

EZRA RELEASES THEIR SELF-TITLED DEBUT ALBUM ON MARCH 1, 2024 WITH ADHYÂROPA RECORDS

EZRA IS JACOB JOLLIFF - MAX ALLARD - JESSE JONES - CRAIG BUTTERFIELD

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OBERLIN, OH — February 5, 2024 — EZRA releases their self-titled debut album on March 1, 2024 with Adhyâropa Records.

Founded by award-winning composer and multi-instrumentalist [Jesse Jones](#), **EZRA** is a collective of classical, jazz, rock, and bluegrass musicians focused on the creation of genre-crossing and style-inclusive new music. The ensemble consists of world-renowned mandolinist [Jacob Jolliff](#), banjo virtuoso [Max Allard](#), and bassist extraordinaire [Craig Butterfield](#), with Jones on guitar- and keyboard-related instruments.

EZRA's debut album *EZRA* includes nine works by Jones, and was recorded while Jones was on a one year sabbatical from his composition professorship at Oberlin Conservatory. Jones, who is also a luthier, used much of his sabbatical to build some of the instruments he plays on the album. He then invited longtime collaborator Butterfield, together with Jolliff and Allard, for an intense week of rehearsals and recording in Oberlin. It was the first time all four musicians had been in the same room, much less played together, but things fell into place from the first notes.

This speaks to the musicianship and camaraderie of all involved, but it is also due to the fact that Jones had been collecting these pieces for years, waiting for the right moment, and the right musicians. Jones says, "I sat alone in my living room for at least a decade playing through the dozens of compositions I had in my head. When I met Craig, who shared a lot of similar classical, roots, and folk interests, I decided to stretch myself and see if I could hang (musically) with a world-class musician like him. We hit it off, and from 2013 through 2019 we co-wrote and recorded three albums as a duo. I grew immeasurably as a musician as a result."

Jones continues, "When the pandemic closed everything down, I found myself back in my living room, writing tune after tune alone with my instruments. In 2021, I fortuitously reconnected with an old friend, the phenomenal mandolinist Jacob Jolliff, and around the same time became acquainted with banjo wunderkind Max Allard. I jumped on the chance to get these guys together and record nine of the tunes I had lying around. The result was beyond what I could have imagined and was heaps of fun to rehearse and record."

"Fabulous playing! So great to hear the next generation of string wizards dive in and continue the tradition forward."

— Mike Marshall



TRACK LISTING

1. Smoke in the Valley (5:13)
2. Jarrah (3:55)
3. Garden Gate (2:47)
4. Contrabuffoon (5:04)
5. Banjaleena (4:45)
6. Cowboy Walks (4:57)
7. The Jolly Jolliff (4:23)
8. Beedabumbum (4:25)
9. Dix-Neuf (3:50)

All tracks written by Jesse Jones

Jacob Jolliff: mandolin

Max Allard: banjo

Jesse Jones: guitar and piano

Craig Butterfield: double bass

Produced by **EZRA**

Engineered and Mixed by **Paul Eachus**

Mastered by **Dave Sinko**

Album Art by **Bailey Jones**

Released by **Adhyâropa Records**

Release Date: **March 1, 2024**

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Jones began building instruments in 2020, studying with Alan Chapman of Chapman/Fisher Guitars. In the last year and a half, Jones has built a variety of instruments, including a quarter-tone Irish bouzouki, a 13-tone small instrument, a Pardessus, several steel string guitars, four classical guitars, two ukuleles, three mandolins (two of them experimental, single string designs), and a mandola.

On the track “Jarrah,” Jones plays the banjo-tuned guitar he built using jarrah wood, a deep red wood he particularly enjoys working with: “I have just a small block of it and used it for the rosette/headstock — when I got the instrument up and running, a tune fell from it into my hands, and I named it “Jarrah” after the wood.”

Jones explains that a lot of his compositions come about that way: “I play a lot of different instruments, and when I go down the rabbit hole on one of them (say the banjo in double C tuning), I tend to fall into several new tunes, almost by accident — Banjaleena, Dix-Neuf (at least the 4/4 melody part), Smoke in the Valley, and Garden Gate all came as I was searching and discovering new shapes and sounds on the banjo (the parts Max plays). “Cowboy Walks” just emerged from the first classical guitar I made.”

Though Jones wrote all nine compositions for the debut album, EZRA’s focus is centered around collaboration. Working up the arrangements together was part of the process (and the fun). Recorded and engineered by **Paul Eachus** at First Church in downtown Oberlin and mastered by **Dave Sinko** (Punch Brothers, Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer), EZRA’s debut album captures lightning in a bottle.

For further details, please read the extended version of the press release on the following pages.



Banjaleena (4:45)
EZRA’s first single releases
February 13, 2024

Jesse Jones has walked (and crossed) the line between classical and bluegrass/roots for a long time. From his very early years, he had planned to be a concert pianist, practicing 6-8 hours a day until an unexpected turn of events: he broke his arm when he was nineteen. Not content to give up music for any length of time, he learned to play the mandolin while his arm was still in a cast. He applied the knowledge he had acquired on the piano to the mandolin and progressed quickly.

At around this same time, Jones' family moved to Oregon, and Jones enrolled at Eastern Oregon University. There he became a mandolinist and singer in the progressive bluegrass trio String Helix, which toured from 2001 to 2005 and grew accomplished enough to gain a spot on Garrison Keillor's radio show *A Prairie Home Companion*. Jones began writing fiddle tunes, but soon embraced writing more complex music. He earned a master's degree in composition from the University of Oregon, and a DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) from Cornell University.

Although Jones put down his string instruments for almost ten years to compose for a classical repertoire, and he considers himself primarily a classical composer, he says, "I've always had the mandolin and guitar and banjo floating around in the periphery of my musical career, my musically creative life. I think everything that I've learned to do as a composer sort of naturally went into compositions for mandolin and banjo and such."

The music of this Rome Prize- and Guggenheim-winning composer has been described as "striking,...elegant and poised" (New York Times), "engaging,...eerie, and well-written" (Los Angeles Times), "fascinating," and possessed of "the melodic earthiness of Britten" (New York Classical Review).

Jones and Jolliff

Jones first met an eleven year old **Jacob Jolliff** at a bluegrass festival in Oregon in 1999. They struck up an easy rapport playing music together, but they also bonded over the fact that both of their initials were JJ, and that they shared the same birthday, exactly ten years apart. Jones and Jolliff shared something else: an intense practice habit. Jolliff began playing the mandolin at age seven, and after six months of practicing the 15 minutes a day that his father suggested, Jolliff found he was playing 4-5 hours every day, a sort of dedication he continues to this day. Jones and Jolliff continued to meet up and play music together at various bluegrass festivals and gatherings over the next years, but they lost touch when their careers took them in separate directions.

In the meantime, Jolliff attended Berklee College of Music on a full scholarship. There he joined and toured with the roots music band Joy Kills Sorrow from 2008 to 2014. Jolliff then joined the progressive bluegrass jam group Yonder Mountain String Band, touring and releasing three albums with them from 2014 to 2019. Jolliff also won some major mandolin competitions in this timeframe, including the National Mandolin Championship in Winfield, Kansas in 2012.

"Considering his strong musical concept, formidable technical abilities, and a powerful work ethic, he is a mandolinist to watch."

— Béla Fleck

Jones and Jolliff reconnected in more recent years and wondered if there might be an opportunity for a project together, or at least a chance to sit down and play a few tunes.



The Jolly Jolliff (4:23)

EZRA's second single releases
February 19, 2024

Jones and Butterfield

Jones met **Craig Butterfield** in 2013 while both were on faculty at the University of South Carolina's School of Music. They initially connected over their love of roots music, in addition to their shared classical backgrounds. Both admired artists like Chris Thile, Edgar Meyer, Mike Marshall, Béla Fleck—artists who were forging a new repertoire for bluegrass instrumentation in the chamber music world.

Jones and Butterfield quickly began playing and writing together, and in the next years released their first duo album, *Stickerfoot* (2015), which was quickly followed with their next album, *Pisces* (2016). They did some tours and shows and residencies together, but in the meantime, Jones accepted a position at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio. The distance made for a different kind of collaboration, and in 2019 they released their third duo album, *Eclipse*.

Butterfield directs one of the largest double bass programs in the Southeast at the University of South Carolina, where he is a professor of double bass and jazz studies. Comfortable in many styles of music, Butterfield has performed extensively as a jazz artist as well as a classical soloist and clinician.

American Record Guide said, "Craig Butterfield is nothing short of magnificent...His tone is gorgeous, his intonation rock-solid, and his phrasing expressive and flexible."

With both Jones and Butterfield pushing boundaries in their own careers, it is not surprising they conspired to push boundaries even further as a duo. They had often envisioned writing for a larger bluegrass chamber ensemble, but it seemed logistically difficult. With their vigorous university schedules and their own writing and performing, they felt lucky to find the time to play as a duo.

Jones and Allard

In fall of 2021, **Max Allard** began his composition studies at Oberlin Conservatory, with Jesse Jones as his advising professor. Max is an award-winning banjoist in his own right (he won the Rockygrass Banjo Competition in 2018 and the Freshgrass Banjo Award in 2019). Jones had long hoped to have a roots music program at Oberlin and could see how someone like Allard could make an impact in the department.

Once again, Jones found himself bonding with another musician over the admiration for bluegrass chamber music. In their weekly private lessons, they worked on classical composing, but also discussed incorporating Allard's primary instrument, the banjo, into the department's new works. Jones encouraged Allard to teach classes to his fellow composers on writing for the banjo, and all of his professors encouraged his solo banjo work, while also stretching his ears and mind to write for traditional classical instruments and chamber ensembles.

Allard released his debut solo album *Odes / Codes* in January 2022, comprised of mostly solo banjo material. Béla Fleck called him "a new mature and poetic voice on the 5 string banjo. Beautiful compositions and a very nice touch."



Contrabuffoon (5:04)

EZRA's third single releases
February 26, 2024

Allard's second year of study at Oberlin was the academic year Jones took his sabbatical. At first it was disappointing to put their weekly meetings on hiatus, but an intriguing idea was soon floated. Oberlin has a short term in January for intense studies and exploration of various topics outside the usual curriculum, dubbed Winter Term. Jones proposed that he would invite Craig Butterfield and Jacob Jolliff to campus for a residency during this month, in which they would work with a small group of students to write original roots/bluegrass music as part of the Oberlin Winter Term. He also arranged for a week of the term to be devoted to something else: he invited Butterfield, Jolliff and Allard to record nine of Jones' compositions.

Jones and Jolliff and Butterfield and Allard

And that is how it all came together. In January of 2023, the four musicians sat down together for the first time to play through the compositions from Jones. They rehearsed at Jones' house for a week, enjoyed meals together and getting to know each other as players and people. Then they headed over to the First Church in Oberlin, where they recorded the album in two days. It was immediately clear that this was a fortuitous combination, both musically and personally.

Recorded and engineered by **Paul Eachus** and mastered by **Dave Sinko** (Punch Brothers, Béla Fleck, Edgar Meyer), this album felt like capturing lightning in a bottle for these first time collaborators. Only days after wrapping up that first recording session, they were already talking about the next opportunity to record together.

It seems a bit presumptuous to mention that although EZRA is announcing their album debut, they have two more on the way in the next year. In Fall of 2023, the quartet seized another opportunity to play and record another album, this time collaborating with musical polymath and instrument inventor **Mark Stewart**, composer **Elizabeth Ogoneck**, and pianist/Moog-master **Xak Bjerken**. They [performed together in October at Cornell](#). And in January 2024, the quartet met up again in South Carolina, the home turf of Butterfield, to record yet another album. The second and third albums feature many more works by Jones, but also add some compositions from Allard, Butterfield and Bjerken, as well as collaborative improvisatory works with the entire ensemble.

EZRA had their [debut performance as a quartet](#) on January 23, 2024 at the University of South Carolina School of Music, exactly one year to the day of when they first sat down to play together in Jones' living room.

Expect a lot more to come from EZRA.

EZRA's debut album releases March 1, 2024.

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from left to right: Craig Butterfield, Jesse Jones, Jacob Jolliff, and Max Allard