

Nathan Tokunaga

Clarinetist & Saxophonist

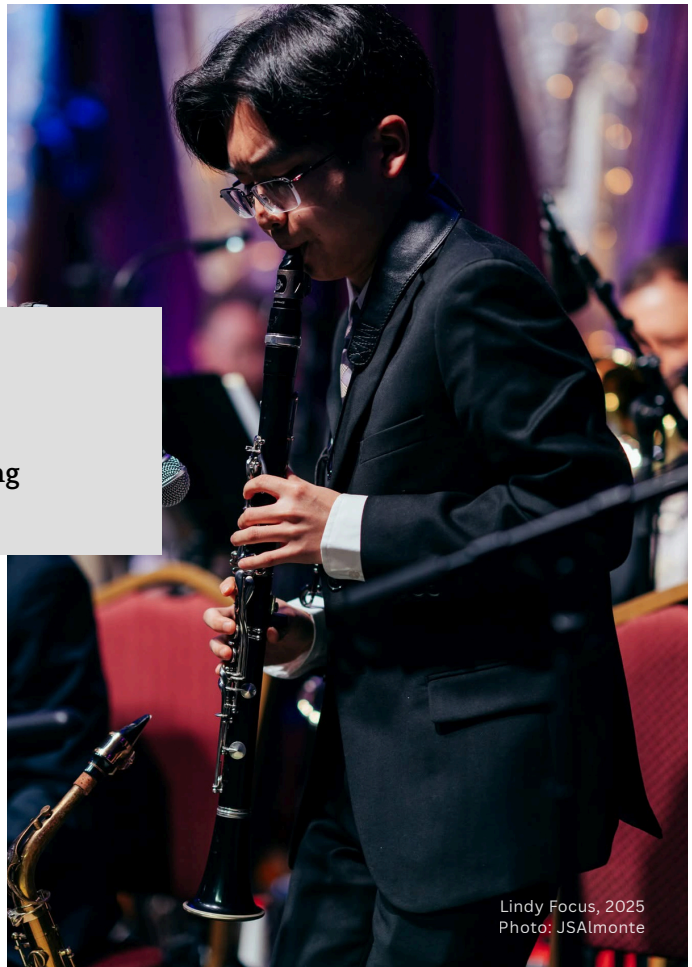
“What we play is life.”

- Louis Armstrong

Nathan Tokunaga is a New York City-based clarinetist and saxophonist from the San Francisco Bay Area whose music blends classic jazz traditions with a fresh, modern voice. The 2026 YoungArts® winner in jazz clarinet, he has performed widely at venues and festivals including Jazz at Lincoln Center, Birdland, Smalls Jazz Club, Lindy Focus, and the Healdsburg Jazz Festival. His playing bridges generations, bringing the joy and spirit of swing to a new generation of listeners.

In high school, Nathan studied with multi-instrumentalist, jazz historian, and radio host Clint Baker, who immersed him in early jazz traditions. At the same time, he studied with New Orleans clarinet virtuoso Evan Christopher. During these formative years, Nathan attended Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Summer Jazz Academy, where he was one of 48 musicians selected nationwide. Since then, mentors and collaborators from both coasts have contributed to his artistic development, shaping his work as both a sideman and bandleader.

Nathan began performing professionally at age 14 and started leading his own ensembles a year later. Since then, he has played hundreds of concerts across the United States and Europe. After



relocating to New York City in 2025 to pursue a bachelor’s degree at The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, he has performed with and led multiple bands and has become an active presence in the New York swing dancing community. A versatile multi-instrumentalist, he performs on clarinet, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, and soprano saxophone, often switching seamlessly between instruments mid-performance.

Nathan has two albums scheduled for release in 2027. The first, *All The Strings You Are*, is a collaboration with pianist and arranger Charles Chen, framing Nathan’s sound against the backdrop of a lush 50-piece orchestra. The second album will be released that summer on Turtle Bay Records and will feature fresh renditions of timeless hits and overlooked gems of the 1920s-1940s, drawing mainly from the Great American Songbook.

Through performance, academic and private study, and recording projects, Nathan continues to refine his own artistic direction while remaining rooted in the jazz tradition.