
Dr. Willie L. Morris III

Dr. Willie L. Morris III is Associate Professor of Saxophone at the University of Dayton, where he has served on the music faculty since 1993. A saxophonist, jazz educator, conductor, clinician, and ensemble director, he oversees saxophone and jazz improvisation and directs the Dayton Jazz Ensemble and University of Dayton Flyer Pep Band. He has also coordinated jazz studies and coached saxophone chamber ensembles, including the First Flight Saxophone Quartet and University Saxophone Quartet.

Morris earned the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in saxophone performance from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music, the Master of Music in Saxophone from Stephen F. Austin State University, and the Bachelor of Music Education from East Carolina University. Before joining Dayton, he taught for four years at the University of Alabama and for two years at Alcorn State University.

As a concert saxophonist, Morris has appeared as a soloist, chamber musician, educator, and clinician in the United States and abroad. His work includes performances connected with World Saxophone Congresses in Valencia, Montreal, and Minneapolis; national and regional North American Saxophone Alliance conferences; and performance or teaching activity in South America, Japan, China, Canada, and Europe. He taught and presented clinics at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music in Chengdu and taught jazz history while performing in Paris jazz clubs. He has premiered numerous compositions, including works by African American composers, and has hosted NASA regional conferences at both Dayton and Alabama.

Jazz performance and education are central to Morris's career. As director of the Dayton Jazz Ensemble, he leads an auditioned big band devoted to challenging traditional and contemporary literature, stylistic breadth, and improvisation. Under his direction, the ensemble has been invited to the Ohio Music Education Association Professional Development Conference more than twelve times and is scheduled to return in February 2027. Its national record includes the 2008 MENC National Conference and Jazz Education Network conferences in 2013 and 2019. The ensemble has also toured to New York City and worked with artists including Branford Marsalis, Mulgrew Miller, Carl Allen, and Terrell Stafford, as well as musicians associated with the Count Basie and Woody Herman orchestras.

Morris has served as President of the Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Jazz Educators, directed the OMEA/IAJE Intercollegiate Jazz Ensemble, and appeared as an honors jazz-band clinician and conductor. As a performing jazz saxophonist, he has directed the UD Faculty Jazztet, led his own groups, served as lead alto saxophonist and music director for the Eddie Brookshire Big Band, and performed with the Dayton Jazz Orchestra and other regional ensembles. His performance experience informs a teaching approach that treats jazz as a living language grounded in listening, improvisation, interaction, and ensemble craft.

Since 1996, Morris has served as head director of the University of Dayton Flyer Pep Band, shaping it into a highly visible musical ambassador centered on musicianship, energy, student leadership, service, and community. In the 2023 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, the band supported Fairleigh Dickinson University, learning its recovered fight song and cheering the Knights during their historic upset of top-seeded Purdue. That service earned the Flyer Pep Band a 2023 Stan Musial Award for Extraordinary Character - the first such recognition for a band.

Across more than three decades at Dayton, Morris has built a career connecting saxophone performance, jazz pedagogy, ensemble leadership, international activity, mentorship, and service through music.

