

Saxophonist creates meaningful experiences through music, composition

GianCarlo Devanii Lay graduating this May with a bachelor's degree in musical performance

By Lynne MacDonald, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

[GianCarlo Devanii Lay](#) has earned an international reputation as one of the most charismatic saxophonists of his generation.

As the Outstanding Undergraduate Student representing the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts at May commencement, Lay will graduate with a Bachelor of Music in saxophone performance from the School of Music, Dance and Theatre.

Soloist and founding member of the acclaimed [LOTUS Quartet](#), Lay captured the gold medals at the prestigious Fischhoff and Coltman chamber music competitions, first prize at the Music Teachers National Association Chamber Music Competition, and top prizes at the North American Saxophone Alliance, MTNA conferences and the Great Plains Saxophone Workshop.

(Video: <https://pwww.youtube.com/shorts/z0Z3dODPFoE>)

He is a winner of the 2026 Arizona State University Concerto Competition and an accomplished composer, receiving the 2025 ASCAP Morton Gould Award for his work "Transcendence," which was commissioned by the ASU Saxophone Octet and premiered at the 2026 North American Saxophone Alliance biennial conference.

Lay's inspiration for music making began in high school after he encountered health issues that prevented him from playing his instrument for six months. During his recovery, an upperclassmen saxophone quartet surprised him with a performance of his favorite music.

"This was a pivotal moment for me as I realized that music is a vehicle for connecting with others and lifting people's spirits," Lay said. "This 'healing experience' was the spark that made me want to be a musician."

After joining the quartet and performing at NPR's "From the Top" radio show in Beverly Hills, California, Lay said he was inspired to pursue music performance at a university.

His most memorable experience was performing with LOTUS on the Fischhoff Chamber Music Gold Medalist tour, giving outreach performances at middle and high schools and engaging with students about being a chamber musician. After students surrounded the quartet asking for photos and autographs, one student handed him a detailed hand-drawn portrait of his face.

"Seeing the students' excitement about LOTUS and chamber music made me realize the impact that we had on these students' lives," he said. "I've kept the drawing as a reminder of why I love music and being a performer."

At ASU, Lay received several scholarships including the Special Talent Award, the New American University – Provost's Scholarship, the Diane Rose Simon Memorial Saxophone Scholarship, the Margaret T. Morris Scholarship and the Presser Foundation Scholar award.

"Receiving these awards was a tremendous honor," Lay said. "I am forever thankful for this support, making it possible for me to afford food, transportation, supplies and daily expenses while I pursued my education."

Here, he shares more about his time at ASU.

Question: What accomplishment or performance are you most proud of and why?

Answer: I am most proud of the world premiere of my original composition, "Transcendence," at the 2026 NASA (North American Saxophone Alliance) conference with the ASU Saxophone Octet to a live audience of over 1,000 people. This piece reflects the journey of humankind towards a more unified and harmonious future. People expressed to me how much the music moved them and how meaningful it was for them, which is extremely important to me as an artist.

Q: What is something you learned while at ASU that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: A human development class about the physiological/cognitive development of humans from prenatal to death gave me perspective on how certain habits, life decisions and daily choices strongly influence long-term health and wellness, and how the choices we make in our 20s determine the way we live for the rest of our lives. This inspired me to seek healthier habits and make important changes to my lifestyle including diet, fitness, recreation, relationships and social interactions.

Q: Why did you choose ASU?

A: The opportunity to study with world-renowned saxophone pedagogue [Christopher Creviston](#) is a big reason I decided to attend ASU. Another important factor was the strong history of success and the culture of collaboration within the fine arts community and saxophone studio.

Q: How do you think your program helped prepare you for a successful career?

A: Working with faculty to improve my musicianship and to find my own artistic voice helped me learn how to make a real impact within my community through music. The support from faculty, my school and the Herberger Institute allowed me to pursue my own artistic interests, attend conferences and festivals, network with important figures in my field, gain exposure at events and highlight my work on international platforms. Collaborating with incredible artists within my program has inspired and enlightened me as an artist.

Q: Which professor or faculty member taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: Dr. Creviston has always reinforced the importance of being a good person, no matter what. Regardless of your status, title or background, one of the most important things you can do in life is to be a good person.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I will attend Michigan State University in East Lansing to pursue two master's degrees in music performance and composition, and hold three assistantships — academic achievement graduate assistant, saxophone teaching assistant and composition teaching assistant.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you'd give to those still in school?

A: 1) Never take your health for granted. 2) Prioritize sustainability over short-term success. 3) Always stay humble and treat people with kindness — every interaction has the potential to make a lasting impact on a person. If you want to make a difference in the world, start with making a difference in people's lives.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



GianCarlo Devanii Lay is earning his Bachelor of Music in saxophone performance this May.
Courtesy photo

Gallery



GianCarlo Devanii Lay with alto saxophone on the steps of the ASU Art Museum, next to the Music Building on the Tempe campus.



Lay performs on soprano saxophone at the 2024 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition.



Lay performs on alto saxophone with the ASU Saxophone Octet at the North American Saxophone Alliance conference.



Lay, winner of the ASCAP Foundation 2025 Morton Gould Young Composer Award.



Lay with soprano saxophone outside the west wing of the Music Building.