

ly with leading contemporary composers. In addition to his championing of **Joe Makhholm's** music, notable premieres include the Concerto for Piano and Orchestra by Stephen Dankner with the LSU Symphony Orchestra and Greg Yasinitzky's Jazz Concerto for Piano and Orchestra with the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, which was awarded *The American Prize* in composition in 2018. He recently premiered his own jazz piano concerto, *Ebbs and Flows – Fantasy for Piano, Winds, Vibraphone and Double Bass* with the LSU Wind Ensemble.

Delony is the Boyd Professor of Piano and Jazz Studies in the School of Music at Louisiana State University, where he has been a member of the music faculty since 2000. He is a past recipient of an Artist Fellowship awarded by the Louisiana Division of the Arts, as well as the Edith Kirkpatrick Arts Leadership Award given by the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra. He received the LSU Distinguished Faculty Award in 2019 and was named the SEC Professor of the Year for LSU in

2020. In 2025, he was inducted into the *Steinway and Sons Teachers Hall of Fame*, recognizing his contributions in both classical and jazz piano.

Dedicated as always to Tricia, who designed and saw to completion the home studio where this music was recorded.
– Willis Delony

Standards and Improvisations: Music by Joseph Makhholm

WILLIS DELONY, piano

1	Standards I – “Herbie’s Anxious Years”	5:58
2	Improvisation I – Medium fast, swing eighth notes	2:22
3	Improvisation II – Ballad, rubato	2:04
4	Standards II – “Yesterday Speaks Not”	5:51
5	Standards III – “Blue Neptune Fantasy”	5:38
6	Improvisation III – Medium, swing eighth notes	2:17
7	Improvisation IV – Bright waltz, swing eighth notes	2:35
8	Improvisation V – Medium ballad	2:36
9	Standards IV – “Juxtafixation”	5:52
10	Standards V – “The Things You’ve Lost”	6:36
11	Improvisation VI – Bright, even eighth notes	2:10
12	Improvisation VII – Fast, swing eighth notes	2:58
13	Standards VI – “I’m Your Only”	4:22

Total time: 52:25

Recorded July 14-15, 2025, Maxine Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Produced by Willis Delony. Engineered, edited and mastered by Tucker Robison, Robison Productions. Piano technician, Joe Rush.



CRC 4187

Willis Delony

Standards

&

Improvisations



The Music of Joe Makhholm



The incredible music on this album feeds into my lifelong fascination with musical connections, especially the complicated relationship between classical music and jazz. My dear friend Joe Makhholm, whose pathfinding music I've been performing and recording for over 25 years now, is a master at exploring this occasionally uneasy marriage. In the groundbreaking set of pieces presented here, all superbly crafted and bubbling with inspiration, Joe is at his creative best in a decidedly jazz-centered collection that is full of straight-ahead swinging, deep expression, pianistic imagination, wit and sophistication. Below is his own description of the music:

“Standards” and “Improvisations.” For jazz musicians, these words broadly define both the music they play and the way they play it. They also describe, in their own way, the two collections included in this recording: what inspired them, what they are, and what they are not. The **“Standards”** here are not standards in the usual sense—familiar tunes widely performed and recognized across the jazz and

broader musical communities. Instead, they are **contrafacts**: original melodies written over harmonic structures borrowed from established standards. My inspiration came from Willis's recording of Bill Dobbins's **“Prelude VII in E-flat major”** on *Double Dance – Classical and Jazz Connections II* (Centaur). I never tire of listening to that piece. Its swinging medium-tempo melody and that delightful chord progression can lift the spirits at any time of day. The six pieces in this collection were conceived as a unified set. Each uses the same 32-bar ABAC form in 4/4 meter, yet they vary widely in mood, tempo, and tonality. Improvised choruses appear in each piece, which can be played as written or replaced by the pianist's own improvisations, together with other devices such as secondary themes and shout choruses. By contrast, the **“Improvisations”** are not improvised in the literal sense—all the notes are written out. But each piece is composed with an improvisatory character: there is no predetermined structure or formal plan, and the music moves forward with little regard for what came before. A piece ends when it

ends, often without telegraphing its arrival. What *is* improvised, in a sense, is the **interpretation**. Apart from some general tempo indications, there are no dynamics, no articulations, no tempo modifications. These decisions are left entirely to the performer. **“Improvisation I,”** written in 1998, began as an experiment in **through-composed** writing—music that shares much of the spirit of free improvisation. It was a one-off effort at the time, but an idea I returned to more than a decade later. The next six pieces were composed over a two-year span beginning in 2011. This collection is intentionally open-ended, with no overarching plan. The only guiding principle is that each piece should offer a clear and evident contrast to the one before it.

French-American composer and jazz pianist/trombonist **Joe Makhholm** grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, attended Berklee College of Music in Boston, and graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music with a Master's Degree in Composition. He subsequently moved to Paris to study orchestral con-

ducting with Léon Barzin. Soon after his arrival he began teaching jazz piano and improvisation, and is presently on the faculty of the Bill Evans Piano Academy, where he has taught jazz composition/arranging and jazz history. Makhholm's compositions often make direct reference to the rhythmic, harmonic and formal character of modern jazz. His best-known composition, *Three Impressions* for Solo Piano is listed on the syllabus of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music in the United Kingdom. That piece, along with its companions, *Three Reflections*, *Three Conceptions* and *Three Contemplations*, have all been recorded by Willis Delony and are published by Billaudot in Paris. His three-volume pedagogic collection for solo piano, *Jazz Tonic*, is widely used in conservatories throughout France and abroad. Its success encouraged the creation of a parallel collection for clarinet/alto saxophone with piano accompaniment, entitled *Jazzosphère*, also in three volumes. Both are published by Billaudot. In the spring of 2013 *Five In One* (Monk's

Moods), a symphonic portrait of Thelonious Monk for 15 instruments and percussion, was premiered by the Turning Point Ensemble in Vancouver, Canada. Makhholm is founder, pianist and musical director of the Paris Jazz Repertory Quintet/Septet, an ensemble known for its innovative and challenging scores. The group's recent programs of original music have included *Concert Climat*, trilogy of jazz suites evoking humanity's struggle in the face of climate change, and *Le Cercle Rouge*, a collection of pieces inspired by the first Covid confinement in Paris in the spring of 2020. He is also trombonist and arranger for Luna Ocho, an octet specializing in music from Latin America.

In a performing career spanning over four decades, pianist **Willis Delony** has won acclaim as a leading classical/jazz crossover artist. His innovative concert explorations of the two musical worlds are showcased in a series of solo piano recordings on the Centaur label. *A New World A' Comin' – Classical and Jazz Connections* was released in 2001. *Double Dance –*

Classical and Jazz Connections II was released in 2008. *Out of Character – Classical and Jazz Connections III*, was released in October 2014. Also part of the series is an independent release from 2018 entitled *Butterfly Room – Connections for Solo Piano*. The project continues with *Between the Notes*, which was released by Centaur in 2021. His most recent recording is a double album on Centaur Records with violinist Joana Genova featuring the Four Sonatas for Violin and Piano by Stephen Dankner. Delony has appeared as piano soloist, chamber musician, jazz performer, and guest pianist/arranger or conductor with orchestras throughout the United States as well as orchestras in Canada, the former Soviet Union and China. As a solo and collaborative recitalist, he has performed classical and jazz concerts throughout the U.S. as well as France, Germany, the former Soviet Union, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil and Argentina. He is also an active jazz composer/arranger whose scores have been performed by orchestras throughout the U.S. and Canada. He collaborates regular-