



## Michael A. Cuscuna

September 20, 1948 - April 20, 2024

MICHAEL CUSCUNA, (1948 – 2024), three-time Grammy Award winner and influential figure in the jazz recording industry, died Saturday, April 20, 2024 at the age of 75. He was most well-known for his groundbreaking jazz reissues, the result of a lifelong mission to unearth hidden musical gems and bring them to light. Cuscuna's meticulous work in the Blue Note archives offered jazz aficionados an unprecedented glimpse into the creative process of the genre's most iconic figures.

Born on September 20, 1948 in Stamford Connecticut, he was a graduate of King School, entered The Wharton School of Business and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. While in college, he hosted nightly jazz programs on the University's radio station, WXPB, and had a part time job at ESP-Disk Records. He eventually took on writing assignments for DownBeat, and Jazz and Pop magazines. By 1967, Cuscuna was presenting concerts in Philadelphia for Paul Bley, Joe Henderson and others. Upon graduating, he received an offer from Philadelphia's WMMR to DJ a radio jazz show, and later he went to work for WABC FM (WPLJ), which brought Cuscuna to New York City as a DJ on the 'free form' morning show.

While in New York, Cuscuna produced albums by Buddy Guy and Junior Wells for Vanguard and Blue Thumb. He also recorded several singer/songwriters including Bonnie Raitt's "Give It Up". He went on to work

for Atlantic Records, producing records with Garland Jeffreys, Oscar Brown Jr., Buddy Guy, Dave Brubeck, and The Art Ensemble of Chicago.

By the end of 1973, he established himself as a freelance producer with projects for Atlantic, ABC, Motown, and Arista. Notable among these was a series of critically acclaimed albums for Columbia by Dexter Gordon and Woody Shaw. Throughout the 1970s, Cuscuna continued to write for DownBeat, The New York Times, Rolling Stone, Saturday Review, and Record World, where he was also the jazz editor from 1971 to 1976.

Throughout his career, Cuscuna possessed a curiosity for unearthing unissued jazz recordings, delving into the vaults of record labels. In 1975 his search led him to the great Blue Note vaults – unlocking a treasure of unissued material by the great jazz legends. This experience would later be the impetus for co-founding Mosaic Records Inc, a boutique label specializing in complete sets of some of the most influential jazz artists. Mosaic Records, co-founded with Charles Lourie, re-released hundreds of editions including works by Thelonious Monk, Sidney Bechet, Hank Mobley, Horace silver, John Coltrane, Lee Morgan, Dexter Gordon, Art Blakey, The Nat king Cole Trio, Miles Davis and Billy Holliday. Cuscuna's dedication to the preservation and continuation of the Blue Note Label will forever be considered perhaps his most important contribution to the jazz community. Mosaic Records will continue under the direction of Fred Pustay, Michael's other partner.

Throughout Mosaic's history, Cuscuna continued to work with other record labels. He worked for Bruce Lundvall at Blue Note Records, where he produced records by Lou Rawls, McCoy Tyner, Tony Williams, Dianne Reeves, Freddie Hubbard, Don Pullen, Andrew Hill, Joe Lovano, the Charles Tolliver Big Band and New Directions with Greg Osby, Stefon Harris and Jason Moran among others. He brought many artists to the label including Andrew Hill, John Scofield, and Al Green.

He was a producer for the Mt. Fuji Festival for Japanese TV from 1986-1996. From 1989 to 1992, he served as musical director for a series of jazz videos produced by SDR films for Pioneer Laser Discs. The series includes such artists as Stanley Jordan, John Scofield, Dianne Reeves and Tony Williams. In 2014, He co-produced with Jason Moran the Blue Note 75th Anniversary Concert at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Michael served as a primary consultant on Bertrand Tavernier's film 'Round Midnight and for Ken Burns documentary series, Ken Burns's Jazz in which he appears. He also has appeared as the unofficial Blue Note historic authority in "Blue Note, Beyond the Notes", a film by Sophie Huber documenting the story of the Blue Note label.

In 1988, as a writer and archivist, he co-authored, The Blue Note Label: A Discography. After acquiring the Francis Wolff Photographic Collection in 1993, more than 20,000 negatives shot during the original Blue Note Recording sessions, Mosaic's sister company, Mosaic Images, published 2 books with Rizzolli and furnish material for three other books published in France, Germany and Barcelona.

In 1995 Cuscuna designed a series of box sets to organize and document the considerable legacy of Miles Davis at Columbia from 1955 to 1970. In the early 2000's, Cuscuna, co-created a series of box sets featuring live Miles Davis performances called the "Bootleg Series".

In 1979, Cuscuna was voted #1 as DownBeat's "Producer Of The Year" critics poll and has placed #1 or #2 in many subsequent years. DownBeat presented Michael with a "Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2023 for his contribution to the recording industry.

Cuscuna won three Grammy Awards, the first of which was in the Best Historical Album category for The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Nat King Cole Trio (Mosaic) in 1992 and The Complete Billie Holiday on Columbia 1933-1944 (Columbia) in 2001 and in the best liner notes category in 1998 for The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet 1965-1968 (Columbia/Mosaic).

A resident of Stamford, Connecticut, Michael is survived by his wife Lisa, his children, Max and his wife Jackie, daughter Lauren, and two grandchildren, Nicolas and Penelope Cuscuna.

Family welcomes relatives and friends on May 4th from 11:00am to 1:00pm at the Bosak Funeral Home, 453 Shippan Avenue, Stamford, CT. Afterwards, friends and family are invited to the house on Fairview Avenue.

Other news regarding a tribute will be forthcoming.

To express condolences for the family online, please visit the family guestbook at [www.bosakfuneralhome.com](http://www.bosakfuneralhome.com) or [www.facebook.com/bosakfuneralhome](http://www.facebook.com/bosakfuneralhome)

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAY 4. 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (ET)

Bosak Funeral Home & Cremation  
453 Shippan Avenue  
Stamford, CT 06902

# Tribute Wall

BB

“ I got to know Michael a few years ago because we lived not far from each other. It was special to meet this guy whose liner notes I had been reading for the last 50 years and learned so much from. I still remember his note for a Blue Note inner sleeve on a Charles Lloyd record, that taught me so much about what made Blue Note the greatest jazz label that ever was or will be. His love of the music and the people who made it, and the work he did making Mosaic such an incredible resource, will never be forgotten. RIP Michael and thanks for the memories.

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**Bill Beran** - May 03, 2024 at 05:04 PM

RG

“ Michael "taught" me how to listen to jazz, what to listen to in jazz, and through his tireless efforts, especially working through the Blue Note vaults, why this endearing music should be listened to; because of his passion and tireless work, we are his heirs. The only folks happy right now are those countless musicians greeting him in the jazz "Valhalla" You were the very best, Michael, thank you.

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**Robert Gilman** - April 25, 2024 at 10:36 PM

MM

“ I heard Michael before I first saw him, listening to his hip delivery on WPLJ-FM, so I felt I already knew him a little bit when he came to work at Atlantic Records a year after I joined the company. Our relationship quickly transmuted from being colleagues to becoming friends, which lasted to the present. We produced a couple of albums together, Cornell Dupree for Atlantic and Luther Allison for Motown, and had fun doing it. A couple of random memories: Michael excitedly calling me at home one day in 1976 to play Weather Report's "Birdland" over the phone, saying he wanted to share the great new side with me; Michael eating a couple of raw jalapeños to demonstrate his tolerance for spicy food; working together again when I went to ABC Records and Michael burrowed into the Impulse vault; Michael introducing me to Dexter Gordon.

*Always hip, never flashy, always warm -- a cool cat mensch. I will miss him.*

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**Mark Meyerson** - April 25, 2024 at 08:44 PM

JA

“ It was always a wonderful and special time working with Michael. Here we are in Warsaw, Poland, December 2009. Jim Anderson



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**Jim Anderson** - April 25, 2024 at 10:02 AM