

Scott Amendola:
Drummer/Composer/Bandleader/Educator

“Amendola’s music is consistently engaging, both emotionally and intellectually, the product of a fertile and inventive musical imagination.” *Los Angeles Times*

“If Scott Amendola didn't exist, the San Francisco music scene would have to invent him.” Derk Richardson, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

“Amendola has complete mastery of every piece of his drumset and the ability to create a plethora of sounds using sticks, brushes, mallets, and even his hands.” Steven Raphael, *Modern Drummer*

“...drummer/signal-treater Scott Amendola is both a tyrant of heavy rhythm and an electric-haired antenna for outworldly messages (not a standard combination).” Greg Burk, *LA Weekly*

For Scott Amendola, the drum kit isn’t so much an instrument as a musical portal. As an ambitious composer, savvy bandleader, electronics explorer, first-call accompanist and capaciously creative foil for some of the world’s most inventive musicians, Amendola applies his wide-ranging rhythmic virtuosity to a vast array of settings. His closest musical associates include guitarists Nels Cline, Jeff Parker, Charlie Hunter, Hammond B-3 organist Wil Blades, violinists Jenny Scheinman and Regina Carter, saxophonists Larry Ochs and Phillip Greenlief, and clarinetist Ben Goldberg, players who have each forged a singular path within and beyond the realm of jazz.

While rooted in the San Francisco Bay Area scene, Amendola has woven a dense and far-reaching web of bandstand relationships that tie him to influential artists in jazz, blues, rock and new music. A potent creative catalyst, the Berkeley-based drummer is the nexus for a disparate community of musicians stretching from Los Angeles and Seattle to Chicago and New York. Whatever the context, Amendola possesses a gift for twisting musical genres in unexpected directions.

Nels Cline maintains his long-running role in the alt-rock juggernaut Wilco, but the band’s long stretches of inactivity mean that he can also perform as a member of the Scott Amendola Band and a recently launched duo project (a tête-à-tête setting in which Scott thrives). Amendola continues to tour and record with the volatile instrumental band, The Nels Cline Singers, which is due for a follow up to 2014’s critically hailed, genre-obliterating *Macroscope* (Mack Avenue).

It’s not surprising that the Singers provided an early and essential forum for Amendola’s artful use of electronics, a small menagerie of devices that has found its way “into everything I do,” he says. “After years of experimenting I’m using them in a more expressive and confident way than ever before.”

Cline was still an underground LA legend in the mid-1990s when he first encountered Amendola and was “blown away,” he says. “There aren’t too many drummers on the West Coast who had his wide-ranging ability. Scott’s got some funk in him, a looser, sexy thing going on, and the flexibility to play free and different styles. He plays behind singer/songwriters and he rocks too.”

Scott also performs widely with his longtime sparring partner Wil Blades in the orchestral duo Amendola Vs. Blades. While they’ve honed a wide array of material, the project

initially centered on their thrilling investigation of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's "Far East Suite." Their 2016 debut album *Greatest Hits* (Sazi Records) earned lavish critical praise, with the *San Jose Mercury News* hailing the duo for honing a "repertoire of groovelicious jazz for more than a decade, and they throw down the funk with fervor on a project that clocks in at the old-school LP length of 39 minutes, distilling some of their leanest, meanest, punchiest pieces."

No project better displays Amendola's big ears and musical ambitions than *Fade To Orange* a piece commissioned as part of the Oakland East Bay Symphony's Irvine Foundation-funded New Visions/New Vistas Initiative. The roiling work premiered to critical acclaim at Oakland's Paramount Theater on April 15, 2011. Determined to refine and document the piece, Amendola conducted a successful PledgeMusic crowd-funding campaign and recorded *Fade To Orange* at Berkeley's storied Fantasy Studios with his original collaborators—his Nels Cline Singers bandmates (Cline and powerhouse bassist Trevor Dunn)—and the great Magik*Magik Orchestra.

"The idea was really the Singers meet the Symphony," Amendola says. "I wanted Trevor's electric bass for that big contrast with the orchestra, and I conceived of the piece as a concerto for guitar. It was an amazing experience to premiere 'Fade to Orange' at the Paramount, but it was bittersweet after all that work. Like, that's it? I wanted to see what else we could do with it."

He released *Fade to Orange* on CD and vinyl on his label Sazi Records in 2015. The album includes four distilled, wildly imaginative remixes of "Fade to Orange" by Cibo Matto's Yuka Honda, Mocean Worker, Beautiful Bells, and Deerhoof's John Dieterich and Teetotum's Drake Hardin.

Amendola established his reputation as a bandleader in 1999 with the release of the acclaimed album *Scott Amendola Band* featuring the unusual instrumentation of Eric Crystal on saxophones, Todd Sickafoose on acoustic bass, Jenny Scheinman on violin, and Dave Mac Nab on electric guitar. By the time the quintet returned to the studio in 2003, Cline had replaced Mac Nab, contributing to the quintet's combustible chemistry on the Cryptogramophone album *Cry*.

Cline was a crucial contributor on Amendola's 2005 Cryptogramophone album *Believe*, which also features guitarist Jeff Parker (from the band Tortoise), Jenny Scheinman, and late bassist John Shifflett. Scott created his own label, SAZi Records, for his next release, 2010's exquisite *Lift*, a trio session with Parker and Shifflett dedicated to his gossamer, bluesy ballads and ethereal soundscapes, with an occasional foray into surf rock deconstruction.

In some circles, Amendola is best known for his intermittent two-decade collaboration with seven-string guitar wizard Charlie Hunter, with whom he connected shortly after moving to the Bay Area in 1992. They went on to play together with John Schott and Will Bernard in the three-guitar-and-drums combo T.J. Kirk, which earned a Grammy nomination for its eponymous 1996 debut album. After years of occasional gigs, they teamed up again in 2011 in a tough and sinewy duo. They spent five years touring incessantly and released two acclaimed albums: 2012's recession-inspired *Not Getting Behind is the New Getting Ahead* and 2013's *Pucker*, the latter showcases Amendola's melodically inspired tunes.

In 2014, looking for new avenues to distribute their music, Hunter and Amendola released four 5-track EPs, each focusing on the music of a particular artist or act. From the standards of Ellington and Cole Porter to the country hits of Hank Williams and seminal new wave tunes of The Cars, the duo transformed everything they encountered with their groove-centric sensibility.

As a sideman, Amendola has performed and recorded with a vast, stylistically varied roster of artists, including Bill Frisell, John Zorn, Mike Patton, Mondo Cane, John Scofield, Cibo Matto, John Dieterich from Deerhoof, Wadada Leo Smith, Bruce Cockburn, Madeleine Peyroux, Cris Williamson, Joan Osborne, Jacky Terrasson, Shweta Jhaveri, Phil Lesh, Sex Mob, Kelly Joe Phelps, Larry Klein, Carla Bozulich, Wayne Horvitz, Johnny Griffin, Julian Priester, Sonny Simmons, Pat Martino, Jim Campilongo, Bobby Black, Larry Goldings, Paul McCandless, Rebecca Pidgeon, and the Joe Goode Dance Group.

Born and raised in the New Jersey suburb of Tenafly, just a stone's throw from New York City, Amendola displayed an aptitude for rhythm almost from the moment he could walk. His grandfather, Tony Gottuso, was a highly respected guitarist who performed with jazz luminaries such as Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Frank Sinatra, and Nat "King" Cole. A member of the original Tonight Show Band under Steve Allen, he offered plenty of support when Amendola began to get interested in jazz.

"We used to play together a lot when I was a teenager," Amendola says. "It had a huge impact on me to play with someone who was around when a lot of the standards that musicians like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Keith Jarrett play were written."

His passion for music only deepened during his four years at Boston's venerable Berklee College of Music, where it wasn't unusual for him to practice for 12 hours a day. Drawing inspiration from fellow students such as Jorge Rossi, Jim Black, Danilo Perez, Chris Cheek, and Mark Turner, and studying with the likes of Joe Hunt, and Tommy Campbell, Amendola found his own voice rather than modeling himself after established drummers.

Over a career spanning more than three decades, Amendola has forged deep ties across the country, and throughout the world. As an ambitious composer, savvy bandleader, electronics explorer, first-call accompanist, and capaciously creative foil for some of the world's most inventive musicians, Amendola applies his wide-ranging rhythmic virtuosity to a vast array of settings. He's never more than one degree away from a powerful musical hook-up.