

## Musician Hits the Right Note in DU/Denver Jazz Scene by Ian Wisekal



Musician Camilla Vaitaitis doesn't wait for opportunity to knock – she goes out and finds it. The jazz pianist, a senior in Lamont's Jazz Studies and Commercial Music program, is a member of six performing groups on and off campus, acting as a pianist, vocalist, arranger and composer.

"I'm passionate about finding all forms of new music," said Vaitaitis, "especially locally."

At Lamont, a piece she wrote for the jazz-fusion FLEX ensemble, 'Backward Thinking,' was professionally recorded and posted to the DU Jazz Ensembles YouTube channel. Outside the university, her band Specific Ocean is active on the Denver scene and has released multiple tracks.

Her varied and prolific output attracted the attention of KUVU, Denver's jazz station. They named Vaitaitis as one of their '30 Under 30' area musicians in August. She is one of nine Lamont students and alumni who made the list (see below.)

Since coming to DU, Vaitaitis has been spotlighted in special events across campus. In the spring of her freshman year, her jazz combo was selected by the British Consulate to perform for the Wounded Warriors Project, where Prince Harry was in attendance. "That was pretty cool," she said.

Recently, Vaitaitis performed in a guest master class with the legendary trumpeter Ron Stout, one of dozens of jazz artists brought to Lamont during her studies.

"He's this huge legend...it was awesome to be able to play with him." Vaitaitis considers this aspect of her education to be invaluable. "All the guest artists the jazz department brings in are just amazing." And hearing them live, she says, makes a huge difference.

Vaitaitis counts her jazz piano professor, Eric Gunnison, as an important musical influence. "His teaching style and my learning style are very compatible. [And] because he's had this great career, he knows how it actually works in the real world," she said.

She also names Steve Wiest, the co-chair of the jazz department, as another important influence.

"We talk about what it means to be a musician in the constantly evolving scene of the 21st century," Vaitaitis says of his 21st-Century Artistry class. She also enjoys arranging with Dave Hanson, a Lamont faculty member, and plans to write more pieces for big band.

After graduation, Vaitaitis intends to make use of her dual Swedish/American citizenship, which allows her to work or study anywhere in the E.U. Armed with her experience at DU, she's excited to take on and explore some of that 'real world' firsthand.

NOTE: the following Lamont students /alums made the list of KUVU's 30 Under 30 featured musicians in August

- Amy Darling - trumpet player, composer and bandleader of The Orchid Room; DU alumna

- Cat Ackermann - pianist and vocalist; DU alumna who received a bachelor's in Jazz and Commercial Studies
- Eunha So - pianist; currently attending the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music and pursuing a bachelor's in Jazz Studies and Commercial Music
- Kevin Matthews - drummer; 2014 DU Lamont School of Music graduate; received a DownBeat award in 2007 for a recording with the Lamont Symphony Orchestra
- Matt Burchard - saxophonist, educator, composer and arranger; graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music with a degree in Saxophone Performance in 2011 and received a Performance Certificate in 2012
- Nate Leichtman - pianist, songwriter, bandleader, sideman and educator; graduated from University of Denver's Lamont School of Music with a bachelor's in Jazz and Commercial Piano
- Paul Mullikin – drummer, guitarist, pianist and composer; alum of Lamont School of Music, where he won a Downbeat Magazine award; has worked with the Colorado Symphony
- Wilson Luallen – bassist; Lamont alumnus