

George Winstone - Media Bio

Born in London, the rising star saxophonist George Winstone relocated to New York City in March 2019, bolstered by the endorsements of music legends Chick Corea, Jacob Collier, Ben Monder, and Chris Potter. With his characteristically warm sound, daring technical concept, and adventurous spirit, Winstone is poised as a new voice in contemporary music: one whose vision for the future is beholden to an expansive sense of the past. His latest effort, *Odysseus*, is a striking duo improvisation with the iconic guitarist Ben Monder. Spontaneously composed from beginning to end, it juxtaposes an entire journey's-worth of Winstone's darting melodies against Monder's haunting glacial soundscapes. *Odysseus* is now available worldwide.

In his migration to New York City—made one year before the beginning of the pandemic—what drove the young saxophonist an ocean away from home was a sense, long-felt, that his place was really in the United States. “Instinctively, I felt there would be more space for me to grow as an artist,” he reflects. “For the Americans, the jazz tradition: it’s part of your land, your history, in a very visceral way. There’s an exuberance of spirit and a playfulness that occurs in the American musicians: a freedom.”

Rewarded for his dedication to a bold, personal vision, Winstone's career in the UK was a series of early successes. He attended Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music, one of Europe's top music schools. As a leader, he earned feature spots at London in-crowd establishments, including the legendary Ronnie Scott's, Jazz in the Round at the Cockpit Theatre, The Verdict, and The Vortex. He penned modern original music with a wistful, melancholic bent, enlisting a tight-knit group of his peers to bring the songs to life. And after releasing his first EP in 2018, *Outer Spaces*, Winstone's work met critical acclaim: *All About Jazz* called him a “future star in the making” and *Bebop Spoken Here* praised his “floating, ephemeral sound that drifts like a cloud.”

But Winstone wanted something more, and he knew where to find it: in the gritty jungle of New York City, where hallowed halls of music had hosted his heroes—John Coltrane, Kenny Garrett, Michael Brecker, and so many others.

“In terms of the first people I settled in with here,” Winstone recalls, “it was these super-advanced technical-harmonic wizards: Aaron Burnett, James Robbins, Nick Jozwiak, Jon Elbaz. They all play with wild abandon and a profound technique on their instruments. In the UK, with this same orientation, I sometimes felt boxed in, almost typecast; but in what’s become my community here—these really eccentric artists, all deeply obsessive, who’ve developed these weird technical powers—I’ve felt so fully welcomed.”

This gravitation toward a mystically-aligned virtuosity has long been an inclination of Winstone’s. Indeed, attending a jazz summer camp during his teenage years, he found himself befriending a young Jacob Collier, already a burgeoning talent. The two quickly became close. “We connected,” Winstone remembers. “Jacob was a deeply illumined musical spirit. We would play standards, and we would also just improvise freely and converse. In a way, that laid the foundations for what happened on *Odysseus*. Ben and Jacob both possess that same harmonic sagacity; and as regards the purity and the liberty with which we’ve conversed in music, our dialogues run rather parallel.”

Years passed, and Winstone made the move across the Atlantic. One May night, at the West Village’s famed 55 Bar, he heard the groundbreaking guitarist Ben Monder. After the show, Winstone approached him, asking for a lesson. Monder agreed. Upon arriving at the guitarist’s home, “We just played,” says Winstone. And from there, a friendship formed. “Then I booked this gig at Ornithology, and I knew that I just had to do something with Ben.” In a duo performance at the popular new jazz club in Bushwick, Brooklyn—a cozy listening room founded in 2021 by Mitch Borden (who started the beloved New York jazz clubs Smalls, Fat Cat, and Mezzrow)—Monder and Winstone played entirely freely with no pre-set agenda. “I was feeling more comfortable in knowing, ‘We’re gonna improvise. We’re not gonna play “I

Remember April.” That isn’t how far we can take it.’ And I did that gig—and I remember these guys in the audience coming to me after the show, saying, ‘Bro’”—Winstone chuckles—“Bro—you need to record this.”

Thus was born *Odysseus*—from a musical and personal chemistry that allowed Winstone to venture out confidently into breathtaking landscapes of harmony and melody. On the recording, mixed by GRAMMY-winning engineer Joseph Branciforte, *Monder*’s enormous sound is like an impossible hydra, a formless beast roping its thousand necks around mountains and clouds. Against this shifting topography, sometimes holy and shimmering, sometimes downright disturbing, Winstone plays the hero’s part: wandering, climbing, searching, pondering, and fighting. “It’s all improvised, but it’s not in the mode of free “jazz”,” he explains. “This is film music; this is ancient. I can’t escape Prokofiev and I can’t escape Trane. Have you listened to Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia? You see: artists want to tap into certain eras—but humans have been making music for tens of thousands of years.”

A seriousness enters his voice. “I’m not trying to play jazz,” he says, “and I’m not trying to play classical music. I’m improvising, sculpting with sound: we’re creating worlds. For me, the greatest musicians announce that same point which the classical texts of Chinese cosmology honor: that the illusion of self - our seemingly individual expressions - are all accounted for in the procession of nature. We have no choice to be other than what we naturally are.”

Why, then, the name *Odysseus*? “I didn’t have the name *Odysseus* in mind,” says the saxophonist, “And then, listening back to what we recorded, I knew this viscerally as a mythical hero’s journey. It’s like entering Hades, swallowed up by this apocalyptic soundscape, and the sax is this kind of hero, trying to navigate. And then the name *Odysseus* just came to mind—and I was like, that’s the story.”

Asked what he wants to do with his music, Winstone replies, “When the band’s not thinking—about chords or anything—then, I’m just playing sound, I’m just a creature, an

animal. What I would hope for is that people connect to that, as the most personal way that I am. When you can feel each other,” he says, “the divisions fall apart. And that’s what we all want.”