

**Arts for Art Proudly Announces**

**VISION 30 Opening Night Celebration — June 23, 2026**

## **Joe Morris · 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award Honoree**

Arts for Art is proud to honor **Joe Morris**, a master improviser and guitarist, bassist, multi instrumentalist, author, educator and arts organizer with the **Lifetime Achievement Award** on June 23, 2026, for the opening night of **VISION 30** at **Abrons Art Center**.

Joe Morris is a key figure in the ongoing legacy of FreeJazz. Linking Past to Present to Future, his work remains contemporary and cutting edge. His students have made a whose who list. As part of the second generation of the creative improvised music scene that blossomed in the 1970's, Mr. Morris developed his original language on the guitar inspired by the sounds of John Coltrane and Jimmy Lyons.

He began collaborating with key figures such as Lowell Davidson, William Parker, Matthew Shipp and Rob Brown while also composing, performing and recording his own music on his label Riti. Mr. Morris is equally at home collaborating with New York's Black FreeJazz scene as he is in the European free music scene associated with the likes of Evan Parker, Paul Rutherford and Han Bennink. Morris possesses a deep understanding and respect for all of the ways that music flows freely with improvisation. His own ideas of freedom in music he calls Instantiation.

From very early in his career he understood that it was important to take responsibility for creating opportunities to play and present this creative music so he has been organizing and curating festivals and musical series first in Boston and later New Haven and Harford.

Mr Morris is a legendary educator of a younger generation of FreeJazz musicians. He provides for them insight into the different free musical heritages and instills in them a deep respect for the Black originators of FreeJazz. Artists such as Daniel Levin, Mary Halvorson, Brandon Lopez,

Jaimie Branch, Dan Blacksberg, Hery Paz, Charmaine Lee, DoYeon Kim and James Paul Nadien are a few of the students who benefited from his mentorship.

VF30 honors these contributions with a night of programming featuring five ensembles of Morris' peers and followers.

## **JOE MORRIS BIOGRAPHY**

Joe Morris: composer/improviser, guitar, double bass, banjo, educator, concert producer/curator and author.

*Born and raised in **New Haven, Connecticut**, Joe Morris was largely self-taught. At age 15, his sister gave him a copy of John Coltrane's *Om*, which set him on a lifetime exploration of the creative improvised movement. Joe Morris had already begun shaping his unique musical language in 1975. By 1977 he had formed his first group with Lowell Davidson, launching a career grounded in the aesthetics of Creative Improvised Music aka Freejazz. Throughout the late '70s and '80s, he emerged as an original voice on his instrument, developing a unique language outside traditional jazz guitar. During this period, Morris performed with forward-looking artists including Davidson, Billy Bang, Andrew Cyrille, William Parker, Peter Kowald, Joe McPhee, Malcolm Goldstein, Thurman Barker, and many others. In 1981, he founded Riti Records to release his own work. Further committing himself to independence and self-determination, he co-founded Boston Improvisers Group (BIG) organizing concerts that featured the contemporary improvised scene.*

*The 1990s marked a major expansion in Morris's career. His album *Sweatshop* (1990) and subsequent releases showcased his "Big Loud Electric Guitar" experiments, integrating rock energy, groove, and abstraction into his improvisational approach. In 1994, he became the first guitarist to lead a session for Black Saint/Soul Note, releasing the acclaimed trio album *Symbolic Gesture*. Over the next decade, Morris solidified his international reputation through extensive touring and prolific recording with artists such as Matthew Shipp, William Parker, Mat Maneri, Ivo Perelman, Ken Vandermark, and a wide cohort of American and European improvisers. His work appeared on leading creative-music labels including Leo, Hat Hut, AUM Fidelity, Knitting Factory, Clean Feed, and many others, defining him as one of the most original guitarists of his generation.*

*From 2006 onward, Morris has continued to evolve as one of the central figures in contemporary improvised music. He has released a steady stream of albums as a leader, co-leader, and sideman—now totaling more than 180 recordings—and remains an in-demand collaborator with multiple generations of musicians across North America, Europe, Brazil, Korea, and Japan. His projects during this period include numerous trios, duos, solo recordings, and genre-defying ensembles marked by clarity, intensity, and conceptual depth. Morris also expanded his role as a teacher and theorist, joining the faculty at the New England Conservatory and publishing *Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music* (2012), a widely respected exploration of improvisational methodology. His later collaborations have included work with Tyshawn Sorey, Evan Parker, Nicole Mitchell, Joëlle Léandre, Ikue Mori, Darius Jones, Agustí Fernández, Gerald Cleaver, Ingrid Laubrock, and many more.*

**Author:** *In 2012 he published the book *Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music* (Riti, 2012). His article “Encryption” was included in *Arcane* vol. 7 (Tzadik 2014). His article “Perpetual Frontier” appears on [www.pointofdeparture.org](http://www.pointofdeparture.org) (Pod39) May 2012. His monthly column, “Intentional Evolution” for *Jazz Podium Magazine* ran from January 2020 until October 2023.*

**Educator:** *Joe Morris has lectured and conducted workshops on music and improvisation at colleges and universities in Korea, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Belgium and Ireland and in the U.S. at Princeton University, Dartmouth College and Harvard University, University of the Arts, Berklee College of Music, University of Calgary, University of Guelph, University of Alberta, and Mannes School of Music. He has served on the faculty at Tufts University Experimental College, Southern Connecticut State University, University of Calgary and the Longy School of Music at Bard College. He has been on the faculty in the Jazz and Contemporary Musical Arts Departments at New England Conservatory of Music since 2000 where he has influenced many of the most important from younger generations of artists such as Mary Halvorson, DoYeon Kim, Daniel Levin, Jaimie Branch, Hery Paz, Charmaine Lee, Kim Cass to name a few...*

**Organizer:** *He began his work as an organizer and performance producer/curator in 1976 in Boston, where in 1981 he co-founded the Boston Improvisers Group (BIG). Over the next few years through various configurations BIG produced two festivals and many concerts. Morris created a series at Tufts University where he also co-produced the 1985 Jazz Now Festival,*

*started the jazz programming at Charlie's Tap/Green Street Grill, and was a programming adviser for the 1369 Club and the Middle East. Upon his move to New Haven CT in 2001 he created the Just Play series in New Haven (2003/2004), curated the premier season at Firehouse 12 (2005), was artistic director for Hartford Jazz Society Jazz in the Park series (2008), co-founded and curated the Improvisations series at Real Art Ways in Hartford (2011–2016), and founded and co-curated the Multiplex series at State House in New Haven (2019–2020). He was in residence at The Stone NYC for two weeks in January 2013, and for one week in June 2014, August 2016, June 2017 and May 2018. In September 2015 through June 2016, he produced the series Arcade which presented him in performance with new emerging musicians with ten performances presented in New Haven, Hartford, Cambridge, Mass., and Brooklyn, N.Y. His one-day festival Spectacle was presented at Real Art Ways in Hartford CT annually from 2013–2018. It featured emerging musicians performing in ad-hoc groupings with well-known professionals. His latest concert series ImprovisationsNOW/Instantiations at Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut which began in 2021 is now in its 5th season.*

*Across five decades, Joe Morris has forged a body of work that is both far-reaching and deeply personal—an ongoing investigation into sound, form, and freedom that places him among the most influential guitarists and improvisers of his time.*

#### Press Quotes:

*“One of the most profound improvisers at work in the U.S.” — The Wire*

*“The preeminent free-music guitarist of his generation.” — DownBeat*

*“Morris’ quartet plays free jazz with passion and discipline; his angular solos mark him as one of the most original guitarists since 1980.” — JazzTimes*

*“Prolific and astonishingly wide-ranging, Morris traverses a stylistic spectrum that reveals a wealth of ideas.” — JazzTimes*

*“A complete original: endlessly inventive, intense, and honest — one of the most important guitarists in improvised music.” — Premier Guitar*

*“Joe Morris is a singular creative force — a guitarist-bassist and free improviser whose deeply committed, genre-defying art speaks with clarity and conviction.” — Psychedelic Baby*