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“A force of nature on the baritone.” –Adam Narimatsu, CapitalBop

Washington, DC native Leigh Pilzer is a baritone saxophone specialist, composer, arranger, and educator. Her performance resume includes appearances with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, The DIVA Jazz Orchestra, the Bohemian Caverns Jazz Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore’s Soulful Symphony, and more. She is also a bandleader in her own right, leading the Leigh Pilzer Startet, her all-star quartet/quintet; organ group Leigh Pilzer’s Low Standards; and her latest project, Leigh Pilzer’s Seven Pointed Star. She also co-leads PALS, a duo with bassist Amy Shook and JLQ, the Jen Krupa-Leigh Pilzer Quintet. Pilzer has presented her groups to enthusiastic audience response at top venues including Blues Alley, Keystone Korner, the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden, and the Atlas Performing Arts Center, to name a few.

Pilzer is an in-demand composer and arranger whose music is performed by jazz ensembles and brass quintets throughout the country, as well as by the DC-area premier military jazz ensembles. She has contributed a number of works to the libraries of SJMO, DIVA, and BCJO, including “East Coast Andy,” the opening track on DIVA’s critically acclaimed *25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project*. Other notable writing credits include orchestrations for the Broadway production of *Maurice Hines Tappin Thru Life* and horn section arrangements for recordings by Chuck Brown and Eva Cassidy. Pilzer is a Brava Jazz Publishing artist, and commissions include an arrangement for the University of Maryland Jazz Ensemble’s inaugural recording. Her most recent writing project is a library of compositions and arrangements for her septet, Leigh Pilzer’s Seven Pointed Star. The group’s debut recording, released in March, 2024, includes eight of Pilzer’s original compositions and one by long-time colleague, bassist Amy Shook, all exquisitely arranged by Pilzer for trumpet, alto, trombone, bari/bass clarinet, piano, bass, and drums.

As an educator, Pilzer has served on the faculties of University of Maryland, George Mason University, and Towson University. Her teaching responsibilities have included Jazz Theory, Jazz Arranging, Jazz History, Fundamentals of Rock, Blues, and Jazz, and Chamber Jazz Ensemble. She has mentored for Strathmore’s Institute for Artistic Development Artist in Residence (AIR) program and for the North American Saxophone Alliance’s Committee for Gender Equality (CGE), and she strives to serve as a mentor and role model for all her students.

In addition to her classroom teaching, Pilzer is an engaging speaker who has presented at the Jazz Education Network conference, “Beyond the Notes,” George Mason University’s Musicology lecture series, and for numerous educational initiatives including the Washington Women in Jazz Festival, University of Maryland Jazz Studies Department, the Baltimore Jazz Education Project, NASA’s CGE, and Strathmore’s AIR program. In recognition for Pilzer’s work as a presenter, performer, educator, bandleader, and presenter, in 2023 the Capital Hill Jazz Foundation presented her with the D.C. Jazz Leaders in Service Award.

Pilzer holds a Bachelor of Music in Jazz Composition and Arranging from Berklee College of Music. Her desire to improve her instrumental skills led her to earn not one, but two master's degrees from the University of Maryland: Jazz Studies and Saxophone Performance. Her affinity for research and her enjoyment of learning led her to enroll at a doctoral program in music theory at the Catholic University of America but upon the sudden and tragic passing of Steven G. Strunk, her mentor and faculty advisor, for whom she named her debut CD *Strunkin'*, she transferred to George Mason University as a Presidential Scholar. In 2020 Pilzer earned the Dewberry School of Music Academic Achievement Award and graduated with a doctorate in Saxophone Performance with Jazz Emphasis.

“...a fantastic horn player, she brings so much life to the instrument.”—Sunny Sumter, President and CEO, DC Jazz Festival