Long Bio

Rodney T. Whitaker, internationally renowned Mack Avenue recording artist,  jazz bassist, professor of jazz double bass, director of Jazz Studies and artistic director for the Professors of Jazz at Michigan State University where he has built one of the most distinguished jazz degree programs and performing faculty in the United States of America. Whitaker, with one of the most undeniably distinctive bear-sized bass tones, is considered to be one of the leading bass performers and teachers of the jazz double bass in the United States.  Whitaker received his first national recognition performing with the Harrison/Blanchard Quintet.

Building on his Detroit roots and enormous talent, Whitaker went on to earn an international reputation as one of the world’s finest jazz double bass performer.  He completed seven-year tenure as bassist with Wynton Marsalis’ Septet, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and has toured the world over the last twenty-five years, collaborating and performing with legendary jazz artists such as Jimmy Heath, Eric Reed, Mulgrew Miller, Cyrus Chestnut, Vanessa Rubin, Kathleen Battle, Dianne Reeves, Cassandra Wilson, Diana Krall, Jon Faddis, Donald Harrison, Terence Blanchard, Rodney Jones, Wycliffe Gordon, Kenny Burrell, Bob James, Benny Golson, Regina Carter, Pat Matheny, Nicholas Payton, Jimmy Cobb, Joshua Redman, Stephon Harris, Johnny O’Neal, Marcus Belgrave, James Carter, Steve Turre, Claudio Roditi, Junko Onishi, Harry Allen, Ronnie Matthews, Chick Corea, Kenny Garrett, Kevin Mahogany, Ingrid Jensen, Barry Harris, Ron Blake, Jeff Clayton, Dana Hall, Gerald Wilson, Sean Jones, Niki Harris, Wessell Anderson, Don Vappie, Johnny O’Neal, Cedar Walton, Renee Rosnes, Randy Brecker, Rickey Woodard, Bobby Shew, Gary Smulyan, Joe LaBarbera, Randy Napolean, Peter Martin, Nnenna Freelon, Donald Byrd, Branford Marsalis, Greg Hutchinson, Carl Allen, Herlin Riley, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Terrell Stafford, Tim Warfield, Bruce Barth, Jon Carl Hendricks, Roy Hargrove, Marian McPartland, the late greats; Dizzy Gelispie, Tommy Flanagan, John Lewis, Donald Walden, Joe Henderson, Hank Jones, Frank Morgan, and Betty ‘Bebop’ Carter as well as performing with leading symphony orchestras world-wide.  Whitaker has also toured internationally as a featured performer with the Roy Hargrove Quintet.  In addition, he has appeared and presented master classes at the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) conferences.  Rodney is one of the hardest working and swinging bass players on the scene and has recorded with great musicians such as Roy Hargrove, Pat Methany and Wynton Marsalis. Featured on more than 100+ recordings - from film to compact discs - Whitaker’s film scores, China, directed by Jeff Wray, was released on PBS Fall 2002 and Malaria and Malawi, released on PBS Fall 2010.  Also, Whitaker has a DVD release featuring Michigan State University’s Jazz Department entitled, “Inside Jazz” and two new compact discs entitled, “Get Ready” & “Word To Do”—both on Mack Avenue.  In 2011, he was nominated for an EMMY for the ‘Original Music’ category, “Malawi and Malaria: Fighting to Save the Children” produced by Robert Gould and Sue Carter.  Whitaker collaborated with musicians Phil Dwyer and Alan Jones on “Let Me Tell You About My Day,” produced by Alma Records and was nominated for a Juno Award in 2006 for Traditional Jazz Album of the Year, Canada's equivalent to the Grammy.

A dedicated, proven and committed jazz educator, Whitaker has presented numerous master classes/clinics/workshops across the nation at locations such as Duke University, Howard University, University of Iowa, University of Michigan, Barbican in London, the New School (NY), Lincoln Center, the Detroit International Jazz Festival, and many high schools in the United States.  As a consultant for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, he played a key role in the development of the jazz education department for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Civic Ensembles.  Professor Whitaker also served on the faculties of Interlochen Center for the Arts, University of Michigan and Julliard Institute of Jazz.

Currently based in East Lansing, he continues to serve many of the talented in the state of Michigan.  The legacy of Professor Whitaker’s teaching promises to be distinguished with former students currently performing with jazz greats such as Wynton Marsalis, Dianne Reeves, Pat Matheny, Count Basie Orchestra, Stephon Harris and many, many more.