

# SYNKÖFA



The World Music band SYNKOFA builds upon innovative folk song arrangements of violinist Theresa Ellis, and original compositions of guitarist Eric McKenna, and the solos of upright bassist Steve Wesson. The instrumental ensemble seeks to transport listeners to distant times and places only to bring them back again to the present with eyes and ears wide open. Together, they play Celtic roots music with Gypsy Jazz flair. They carry the audience to the misty Irish Highlands, the hot jazz clubs of 1950's Paris, the stone

cathedrals of the Renaissance, to the porch steps of Appalachia, and beyond! They self-describe their music genre as Celtic Jazz.

The English word Jazz may have been derived from the Irish Gaelic T'chass, which means "fiery and full of life", as Theresa's surprising twists on traditional melodies and rhythms exemplifies. But the Celtic Jazz approach is just a springboard for the SYNKOFA Ensemble as they pluck pieces from the vines of Praetorius, Eric Satie, and David Grisman before infusing them with swing tempos, juxtaposed melodies, and extended improvisations.

Each member of the group bestows instrumental proficiency as though it were a solar flare upon the material. Upright bassist Stephen Wesson, equally competent with fingers or a bow, traverses syncopated lead lines to deep sustained tones while holding down the groove. Guitarist Eric McKenna artfully employs harmonics and pull-offs with rasgueado flamenco strums to craft his chords and solos. Masterful techniques underpin fiery leads and stirring melodies by violinist Theresa Ellis.

A distinctive feature of the group is their employment of "Verdi" or "Pythagorean" tuning of A to 432Hz. Historically prevalent and sonically organic, the 432 tuning is designed to speak to your soul and sync with universal vibrations! The name SYNKOFA is a play on the West African concept of "Sankofa", meaning that we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us so that we may use it to reach our highest potential as we move forward.

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## ARTIST BIOS



**Theresa Ellis:** World class violinist/recording artist and SYNKOFA founder Theresa Ellis has helped pioneer the genre of Celtic Jazz. Though adept in a myriad of genres, from classical to country, Celtic music has always been in her blood.

Of Welsh heritage, Theresa hails from Detroit, Michigan where her musical education began at the young age of five. As an unassuming teenager, she recorded with the Motown String Sections. Her desire for an education in music led her to attend the Indiana University School of Music and she was awarded a scholarship to study in Vienna. However her career took a radical turn as she migrated to the heart of country music in Nashville, Tennessee. She was a performer in The Nashville Symphony, and was a featured fiddler/singer with legendary comedic country star Ray Stevens on the Grand Ole Opry.

Her winding musical path bought her to the Salt Lake area, where she currently resides in Eden, Utah. Already, a seasoned performer, she graduated from University of Utah with a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance. Her string quartet called String Zing! was featured at a luncheon with His Holiness Dalai Lama, and for the Farewell Reception for Mitt Romney, at the conclusion of the 2002 Winter Olympics. She married her musical partner and producer, James Franklin Anglesey, and the two recorded the full length Celtic Jazz CD, Ellis & Franklin's *Traveler* in 1994, which received international acclaim and distribution. Their partnership was tragically cut short when James fell victim to cancer. Following the death of her husband and musical collaborator in 2005, Theresa withdrew from a life of public performance.

In 2011, she collected her determination and drive to make music again. With a desire to promote human wellness, she explores its connection with the relationship between musical harmonics and how they relate to the earth's natural frequencies. She has resurrected her ensemble with stalwart bassist Stephen Wesson and rebranded the Celtic Jazz project SYNKOFA, with fresh faces in the lineup, eager to bring her unique style of music back to the stage.

**Stephen Wesson:** Stephen's vast experience and ability on the upright bass make him one of the most sought after session players in Utah. Steeped in both folk and classical traditions, he has been a member of the Jarman/Kingston Quartet which included frequent guest appearances by world-renowned fiddler Darol Anger, the Smith & Wesson duo along with co-founder and cellist Gayle Smith, and the Salt Lake Symphony.



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Hailing from the Salt Lake City, Stephen's musical adventures began in String Orchestra in Junior High School. Since then his musical path has taken him from the classical and folk genres into rock, jazz, country, bluegrass, tango and progressive Celtic. His repertoire also includes the electric and fretless bass, and six and 12-string guitars. Steve was the principal bass and guitar instructor at Jack's Drum & Guitar Shop in the Sugarhouse neighborhood of Salt Lake City from 1996 until 2007. He became a registered Suzuki instructor for String Bass in 1998. He has also served on the Salt Lake Executive Board of the American Federation of Musicians since 1996. His recording credits include Ellis & Franklin's *Traveler*, Doug Wintch's *Wooden Nickels*, and Marv Hamilton's *The Mind Will Follow*. Recruited by Theresa Ellis to join SYNKOFA in 1992, he has been a bedrock member of the ensemble ever since.



**Eric McKenna:** Composer/Guitarist Eric McKenna combines a finger-style approach with creative zeal in forging a distinctive sound informed from some of the world's great musical traditions. Weaving together threads of Spanish flamenco, traditional Celtic, Classical, and Americana, Eric's original music is a contemporary tapestry of historic impressions. Sponsored by MacNichol Guitar & Mandolin, Eric's demonstration videos of Breedlove, Rainsong, CA Guitars and Weber Mandolins reached over 100,000,000 viewers since 2011. Currently, he performs, teaches private lessons, and serves as music faculty at The Open Classroom, a public charter school in Salt Lake City.

A player of brass instruments throughout childhood, Eric first entered the world of strings and frets when he picked up the guitar at the age of 15 in his Northern California home. He studied classical guitar at The Colorado College under guitarist Dale Miller. He performed for four years in the Colorado College Guitar Ensemble. Since arriving in Salt Lake City, Eric has performed as a solo musician and played lead guitar and mandolin for bands such as the Irish infused pub-rockers The Revelators, the progressive-folkies of Naked April, the alt-country/indie band Big Mirror, and jazz-infused rock band November Hotel. In 2003, Eric completed his first CD of original music, *Seven Sails*. The album is an evocative musical journey inspired by the northern California coastline and infused with a rite of passage concept. Highlighted by performances on guitar, cello, violin and piano, several pieces are often included in SYNKOFA's set list since he joined the group in 2012. Eric's musical repertoire also includes the mandolin, Celtic Bouzouki, 12-string and electric guitars. As a solo guitarist Eric was sponsored and endorsed in 2013 by guitar maker Jesse Stearn, and proudly plays a uniquely hand-made redwood OM model crafted by the exceptional luthier.

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## Press and Reviews:

Eden – Music and wellness - “Violinist Theresa Ellis, a resident of the Ogden Valley, works with frequency and vibrations in music and the physical effect it has on listeners. The Color Concert illustrates how the body absorbs the vibrations around us. Her performances can range in style — with classical, Celtic, jazz, bluegrass and various other combinations. With her band SYNKOFA, Celtic jazz music will be played and used to demonstrate melodic ways to health and wellness.”

~Linda Brady, **Ogden Standard Examiner**

“These accomplished performers leave the audience wondering where the rest of the orchestra was hiding. The concert was like a smorgasbord of delicious samples with a contemporary jazzy twist”

~Doreen Christensen, **Heritage News**

“The variety and spirit of your music touches hearts and lifts spirits... it is reflective, soul-stirring and healing.”

~ Kathy Skidmore Latham, **Davis Arts Council Program Chair**

“I was delighted with the sound, with the way one piece morphed into something new. Thanks for a job well done, and I received numerous comments from the audience, all of them positive. Working with SYNKOFA was a great experience from start to finish. You accomplished your stated purpose: you took us on a journey. I am still thinking of the sound of the waves and cries of the seagulls, so artfully rendered from the stage.”

~ Jeff Whiteley, **Excellence in the Community Concert Series**

## Notable Performances:

- National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS) Convention. Guests in attendance included President George H.W Bush and presidential candidate Bill Clinton. Salt Lake City, UT, 1992
- National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star Weekend. Salt Lake City, UT, 1993
- Utah Arts Festival Concert, Salt Lake City, UT, 1994
- Allstate Insurance VIP Dinner, Deer Valley, UT, 1996
- Meyer Art Gallery Artists’ Receptions, Park City, UT, 2000, 2001, 2002
- Sun River Resort Concert – St. George, UT, 2002
- Masonic Lodge Shriners Ladies of The Shrine Dinner & Concert, Salt Lake City 2001
- Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Olympic Hosting Facility at The Gateway Plaza – Winter Olympics – Salt Lake City, UT, 2002

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- OC Tanner Theatre, Zion Park Summer Concert Series, Springdale, UT, 2006
- Interdisciplinary Society for Quantitative Research in Music and Medicine (ISQRMM) Conference Concert – Ogden, UT, 2011
- Excellence in the Community Concert, Gallivan Center Hall, Salt Lake City, 2013
- Ceili at the Roundhouse Celtic Festival, Main Stage, Evanston WY 2014
- Excellence in the Community Concert, The Viridian Events Hall, West Jordan UT, 2014
- Davis Arts Council Sunday Concerts at Ed Kenley Amphitheater, Layton UT, 2013 & 2014
- Utah Arts Festival Concert, Salt Lake City, UT, 2014

**Homepage:** [www.synkofa.com](http://www.synkofa.com)

**Social Media:** [www.facebook.com/synkofa](https://www.facebook.com/synkofa)

**Music Networking:** [www.reverbnation.com/synkofa](http://www.reverbnation.com/synkofa)

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