



## WE ARE THE STL FREE JAZZ COLLECTIVE

### What does our name represent?

STL – this group represents all of us here in this city; we are rooted in St. Louis and draw upon the best of this place; we are on a mission to raise awareness of the awesome music that’s happening here. As LaDonna Smith in *The Improvisor* recently said of our album, *Live at Tavern of Fine Arts*, “*I find your music full of energy and life, the sound is authentic and distinctive, and it is indicative of a very healthy jazz scene in St. Louis.*”

FREE – our music expresses true freedom. We perform without scores, we are all composers working together in the moment, our collaborative effort recognizes the equal value of everyone.

JAZZ – our music and our performance practice is built upon the roots of collective improvisation that goes back to the very beginnings of America’s indigenous music tradition – jazz.

COLLECTIVE – the music we perform is a sum of many parts; it is a totality greater than each of us individually; it is a manifestation of a collective spirit made real in live performance.

### Heritage.

We have a deep and rich heritage. Our members draw upon extensive experience in the most creative areas of music.

Percussionist Gary Sykes studied with BAG member Bobo Shaw and performed countless gigs with a who’s-who list of St. Louis artists including Oliver Nelson, Andrew Hill, Lester Bowie, and Oliver Lake.

Baba Mike Nelson, trumpet and shells, learned music at Sumner High School with Lester and Joe Bowie. Baba Mike states, “Oliver Lake was my 6th grade music teacher.” Lake is another BAG member and a member of the World Saxophone Quartet. Baba’s research into the cultural significance of the conch shell infuses his performance with traditions from the Caribbean and around the world.

Bassist Paul Steinbeck, studied with AACM members, George Lewis and Mwata Bowden, and was co-author with Fred Anderson on Anderson’s *Improvisation* book. Anderson was a member of the AACM and owner of the Velvet Lounge in Chicago.

Keyboard player Jim Hegarty, has a long history of designing and leading multimedia productions in St. Louis as well as Chicago and New York. He has performed with former AACM President Douglas R. Ewart.

Saxophonist Jerome “Jay Dubz” Williams has been a pivotal member of countless groups in St. Louis. His artistic vision reaches from jazz to R&B to experimental styles.

Poet Michael Castro’s words and world view have been an inspiration to countless readers and listeners here and throughout the world. Castro began combining his poetry with music around 1970, performing for years with the Human Arts Ensemble, whose members included alumni of the Black Artists Group (BAG). For over a decade, Hegarty has accompanied Michael Castro’s poetry in a variety of performances. Because of the strong social purpose that is the foundation of this group, it was a natural and pivotal element to include his art as a key element of our collective expression. St. Louis Poet Laureate Michael Castro is a leading artist in the St. Louis literary scene with numerous published works. He has also performed his poetry throughout the world and brings a broad knowledge of culture and traditions to our ensemble.

### **We have been asked of our connection to BAG.**

In St. Louis and beyond, the Black Artists Group (BAG) laid the foundation of a recognition of multicultural perspectives that have impacted the music and art world to this day. Together with Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), these organizations, born of the soil of Midwestern urban communities, drew focus towards important social issues through the voice of music and performance.

This is a strong and powerful tradition that we consciously build upon. As noted above, many of our members have early and long-standing connections to this tradition and it can not help but be reflected in our voices.

The recognition of our connection to this heritage inspires us to strive to reach the impact and significance that they accomplished. We are working to earn our place in this tradition by striving to be a catalyst for the greater good of our communities within St. Louis and beyond.

Castro’s poems, including “America Loves It’s Guns More Than It’s Children,” carry a message that is direct and timely. We are using our music to reach out and connect and inspire vitalized urban communities built upon a belief that change is possible, that we can all rise to a collective equality of unity, safety, and opportunity.

### **Our music and members.**

When Hegarty founded STL there were two primary guiding principles. First, it was to be a group with a mission, a musical and artistic enterprise that would reach out to the people of St. Louis to demonstrate a vision of unity and freedom that could benefit everyone in this city and the world.

Our first performance took place on March 24, 2015 at the Tavern of Fine Arts. It was the culmination of two foundational experiences in Hegarty’s music work. Throughout his career, his significant accomplishments have centered around productions that embodied and expressed positive social perspectives. Starting with his multimedia opera, “The Soul of the Rock,” produced with support from the National Endowment for the Arts in New York and Chicago, his work has turned thought to issues of freedom and non-violence. In August, 2014, he performed a show at Foam on Cherokee Street. At a time when the events of

Ferguson were still evolving, he chose to produce a work centered on the recording of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech. The result was compelling and arresting. The audience and performer were joined in a unified perspective of the potential of brotherhood and freedom here.

When the group was founded, this was the natural place to begin; this is the inspiration behind our group. We go forward with the purpose of bringing an inspiring new vision, infinitely diverse, yet jointly cooperative, to St. Louis and the world.

The second factor in the founding of STL is a focus on the members as artists. Having performed in many free improv groups over the years it's been obvious and clear that each performance reflects the individuality of the performers involved and, collectively, those individualities define the group sound. Working in a form of music where each moment in time is the result of the collaborative thinking of the people on stage, we perform and define STL Free Jazz Collective as a group of six very specific creatively joined individuals. We do not bring in substitutes.

We hope our music inspires you to clap your hands, smile, look both friends and strangers in the eye, to think, to dance (get up and move it!), and reach out a hand. The music, the vibe, the atmosphere in the air at our performances is contagious and we can carry that feeling forward, together. *Life is, after all, one big jam!*