

Click [here](#) to return to main profiles page

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*Fred Hersch*  
the "pristine pianist with a poet's soul"

Fred Hersch has been working in the jazz world for over 20 years. And for more than ten of those, the man known as the "pristine pianist with a poet's soul," has lived as an out and proud gay man. "I came out in a big way," says Hersch, "because it was about having HIV and about being gay. In those days very few artists were out because the conventional wisdom was people wouldn't book you. But, it has been good for me, artistically. I don't waste energy worrying. I've been able to help others come out. I'm sort of like the den mother."

It's the music, however, that really defines Hersch. This year he has already released two impressive albums, *The Fred Hersch Trio: Live at the Village Vanguard* and *Songs & Lullabys: Fred Hersch and Norma Winstone*. "The guys I play with

(Drew Gress and Nasheet Waits) are brilliant. It was important to release *Live At The Village Vanguard* so people can see that I am not just a solo pianist. Even though I play more solo now, it really felt nice to make a trio album at the Vanguard."

Hersch, honoree of a recent Guggenheim Fellowship Award, has no intention of slowing down. "I am doing the fourth installment of a CD collection: *Classical Action/Performing Arts Against AIDS for Broadway Cares*. I'm working with 12 female artists ranging from Renee Fleming to Dawn Upshaw. Everyone involved is donating their time. I think it's important to give something back."

At 47, and at the top of his game, there is a refreshing humility to Hersch. "I've been HIV+ for many years, I know pianists who work more than I do. All I care about is that I am able to continue to make artistic choices. Every year, my career gets better and more interesting. (b.b.)

  
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