

Scott Amendola: Drummer/Composer/Bandleader/Educator

“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. 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 and Jim Campilongo, Hammond B-3 organist Wil Blades, violinist Jenny Scheinman, saxophonists Larry Ochs and Phillip Greenlief, and clarinetist Ben Goldberg. Working in various (often overlapping) combos he's 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.

Spaghetti exemplifies Amendola's wide-open sensibility, bringing together roots rocker Jim Campilongo, avant-garde bassist Mat Muntz, and folk-jazz composer, accordionist and pianist Sam Reider. The collective quartet released an eponymous album via Bandcamp in May. Amendola has also been busy with his quintet Floating Parade, a spacious but groove-centric ensemble featuring Tune-Yards bassist Nate Brenner, percussionist Robert Lopez, vibraphonist Mark Clifford and electric guitarist Ryan Schaeffer.

His trio SticklerPhonics, which released the critically hailed 2024 album *Technicolor Ghost Parade*, has continued to evolve, with Ben Goldberg or saxophonist Kasey Knudsen often joining trombonist Danny Lubin-Laden. Each volatile iteration digs into the chordless, bass-less settings, while

exploring an inviting continuum of jazz practices from traditional jazz polyphony and ambient soundscapes to funk and free improv. His latest album *Scott Amendola Trio with Jeff Parker*, adds an enthralling new chapter to his journey, reuniting him with the polymorphously creative guitar seeker and bassist Paul Bryan (best known as the Grammy Award-winning producer of several albums by Aimee Mann). The Jealous Butcher Records release will soon be available on CD and vinyl.

Amendola's adventures with era-defining guitarists continue with Nels Cline, who maintains several side projects while holding down his long-running role in the alt-rock juggernaut Wilco. He makes appearances as a member of the Scott Amendola Band and a guitar/drums-and-electronics 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 released the acclaimed 2020 Blue Note album *Share the Wealth*, following up 2014's genre-obliterating *Macroscopic* (Mack Avenue).

"Fade To Orange" a piece commissioned as part of the Oakland East Bay Symphony's Irvine Foundation-funded New Visions/New Vistas initiative, exemplifies Amendola's big ears and capacious creative ambitions. The roiling work premiered to critical acclaim at Oakland's Paramount Theater on April 15, 2011. Determined to refine and document the piece, he recorded "Fade To Orange" at Berkeley's storied Fantasy Studios with his Nels Cline Singers bandmates (Cline and powerhouse bassist Trevor Dunn)—and Magik*Magik Orchestra.

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," Amendola says. "After years of experimenting I'm using them in a more expressive and confident way than ever before."

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 Jeff Parker, 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 three-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, Laurie Anderson, Cibo Matto, Deerhoof's John Dieterich, 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, 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. Since 2014, Scott has served as Associate Professor at the University of California - Berkeley's Jazz Program. His teaching in jazz percussion focuses on private instruction.

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.