MATT SAVAGE

Pianist, Composer, Educator

"A phenomenally talented pianist and composer"
WALL STREET JOURNAL

"Jazz Savant INDEED!"
MARIAN MCPARTLAND

"Wildly inventive"
JAZZIZ

"...a schooled, seasoned jazz pianist..."
JAZZTIMES

"Amazing..."
DAVE BRUBECK

MATT SAVAGE: B I O G R A P H Y

Matt Savage, age 34, has had a remarkable 20+ year professional career as a jazz musician, bandleader and composer, performing with ensembles of different size and as a solo pianist. He's played with some of the biggest names in jazz since first labeled a "jazz prodigy" at age 8 – the same year he met and played piano for Dave Brubeck. Matt has performed (on stage and in jam sessions) with artists such as Chick Corea, the Ellington All Stars, Chaka Khan, Wynton Marsalis, Bobby Watson, Clark Terry, Jimmy Heath, Jason Moran, Arturo O'Farrill, John Pizzarelli, Joshua Redman, Terri Lyne Carrington, Jon Faddis, Jerry Bergonzi, Donny McCaslin and the Aardvark Jazz Orchestra. Matt's encounters with these jazz greats have always resulted in praise. Saxophonist Bobby Watson said it well after he first performed with Matt (age 11) in Kansas City. "It's not so much that he was a virtuoso; he had chops, but he also had direction and he had language. Where did that come from? . . . I knew it wasn't a pretend thing, that he was the real thing and he'd be in music for the rest of his life."

Matt has recently moved back to New York City from Boston, and he currently works as the music director and pianist for the legendary rock 'n' roll group, **The Platters®.** He has toured across the country with The Platters since February 2025.

This is one of many ways that Matt's talent has taken him beyond the jazz world. In 2015 alone, he performed with Stephen Stills, Neil Young and Shawn Colvin at a benefit concert at the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood. He has also played alongside Steve Earle, Bruce Springsteen, and Jackson Browne in New York City.

Savage was just 11 when he debuted at New York City's famed Blue Note. The following year he debuted at Birdland. Since then, Matt has toured worldwide, performing at such additional venues as The Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, Bohemian Caverns, The Town Hall, Dizzy's Club *Coca-Cola*, Scullers, the Jazz Standard, Smalls Jazz Club, the Iridium, the Berklee BeanTown Jazz Festival, the Monterey Jazz Festival, Heineken Jazzaldia (Spain), the Costa Rica International Jazz Festival, the International VSA Arts Festival, the Jacksonville Jazz Festival, the Ottawa International Jazz Festival, the New Orleans Jazz Festival, the Earshot Jazz Festival, Japan, Curacao, Aruba and for the president of Singapore. Matt Savage has performed at popular venues throughout North America, with locations ranging from Los Angeles, Albuquerque, and Vancouver to Canada's Yukon, where he recently did a major interview with CBC Radio, Canada's national public radio broadcaster. And in 2018, Matt did an Asia tour, which took him to India, Japan, and three cities in China.

As a composer, Savage has had great success. In 2014, Matt scored, arranged and recorded the music for a full-length documentary film entitled ***Sound of Redemption: The Frank Morgan Story***. The movie chronicles the story of the late alto saxophonist Frank Morgan's troubled life and eventual redemption. In addition to jazz, Matt writes and performs classical music. In 2014, he premiered in New York his own *Piano Sonata No. 1* and *24 Preludes.* Almost all the songs on Matt's albums are original compositions, several of which have been used in short documentaries, on web sites, in school music curricula and in government educational materials. Savage consistently garners recognition through **ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Awards**, **ASCAP Plus Awards** and the **International Songwriting Competition**. He scores music for ensembles of all size and instrumentation, including big band.

Matt currently leads the Matt Savage Quartet and the Matt Savage Groove Experiment. His latest album is a quartet record called ***The Whole Package!*** This collection of eight originals and three covers was released on June 16th, 2023. "The Savage Life Chose Me" is the opener, starting with a drum solo by Zak King and quickly building to an extremely fast bebop head. Matt Savage takes over with a dramatic and virtuosic piano solo, albeit one that also shows melodic restraint and the influence of past generations of pianists. Mark Zaleski adds saxophone fuel to the fire, with a long solo that culminates in one very intense held note. And bassist Greg Loughman is featured on the track "Pondside Waltz."

Matt has over a dozen previous albums to his name. ***The Whole Package!*** is preceded by the Matt Savage Groove Experiment's two "long EPs," ***The Groove Reawakens*** (2022) and ***Splash Variations*** (2018). These albums each consist of six long jazz-funk tracks, with four songs being instrumental and two songs featuring vocalist Robbie Pate. ***Matt Savage: Piano Voyages*** is a 2016 solo piano album; this album was accompanied by a tour on both coasts. The exploratory solo release includes several classic jazz standards in addition to Matt's originals. One of those is Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage," from which *Piano Voyages* takes its title. Erena Terakubo, a young star from Japan, plays on one song as well. *Piano Voyages* was preceded by a live-in Japan duo album under bassist

Shota Ishikawa's leadership, **It's *My Request*: *Live at Bar Request*** (2016). About three years prior to *Piano Voyages*, ***A Bigger Celebration*** (2013; with Jerry Bergonzi, Bruce Gertz, Richie Barshay and Mark Zaleski) and ***A Live Celebration: Kobe, Japan*** (2014; with Shota Ishikawa and Tatsuhiko Takeda) were released as companion albums.

Welcome Home (2010), Savage's ninth album, received critical acclaim upon its release. This CD furthered Matt's experimentation, reflecting the cycles of country life and the day-to-night rhythms of a metropolitan city through trio, quartet and quintet combinations. *All About Jazz* said "…this is Savage's album all the way, as he not only plays with a maturity well beyond his years but wrote and arranged every number…" *CADENCE* Magazine praised "…hints of Aaron Copland and Pat Metheny done in a piano trio setting that shows how hard-swinging a player Savage is." *Welcome Home* was a quintet collaboration with Bobby Watson on alto saxophone, Jeremy Pelt on trumpet, Joris Teepe on bass and Peter Retzlaff on drums; it also contained various trio configurations with John Funkhouser on bass and Yoron Israel on drums. The album reached #18 on the **JazzWeek** radio charts, #9 on Roots Music Report and #3 on CMJ.

Leading up to ***Welcome Home*** were two albums of note: ***Quantum Leap*** *(2006) and* ***Hot Ticket: Live in Boston*** (2008). An acclaimed studio album, ***Quantum Leap***, marked the Matt Savage Trio's first record to receive worldwide distribution via Palmetto Records (MRI/RED). The album reached the Top 25 on the ***JazzWeek*** charts and received airplay on Jazz stations throughout the country. ***Hot Ticket: Live in Boston*** followed this success and has been Matt's most successful live album to date.

Matt has traveled at an astonishing pace from life on a farm to professional composer and musician. His early years brought a unique set of challenges. At the age of three, Matt could not tolerate music or sounds in general, resulting in a diagnosis of Pervasive Development Disorder, a high-functioning type of Autism. For the next four years his parents immersed him in intensive intervention therapies. At age 6 ½, Matt emerged from therapy and completely involved himself in all things musical. Flourishing at a hyper-accelerated pace, he taught himself to read music and play piano, literally overnight.

From his emergence as a child prodigy to his continuance as a mature and respected artist, Matt has been the focus of media attention. He has appeared/performed on Marian McPartland's "Piano Jazz," NPR's "All Things Considered," "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," "The Late Show with David Letterman," the "Today" Show, ABC's "20/20," the Discovery Channel, BBC, Telemundo TV, and news shows and documentaries worldwide (including the U.S., Germany, France, Japan and the U.K.) Numerous print outlets have featured stories on Matt and reviews of his music and performances including *The Wall Street Journal, JazzTimes, JAZZIZ, TIME*, *WIRED, Der Spiegel, The Jerusalem Report, People Magazine, TIME for Kids, American Way, The Globe and Mail,* the *Toronto Star, The Boston Globe* and the New York *Daily News*.

The Whole Package! and *The Groove Reawakens* represents a post-pandemic comeback for Matt Savage, who graduated from **Berklee College of Music** and earned his Master's from **Manhattan School of Music**. As his journey continues, Matt enjoys the creative evolution of his professional music career and the opportunity to perform in as many locations as possible. Matt is an adjunct professor at **Longy School of Music of Bard College** and **Bunker Hill Community College**, and he gives masterclasses and workshops domestically and internationally (in English and Spanish) as well as private piano lessons. Matt's downtime may be infrequent, but when he is not touring or teaching, he might be found at his family's farm in New Hampshire – a perfect backdrop for relaxation, rejuvenation and the inspiration to write an occasional song.

January 2026

For more information, please visit: www.savagerecords.com

Booking: Sujata Subramanian, Wild Tone Artists, (415) 405-6390, bookings@wildtoneartists.com

Publicity: Chris DiGirolamo, Two for the Show Media, (718) 669-0752, twofortheshowmedia@icloud.com

MATT SAVAGE: NOTABLE QUOTES

"Matt's concert had me pinned to my seat for the entire hour and fifteen minutes . . . I had the feeling I was hearing music that was coming from an entirely different esthetic."
RUTH PRICE, THE JAZZ BAKERY, LOS ANGELES

"...the diversity of 'Piano Voyages' is astonishing - with originals suggesting influences from Keith Jarrett and Bill Evans to Chick Corea and George Winston alongside selected and clever interpretations of material by Wes Montgomery and The Beatles."
THE DAY, NEW LONDON, CT

"No one word could do justice to his performance; it was simply 'beautiful.'"
RYOTA KOJIMA, VOYAGE MAGAZINE, JAPAN

"… this is Savage's album all the way, as he not only plays with a maturity well beyond his years but wrote and arranged every number…"
ALL ABOUT JAZZ.COM

"… Savage proves he's no novelty act, as can be heard on his CD *Welcome Home*."
JAZZIZ

"… hints of Aaron Copland and Pat Metheny done in a piano trio setting that shows how hard-swinging a player Savage is."
CADENCE

"… a phenomenally talented pianist and composer who demands to be taken seriously on purely musical terms."
WALL STREET JOURNAL

"A wildly inventive composer, interpreter and pianist no matter what his age… Savage proves his maturity…"
JAZZIZ

"He clearly knows what he is doing … not only as a hard bop/post-bop pianist, but also as a composer."
ALL MUSIC GUIDE

"This young man plays with grace, energy and originality. Jazz Savant *INDEED*!"
MARIAN MCPARTLAND

"You blew my mind. That was incredible!"
CONAN O'BRIEN, host of "Late Night with Conan O'Brien"

"A jazz legend - at 15"
AMERICAN WAY

"Jazz prodigy makes 'Leap' to maturity."
BOSTON HERALD

"… a schooled, seasoned jazz pianist …"
JAZZTIMES

"… astonishing, refreshing and engaging …"
ALL MUSIC GUIDE

"I am amazed at Matt's musical ability at such an early age."
DAVE BRUBECK

"… is Matt Savage really that good? Does he deserve the hype and hoopla? In a word, yes… he's an admirable jazz pianist, one whose age seems largely irrelevant…"
ALL ABOUT JAZZ.COM

"… brilliant"
TIME MAGAZINE

"… jazz phenom Matt Savage unlocks a door to genius using 88 keys"
PEOPLE MAGAZINE

"The Key Master." … he's got command of the music and, most important, he's got swing."
THE BOSTON GLOBE

"… delightful and inspiring …"
CHICK COREA

"… the future of JAZZ"
JIMMY HEATH

"Besides being an extremely gifted pianist and improviser, Matt has the musical instincts of a person many years older. To me this is the most incredible characteristic about Matt. Where did this come from? Wow! I can't wait to hear him perform when his feet can reach the pedals."
BOBBY WATSON

"I was amazed at how talented he is. Amazing is the word I can tell you. I keep track of young talent in kids, and he's the first one that I met that young that was THAT talented. He has such a musical mind that it isn't music that he has to learn. It seems like he's such an advanced musician in so many ways already at 8."
DAVE BRUBECK

"Matt Savage is, in short, a wonder, and he's just 13 years old."
OAKLAND TRIBUNE

"Whenever he plays… he blows people away."
THE MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM

"Matt combines all forms of harmony resolution, not just rhythmic or counterpoint, but he goes beyond to levels once visited by Bach concerto and Mozart."
AFRO AMERICAN SYNDICATE

"Phenomenal… He sounds as good as any of the top pros in this town, and better than some."
JOHN PAYNE

Savage Records · www.savagerecords.com

***Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) Sunday, June 17, 2018**

From silence to sensation: Prodigy Matt Savage, born with autism, now a music veteran

Katherine Varga, Special to Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK
Published 6:30 a.m. ET June 17, 2018

In some ways, Matt Savage is a pretty standard 26-year-old. He lives in Boston, enjoys hiking, Star Wars and spicy food. He's a fan of Harry Potter (and, as he points out, bears a certain resemblance to him).

He's a pretty typical millennial, if you ignore the fact that he has performed with the likes of Chaka Khan, Wynton Marsalis and Jackson Browne and will be spending his summer touring India, Japan and China after performing two solo piano concerts at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival on June 22.

Oh, and then there's the detail that he's a savant on the autism spectrum who started his career as a child prodigy.

Early days of quiet

Most music prodigies talk of childhood homes brimming with song. Matt doesn't remember much about his early childhood, but he does know it didn't contain much music. Because he was born on the autism spectrum, he had difficulty tolerating noise.

"Everything in the house had to be quiet all the time," he says. "My mom would occasionally still play the piano for me but I would only want it at a very specific time."

According to his mom, she would know to play if he led her to the piano and said "Peanuts" (to hear the Peanuts theme song) or "Fast!" (his name for the third movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight" sonata). Any other time she played, he would try to knock her hands off the keyboard or, worse, scream.

His parents tried auditory integration therapy. The idea was to desensitize him to sound gradually, over the course of weeks, by introducing him to quiet beeps and building up to pop music.

For his parents, Diane and Larry Savage, helping their son cope with his autism went beyond therapy. It meant encouraging him to explore his interests.

When Matt showed an early aptitude and interest for math, his parents bought him math-related

books and games. When he taught himself to read music at age 6, they signed him up for piano lessons a week later.

Learning a new instrument is always challenging, but Matt's neurological tendencies added some difficulties. Kids with autism often want to stop and go back to the beginning every time they mess up. But with piano, students are often taught to keep playing to get to the end of a piece.

They're also likely to want to use the right hand if something is happening on the right side of the body, and the left hand for the left side. But pianists sometimes need to cross hands when playing.

"That was very difficult for him," Diane says, "but he wanted to play the piano so he forced himself to do it."

Life in the spotlight

Matt Savage taught himself to read music as a child and never looked back.

Matt got good at solo piano. Really good. Savant good. But something was missing: He wanted to play in an ensemble.

"He instigated everything. We just followed his lead," Diane says.

His parents started bringing him to a jam session where he could sign up to play with other musicians. Grownup musicians. This was where he first met bassist John Funkhouser, who currently teaches at the acclaimed Berklee College of Music.

Funkhouser wasn't opposed to letting an 8-year-old play. "It's a very non-judgmental kind of jam session, so I kept an open mind."

As soon as he heard Matt play, he was amazed. It wasn't just Matt's technical ability; he also had a strong understanding of how to improvise over a form — something that most musicians take years of training to master.

"I thought, 'Wow, how is that even possible?' " Funkhouser recalls.

Diane asked if Funkhouser would be willing to teach Matt to play in an ensemble, but he told her Matt already knew how to play with others. He just needed gigs.

But nobody Matt's age could keep up with him. So Funkhouser happily joined the Matt Savage Trio. "He was the boss, and yet, we were his mentors in a way, the drummer and I."

Around this time, the Boston Globe published an article about Matt and suddenly, gigs were not a problem.

"The media loves a child prodigy, and people love to read about them," Funkhouser says. (Guilty as charged.) "In a way, certain things just fell in his lap."

During the next several years, Matt appeared on The Today Show, 20/20, Late Night with Conan O'Brien, The Late Show with David Letterman, and NPR's All Things Considered, to name a few. He performed across the country and around the world.

“He had complete control of where he played, when he played, what he played, if he played,” Diane says.

She reveals a telling anecdote: When Matt was around 9, NBC called him to be on a reality TV show where he would compete with other talented kids for a college scholarship. Matt said no. When his mom asked why he told her that music shouldn’t be a competition.

Wise beyond his years, Matt stunned audiences around the world with both his piano-playing and his original compositions. He also excelled in math and taught himself enough geography to win the New Hampshire Geography Bee. He was featured in documentaries and books about savants.

But then, Matt did what all children — even prodigies — do: He grew up.

Life as an adult prodigy

Savage also performs as a trio — and has been playing with other musicians since age 8.

Without the hook of being too short to reach the pedals, Matt faces the same business and marketing challenges that other very talented adult musicians do. What’s remarkable about Matt is that rather than outgrowing his talents, he has grown with them.

“He had this incredible thing handed to him and he ran with it as long as it went, and now he has to figure it out like everybody else,” says Funkhouser, who still plays with Matt a few times a year.

“Anyone who’s serious about the music, that’s what they do. They work hard, they continue to expand their horizons, expand their playing, expand their thinking. And I think he’s been doing all those things.”

This is evident from Matt’s most recent CD, Matt Savage: Piano Voyages, which is his first solo recording as an adult (he has released 12 CDs in total). He will be playing selections from that solo CD during his concert in Rochester.

For the record, during a more than 20-minute-long phone conversation, Matt said very little about his childhood fame, always finding ways to bring the conversation back to music.

When asked what it was like to perform for the president of Singapore as a 10-year-old (not a shabby gig at any age), he focused on the act of performing: “Certainly the event was fancier, but in many ways you’re still doing a concert just like usual.”

It wasn’t until I talked to the people who love him that some of the more impressive details popped up. Like how he graduated high school at 17 (he was home-schooled) and moved to Boston on his own to attend Berklee College of Music, before moving on to get his Master’s degree from the Manhattan School of Music.

Or how his mother trained him — at age 19 — to take over Savage Records so she could retire.

Taking over a music company as a teenager would be a remarkable achievement for anyone, and even more so when you take into account the social difficulties that arise from having high-functioning autism.

But Matt doesn't dwell on his past accomplishments. He cares most about what's happening now and what's coming up. He mentions his excitement for the Matt Savage Groove Experiment, a quintet and vocalist that performs a musical fusion ranging from his original jazz compositions to pop covers.

As fitting for someone who, as a child, believed music shouldn't be a competition, Matt enjoys encouraging other young artists. He cites jazz legends Charlie Banacos and Arturo O'Farrill as two of many teachers who have shaped and inspired him as an artist. Now Matt is giving back by through master classes and workshops (in both English and Spanish), private lessons and a faculty position at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston.

"In many ways, it's a steadier career than performing, but the thing that's most important is just the idea of training the next generation of jazz musicians," he says. "It doesn't just come out of the blue."

Katherine Varga is a Rochester writer.

If You Go:

What: Matt Savage solo piano concert.

When: 5:45 and 7:45 Friday, June 22.

Where: Hatch Recital Hall (Eastman School of Music).

Tickets: $30 (cash only) at the door or Club Pass (available online at rochesterjazz.com).

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The Boston Globe **Saturday, May 12, 2012**

The Boston Globe

SATURDAY, MAY 12, 2012

GROWING INTO HIS GIFT, AND INTO LIFE

JOANNE RATHE/GLOBE STAFF

Matt Savage in a music lab at Berklee College of Music. He will graduate today, on his 20th birthday.

He gained early fame as a jazz prodigy beset by autism. Today, Matthew Savage is ready for anything

By Bella English
GLOBE STAFF

Matt Savage doesn't like to think of his younger days, when he couldn't stand the sound of music, even his family singing "Happy Birthday" to him. Diagnosed at age 3 with autism, he was hyperactive, engaged in repetitive motions, and lasted two days in preschool before being kicked out. Noise of any sort, including music, was anathema.

Now, music is his life. Today, his 20th birthday, Savage will graduate from Berklee College of Music with a 3.99 grade point average. He still has a semester left, but since Berklee has just one graduation ceremony per year, he will collect his diploma with the class of 2012.

TOM HERDE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2001

Savage at age 9, practicing at home. He cut his first album at age 7.

The diploma caps the astonishing first chapter of his jazz career. Savage cut his first album at age 7, formed his own band at age 8, has performed in prestigious festivals and competitions around the globe, has won several ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Awards, and has jammed with the likes of Chick Corea and Chaka Khan.

When his course work is com-

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Despite autism, a jazz career

▶ SAVAGE
Continued from Page A1

plete, he hopes to attend graduate school in music and add teaching to his resume.

"Music is a soundtrack to my life," he says in a rehearsal hall at Berklee. "It transports people into what life could be. When you play music, it feels like you're making the world that much more exciting." His eyes fix immediately on the grand piano, as if he can't wait to touch it. With a slight build and glasses that lend him a studious air, he looks more 12 than 20. Gone are the most obvious signs of autism, though he still struggles with distraction and focusing.

Ask Savage how many songs he's written and he can't really answer. "Definitely over 100, maybe over 200 by now," he says. As a graduation party, he'll perform some of them today at the Acton Jazz Cafe, where he played his first gig at age 8. Back then, his feet didn't reach the pedals and the audience couldn't see his head over the top of the piano, but the music was accomplished way beyond his years.

Along with autism came another label: musical savant. When he was a young boy, his parents, Diane and Larry, saw that Matthew got several types of therapy, including auditory integration, which helped him tolerate sounds. As a result, he fell in love with music.

Today, when Savage sits at the piano, he seems as though he's in another world. His slender fingers fly over the keys, alternately muscular and nuanced. He says he plays in the bebop tradition of the '50s and '60s. Thelonious Monk is his hero.

"He totally did his own thing," Savage says of Monk. "People were bewildered at first, and then realized it's some of the most melodic music out there."

As for himself, he plays from both the heart and from the brain: "But the brain is secondary to the heart, and that's the way it should be."

In the Berklee rehearsal room, he's playing a suite he composed last year on the theme of skiing, with three movements: "Up the Lift," "Down the Summit," and "Experts Only."

After his parents sold their Sudbury home in 2002 and bought a farm in Francestown, N.H., Savage became a dedicated skier. As he plays "Experts Only," he describes the music as "big and loud, the feeling of being at the top of the mountain with a beautiful view but with something exciting right ahead of you."

Through grade 4, Savage attended public school, with a part-time aide. After that, he was home-schooled, earning his GED at 15. His parents thought he was too young to go off to college, and they spent the next year preparing him for Berklee. He'd been away from home alone only twice: a week in each of two summers at a Stanford Jazz Residency.

"We gave him more and more responsibility for himself," his mother says, "and worked with him to organize his time and just to be able to do the day-to-day things like balance a checkbook, go to the store, cook a meal, all of the things that people need to do when they go away from home."

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

Matt Savage and singer Chaka Khan performed in 2005 at a Beverly Hills, Calif., dinner benefiting the Chaka Khan Foundation.

At 17, he entered Berklee, where he has excelled academically and adjusted socially.

He's earned straight A's except for A-minuses in Conducting I and Tonal Counterpoint I. ("That's when you have two voices moving back and forth with two different melodies. You find it a lot in Bach," he explains.) He hastens to add that he made A's in Conducting II and Counterpoint II.

Berklee professor Suzanna Sifter, who gave Savage private piano classes for three semesters, says he's a quick study. "He picks up the ideas and works out many possibilities in an instant," she says. "He's very intelligent and always polite and even sweet at times."

The Matt Savage Trio will play from 4 to 6 p.m. Saturday at the Acton Jazz Cafe. Tickets are $12.50 at the door or $10 at actonjazzcafe.com.

Socially, he wasn't as adept. At first he was overwhelmed when fellow students would approach and say hello. On campus there was so much going on, all the time, and he needed order and calm and a predictable schedule.

"I adjusted really gradually," says Savage, who lived in the dorm for two years and in an apartment with a roommate this year. Summers he spends on the family farm, lending a hand, along with his younger sister, Rebecca.

At school, he can get easily distracted. If he finds something interesting or different, he may focus on that to the exclusion of all else. "If something is the loudest or brightest or most eye-catching in the room, like a bank of light switches with 30 instead of two, I'd focus on that," he says. "I've made a conscious effort not to do that, but it's definitely typical of people with autism."

He seems at ease talking about his condition, but it isn't something he advertises. He tells only those he knows well. "I don't walk around with it every day," he says.

People with autism often have difficulty relating to others, and the fact that Savage spent most of his childhood around adults, not other kids, was an added hurdle.

When he arrived at Berklee, he was bewildered by the social scene — all those people, parties, and plans.

But now he's grown to love "society," as he calls it. He's got friends and been on dates, but says things like slang and fashion elude him. "It's hard for me to tell what's formal and informal, what's fashionable and what's not," he says. Around campus, however, he looks like any other student, clad in jeans and sneakers.

For a long time, his mother bought his clothes. "Most of the kids go through middle school and high school, where they learn the hard way through peer pressure and social cliques what's cool and what's not cool," she says. "And he didn't have that."

Erena Terakubo, a classmate who has often played alto sax with Savage's band, says Savage made lots of friends on campus and his talent draws respect.

"He's one of the genius guys," says Terakubo, who is from Japan. "He can remember a piece he has heard just one time, and then play it by ear."

Nick Frenay, a student who plays trumpet, has known Savage for three years and says his friend is totally focused while playing. "There may be some awkwardness there dealing with a social situation, but he's in the zone whenever he plays," says Frenay, who is from Syracuse, N.Y.

Savage pushes himself to be "out there socially," Frenay says. "He sends text messages to 10 or 20 guys, almost every week, asking if people can come to jam sessions. He's very warm and everyone around here likes and respects him."

Berklee professor John Funkhouser, who has played bass in the Matt Savage Trio for the past decade, says the young man has thrived academically and socially.

"He's basically a typical college kid," Funkhouser says. "He's gotten good grades, met tons of people, and played with a wide variety of people and in various musical styles."

This summer Savage will perform at the Heineken Jazzaldia Festival in San Sebastian, Spain, in July. September brings a gig in Japan and a trip to the prestigious Monterey Jazz Festival in California. His concerts and CD sales have long helped raise money for autism causes, and he serves on a Boston Conservatory advisory board helping autistic kids and adults with music tutoring.

Today his teenage years come to an end. Unlike the old days, his family will sing "Happy Birthday" to him.

Bella English can be reached at english@globe.com.

The Boston Globe **Tuesday, February 9, 2010**

PLAYING THE CHANGES

HOW A BOY WITH AUTISM AND A PRODIGIOUS TALENT NAVIGATES BERKLEE COLLEGE AND A PERFORMING CAREER

BY JOSEPH P. KAHN / GLOBE STAFF

The scrawny kid with the squeaky voice and Harry Potter glasses, the jazz prodigy from Sudbury whose feet didn't reach the piano pedals when he began performing and recording, the autistic grade-schooler who dazzled everybody from Dave Brubeck to David Letterman with his keyboard wizardry, is growing up.

Last month, Matt Savage began his second semester at Berklee College of Music. Before setting foot on campus, Savage, who'll turn 18 this spring, had already established himself as a rising star, having recorded eight CDs, the latest titled "Hot Ticket: Live in Boston," and played the "Today" show, Birdland, Lincoln Center, and the New Orleans Jazz Festival.

Winner of multiple ASCAP Young Jazz Composers Awards, he's jammed with a host of contemporary jazz legends such as Chaka Khan and McCoy Tyner, spent two summers at the prestigious Stanford Jazz Workshop, studied intensively with renowned pianist-composer Charlie Banacos, and been hailed by Jazziz magazine as "a wildly inventive composer."

In 2001, Savage was the subject of a Globe feature that captured his astonishing musical talent — while also detailing the harrowing behavioral issues that had caused Savage to be diagnosed, at age 3, with pervasive developmental disorder. PDD is a form of autism characterized by impaired social interaction and hyperactivity; his early childhood was a parent's waking nightmare, their young child incapable of sitting still or tolerating any loud sound, including music. At the same time, Savage was exhibiting signs of hyperlexia — an unusual facility with words and numbers — and, by age 7, all the earmarks of being a musical savant.

Today, after years of specialized therapies and dietary changes, Savage navigates a daily maze of classes, practice sessions, homework assignments, and dorm life at Berklee. He and his jazz trio, who make a rare local appearance Friday at the Acton Jazz Cafe, squeeze in live performances where and when his school schedule permits. Two weekends ago, Savage flew to Colorado to perform a solo concert in a Denver church before an audience of 800.

PIANO (YOUNG) MAN
Watch a video of Matt Savage at www.boston.com/living

Eight years ago, little of this seemed possible. But the Matt Savage story is rapidly evolving from youthful prodigy with a disability to seasoned performer with a bright future.

"It seems so silly in retrospect, now that I'm more serious as a jazz musician," says Savage, referring to his earlier image as a cute kid who could play piano like a pint-sized Chick Corea.

On a break between classes, Savage has chosen an empty storefront for an interview with a reporter. He's acclimated to the bustle of city life, he says, and shows little outward signs of anxiety, maintaining eye contact through most of a chat about his college life and musical ambitions. He does admit to worrying about "saying the wrong thing," though, and describes his autism as "almost a gimmick" used to get his young talents noticed.

"There's still the issue of communicating with friends," he says guardedly. "I really don't have much of it anymore, though, thanks to the therapies my mom

put me through." Some of this stuff "is kind of personal," he offers, looking downward. "I just love life. I love being here."

Later, on the soundstage at Berklee's Cafe 939 on Boylston Street, Savage demonstrates the power and fluidity of his maturing playing style as he launches into "Picturesque," one of his original compositions. Studious-looking but never stiff, he plays the piece in a lilting, expressive manner that lends its softer edges a big, impressive sound. After finishing, Savage says what he loves most about jazz is its spontaneity, a quality embedded in every note he's just played.

Diane Savage, Matt's mother and business manager, says that three years ago she and her husband could hardly have imagined the progress he's shown as a teenager. In 2002 the Savages moved from Sudbury to a farm in Francestown, N.H., where they raise and sell organic beef while home-schooling Matt's younger sister. Savage, who was also home-schooled, earned his GED last year.

"The music and the travel have helped him a lot," Diane Savage says. "And the more he's shown he could solve problems on his own, the more we've been able to pull back. It's really been harder for me than for him, though, because Matt's early years were so intense, his behavioral issues so extreme."

John Funkhouser, a Berklee professor and bassist in Savage's trio, remembers concerts where a younger Matt might have an emotional meltdown backstage or be found wandering aimlessly around a concert hall prior to a performance.

"His being able to exist at Berklee — without his parents around — is a miracle to me," says Funkhouser, who played no part in steering Savage toward Berklee and only occasionally sees him around campus. "As Matt's evolved onstage, his social life has grown too. He's learned how to talk onstage to the point that he's almost a ham now."

At Berklee, Savage and his remarkable back story have seemingly flown under the radar. The college's public relations department was unaware of his disability, or his professional resume, until a reporter brought them to the staff's attention. Suzanna Sifter, his private piano tutor at Berklee, seemed surprised to hear Savage was anything other than an usually young, and blazingly talented, college student.

"Everything I ask him to do, he takes to the nth degree," Sifter remarked. "His brain works very fast; his thinking is very quick. People at Berklee noticed Matt at first because he's so young, but now he's noticed by the way he plays. He clearly has the ability to create high art."

Sifter recalled tutoring another Berklee student, Tony DeBlois, who, although blind and autistic, has carved out a notable jazz career. DeBlois graduated in 1996 and was profiled in the 1997 CBS Movie of the Week "Journey of the Heart."

THE MATT SAVAGE TRIO
At the Acton Jazz Cafe, Friday at 7 p.m.
Tickets $10 in advance at
www.actonjazzcafe.com
or 978-263-6161; $12 at door.

Savage says his own music is shedding some of its early bebop influences and incorporating more Latin grooves and pop textures. Berklee offers plenty of opportunity for after-school jam sessions and classroom experiences like the fusion ensemble he's currently playing with. "I have some new songs I'm planning to record, too," he says, "some I'll be doing at the Acton gig."

Five years from now, says Savage, he hopes to be leading a band, releasing more albums, attracting new listeners, and playing concert halls across the United States. "But I also want to *expand* — maybe play with some insane virtuoso rock band."

Savage's other goal is helping young people with autism realize their full potential. Proceeds from his concerts and CDs have helped several organizations involved with autism research and awareness. He's also joined a Boston Conservatory advisory board helping autistic kids and adults receive music tutoring.

"Matt really wants to be a mentor," his mother says. "And, if I may say so, he's an excellent teacher."

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Wall Street Journal, Oct. 29, 2008, pg. D9

The Musical Maturing of Matt Savage

By Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim

New York

When you have been declared "a new Mozart" by Dave Brubeck you'd be forgiven for feeling some pressure, but Matt Savage manages to keep his cool. The now 16-year-old jazz pianist whose previous autism and precocious talent drew intense media and medical scrutiny when he began performing with jazz greats eight years ago, is finally shedding the circus attention his savant status brought. His performance at New York's Cachaça Jazz Club on Oct. 18 offered a chance to see the musical maturing of a phenomenally talented pianist and composer who demands to be taken seriously on purely musical terms.

Joined by his gifted New York-based sidemen—David Robaire on bass and Joe Saylor on drums—Mr. Savage performed several new songs alongside favorites from his most recent album, "Hot Ticket," and classics by Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and Rodgers and Hammerstein. The centerpiece of the evening was the premiere of Mr. Savage's most substantial composition to date, "Big Apple Suite." Beginning and ending with quotes from Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," the four-movement suite is a testament to the pianist's confidence and growing maturity. The music follows the rhythm of day and night in the city, beginning with a funky and, thanks to Mr. Saylor's artistry, infectiously danceable first movement that brought to mind '70s TV cop shows.

The second movement is built on a three-chord sequence that vacillates between major and minor. Mr. Savage quickly took it to strange places, launching into crisp variations in the high register of the piano, then letting his bassist run with it. By the end of the movement, the three chords that sounded so strange to begin with seemed to perfectly capture the essence of New York: a kind of Big Apple cadence.

In the most reflective part of the composition, "The City Sleeps," melody took center stage. The movement ended with a long bass solo that Mr. Robaire played beautifully with a rich, resonant tone. The awakening of the city gave Mr. Saylor a chance to show off his artistry in a percussion solo that experimented with pitch as much as rhythm. When the piano and bass joined in, the musical elements of the preceding movements came together into a joyful whole that once again held '70s inflections. By the time Mr. Savage returned to "Rhapsody in Blue," he fully owned the tune.

Savage Records

Matt Savage

Mr. Savage's stage manner reflects his recent growth spurt as much as his music. Gone are the days when his legs were so short that he would swing his feet in time to the music. He still shuffles up and down the piano stool as if to get closer to the extremes of the keyboard, but he's now so tall that he then twists back over himself as if viewing the music from a new angle. His fully grown hands seem preformed to hammer out diminished sevenths.

Mr. Savage's search for the sublime in music is balanced by a teenager's delight in the silly when it comes to song titles. He named one composition "Yellow Submarine," as he announced in his deadpan voice, because it seemed such a silly title and surely one that wasn't taken yet. One gorgeously subtle and sophisticated ballad was introduced as "Dinosaur Attack"—a marketing strategy perhaps better reserved for a PG-13 crowd.

But while there is a good deal of humor in Mr. Savage's music, there is nothing remotely frivolous about it. He approaches the music always by way of the harmony—the meat and muscles of it—while his fingersmith virtuosics arise almost as an afterthought to the chords. His ballads are characterized by simple, lovely tunes carried by complex harmonies. He loves the black keys. One song, "Black Key Magic," is like a manifesto of Mr. Savage's belief in harmonic alchemy. The song begins with an Irish jig, played entirely on the white keys. Then he shifts to the black keys and the song finds its groove: jazzy, sexy, ghetto-street savvy. But the black-key magic also works on the white-key jig, which after several repeats begins to sound entirely American, a new "Appalachian Spring."

With so much original music, Mr. Savage's tributes to jazz masters of the past take on a special significance. A telling choice was Miles Davis's "Seven Steps to Heaven." For Mr. Savage it served as an opportunity to show off the full range of his technical skills, which include not only a facility with rapid scales and arpeggios, but also a command of a broad tone-color palette. "Seven Steps to Heaven" was a pivotal recording in the history of jazz, but it is also a piece that insists on the primacy of harmony. If Mr. Savage continues to keep his feet firmly on these steps, he will climb far.

Ms. da Fonseca-Wollheim is a writer living in New York.

JAZZIZ
APRIL 2008 VOL25NO03

Matt Savage Trio

Matt Savage
Live: Hot Ticket
(Savage)

The strange thing about being a child prodigy is that those astounding early accolades threaten to overshadow an artist's later accomplishments. A wildly inventive composer, interpreter and pianist no matter what his age, Matt Savage can't easily outrun his wild past: performing before age 10 with Chick Corea, McCoy Tyner, and Dave Brubeck, followed by headlining the Blue Note at 11 and Birdland at 12.

The blazing spirit of this September 2007 concert at Tufts University makes it easy to look beyond Savage's legendary childhood collaborations and think about the way he's ensembling now with his new trio of bassist Dave Robaire and drummer Joe Saylor. Setwise, there's a lot of light and dark contrast, from the zip-a-long pace of the Latin-fired "Muy Caliente" and the hypnotic bluesy funk of "Father's Day" to the softhearted eloquence of "Setting Sun." Because it's a live date and the first time he's recording with the new trio, Savage could have easily just run through a string of his earlier studio tracks — but most of this set is fresh new material. The happy calypso jam "Curaçao" is the tune he performed as a guest on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, and his crackling romp through Miles Davis' "Seven Steps To Heaven" provides some delightful historical context for his journey to traditional jazz's bright future.

Savage proves his maturity, and someday soon, he may even make people forget he's years away from 20.

— Jonathan Widran

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Matt Savage Trio

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Artist

Matt Savage Trio

Album

Hot Ticket: Live in Boston

Rating

★★★★☆

Release Date

Jan 22, 2008

Label

Palmetto

Type

Live

Genre

Jazz

Review

by Alex Henderson

In the jazz world, underage musicians that publicists and A&R people have tried to market as "child prodigies" have often failed to live up to the excessive hype that surrounded them. GRP certainly didn't do Amani A.W. Murray any favor when, back in 1991, they acted like the saxophonist (who was in his early teens at the time) was the reincarnation of Charlie Parker; Murray, although not without talent, wasn't ready for prime time -- and GRP should have known better. But Matt Savage is an example of a "child prodigy" who really did show tremendous potential at a very young age. Recorded at Tufts University in September 2007, *Hot Ticket: Live in Boston* finds Savage (who turned 15 that year) sounding like an improviser who could easily be ten years older. Savage never sounds like he hasn't spent enough time in the shed; he clearly knows what he is doing during this Boston appearance -- not only as a hard bop/post-bop pianist, but also as a composer. Except for Miles Davis and Victor Feldman's "Seven Steps to Heaven," everything on this 65-minute, 12-track CD is a Savage original -- and that includes the exuberant, Latin-flavored "Muy Caliente" as well as more introspective and lyrical offerings such as "Setting Sun," "Colors," and "An Awful Song" (which isn't awful at all -- Savage was being ironic when he came up with that title). Chuck D and Public Enemy knew exactly what they were talking about when they cautioned listeners not to buy into bloated, exaggerated hype, but *Hot Ticket* demonstrates that Savage really was quite capable of playing straight-ahead jazz authoritatively at 15.

Releases

Year	Type	Label	Catalog #
2008	CD	Palmetto	00080

JAZZTIMES

Eighty-Eights ***from the November 2006 issue***

MATT SAVAGE TRIO
Quantum Leap (Savage)

If this album had arrived unannounced and unidentified, you would think you were listening to a schooled, seasoned jazz pianist. You would notice the unique astringent voicings, the slightly halting, asymmetrical phrasing, the unexpected elasticity of meter, the dense, formal chordal patterns suddenly shot through with impulsive right-hand ripples and cascades—and you would assume you were listening to a pianist well on the way to forging an effective personal language.

You would encounter deep ballads like "Serenity" and assume they were standards, and later learn that they are originals. You would discover interpretations of actual standards like "All the Things You Are" and "Lullaby of Birdland" that are intriguing in the sharp angles of their approaches and the liberated spontaneity of their departures. In another standard, "A Child Is Born," you would hear a darkness not found in other versions, and then hear it become light.

Matt Savage, now 14 years old, was diagnosed with autism when he was three. He has made extraordinary progress in a special program for autistic children, and has been performing brilliant jazz in public since he was nine. It should be fascinating and uplifting to hear his story as it unfolds.

-Thomas Conrad