

**Performance as Portal:**

**Joe Lovano, the Kennedy Center, and the Sound of Becoming**

By Jerome S. Paige, The Meditativist

**Prologue: The Decision to Attend**

Like many, I had to decide: Do I attend the 7 pm performance at the Kennedy Center on March 28, 2025? The question wasn't logistical. It was political, spiritual, and ethical. In a time when cultural institutions are being taken over, even showing up becomes an act requiring discernment.

I had purchased the tickets long before President Donald Trumped put himself at the head of the Center.

I chose to attend—for three reasons:

1. The tickets were already purchased.
2. The artists were still performing.
3. And perhaps... this would be the last time a group like this would perform in that space.

It felt like an act of witness.

On my way to pick up my daughter—who was coming to see her friend, drummer Will Calhoun, perform—I realized I had left the tickets at home. I had to turn around. She took public transportation. Somehow, we arrived at the same time.

The music had begun when my wife, sister, daughter, and I stepped into the Kennedy Center. We watched the first part of the set on the monitor—still outside the sanctuary, still just on the edge of the portal. But even through the screen, the vibration was precise: This was no ordinary performance.

**Entering the Portal**

After the first set, the doors opened—and we stepped through.

We entered a darkened, studied space. The kind of space that quiets you before you even sit down. A hush, not of silence, but of reverence.

From where we sat, high above the stage, the visual field was like a three-dimensional canvas painted in finishes of sound and light. There were moments of **gloss**—sharp, brilliant bursts from Lovano's saxophone gleaming under stage lights. **Semi-gloss** tones emerged from the interplay of guitar and bass, reflective but grounded, textured yet smooth.

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And then the **matte** elements—the quiet spaces between notes, the settled shadows where presence lived without shine. The stage wasn't just a platform. It was a textured mural of presence, resistance, and resonance.

In the middle set, **Will Calhoun**, surrounded by his drum kit—anchoring the quartet's spiritual and rhythmic gravity. To his right stood bassist **Asante Santi Debriano**, upright and fluid, his fingers plucking deep-rooted memory from the strings. To Will's left was guitarist **Julian Lage**, sculpting sound with finesse and fire. And then there was **Joe Lovano**—in a red jacket and white hat—who moved like breath. He'd step forward during his solos, bringing brilliance to the fore. But when others took the lead, he'd drift to the back—letting the spotlight settle elsewhere. And always, just before the song's end, Lovano would return—his horn gathering all voices into one final invocation.

We found our seats—near the top. That vantage point gave me something unexpected: a panoramic view.

The stage was not just a stage. It was a canvas. Three-dimensional. Textured. Subdued but bright. A flood of light washed over the quartet, creating an aura—almost otherworldly.

The tensions of my day faded. My body softened. My mind stilled. And there I was.

Fully present. No longer in the Kennedy Center. No longer in my seat.

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I was in one of my jam sessions—not as a host, but as a witness—a spiritual jazz and meditation session curated not by but for me.

### **The Quartet as Architects of the Portal**

The ensemble we witnessed was called the Paramount Quartet—an assembly of jazz giants led by Joe Lovano. The group represents a generational convergence: rooted in tradition yet radically open in form. Lovano formed this group as a space for collaboration and innovation, drawing on long-standing relationships with each member. Their schedule includes performances across major cultural venues as part of a 2024–2025 tour designed to bridge classical jazz settings with newer, expansive audiences. Like this one at the Kennedy Center, each performance offers music and a curated meditation on improvisation, memory, and collective presence.

As I settled into that panoramic view, the music unfolded like a ritual.

Lovano's saxophone didn't just cut through the air—it parted it. He wasn't blowing sound. He was summoning memory.

Lage, on guitar, was the messenger between realms. His runs hovered like hummingbirds suspended mid-air.

Debriano, holding the bass, grounded us. His playing summoned something from below—a foundation of ancestral knowing.

And then there was Calhoun—he didn't keep time. He bent it. He wove rhythm into architecture.

We weren't just hearing—we were witnessing freedom in motion.

And then came the personal—the unexpected rediscovery that reshaped the night.

### **A Confession, A Rediscovery**

The Lovano Paramount Quartet is an intergenerational collective of jazz innovators. Led by Grammy-winning saxophonist Joe Lovano, the ensemble includes guitarist Julian Lage, bassist Asante Santi Debriano, and drummer Will Calhoun. Their performance at the Kennedy Center was part of a broader 2024–2025 tour, bringing their dynamic and deeply spiritual sound to intimate and iconic venues nationwide.

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Each member brings a distinct lineage of jazz mastery: Lovano's expansive tonal storytelling, Lage's melodic agility, Debriano's grounded virtuosity, and Calhoun's polyrhythmic force. Together, they form a quartet of musical talent and spiritual intentionality—crafting performances that feel more like ceremonies than concerts.

My daughter had recently seen the Paramount Quartet perform at the Village Vanguard in New York City—a space steeped in jazz history and intimacy. And we had both seen Will Calhoun perform before the pandemic at Blues Alley in Washington, D.C. That night, he was leading his band. I own a CD that contains many of the songs he performed. The energy was electric—tight, expressive, overflowing with rhythmic clarity. Both of those performances shaped the depth of presence we brought with us to the Kennedy Center.

Before this concert, I hadn't heard of Joe Lovano.

We were there to support and experience Calhoun, a friend of my daughter's and an artist whose rhythm has left an imprint on our lives.

Looking into Calhoun's music, I rediscovered something: he was the heartbeat behind Living Colour.

**Living Colour** wasn't just a rock band. They were a seismic force. And **“Cult of Personality”**—layered with samples and thunderous drums—became one of the most sampled songs of its era.

So, when Calhoun sat behind the drum kit that night, he wasn't just keeping tempo. He was carrying a legacy. From protest rock to polyrhythmic jazz futures. I came for friendship. I left with a lesson in power.

The core theme of my Spiritual Jazz and Meditation Jam Sessions has always been this: ***making liberation, freedom, and empowerment happen—through music, movement, and life.*** My sessions were not just about listening. They were about aligning and using jazz as a spiritual and strategic tool to move through the world with intention, clarity, and creative power.

### **Sound as Object of Meditation**

In my Spiritual Jazz and Meditation Jam Sessions, we train the mind to return—again and again—to the present moment through sound.

The Lovano Paramount Quartet's performance became my object of meditation. And, like any practice, my mind wandered. But I returned. Again and again.

Unlike my usual curated sessions, this was live. Visual. Physical.

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I watched Lovano tilt his head and breathe before releasing scripture. I saw Calhoun listening to silence before shaping what came next.

I went back and forth between eyes open and closed. Observation. Embodiment. Seeing. Becoming.

The concert wasn't just an experience. It was practice—a masterclass in moment-by-moment liberation.

### **From the Sixties to the Stars**

In my jam sessions, I often center music from 1965 to 1974. That era wasn't just a period but a frequency of freedom.

Artists like John Coltrane (***A Love Supreme, Meditations***), Alice Coltrane (***Journey in Satchidananda***), Pharoah Sanders (***The Creator Has a Master Plan***), Archie Shepp, Sun Ra, Ornette Coleman, and Sonny Rollins forged a soundscape of liberation—fusing cosmic awareness with a radical tradition. Their music wasn't just experimental. It was elemental—a language of survival, transcendence, and sovereignty.

I was in my Spiritual Jazz Space at the Kennedy Center, not in nostalgia, but in resonance.

Lovano's quartet communed with that lineage but didn't stay there. They moved through time—past, present, future—until time itself dissolved.

They reminded us freedom is not a tempo. It's a dimension.

### **A Counterforce to Extraction**

This concert wasn't just a performance. It was a counterforce.

Today's Private Equity State Capitalism seeks to extract memory, flatten culture, and rebrand sanctuaries for profit. But jazz refuses containment.

Lovano's quartet didn't play for profit. They played for presence.

This was not entertainment. This was insurgency.

A mural of sound. A blueprint of sovereignty. A refusal to be silenced.

It is also a reminder that breath, rhythm, and memory are the truest infrastructures of liberation.

### **Backstage: The Afterglow of Sound**

After the show, we were invited backstage.

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We spoke with the musicians—heard how they came together, who they had played with, where they had traveled. We took pictures. Laughed.



Gina Paige & Joe Lavano



Jerome Paige, right; Barbar  
Paige, center; Will Calhoun, left.  
Calhoun gave me my top. It's  
from Sierra Leone.



Asante Santi Debriano, left;  
Barbara Paige, right

We couldn't stay long—they had a 9 pm set to prepare. Another portal to open. Another room to fill with light.

But we left full. Full of story. Full of reverence. Full of the truth that sometimes, the deepest meditations are not silent. They are \*sounded\*.

**Jerome S. Paige is The Meditativist**—writer, practitioner, and founder of *The Meditativist's Journal*. Through inquiry circles, cultural reflection, and sonic meditation, he maps how memory, music, and moment-by-moment presence can interrupt systems of control and move us toward collective liberation.

Learn more at <https://whatsonjeromesmind.com> and <https://themeditativist.substack.com>