

Richard D. Johnson – Biography

Born in Pittsburgh, home to jazz greats Art Blakey, Ray Brown, Jeff “Tain” Watts, and Ahmad Jamal, Richard D. Johnson has deep territorial jazz roots. He was first introduced to the piano at the age of five by his father, a gospel pianist from Baltimore, Maryland. Since then, he has cultivated a rich musical background, studying under some of the most legendary jazz musicians and at prestigious institutions. After receiving a scholarship and graduating from the Berklee College of Music in just two years, Richard entered the Boston Conservatory, earning a Master’s degree in Jazz Pedagogy in three semesters. He then received an Artist Performance Diploma from the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Performance at New England Conservatory under the direction of the influential Ron Carter.

Richard was invited to become a member of Wynton Marsalis’ Septet and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, which he joined from 2000–2003. He also performed with the Russell Malone Quartet, Delfeayo Marsalis Quintet, and the Bobby Watson Quartet. After completing these tenures, Richard founded the Reach Afar program for young people ages 7–17, educating them about elements of jazz in hip-hop.

He has traveled extensively, sharing jazz with audiences around the world. As a U.S. State Department Musical Ambassador, Richard performed in more than 92 countries, including countries throughout Central and South America, Africa, and the Middle East. During this time, he accompanied jazz icons such as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Heath, and Stevie Wonder. In 2005, he became the musical director for Atlanta Spirit LLC, creating a live five-member band for the NBA and performing at all 46 home games and related events.

Richard’s international work continued in Doha, Qatar, where he performed at Jazz at Lincoln Center and was appointed acting on-site Jazz Ambassador at the St. Regis Doha Hotel. In this role, he helped expand the presence of jazz through performance, cultural programming, artist engagement, and international collaboration.

He is currently an Associate Professor of Jazz Piano at the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and a 2025 Public Engagement Speaker Fellow for the university. At Peabody and Johns Hopkins, Richard continues to expand his work beyond performance through education, public engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative program development.

Richard is also the founder of **Let’s Build Together**, an educational initiative that connects music, creativity, science, engineering, collaboration, and community learning. Through this program, he brings together students, educators, artists, scientists, and community members to explore how jazz and creative problem-solving can be used to understand complex ideas. His recent work also focuses on artificial intelligence, helping educational organizations explore how AI can support creativity, teaching, communication, curriculum design, and organizational growth. Richard’s approach to AI emphasizes that technology should enhance human creativity, support employment growth, and help institutions build new models for learning, leadership, and innovation.

An accomplished composer and arranger, Richard has released eight recordings, including his latest CD, **Warm Embrace** (2025). He holds an M.M. in Spanish from the University of Texas Permian Basin and is pursuing a Doctorate in Leadership and Curriculum. Richard is a Yamaha-endorsed piano artist and the creator of the podcasts **The Jazz Architect** and **Music is Business...What is This?**