

New York Voices

THE GRAND FINALE

The first time I saw New York Voices perform live, at a show at Long Island University more than a decade ago, that's when it dawned on me: These are four of the most distinctive and accomplished singers in jazz who just happen to sing together.

The Voices - soprano **Kim Nazarian**; alto **Lauren Kinhan**; baritone **Peter Eldridge**; and tenor, saxophonist, and musical director **Darmon Meader** - "The Four and Only," as the great Cuban saxophone and clarinet virtuoso Paquito D'Rivera once dubbed them, have been one of the world's elite jazz singing groups for 38 years.

When they solo, it's plain to see that each is a jazz vocal thoroughbred, a master of swing, invention, breath control, and nuance. Then, when they combine their voices, there are those *arrangements* - as sophisticated as any ever written for a jazz vocal group - and that *blend*, as refined as any group in jazz history.

Now, after nearly four decades of concerts, world tours, 11 landmark albums under their own name, and high-profile collaborations with international jazz masters, they are preparing to hang up their mics at the end of 2026. But not without a *Grand Finale* - an international tour, now in progress, *and* multiple new recording projects.

"We want to go out on a high note," said Darmon. "This band has taken us all over the world, from intimate clubs, to concert halls with big bands and symphony orchestras, to international festivals where we've performed for thousands. And it's given us countless opportunities to work with many of the greatest names in jazz. In our final months as a group, we'll continue to travel the globe on our Grand Finale tour so that our fans will have one more chance to see and hear us live."

A gala final concert is planned for January 2027 in New York City, with the venue and date to be announced. *{Current tour dates are listed below; new shows are being added all the time.}*

As practitioners and educators in the art of group vocal jazz, New York Voices have always been grounded in the tradition of **Lambert, Hendricks & Ross; Singers Unlimited**; and **the Hi-Los** - and they're dedicated to passing the tradition on to future generations.

After decades of international touring, they have accumulated indelible memories - singing with, and for, **Nancy Wilson** when she was inducted as an NEA Jazz Master; performing in many foreign capitals with legendary Brazilian songwriter **Ivan Lins** (Peter was honored to write English lyrics for several of the master's songs); making albums with the **Count Basie Orchestra** and **Paquito D'Rivera**; and occasionally

performing as a super-octet with their dear friends **The Manhattan Transfer**. Then there was Darmon's "pinch me" moment at the Hollywood Bowl in 2019, "after an all-star Brazilian concert in which we performed, when **Quincy Jones** came backstage and asked us, 'Who does your arrangements?' And he gave me a fist bump."

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New York Voices began in the mid-1980s at Ithaca College in upstate New York, where choral director Dave Riley had an opportunity to bring a vocal quartet with him on a tour of European jazz festivals. He invited six students to come along, including Darmon, Peter, Kim, and **Caprice Fox**. It was Riley who gave the group its name. The response to the newly christened New York Voices was overwhelmingly positive, inspiring the four young musicians to move to New York City in 1988 and try their luck in the music business. There, with the addition of **Sara Krieger**, the group became a quintet.

After developing a following at a Greenwich Village club called Preacher's, the band signed with the storied GRP label, making their first recording, *New York Voices*, and hitting the road in a motor home. When Krieger left the band in 1991 after its second album, *Hearts of Fire*, they began searching for a new fifth member, auditioning some 70 singers before being blown away by **Lauren Kinhan**, who joined in 1992. Two years later, Caprice Fox decided to move on to other adventures, and the group became a quartet.

Over the years, the Voices albums, repertoire, and concerts evolved, sometimes in surprising ways, embracing a diversity of styles, from big band jazz to post-bop, from Brazilian jazz to the singer-songwriter repertoire of **Paul Simon** and **Stevie Wonder**, to their own tuneful originals.

In the beginning, their live shows featured a compact rhythm section; they had no plans to perform with big bands or symphony orchestras. That changed in the fall of 1994 when the group was invited to sing two songs with the **Count Basie Orchestra** at Carnegie Hall. "The appearance was a hit, which led to our writing our first book of big band arrangements - and touring extensively with the Basie band," Darmon said. "Performing with them was a huge gift. We often refer to those years as getting our master's degree in swing."

That same year, the group was invited to perform its first pops orchestra concert with a small symphony in Texas. "They asked me if we had a symphonic book, and I said 'Um, YES,' - and then quickly started writing one!" Darmon says. Symphonic opportunities in the US, Canada, and Europe expanded, culminating in an epic Christmas tour with the **Boston Pops** in 2005.

They recorded the album *Sing! Sing! Sing!*, a tribute to big band music, in 2000, leading to even more big band and symphonic opportunities. They included concerts and tours with the **WDR** and **SWR** Big Bands in Germany, the Metropole Orchestra in The Netherlands, the USAF Airmen of Note, Norway's Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, and many other notable orchestras. Along the way, they collaborated with a Who's Who of legendary jazz arrangers including **Michael Abene, Gil Goldstein, Rob Mounsey, Vince Mendoza, Jim McNeely** and **Don Sebesky**. Several albums document the group's adventures in big band singing, including 2013's *New York Voices: Live with the WDR Big Band Cologne* and 2018's *Meeting of Minds* with the **Bob Mintzer** Big Band.

Other major albums include 1997's acclaimed *New York Voices Sing the Songs of Paul Simon*; the 2013 holiday collection *Let It Snow*; and 2019's eclectic *Reminiscing in Tempo*, co-produced by legendary engineer and longtime friend of the band **Elliot Scheiner**.

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It's something of a miracle that the group has managed to stay together for 38 years, despite settling hundreds of miles apart in Oberlin, Ohio (Kim), upstate New York (Darmon), Long Island (Lauren) and New Hampshire (Peter). "We're really the Eastern Time Zone Voices now," Meader once joked to me, "but that doesn't quite have a ring to it." Although the logistics were difficult, they were simply unwilling to give up the joy of singing with NYV nor sacrifice the group's legacy.

Part of that legacy is mentoring the next generation of jazz vocalists. The Voices have become leading educators in the field of vocal jazz. Darmon has taught at Manhattan School of Music and Indiana University; Lauren teaches at Queens College and New York University, Peter at Berklee School of Music, and Kim at Ithaca College.

Since 2008, they have directed their own annual, week-long **New York Voices Vocal Jazz Camp**, which, after initial years at Bowling Green State University and Ithaca College, found a final home with their partners at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. They also have conducted international vocal jazz camps in Slovenia and at the Bavarian Music Academy in Marktoberdorf, Germany. Over the past 16 years, the camps have provided life-changing experiences for aspiring jazz vocalists, teachers, and amateur singers looking to deepen their knowledge and share the joy of making music.

Several years ago, I had the chance to observe the group's skill at coaching and training young singers when they were guest instructors at a special "Jazz Day" event at Long Island University attended by a mix of college students and jazz-oriented high school choruses. The NYV members spread out among the visiting groups to maximize

their impact. I remember being impressed with the energy and organization they brought to the task, their passion, the high expectations to which they held their young charges, and their unfailing good spirits.

“We’re very proud of our contributions to jazz vocal education,” Kim says. “Many of these students see themselves in us. It’s an honor to inspire those who share our passion and to help them make their dreams a reality.”

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The Grand Finale Tour will take them throughout the U.S., Europe and Taiwan, including holiday shows featuring music from *Let it Snow*. A gala final show is planned for January 2027 at a venue and date to be announced.

After they disband, they will hardly be done with music. All four will continue their illustrious solo careers as performers, recording artists, and teachers.

But first, they plan on going out with a bang. Their legions of fans will be thrilled to hear that they are planning to release no fewer than four recordings in 2026:

- A studio recording with the **Taipei Jazz Orchestra**;
- A live album documenting an all-Brazilian show recorded in Los Angeles in 2022;
- A collaboration with **Ivan Lins** and the **Danish Radio Big Band**; and
- A new studio EP with originals and standards.

Enjoy them live while you can; and thank goodness we’ll always have their records. We might be waiting a long time for a vocal group that can equal their verve and joy.

As New York Voices sang in Lauren and Peter’s wonderful original song, “The world will keep you waiting / Will leave you wanting for more, something more...” If their goal was, as the show business canard has it, to “always leave them wanting more” - well, mission accomplished.

-- Allen Morrison, Contributing Writer, *DownBeat* and *JazzTimes*