bub(z) and da Ouncle\$**, and guided by the extraordinary sound of **Ruby Hinepunui Solly's** Waitaki lithophone, Schaverien-Kaa leads audiences through a deeply immersive journey of loss, reflection, catharsis, and transformation (**Tāwhiri Warehouse, Sunday 18 October, 6pm**).

Festival Co-Director **Tama Waipara** comments "We are thrilled to present this year's commissioned artist Hikurangi Schaverien-Kaa with his new work ***Te Ao Kōhatu***. Hikurangi is already taking global strides with his music, and we can't wait to hear this exciting new work."

These acts join the already sold-out **Macy Gray Live** at **St James Theatre** on **Thursday 15 October**. The GRAMMY Award-winning singer-songwriter returns to New Zealand for the first time in a decade, adding further star power to this year's Festival line-up.

Mark Oldershaw, Chief Executive of WellingtonNZ, reflects “For 30 years, the Wellington Jazz Festival has brought people together through great music and memorable experiences, and this year's anniversary programme is a celebration of that. The Festival is very accessible, whether you're a dedicated jazz fan or discovering the genre for the first time. Over five days, it creates a real buzz across Wellington, filling the city with energy, creativity, and live music. I encourage everyone to get involved and be part of this special 30th anniversary celebration.”

Stay tuned for the full **City Line-Up** announcement on **2 September**.

Tickets for the First Release Programme are on sale now at [jazzfestival.nz](http://jazzfestival.nz).

## **ENDS**

Find out more: [www.jazzfestival.nz](http://www.jazzfestival.nz) / Instagram [@welljazzfest](https://www.instagram.com/welljazzfest) / Facebook [@welljazzfest](https://www.facebook.com/welljazzfest). For imagery and interviews please contact: Rebecca Reed 021 205 7718 or [rebecca@arribapr.co.nz](mailto:rebecca@arribapr.co.nz)

## **ABOUT WELLINGTON JAZZ FESTIVAL**

The annual Wellington Jazz Festival is the highlight of Aotearoa's music calendar, featuring some of the finest musicians from across Aotearoa New Zealand and around the globe. For 2026, the Festival's First Release acts will be presented at The Opera House, St James Theatre, Meow Nui and Tāwhiri Warehouse.  
Festival Dates 14 - 18 October 2026.

## **Core Partner:**

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