

Nat Dixon, pastor and jazz musician, releases new album

by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [December 7, 2016](#) issue

Before Nat Dixon preaches, he picks up his tenor saxophone and riffs a bit.

Blending the gospel message with jazz is what the former full-time musician has been doing for years, with his parishioners at St. Stephen's United Methodist in the Bronx, New York, as the principal beneficiaries.

Recently Dixon released [his first CD in more than 20 years, *Made in New York City: Nat Dixon and Friends*](#). It includes Dixon's sacred compositions, such as "My Lord, My God" and "Jesus Eyes," as well as his "Back Street Blues," a 1990s hit on jazz radio stations, to which he added Christian lyrics.

Dixon calls his music GOJA—gospel and jazz.

"The idea is good news jazz that focuses on lifting up Jesus Christ," he said.

Dixon's collaborators for the recording include Lori Hartman, pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Jamaica, New York. She sings on "My Lord, My God," a composition she describes as a musical prayer. She, like Dixon, entered ministry after a career in jazz.

"He speaks the gospel through the music," she said of Dixon.

Dixon took up the clarinet as a boy, and recalls his first gig: performing with a youth orchestra at Carnegie Hall. He moved on to the saxophone and toured the world.

One constant in his life was Harlem's Salem United Methodist Church, where he served as a lay speaker. A pastor there encouraged him to consider seminary, and Dixon—at first incredulous at the idea—ultimately attended Drew University School of Theology.

Since 2005, Dixon has been pastor at St. Stephen's. He taught music for years through a Saturday academy at the church, and he leads a Word and Jazz service on Wednesdays.

Dixon plans to retire as pastor in June but expects to keep composing and performing.

“Music is integral to my ministry,” Dixon said. “And I’m grateful for that.” —United Methodist News Service