

Mon & Tue
SEP 16 & 17
7:30 pm

Pavilion

Brandon Sanders Trio

Just Friends Jazz Series



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We are pleased to partner with the Lied Center of Kansas to present the *Just Friends Jazz Series*.

There will be no intermission during this performance.

Brandon Sanders, drums

Keith Brown, piano

Eric Wheeler, bass

As far as drummer **Brandon Sanders** is concerned, everyone should have a grandmother who runs a jazz club. It was at the Casablanca, his grandmother's boîte in Kansas City, that he was first exposed to the music that changed his life. During summer visits from his home in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s through the late 80s, young Sanders not only encountered the music of such greats as Jimmy Smith, Grant Green and Lou Donaldson, he also learned about their lives from the stories his grandma told him. At 53, Sanders may be long removed from those formative days, but on his splendid debut album, *Compton's Finest* (2023), the influence of his grandmother, Ernestine Parker, can be detected. The album may be the work of a late bloomer, but its emotional depth is the mark of a seasoned veteran.

Sanders was born on February 20, 1971, in Kansas City, Kansas. When he was nearly two years old, his mother moved with him to Los Angeles. He spent his early years in Compton, growing up in a musical household. His mom played the violin, and his stepfather played the trombone. During his teens, Sanders started compiling his own now-massive collection of jazz albums (which he now estimates at more than 30,000).

After playing basketball for Mt. San Antonio College near Los Angeles, he enrolled at the behest of his grandmother at the University of Kansas. While studying communications there, he became a walk-on practice player for the top-seeded team in the country. Among its players at the time were future NBA stars Greg Ostertag and Rex Walters. He quickly gained a reputation as a dogged defender. After getting his undergraduate degree in communications, he earned his master's in social work at KU.

Eventually, his passion for music caught up with him. "So, at age 25, I dedicated myself to learning how to play drums, which came more naturally for me than the guitar and saxophone." After years of intense practice, he attained a level of proficiency that got him into Berklee College of Music, where he met Warren Wolf, who became one of his biggest mentors. Sanders moved to New York in 2004 and worked in the public and charter school systems as a counselor and social worker (which he continues to do today), while practicing and gigging as much as possible. He went on to accompany a long list of leading artists, including Joe Lovano, Jeremy Pelt, Esperanza Spalding, Walter Smith III and Billy Pierce, while still "practicing, practicing, trying to develop my craft."

It was Warren Wolf who encouraged Sanders to make an album—the result is *Compton's Finest*. Named for the town in which Sanders came of age, the original, bluesy title track reveals his deep streak of humanism in striving to rescue the image of Compton from its portrayal in films and rap songs.

Compton's Finest, which features vibraphone great Warren Wolf and young singing star Jazzmeia Horn, also draws from Sanders's parallel career as a social worker. "It's about trying to lift people's spirits," he says. "That's what I try to do as a social worker. It's about making sure that people leave feeling different than when they came in."

Other personnel on the album includes Willie Jones III, producer; Chris Lewis, tenor sax; Keith Brown, piano; and Eric Wheeler, bass.