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NEWS RELEASE

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Composer and bandleader Christopher Zuar takes a bold leap forward with the dazzling second album by his 22-piece Jazz Orchestra

***Exuberance*, due out May 10, 2024 via Tonal Conversations, vividly traces Zuar's personal evolution through his relationship with his wife and collaborator, animator Anne Beal**

Album release concert May 11, 2024 at the Sheen Center for Art and Culture, featuring the full ensemble and projected animations

Exuberance is "a mature statement by a great composer in his prime, performed by a stellar ensemble with passion and care." – pianist/composer Fred Hersch in the album's liner notes

"[Zuar's] music, artfully crafted and expertly rendered by a forward-thinking jazz orchestra, manages to harness and refract the sounds of struggle, hope, affirmation, humor, and youth." – Dan Bilawsky, [All About Jazz](#)

"Zuar's compositions soar with a richness and beauty that demand reflection and leave a deep sense of serenity." – Jeff Krow, [Audiophile Audition](#)

Imagine a set of music charting the course of a (successful) romantic relationship, and the picture that comes to mind might be of something starry-eyed and swooning, brimming with giddy elation and bright colors. But bandleader/composer **Christopher Zuar** recognizes that, as Shakespeare so eloquently put it, "the course of true love never did run smooth." Five years in the making, Zuar's dazzling new big band album ***Exuberance*** developed in parallel with his relationship with his now wife, animation filmmaker **Anne Beal**. Brought to stunning life by his 22-piece **Christopher Zuar Orchestra**, the album is as rich, complex, and infinitely varied as falling in love can get.



Due out **May 10, 2024** via **Tonal Conversations**, *Exuberance* is the much-anticipated follow-up to Zuar's acclaimed 2016 album *Musings*, hailed by *DownBeat* Magazine as "an impressively accomplished debut." The Orchestra's sophomore outing marks a bold expansion of the ambition and scope of the composer's already impressive vision. Conducted by **Mike Holober**, the ensemble features a superb collection of first-call musicians that includes guitarist **Pete McCann**, pianist **Glenn Zaleski**, bassist **Drew Gress**, drummer **Mark Ferber**, Brazilian percussionist **Rogério Boccato** and a horn section that

includes **Charles Pillow**, **Jason Rigby**, **Ben Kono**, **Dave Pietro**, **Tony Kadleck**, and **Alan Ferber**, among others. In addition, the band is joined by special guests **Sara Caswell** (violin), **Emma Frank** (vocals), **Joe Brent** (mandolin), **Max ZT** (hammered dulcimer) and second percussionist **Keita Ogawa**.

While the title of *Exuberance* suggests a mood of unalloyed happiness, the music contained within is far more varied and multi-hued. The title track comes at the end of the album and marks an ultimate arrival point. Zuar describes these seven compositions are less the portrait of a couple than an impressionistic map of his own personal and emotional evolution over their half-decade together. "This album is a journey of personal growth," he explains. "For me, this has been very much a process of becoming more open and learning how to let another person into my life. Each piece is an in-depth exploration of my emotional landscape at the time it was written."

Exuberance and Zuar's and Beal's marriage were born in 2017, when both were invited to be Fellows at MacDowell, the famed artists' residency in New Hampshire, which has hosted such luminaries as Aaron Copland, James Baldwin, Leonard Bernstein, Thornton Wilder, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Michael Chabon. "We spent five weeks in this otherworldly place focused solely on making art," Zuar says. "There's no experience quite like it." Among their cohort of artists was the legendary pianist and composer Fred Hersch, who penned the album's liner notes, calling *Exuberance* "a mature statement by a great composer in his prime, performed by a stellar ensemble with passion and care."

In addition to Hersch's, Zuar and Beal garnered each other's admiration over the course of the five-week program, sparking a personal and professional relationship. Their marriage coexists with a fruitful collaboration, vividly influencing each other's work. A painting by Beal, washes of color atop one of Zuar's scores, hangs above his piano in their New York City home. They've worked together on a video installation for Chicago's 150 Media Stream and on an ongoing series called Tonal Conversations. Beal is creating animations and music videos to accompany the music on *Exuberance*. "At this point," Zuar says, "we're inextricably linked."

Their early, tenuous beginnings are captured on "In Winter Blooms," which opens the album with an evocation of MacDowell's frost-covered landscapes, conjuring the image of the first green shoots breaking through a blanket of snow. Drew Gress takes an elegant, tender solo, followed by the spring-like burst of Jason Rigby's tenor. Alternating elliptical orchestra statements and an enthralling dialogue between Matt Holman's flugelhorn and Mark Ferber's drums, "Moments in Between" takes its held-breath atmosphere from the waiting, a period in which Zuar returned to NYC and Beal to her then home in Chicago.

With Glenn Zaleski's piano setting the pace, "Communion" takes its warmth from a feeling of spiritual kinship. Sara Caswell's violin and the tune's jaunty feel hint at the North Carolina fiddle music tradition in which Beal was raised, a striking depiction of two lives intertwining in musical terms. The track ends with the chirping of katydids, a living memory recorded outside Beal's childhood bedroom window. "Simple Machines" remains in that rural territory, boasting a vibrant arrangement featuring Joe Brent's mandolin and Max ZT's hammered dulcimer along with Caswell to conjure a lively folk dance, simple building blocks conjoining to create something far more complex.

Darkening suddenly with a roar of thunder, doubts encroach on the tempestuous "Before Dawn," highlighted by Pete McCann's blistering solo. Despite a chorus of whispering voices, questions are dispelled on the stentorian "Certainty," a feature for Zaleski's graceful piano. Finally we arrive at "Exuberance," which bristles with the nervous energy and excitement of giving yourself over to romance. Emma Frank gorgeously conveys Beal's heartfelt lyric.

"This is not a fairy tale version of what our relationship has been and continues to be," Zuar concludes. "It contains all the joy and sorrow, isolation and connection that are part of it. I needed to go through the entire journey to fully understand and arrive at the point of exuberance."

Christopher Zuar

Bandleader and composer Christopher Zuar's music has been performed by the WDR Big Band, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, the Danish Radio Big Band, and the Symphonic Jazz Orchestra. Zuar's debut album, *Musings*, was released on Sunnyside Records in 2016 and received broad critical acclaim, including a spot on DownBeat Magazine's "Best Albums of 2016", and runner-up "Debut of The Year" in the NPR Jazz Critics Poll. He is the recipient of a 2020 Copland House Residency Award, and a 2022 MacDowell Fellowship.

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