

James Westfall

Biography

"Westfall's vibes show some Gary Burton heritage, but he's really not playing it a whole lot like a vibraphone is played; the phrasings resemble more of an electric guitarist." - Victor Aaron at BlogCritics.com writes. Westfall prides himself on continuing the tradition of breaking tradition. Whether he is performing with The Wee Trio or his solo projects, *"Westfall continues to incorporate elements of rock and hip-hop."* – JazzTimes

Westfall was born in Houston, Tx where he attended The High School for Performing and Visual Arts. It was there where he was able to perform with such American idols as Shania Twain and Dr. Billy Taylor. After a restored vibraphone was given to him by his grandfather James made the switch from piano to vibraphone with ease. Prior to graduation he quickly moved to New Orleans to continue his studies at UNO where he studied privately under Ellis Marsalis, Harold Battiste, and Ed Petersen. Still at an early age he was performing in bands led by his peers and elders including Harold Battiste and David Torkanowsky. It was also around this time where he was chosen to attend Betty Carter Jazz Ahead at The Kennedy Center.

While still living in New Orleans, Terence Blanchard helped mentor his studies and encouraged him to attend The Thelonious Monk Institute being the first vibe player to have been accepted. *“Being the first vibe player doesn’t phase me because I’m a musician before I am a vibraphonist and a human being before I am a musician.”* Westfall tells The Gadget Press in 2005. While attending the Monk Institute he was able to fulfill his jazz dreams by performing at venues like Tokyo Jazz Festival, Blue Note, and Blues Alley with artists like Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Kenny Garrett, and Clark Terry.

After moving back to New Orleans in 2005 he had a brief stint in New York where he formed The Wee Trio. This collaborative band continues to perform across the country at venues like The Jazz Bakery and Cornelia Street Café, festivals, and an artist residency at Universities. With their release of Capitol Diner Vol. 1, The Boston Globe declares it a “winning debut.” He also released his own record Independent where Jazztimes says is “uplifting and distinctive.” Also while in New York he was able to gain some sideman experience with the likes of Terri Lyne Carrington and Nicholas Payton while touring the East Coast to promote his record performing with such luminaries like Tim Warfield.

Today Westfall is back in New Orleans living in the Musician’s Village. Since his arrival, James has developed the new Indi Rock band *Bionica*. He also continues to promote both his record and The Wee Trio on a national level all the while sustaining his own voice in the New Orleans community.