COLLEGE OF MUSIC

University of North Texas College of Music

Doctoral Recital | Monday, October 19, 2026 | 8:00 p.m. | Lab West

Kai Wagner, jazz bass

Places

Blues for the Bad Seed (2023) ..... Kai Wagner
(b. 1999)

Saguaro (2026) ..... Kai Wagner
(b. 1999)

America (1957) ..... Leonard Bernstein
(1918-1990)
arr. Kai Wagner
lyr. Stephen Sondheim

I'm Glad There is You (1941) ..... Jimmy Dorsey, Paul Madeira
(1904-1957, 1904-1998)
arr. Kai Wagner

Evergreen (2026) ..... Kai Wagner
(b. 1999)

赤とんぼ (Akatombo) (1927) ..... 山田耕筰 (Kōsaku Yamada)
(1886-1965)
lyr. 三木露風 (Rofū Miki)
arr. Kai Wagner

Understudy (2026) ..... Kai Wagner
(b. 1999)

Program sixty-eight of the 2026–2027 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

Program Notes

Throughout my life, music has always been a constant no matter where I've been. Although this is common for any student in the music department, students often focus intently on what is now and what is to come that it can be difficult just to reflect on the past or to share where we have been. I thought it apt to share a recital representative of my past, with respect to many of the places that have been most important to me. Each piece is programmed to honor where I've been, and in anticipation of where I may go. I have also declared my Related Field of my degree to be in Jazz Composition and Arranging, so I am excited to present newly written and arranged music for you, performed by never-before-seen Kai Wagner Dectet. Please enjoy!

Blues for the Bad Seed (2023) | Kai Wagner
I did my undergraduate studies in Spokane, Washington at Whitworth University where I also met my now-wife Natalie and stayed in the area after graduating. The Bad Seed is an old library converted into a bar that hosted one of the local jam sessions where I played in the band on Monday nights. Spokane's growing scene was integral to my growth as I learned the ins and outs of playing jazz music. I wrote this blues in 2023 soon after moving away to capture the music of Wayne Shorter and others that I often heard there.

Saguaro (2026) | Kai Wagner
My immediate family, my father's side of the family, and my in-laws have all lived in the Phoenix area at one time or another. The stinging heat and beautiful landscape have been a part of my upbringing since before my earliest memories. The rich history of each cactus littered around streets and hiking trails are the prominent symbol as I recall the time with family that I've spent in the area. This is a new tune I wrote to convey the distinct terrain.

America (1957) | Leonard Bernstein, lyr. Stephen Sondheim
Growing up, my family would take a yearly summer trip to Whistler, Canada. I have fond memories of the city, and it was a tradition for the family to go to the nearest library and rent movies on DVD to watch in the hotel room. This is where I first remember watching West Side Story (1964), and I have been compelled by the soundtrack ever since. Here is my arrangement of America from the film as my homage to Canada.

I'm Glad There Is You | Jimmy Dorsey, Paul Madeira
After meeting Natalie for the first time, I was very glad to learn that we lived within driving distance even when not in school. I paid for copious COVID-era Washington state gasoline to drive up to Edmonds as often as I could to spend time with her and her family, and to play multiple regular sessions a week with students from jazz conservatories over breaks in school. I first started attending church, proposed, and made many good memories there with family and friends. This is my rendition of this standard to remember my time there.

Evergreen (2026) | Kai Wagner
Besides my time here in Denton, I have always lived in Washington state, surrounded by Fir and Hemlock trees, ferns, and other rich, verdant nature all around. Recently, after returning for the first time in a while, I was hit with the sharply fresh, camphorous, sweet smell of the sap from a forest of fir trees; I was simultaneously surprised by its intense aroma and that it felt so familiar despite not having experienced anything like it in a long time. I felt that the experience warranted a new melody to encapsulate the powerful and intense presence of the evergreen tree.

赤とんぼ Akatombo (1927) | Kōsaku Yamada, lyr. Rōfu Miki
During the 1920s, many Japanese composers sought to write new music for the people of Japan that could serve both as children's songs with beautiful melodies and meaningful lyrics and as art songs for anyone. This melody is one that I heard often as a child, simply as a "traditional" that all children know, and is still one of the most recognizable melodies in Japan. The lyrics tell of a red dragonfly (akatombo) seen in the family fields, witness to the daughter of the family leaving town to be wed and to the empty field that remains. The eight bar theme is rich with nostalgia despite its brevity. My mother's side of the family all live in Japan, and I used to visit them every summer. Despite not having ever lived there, my family and other Japanese family friends of mine speak of going to Japan as "visiting home." Even as a second-generation Japanese immigrant (Nissei), I still find thinking back to the time I've spent with family in Japan to be some of my fondest childhood memories. Here is my treatment of the melody which you will hear introduced first by the piano.

Understudy (2026) | Kai Wagner
The last locale, of course, is Denton, Texas. This area has been very kind to Natalie and I, through schooling, work, and all else. The support I have had from peers, faculty, and the greater community have been invaluable to my experience of life in this area. In particular, the recent change in faculty means that I have studied under two bass professors at UNT: Lynn Seaton and Eric Hitt, along with starting lessons with a third professor in Rich DeRosa for writing. I am very grateful to them and to Professor Quincy Davis for overseeing this recital and for their guidance. As the closer of a Doctoral jazz recital, I thought it would be apropos to play something to honor all of the practicing that we have collectively done (and all of the practicing that we wish we had done, understudying) by playing a new tune that you may recognize harmonically, but with a twist. Something to switch up the form and put a slightly more challenging cherry on top.

Personnel

Woodwinds
Natalie Wagner,
alto saxophone,
soprano saxophone,
flute, and clarinet

Kirill Poudavov,
tenor saxophone

Garett Ames,
baritone saxophone,
bass clarinet

Trumpet and Flugelhorn
Alessandro Squadrito Moore
Jack Phillips

Trombone
Scott Schaffer
Kysen Ellis

Piano
Ayane Karachi

Double and Electric Bass
Kai Wagner

Drumset
Simon Von Hatten