

## Kenny Wheeler-inspired Jazz Composition Symposium

### Finalized Speaker's Schedule

#### Presentation #1

**Presenter:** Dean McNeill

(25 min talk) Thursday May 22, 2025, 11:00 AM, Room 1036, USASK Education Building.

**Talk title:** So much from so little; lessons gleaned from Kenny Wheeler's compositions For Jan and Sweet Time Suite Intro.

**Presenter's bio:** Trumpeter Dean McNeill has been contributing to the Canadian music scene in a variety of capacities for decades as an award-winning musician/educator and arts administrator. As Professor of Brass & Jazz for 26 years at the University of Saskatchewan (9 of which also serving as Head of the Music Department) Dean is the recipient of the UofS's *Dwaine Nelson Teaching Award*, USASK Student's Union *Teaching Excellence Award*, the Saskatchewan Jazz Festival's *Special Recognition Award*, Saskatchewan Choral Federation's *Outstanding Administrator's Award*, and, the *Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal* (Saskatchewan). Dean is honored to have shared the stage with the likes of Jon Ballantyne, Tommy Banks, David Braid, Dee Daniels, Phil Dwyer, Hugh Fraser, Mark Fewer, Guy Few, Wycliffe Gordon, Kelly Jefferson, Ingrid Jensen, Michael Kaeshammer, Alastair Kay, Bob Mintzer, PJ Perry, Maria Schneider, Denzal Sinclair, and Brad Turner. Dean was a member of the Saskatoon Symphony for 23 seasons. He is currently the A.D. of the *Saskatoon Jazz Orchestra* which is in its 11<sup>th</sup> season. Dean has been involved in many interdisciplinary projects and CDs, most notably six USASK Jazz Ensemble '*Bumper Crop*' CDs (as conductor), various Western Canadian Music Awards-nominated CDs (e.g. *The Saskatchewan Suite: The Story of Us* (performer), *The Complete Rebirth Of The Cool* (performer), and *\*O Music* (performer)).\*Won a Western Canadian Music Award for classical composition of the year.

Dean attended MacEwan University (M.dip.), McGill University (B.Mus.Jazz), and the University of North Texas (M.Mus.Jazz). He continues to study privately with a variety of teachers and mentors.

For more information visit: <http://artsandscience.usask.ca/profile/DMcNeill#/profile>

#### Presentation #2

**Presenter:** Dr. Paul Rushka

(50 Min talk) Thursday May 22, 2025, 3:00 PM, Room 1036, USASK Education Building

**Talk title:** Kenny Wheeler's Compositional Language: An Analysis of "Smatta".

**Abstract:** The roots of jazz composition are found in the canon of the Great American Songbook, which constitutes the majority of standard jazz repertoire and set the compositional models for jazz. Beginning in the 1960s, leading jazz composers such as

Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock began stretching the boundaries set by this standard repertoire, with the goal of introducing new compositional elements in order to expand that model. Trumpeter, composer, and arranger Kenny Wheeler was at the forefront of European jazz music since the late 1960s until his death in 2014, and his works exemplify a contemporary approach to jazz composition through such elements as the expansion of tonality through the use of mode mixture, non-functional harmonic progressions, melodic composition through intervallic sequence, use of metric changes within a song form, and structural variation.

This presentation will provide an in-depth analysis of the piece “Smatta” from Wheeler’s 1976 ECM recording *Gnu High* and will detail elements in the work that are fundamental to Wheeler’s compositional voice, such as an expanded tonal concept that goes beyond traditional major or minor categories, an atypical song structure, modal cadences, metric changes, and melodic sequencing. There will also be a short discussion on the challenges this piece poses to performers and suggestions for how to navigate it. The material for this presentation is taken from my doctoral thesis “The Compositional Language of Kenny Wheeler” (McGill University, 2014), which was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

**Presenter’s bio:** An open, adventurous musician with a deep groove and a proclivity for interactivity, bassist, arranger, composer and educator Paul Rushka has been a significant contributor to the Canadian musical landscape for nearly 30 years. Known for his sonorous tone and expressive melodicism, Rushka’s confident beat informs everything he plays. Bill Bennett (*All About Jazz*) states that Rushka “comes across like a postmodern Milt Hinton, providing a powerful pulse that never flags”. Currently based in Antigonish, NS, where he is part of the music faculty at StFX University, Paul grew up on the west coast and spent most of his career in the Vancouver & Montréal music communities. Paul has toured across Canada numerous times, including in support of his debut album *As It Happens*, and has also performed in China, the US and the UK. Paul has appeared on stage and/or recorded with many jazz luminaries, including John Taylor, Joe LaBarbera, Julian Priester, Melissa Aldana, Jimmy Greene, Peter Bernstein, Seamus Blake, Champion Fulton, Denzal Sinclair, Brad Turner, Ross Taggart, Lorne Lofsky, André White, and many more. In 2003, Paul won a Western Canadian Music Award for Best Jazz Album for his work on the Mike Allen Trio’s *Dialectic*. Paul holds a Doctor of Music degree from McGill University, where he was the recipient of a prestigious 3-year Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarship from SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada), which funded his research on the music of Kenny Wheeler.

For more information visit: <https://www.stfx.ca/faculty-staff/paul-rushka>  
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### Presentation #3

**Presenter:** Jonathan Challoner

(25 Min talk) Friday May 23, 2025, 11:30 AM, Room 1036, USASK Education Building

**Talk title:** Kenny Wheeler's Musical Worlds.

**Abstract:** The first thing that attracted me to the music of Kenny Wheeler was his ability to create distinct, immersive musical worlds through his imaginative writing, arranging and bandleading. Through analysis of a number of Wheeler's projects I will touch on key techniques that he utilized to bring his music to life.

**Presenter's bio:** Jonathan Challoner is one of Canada's most versatile and creative voices on the trumpet. Originally from Qualicum Beach, BC he became hooked on his instrument upon hearing the legendary lead trumpeter Arnie Chycoski of the Boss Brass. He began his music career in Toronto, where he was an integral part of the city's vibrant music scene, working with Canadian artists such as Don Thompson, John MacLeod, Hilario Duran, Robi Botos, Phil Dwyer and Jackie Richardson among many others. After moving to New York City to attend the Juilliard School, Jonathan has performed with some of the world's most acclaimed artists in jazz, classical, salsa, musical theater and pop. Most recently, Jonathan was featured on Bobby Sanabria and the Multiverse Big Band's 2024 Grammy nominated album, Vox Humana. Jonathan is currently based in Winnipeg, where he is the assistant professor of jazz trumpet at the University of Manitoba.

For more information visit: <https://umanitoba.ca/music/faculty-instructors-staff/jonathan-challoner>

## Presentation #4

**Presenter:** Keynote Speaker: Ingrid Jensen

(50 Min talk) Saturday May 24, 2025, 11:30 AM, Quance Theatre, USASK Education Building

**Presenter's bio:**

Ingrid Jensen has been hailed as one of the most gifted trumpeters of her generation. As a sought-out teacher, collaborator, and soloist, it is easy to see why the New York Times calls her "as versatile as she is vigorous." After graduating from Berklee College of Music in 1989, Jensen was offered a position at the prestigious Bruckner Conservatory in Linz, Austria. In the 1990s, she recorded three highly acclaimed CDs for the ENJA record label, becoming one of the most in demand trumpet players on the global jazz scene. Settling in New York City, she joined the innovative jazz orchestras of Maria Schneider (1994-2012) and Darcy James Argue (2002-present). She has performed with a multigenerational cast of jazz legends ranging from Clark Terry to Esperanza Spalding. Jensen has also performed alongside British R&B artist Corrine Bailey Rae on Saturday Night Live and recorded with Canadian pop icon Sarah McLachlan. Jensen is prominently featured on the Grammy Award winning Mosaic Project, led by drummer Terri-Lyne Carrington. One of Jensen's most frequent and closest collaborators is her sister, the saxophonist and composer Christine Jensen. She is a featured soloist on the Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra's Juno-award-winning

album, *Treelines* (2011), and its successor, *Habitat* (2013). The sisters released a highly regarded small group recording entitled *Infinitude* (2016) on the Whirlwind label featuring the brilliant guitarist, Ben Monder and have further collaborated with Nordic Connect, an international band featuring pianist and composer Maggi Olin. A dedicated jazz educator, Jensen has resided on the jazz trumpet faculties at the University of Michigan, Peabody Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music. She also served on the jazz faculty, teaching composition and arranging at Purchase College and the New School for Jazz in NYC. She performed and lectured as a guest artist with the Thelonious Monk Institute High School group featuring Herbie Hancock; and performed and taught regularly at the Centrum Jazz Workshop, the Brubeck Institute, the Banff Center for Jazz and Creative music, the Stanford Jazz Camp, the Geri Allen Jazz Camp for Young Women and the Betty Carter Institute under the direction of Jason Moran. She is currently the Dean and Director of Jazz Arts at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music. Since her victory at the Carmine Caruso Trumpet Competition in 1995, Jensen has sat on the judges' panel twice. She is regularly invited to trumpet festivals around the world and recently served as artist-in-residence with Tia Fuller at the prestigious Monterey Jazz Festival, where she also performed with her own quintet. Her second project on the Whirlwind label honoring the late great Kenny Wheeler-Invisible Sounds (2018) was featured on NPR's Jazz Night in America hosted by Christian McBride, receiving critical acclaim both in the US and abroad. Glowing reviews have earned her a loyal fan base around the globe, and she was hailed by the JJA as 2019's Trumpeter of the Year as well, she is consistently listed in the top 5 in the Trumpet category of the Downbeat critic's poll. Ingrid records often as a guest on scores of side projects, appearing at major venues around the world both as a performer and an educator. She is an integral member of the highly acclaimed Blue Note recording band, Artemis and continues to write for and perform with her own projects both in New York and beyond.

Ingrid plays a custom Monette trumpet, built personally by the master builder Dave Monette.

For more information visit: <https://ingridjensen.com/>

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## Presentation #5

**Presenter:** Keynote Speaker: Nick Smart

(50 Min talk) Saturday May 24, 2025, 1:30 PM, Quance Theatre, USASK Education Building

**Talk Title:** The Kenny Wheeler story - a timeless role model for today

**Talk abstract:** Nick Smart, co-author of the recent biography "*Song For Someone: The Musical Life of Kenny Wheeler*", explores the key developmental events in Kenny's biographical story and highlights how they remain an inspirational example that transcends genre or era for all of our students today. As the years since Kenny's death

in 2014 continue to roll by, this unique perspective can help us keep his legacy alive and relevant in our own teaching and mentorship.

**Presenter's bio:** Head of Jazz Programmes at the Royal Academy of Music in London, Nick Smart is an internationally renowned jazz educator, trumpeter and conductor who has given guest masterclasses and performances around the world. In 2013 he was awarded the Parliamentary Jazz Award for Jazz Education, in 2015 awarded Honorary Membership of the Royal Academy of Music, and in 2022 conferred with Professorship from the University of London.

His versatility as a trumpet player and his work at the upper echelons of Jazz Education has allowed him to perform alongside many international jazz stars in a variety of contexts, from Jazz Festival appearances to summer school concerts. These have included Dave Holland, Bob Brookmeyer, John Hollenbeck, Mike Gibbs and Nikki Iles, as well as most of the leading names on the UK jazz scene. He has also performed and recorded internationally as the regular soloist with the famous "JTQ". Nick has released three albums as a leader to critical acclaim, including 2005's "Remembering Nick Drake" which was described by *Straight No Chaser* magazine as "...a future classic because it really captures all that is best about British jazz...". At home he is recognised as one of the leading musicians on the UK jazz scene, where as well as being in regular demand as a sideman to players of all generations, he continues to record and tour with his own projects. As an acclaimed musical director of large ensembles, Nick has been invited to lead projects with big bands all over the world. He has been a guest director of European Big Band projects in Paris, Tallin and the Jazz Institute Berlin, and last year was the guest director of the Grahamstown Festival Big Band in South Africa. And at home he has conducted the Stan Sulzmann "Neon Orchestra", the award winning Troyka large ensemble, "Troykestra", the Gareth Lockrane Big Band, the Julian Siegel Jazz Orchestra and orchestral projects with JTQ.

Perhaps most notably, Nick was a close colleague and friend of the late Kenny Wheeler and has been instrumental in keeping Wheeler's legacy alive. As well as being a member of Kenny's big band, Nick helped manage the latter stages of Kenny's career, secured the Kenny Wheeler Archive into the Royal Academy of Music Collections, completed a PhD focused on Wheeler's development and co-wrote the biography; *Song for Someone: The Musical Life of Kenny Wheeler* (Brian Shaw and Nick Smart, Equinox Publishing 2025). Now regarded as one of the leading authorities in the world on Wheeler's life and music, Nick has given talks, masterclasses and concerts around the world focused on various aspects of Kenny's life and his repertoire, many times in partnership with another close Wheeler associate, Dave Holland.

For more information visit: <https://www.ram.ac.uk/people/nick-smart>

