

# Sounds across the divide

Kendrick Scott Oracle's music builds bridges out of walls



Kendrick Scott's jazz sounds fuse the personal with the political.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE NOTE RECORDS

BY MARCUS CROWDER

to forwards," Scott says. "How we could best tell that story of walking on a bridge?"

Scott's producer Derrick Hodge finally told him to use the insecurity he felt and let it be a part of the music he was making. Freed into exploring ideas rather than second-guessing them, Scott pulled together the record he wanted.

"Derrick helps me translate what I'm hearing and feeling inside of my self into how the music's captured. He understands the wavelength that I work on," he says.

Scott says he was also buoyed by the engagement of longtime Oracle colleagues—pianist Taylor Eigsti, guitarist Mike Moreno, reedist John Ellis and bassist Joe Sanders, along with special guest turntablist Jahi Sundance—who contributed compositions during the sessions.

"When I compose a record I think of the grand arc of the record itself and how each track fits inside of the record and inside of the narrative," Scott says. "Especially when we made this record—it was all narrative based—what messages are we sending? Front to back, I made conscious choices with each tune."

Musically, the band simmers on high through the driving assertiveness of Scott's playing, but each of the players individually is a noteworthy creator. Ten years from now, some may marvel that they were all in a band together.

Pianist Eigsti, a Bay Area native, has a fluid rolling style that swings effortlessly. Ellis deftly moves between tenor saxophone and clarinet with the woodsy tone of the latter adding to the band's earthy grounded vibe. Lyrical guitarist Moreno, who also leads his own acclaimed quartet, has known Scott since they were teenagers.

As powerful as the band can be, much of the playing has textured intimacy and warmth. Scott says that the band in the studio and onstage are quite different.

"A record is a more solemn experience for the people who are creating the art," he says. "In a show we're going with the flow of what the music feels like to the audience—what signals we're getting from them in the moment. It's a collaborative experience between the audience and the band."

Catch Kendrick Scott Oracle at the Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, One Shields Ave., Davis, Oct. 23-26. \$23.50-\$47. For more information [mondaviarts.org](http://mondaviarts.org).

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Kendrick Scott perfectly embodies the free-form attitude in new jazz; he's as much influenced by progressive rapper Mos Def as iconoclast legend Miles Davis.

A drummer, composer and band leader, Scott front-loads politics and personal sensibilities into his band's densely layered sound. The quintet visits the Mondavi Center for four nights Oct. 23-26.

Kendrick Scott Oracle's new album *A Wall Becomes A Bridge* references "the wall" we've heard so much about, but Scott pushes an idea of transforming the negative into positivity.

"More people are paying attention to the government and that level of intensity is what we need—as is that level of intent in how we vote and how we live and treat others. All that is a bridge," Scott wrote of the record on his website.

While the album, released in April, sounds and feels like one thematic piece, the 39-year-old Houston native now based in New York says composing it was difficult and frustrating at first. He had fragments of songs, but wasn't confident they fit together.

"We had a chalkboard in the studio and we were talking about what sentiments we wanted to relate with each song, trying to tell this narrative backwards

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