

Joe Policastro Trio

Biography

Hailed by *Downbeat* for its “deft analysis of choice repertoire,” and by the *Chicago Reader* for its “diversity of approaches to all kinds of source material,” the JOE POLICASTRO TRIO is a forward-thinking, Chicago-based jazz trio led by bassist Joe Policastro featuring guitarist Dave Miller and drummer Mikel Avery. While firmly rooted in jazz, the band’s open-minded, inclusive nature draws upon a wide array of musical styles and sources while still keeping the aesthetic of an acoustic trio intact.

The band has released seven albums to date: *Mending Wall* (2025), *Ceremony* (2023), *Sounds Unheard* (2022), *Nothing Here Belongs* (2019), *Screen Sounds* (2017), *POPS!* (2016), and *West Side Story Suite* (2013). Their diverse catalog captures the band’s progressive, forward-thinking approach in sonic detail showcasing the band’s original music alongside the trio's ability to remake unlikely songs in its own raw, highly idiosyncratic fashion.

True bands are a rarity in jazz these days, especially ones who hone their craft as consistently as this one does. For over a decade, the band held court thrice-weekly at Pops For Champagne. Beyond Chicago, the band has been extensively playing together throughout the US and Canada having even performed for President Barack Obama.

As sidemen, Joe Policastro (Pat and Debby Boone, Sheila Jordan, Phil Woods, Diane Schuur), Dave Miller (Clarice Assad, Patricia Barber, Algernon), and Mikel Avery (Joshua Abrams, Theaster Gates, Rob Mazurek) have shared the stage with a wide array of musicians but dedicate collectively to this trio. Whether highlighting the original music of its members, re-contextualizing modern music, or performing jazz classics of the likes of Thelonious Monk, Chico Hamilton, or Charles Lloyd, the trio readily displays its singular approach, sound, texture, and simultaneity.

"The trio have refined their layered blend of the familiar and faintly far out, playing three nights a week at Chicago’s Pops For Champagne and through extensive roadwork. Their deep understanding of each other and deft analysis of choice repertoire repays repeat and close listening."

- Michael Jackson, *Downbeat*

Known for its eclectic taste and approach, the Joe Policastro Trio "makes the case that such musical hybridity is worth celebrating." "Policastro...is a melody-minded bassist who prioritizes group cohesion over individual displays of virtuosity."

- Brian Zimmerman, *Downbeat*

"There are always new wrinkles to be found in the familiar. That's a political stance that seems to serve the Joe Policastro Trio well...putting alternately gritty and focused touches on songs we've come to love....Policastro and company have found their niche tapping into different breeds of treasured songs."

- Dan Bilawsky, *All About Jazz*

The Joe Policastro Trio is a band that can turn "pop tart into Jazz art" (Travis Rogers, *Jazz Owl*) and one that "should have wide appeal among both jazz fans and listeners of other genres." (Hrayr Attarian, *Chicago Jazz Magazine*)

Joe Policastro bio:

Chicago bassist, composer, and arranger Joe Policastro grew up in the fertile jazz, classical, and popular music scene of Cincinnati, OH. He earned his Bachelor of Music in Jazz/Studio Music from the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati and his Master of Music in Jazz Studies from DePaul University in Chicago. After performing and recording in Germany, he settled in Chicago quickly establishing himself an in-demand musical voice as both performer and arranger/composer in jazz, theater, and beyond. He has performed and recorded with a wide array of artists such as Sheila Jordan, Diane Schuur, Pat and Debby Boone, Harry Allen, Jeff Hamilton, Howard Levy, Phil Woods, Ira Sullivan, Howard Alden, and David "Fathead" Newman among others. He leads the Joe Policastro Trio, and the group has released seven albums since 2013. The band extensively tours, has been featured at numerous jazz festivals, and has even performed for President Obama. He also leads and co-leads the Gerry Mulligan tribute ensembles, Jeru, and the Mulligan Mosaics Big Band and Nonet, both for which he has extensively written and arranged. As composer/arranger, his work can be heard on recordings by artists including Ira Sullivan and the Rob Parton Big Band. As an educator, he has been a Ravinia Jazz Mentor, a Lecturer of Jazz Studies at DePaul University, a bass instructor at Morton College and the Chicago Academy For The Arts, a jazz director at the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory, and he is currently on the jazz and string faculty at North Park University.

Dave Miller bio:

Combining major stints in both New York City and Chicago and numerous tours abroad, Dave Miller has cultivated a truly unique, exciting, and inviting approach to songwriting, improvisation, and the guitar. After releasing three albums to wide acclaim with his experimental rock band, Algernon (Cuneiform Records), Miller has continued to redefine his artistic parameters through his solo work: 2020's DAVE MILLER was heralded as "the psychedelic record Booker T and the MGs never made" (Cult MTL) while 2022's DAUGHTER OF EXPERIENCE "challenge(s) many instrumental guitar music tropes, while delivering beautiful, quietly powerful music" (Folk Radio UK). All the while, Miller has served as a consummate side person to such luminaries as jazz songwriter, Patricia Barber (Blue Note Records), the Joe Policastro Trio (JeruJazz Records), Ted Sirota's Rebel Souls (Delmark Records), Greg Ward's Rogue Parade (Greenleaf Music) and Brazilian composer, Clarice Assad, with whom he served as an artist in residence for Jazz at Lincoln Center. Other career highlights include an album collaboration with legendary reggae producer, The Scientist, and appearances at the Chicago Jazz Festival, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Chicago Symphony Center. Most recently, Miller has released a string of EPs and singles of psychedelic electro-acoustic house music under the nom de plume, god realm.

"Miller's guitar has a peculiar crackle to it, a spare way of playing that lets the strings truly resonate, almost making a listener feel inches from the guitar."

- Mark Keresman, New York City Jazz Record

"I count Miller among my favorite modern guitarists."

- Grammy Award-winning music journalist Neil Tesser

Mikel Avery bio:

Now residing in Philadelphia, multidisciplinary artist MIKEL PATRICK AVERY had been actively working out of Chicago and New Orleans for the past 20 years. Established as a jazz drummer, he is commonly recognized for his orchestral and melodic style of drumming that often involves the use of unconventional "non-musical" objects. Adjacent to being a performing musician, Avery is a dedicated filmmaker, composer, photographer, designer, and educator, whose body of work invariably draws upon ideas of 'unstructured-play' commonly applied to learning environments found in early education.

In recent years, Avery has become an integral voice in varying ensembles, including Rob Mazurek's Exploding Star Orchestra, Joshua Abrams' Natural

Information Society, The Chicago Jazz Philharmonic, Tomeka Reid, Kurt Vile, Big Thief, and Theaster Gates's Black Monks of Mississippi as well as leading several of his own projects, including 1/2 Size Piano Trio, Wazella, Sore Thumb, PARADE, and MPA 'PLAY'.

Mikel has had the privilege to perform and exhibit either his own work or in accompaniment to others at a variety of venues and cultural institutions around the world. Most notably at, The Art Institute of Chicago, New Museum NYC, Art Basel (Switzerland), Hyde Park Jazz Festival, The Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), Documenta, Drunk Lunch Gallery, Pitchfork Music Festival, Oto (London), & White Cube (London)