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2025

NJJS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



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CORRECTIONS: Trumpeter/keyboardist Carl Gerhard played with Giant Country Horns, a band that toured and has been recorded with Phish. He did not play keyboards with Phish, as incorrectly stated in the Ross Farm Jazz Festival article, May 2025 Jersey Jazz.

When trumpeter Jonny Gittings was in the Next Generation Jazz Orchestra at the Monterey Jazz Festival, the Director was Paul Contos, not Gerald Clayton (Jazz in Wayne: May 2025 Jersey Jazz).

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

BY CYDNEY HALPIN



The 2025 Juried Scholarship Competition has found its WINNERS! The Competition produced 26 student entries - a 46% increase in participation over last year. The category breakdown was as follows: Instrumental Performance - 16, Vocal Performance - 3, Original Composition - 7. The entries breakdown by college was: William Paterson University - 16, Princeton - 6, Rutgers - 3, New Jersey City University - 1.

The Competition will award a \$1,000 and a \$500 prize in all three categories, and this year marked our first year with the Jazz Vocal Performance category thanks to the generosity of Board members Mike Katz, Jackie Wetcher, and Cynthia Feketie.

In the Instrumental Performance category the \$1,000 winner is saxophonist Joseph Foglia from William Paterson University and the \$500 winner is saxophonist Nate Tota also from WPU.

In the Vocal Performance

category the \$1,000 winner is Kyra Cioffi from WPU, and the \$500 winner is Sophia Varughese from Princeton University.

In the Composition category the \$1,000 winner is Matthew Cline from Princeton University and the \$500 winner is saxophonist Aiden Woods from WPU. Congratulations to the winners! Congratulations to department heads Dr. David Demsey (WPU), Rudresh Mahanthappa (Princeton), and voice teacher Michelle Lordi (Princeton) for supporting this program and encouraging their students to participate.

Along with the cash award, winners receive guidance, mentorship and the opportunity to perform with industry professionals at our November 2nd Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert, and coverage in this issue of *Jersey Jazz*. Please see page 11 for more information on the winners.

While the competition ultimately produced six winners, it was a

very competitive field, and the Board and I would like to acknowledge and congratulate the other 20 applicants whose submissions have proven that jazz is alive and well and competently in the hands of this generation.

The Instrumental Performance applicants were: Anthony Weaver/NJCU/saxophone, Logan Soltys/Rutgers University/drums, Christian Orlowsky/Rutgers/guitar, Ginger Meyer/Rutgers/saxophone, Simon Bahadoran/WPU/piano, Cole Johnson/WPU/drums, Maria Kolesnik/WPU/drums, Charles Dutta/Princeton/piano, Sean McCoy/WPU/saxophone, Nathan Renson/WPU/saxophone, Bryan Castillo/WPU/trombone, Killian Winn/WPU/bass, Dorian Wylde/WPU/trumpet, Avishai Seguel/WPU/bass. The third vocal applicant was Lily Tirsch/WPU.

The Composition applicants were: Nick Mikhail/WPU/trumpet, Seobin Cho/WPU/piano, Thomas Verrill/

Princeton/trombone, Lilia Burton Patel/Princeton/instrumentalist & vocalist, Danny Allen/Rutgers/piano. Learn these musicians' names as there's no doubt you'll be seeing these cats in the years to come.

So many life skills are developed through the discipline of music. Thank you and congratulations to ALL the teachers and mentors of these winners and applicants for your dedication and training. The art of jazz takes a village, and each of you has a vital role in the personal and professional lives of these fine young musicians.

This competition was judged by our prestigious panel of professional musicians, educators, and industry leaders comprised of:

Don Braden » World class tenor saxophonist, flutist, composer and educator

Mariel Bildsten » Trombonist, bandleader, sidewoman, and educator

Ted Chubb » Princeton University Lecturer of Music - Jazz Trumpet, com-

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

poser, educator, and arts administrator **Jason Olaine** » Vice President of Programming, Jazz at Lincoln Center

Our deepest gratitude to judges Don, Ted, Mariel, and Jason for their dedication and expertise, and for their input and advice as we continue to nurture and shape this competition.

We're exceedingly grateful to Nan Hughes Poole for her generous multi-year donations in support of this initiative, and to NJJS Board Members Mike Katz, Jackie Wetcher, and Cynthia Feketie for their additional generous support of this Competition.

If you'd like to make a donation to further support and expand the 2026 competition prizes, you can do so at **njjs.org** via the red "Donate" button on the homepage, or by check payable to NJJS, 382 Springfield Ave., Suite 217, Summit, NJ 07091. Please note "Scholarship." Don't hesitate to contact me at pres@njjs.org if you have any questions.

I've said it many times, I'm very blessed to have met and worked with so many wonderful people in the jazz world, and Dr. David Demsey is indeed one of them! He's retiring this year after 33 years as the Coordinator of Jazz Studies at William Paterson University. He's been an incredible support to NJJS and to me, and I'm going to miss him. Thank you, David for all of your assistance over the years and for encouraging WPU students to participate in our Scholarship Competition. The Board and I wish you every blessing in the next chapter of your life. Please know that you have a standing invitation to all future NJJS events! For more information on Dr. Demsey, please see page 17.

As we say goodbye to David, the Board and I welcome Mitch Butler - David's successor - to his new role at WPU. We look forward to meeting you and working with you in the future.

If you haven't yet experienced a LIVE! event, I encourage you to do so. Come celebrate America's original art form with joy and community and support our 53rd year dedicated to the performance, promotion and preservation of jazz.

As, June marks our 3rd anniversary in partnership with the Madison Community Arts Center in presenting our Sunday afternoon Jersey Jazz LIVE! programming., the Board and I wish to extend a big thank you to Caroline Romanelli, Director of Arts and Events, for her incredible efforts in support of NJJS.

Our next LIVE! concert is Sunday, June 8, and will feature the Danny Jonokuchi Quartet. The Rising Stars will showcase the Alex Marichal Trio. Please see "Latest News" on our website homepage **njjs.org** for more information.

Admission is \$15 members/\$20 non-members/\$5 students (ID required) & children . Tickets are

available online at: **ticketleap.events/tickets/new-jersey-jazz-society/jersey-jazz-live-danny-jonokichi-quartet**

Tickets are also available at the door. Doors open at 2:30 p.m., concert starts at 3:00 p.m. Light refreshments are available for purchase. Free street parking is available. Madison Community Arts Center, 10 Kings Road, Madison, NJ.

Save the Dates for the following future LIVE! events: October 5 - the Anais Reno Duo, November 2 - 2025 Scholarship Winners Showcase with industry professionals, and December 7 - A Centennial Birthday Celebration of Al Cohn and Zoot Sims with Harry Allan and friends. It is also the NJJS Annual Meeting. Plan ahead and plan on joining us!

Those who wish to sing always find a song. — UNKNOWN



Music is the 'Great Equalizer': Autistic Pianist Matthew Stern Inspires His Fellow Students

I know he struggles to communicate verbally, but when he gets behind that piano, his face lights up.”

That comment, from saxophonist Birsa Chatterjee, Education Program Coordinator at Jazz House Kids, was about Matthew Stern, a 20-year-old with autism, who doesn't talk but speaks brilliantly on the keyboards.

Stern lives with his mother, Elle Jardim, in Basking Ridge, NJ, and attends ECLC of New Jersey, a Chatham-based school that serves students with severe learning and/or language disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, Down syn-

drome or multiple disabilities.

Since Matthew was a young child, he has been attracted to the piano and has taken piano lessons, but, said Jardim, “they were

too remedial.” A few years ago, her brother, a guitarist, suggested she contact Jazz House Kids, and Stern joined the program in 2021.

“I talked to his mom before I actually met Matthew,” Chatterjee recalled, “and then I finally met the young man. It gave me so much joy to see him having fun in a community and expressing himself in a way that words might fall short. He has an incredibly gifted ear, but he also

does read sheet music. He's done great. He has an assistant in class (pianist Lornaa Morales) who stays next to him. Any time something might get lost in translation, she can explain to him what to do. There's not a single time where he can't do what the class is expected to do.

“I see him light up when it's a more upbeat song,” Chatterjee continued, “but when something is giving him a challenge, he can get pretty frustrated, like all of us. We were doing this song called ‘Eternal Triangle’ (written by Sonny Stitt), which is a pretty difficult bebop song. I remember Matthew was getting mad at himself. Lornaa asked, ‘Do you mind if I just take him out of the room to work on this and then come back?’ When he came back, he played the crap out of it. He had this proud smirk on his face. That's just awesome to see.”



Matthew Stern, at a recent Jazz House Kids concert.

EDITOR'S CHOICE



From left, Matthew and Lornaa Moralies; Birsa Chatterjee

The Jazz House Kids experience, Jardim said, “has taken our everyday life to a whole new level. To be able to see my son perform on stage is the most amazing thing. His playing has matured, and he has gained a lot of confidence. He can be on the piano for hours, and he’s smiling ear-to-ear.

This has brought so much joy to his life. He would never have had this opportunity, if not for Jazz House Kids.”

Stern plays in JHK’s Afro-Latin Ensemble and several small ensembles; and, in August, he’ll participate in JHK’s two-week Summer Workshop at Montclair State. “It’s 9 to 5,



all music, all the time,” Chatterjee said. “He’s loved it the last couple of years. I can’t wait to have him back.”

As much as Jazz House Kids has meant to Stern, his presence has also made an impact on his fellow student musicians. Another of his instructors, trombonist Peter Lin, pointed out

that Stern “finds a lot of joy in playing his instrument. In turn, I think he inspires the other students to find that same passion in themselves.”

Added Chatterjee: “I know he’s struggled to find a community where he feels he belongs, thrives in, and is accepted in. I’m not only super proud of him, but I’m so proud of the other students at Jazz House Kids for welcoming him with open arms. Music is the great equalizer. What you put in is what you get out. Matthew can play, and he works really hard. It really shows, and just to see the other students accepting him and to see him have a community where he feels comfortable in and is thriving in is the reason we do what we do.”

At ECLC, Stern’s Music Teacher, Diana Reed, said: “When we put on a show, he will play the piano, and his passion for music helps all the students.”

ABOUT NJJS

Founded in 1972, The New Jersey Jazz Society has diligently maintained its mission to promote and preserve America’s great art form—jazz. To accomplish our mission, we produce a monthly magazine, *Jersey Jazz*; sponsor live jazz events; and provide scholarships to New Jersey college students studying jazz. Through our outreach program Generations of Jazz, we provide interactive programs focused on the history of jazz. The Society is run by a board of directors who meet monthly to conduct Society business. NJJS membership is comprised of jazz devotees from all parts of the state, the country and the world.

» Visit **www.njjs.org** or email **info@njjs.org** for more information on our programs and services

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New Jersey **Jazz** Society



'Best of JLCO' Replaces Snow-Canceled 'Cool School & Hard Bop' Concert on June 19

Reprise of June 13-14 Performance at Jazz at Lincoln Center



Joe Block



Alexa Tarantino



Bruce Williams

Jazz at Lincoln Center's "Cool School & Hard Bop" concert, scheduled for January 19 at Morristown's Mayo Performing Arts Center (January 2025 *Jersey Jazz* cover story), was canceled due to a snowstorm and rescheduled for June 19. The June 19th performance will feature the JALC Orchestra, but the program will be different. It will be a repeat of the 'Best of JLCO' concert being presented in New York City on June 13 and 14.

The Best of JLCO traditionally closes out the season at Jazz at Lincoln Center, and according to a JALC spokesperson, the concert will deliver "an evening of swing, soul, and surprise." Directed by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, JALC Managing and Artistic Director, the band will play a mixture of standards and original compositions

Among those performing will be: pianist Joe Block, multireedists

Bruce Williams and Alexa Tarantino, trumpeter Marcus Printup, trombonists Chris Crenshaw and Vince Gardner, and bassist Carlos Henriquez

Block, a *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star in January 2021, was Director of the Hard Bop segment of the original concert. His Co-Director (for the Cool School segment) was alto saxophonist Sherman Irby. Williams led a quintet at the February *Jersey Jazz LIVE!* concert in Madison, NJ, celebrating the music of Gigi Gryce. Tarantino, a recent addition to the JALC Orchestra, succeeding Ted Nash, was the *Jersey Jazz* cover story in March 2022.

.....
: The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 19. The Mayo Performing Arts Center is located at 100 South St. in Morristown, NJ. For more information or to order tickets, log onto mayoarts.org or call (973) 539-8008.

JOE BLOCK PHOTO BY NICK DENINNO

This Year’s Awardees: Four from William Paterson; Two from Princeton

A Vocal Performance Category Was Added to This Year’s Competition

JOSEPH FOGLIA

This is the third consecutive NJJS scholarship for Joseph Foglia. In 2023, he won second place for Instrumental Performance; and in 2024 he won first place for Composition. Foglia is in his final year at William Paterson. After graduation, he plans to take a year away from school “to focus on work/practice” before applying to grad school. Originally from Raleigh, NC, Foglia lives in Jersey City and will be leading his band on July 16 at Brooklyn’s Shapeshifter Lounge. He has also played with trum-



\$1,000 PRIZE

INSTRUMENTAL PERFORMANCE
Tenor Saxophonist Joseph Foglia
Raleigh, NC, William Paterson
University Jazz Studies

\$1,000 PRIZE

VOCAL PERFORMANCE
Kyra Cioffi
Rutherford, NJ, William Paterson
University Jazz Studies

\$1,000 PRIZE

COMPOSITION
Multi-Instrumentalist Matt Cline
Edmonton, Canada/Shanghai,
China, Princeton University,
Program in Musical Performance

\$500 PRIZE

INSTRUMENTAL PERFORMANCE
Alto Saxophonist Nate Tota
Clinton, NJ, William Paterson
University Jazz Studies

\$500 PRIZE

VOCAL PERFORMANCE
Sophia Varughese
Delray Beach, FL, Princeton
University, Program in
Musical Performance

\$500 PRIZE

COMPOSITION
Alto Saxophonist Aiden Woods
Warwick, NY, William Paterson
University Jazz Studies

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peter/percussionist Etienne Charles at Baltimore's Keystone Korner.

As a previous scholarship winner, Foglia had the opportunity to play and learn from industry professionals at NJJS' Jersey Jazz LIVE! concerts in Madison, NJ. "All the musicians," he said, "were so gracious and willing to give their time and knowledge at the roundtables. Don Braden, (tenor saxophonist/flutist), Mary Anne McSweeney (bassist), Oscar Perez, (pianist), Alvester Garnett (drummer), and David O'Rourke (guitarist) were incredible to share the bandstand with. Don Braden also gave us some really great advice, not only about music, but also about life and health."

Last summer, Foglia attended the Brevard (NC) Jazz Institute as a Teaching Assistant and played in Charles' Afro-Caribbean Big Band at the Jazz Aspen Snowmass. His first influences on saxophone were

Charlie Parker and Dexter Gordon. "I would always listen to Bird and practice out of the omni-book (note-for-note transcriptions)," he said.

KYRA CIOFFI

A junior at William Paterson, Cioffi cites Betty Carter as her "chief musical influence. Her ability to carve spaces for vocalists in largely instrumentally-dominant spaces through the mastery of her instrument and of jazz languages has inspired me. A more contemporary vocalist who inspires me is Veronica Swift. I find her elasticity when navigating both the songbook and bebop canons mesmerizing."

Cioffi, who grew up in Rutherford, NJ, leads her own band, the Kyra Cioffi Octet, aka KCO. Based in New York City, it's a collaborative effort with bassist Logan Friedman, a WPU senior,



who serves as Musical Director. Other band members are all William Paterson jazz majors: drummer Luke Richards (who played at the recent Ross Farm Jazz Festival in Basking Ridge), tenor saxophonist Sydney Mecca, alto saxophonist Rose Drown, baritone saxophonist Evan Gongora (a May 2024 *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star), guitarist

Ryan Williamson, and trumpeter Seth Burke. In March, the octet performed at Chelsea Table & Stage in NYC. Cioffi also appeared in June at the Wayne, NJ, Library with pianist Tomoko Ohno (a WPU grad), bassist Gabe Schmid-Doyle, and drummer Maria Kolesnik (current WPU student).

Dr. David Demsey, WPU Coordinator of Jazz Studies, calls Cioffi "an extraordinarily gifted singer. When she performs, the passion of the music seems to come directly from her soul and imagination to the audience. She is very serious about the jazz lineage, and this dedication shows in every note she sings."

On July 27, Cioffi will perform during brunch at 1776 in Morristown, NJ, and on August 21, she'll appear from noon-1 p.m. at the Kearny, NJ Library with pianist Leonieke Scheuble's Quintet. Scheuble is a 2024 William Paterson graduate.

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MATT CLINE

Matt Cline is originally from Edmonton, Canada, but grew up in Shanghai, China. Finishing his sophomore year at Princeton, he is a Public and International Affairs major and a Music minor.

A multi-instrumentalist (trumpet, bass, and drums), Cline attended Shanghai American School from fifth through 12th grade. His band teacher, Christy Wanamaker “introduced me to jazz in middle school, and, later, my trumpet teacher, Jeremy Sinclair, a Berklee and University of North Texas grad, really elevated my trumpet chops and provided me with composition advice and gig opportunities.” During Cline’s freshman year at Princeton, he received “amazing instruction in big band composition from Darcy James Argue, without which I wouldn’t have been able

to compose at the level I do now.”

His biggest jazz influences are Thad Jones, Bob Brookmeyer, and Herbie Hancock—“not just as artists, but as models for how to constantly evolve and experiment.” Cline’s long-term goal is to “eventually take



my jazz training into the world of media composition. To me, there exists a huge opportunity to bring jazz vocabulary into film and TV, and composers like Michael Giacchino—especially in *The Incredibles*—have shown how exciting that can be.” He hopes to pursue a master’s degree in film scoring at either the University of Southern California or UCLA, “bringing with me a deep background in jazz arranging and composing.”

Rudresh Mahanthappa, Anthony H.P. Director of Jazz at Princeton, said, “Matthew arrived at Princeton with vast musical experience in hand. He had already written several compositions for small group settings as well as two musicals! He has continued to excel at Princeton and participates in every musical opportunity available to him, as both performer and composer. Matthew is an unstoppable musical force.”



NATE TOTA

Alto saxophonist Nate Tota is entering his final year at William Paterson and sees no other option than pursuing a career as a professional jazz musician. “I HAVE to do this,” he said. “There is no other path I can imagine myself taking. Jazz is my passion, and the music gives me the most artistic fulfillment.”

Tota, who grew up in Clinton, NJ, attended a summer jazz camp at Moravian University in Bethlehem, PA, while he was in high school. “It was the first formal jazz education I had,” he said, “and it gave me a solid foundation to build on.” His biggest influence

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on alto saxophone is Cannonball Adderley. “I love his rich sound, heavy sense of swing and the blues, and his sophisticated melodicism. It never gets old. I am also a huge fan of Lester Young and the particular sort of soulful quality that only his playing has.”

In addition to the Moravian camp, another early introduction to jazz was the 1958 Prestige album, *Relaxin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet*, which Tota heard when he was 14 or 15. “I was getting more interested in playing the saxophone at that time,” he recalled, “and Coltrane on that album opened my eyes to how the instrument could sound. From there, I got into Cannonball, Jackie McLean, Phil Woods, and Dexter Gordon and became really interested in their styles and how one could convey ideas and feelings through jazz improvisation.”

According to Dr. Demsey, Tota “has developed good leadership skills as the lead alto saxophone in the Wil-

liam Paterson Jazz Orchestra. He has an unusually mature bebop vocabulary, and he has a great sense of imagination and forward motion as an improviser. Our band has performed with the iconic vocal group, New York Voices, and with the great saxophonist, Chris Potter, this year. Each concert had very different repertoire and style requirements, which he handled very well, learning and growing a great deal as he progressed.”

SOPHIA VARUGHESE

Growing up in Delray Beach, FL, Sophia Varughese played classical French horn and jazz trumpet. She didn’t begin singing until her sophomore year at Princeton. “Music,” she said, “has been a part of my life since I was a child. While I had always sung in the shower and in the car, I finally developed the confidence to begin singing in front of others, and, after doing



so, I realized my voice was the instrument I was always meant to pursue.”

Once she started, her influences were varied. “The easy answers,” she said, “are Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, but the more accurate and ‘me’ answer would be Freddie Mercury and Billy Joel. Listening to Freddie, with his powerful, lyrical voice, made me want to practice just to see if I could mimic an ounce of his expression. Billy Joel’s storytelling abilities are unlike anything I’ve ever heard and really push me to tell the story of the music I’m singing.”

In her junior year, Varughese is

an Astrophysics major and Vocal Jazz Performance minor. She plans to attend graduate school to pursue a Masters in Music for jazz voice. That decision was made after “dedicating two years of my life to learning from vocal coaches, playing with and listening to talented colleagues, and performing in a variety of venues.” This summer, she plans to attend some jam sessions in New York “to gain some real performing experience!”

Her current voice teacher at Princeton, Michelle Lordi, “pushed me beyond what I thought was possible for myself and really made me feel like my dreams are in reach.” Lordi said Varughese’s involvement with the Princeton Jazz Vocal Ensemble since September 2024 “has allowed her to showcase her versatility as a jazz vocalist, performing music spanning bebop, swing, avant-garde, Latin jazz, and contemporary compositions.”

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AIDEN WOODS

During his junior year at Warwick (NY) Valley High School, Aiden Woods learned about the William Paterson Summer Jazz Workshop from a friend, guitarist Jackson Dunkin. “Prior to this,” he said, “I had little experience playing jazz music. I participated in my high school’s jazz band and various area jazz bands, but it hadn’t quite clicked for me yet. However, when I arrived at WPU, my perspective on the music completely changed. For the first time, I was surrounded by some of the greatest active jazz educators in the world, and I loved it.”

The year Woods participated, the workshop included concerts by vocalist Samara Joy, guitarists Pasquale Grasso and Dave Stryker, trombonist Frank Lacy, and drummer Sylvia Cuenca. “Hearing this music per-

formed at such a high level on nightly basis and having the opportunity to interact with these artists,” Woods said, “was incredible. However, the biggest highlight was the fact that it essentially threw me straight into the music at full throttle, and I’m grateful for that. By the end of the workshop, I had been playing so much that I didn’t want it to end. I quick-



ly realized this is what I *had* to do.”

Other important teaching influences for Woods were his high school Band Director, Chris Persad; Dan Shaut, Director of Bridge Arts and Education and the Hudson Valley Youth Orchestra; and saxophonist Jim Saltzman, who teaches at the Manhattan School of Music. Woods took private lessons from Saltzman, and “he was one of the first teachers to really give me unapologetic constructive criticism that truly gave me an idea of where I was at musically, and the work I needed to do.”

The NJJS Juried Scholarship Competition was initiated in 2022, with \$1,000 and \$500 scholarships awarded for Instrumental Performance and Composition. This year, a Vocal Performance category was added, thanks to the support of NJJS Board members Mike Katz

and Jackie Wetcher. The competition is also generously supported by Nan Hughes Poole and Board member Cynthia Feketie.

The competition is open to all New Jersey college students currently enrolled in a college undergraduate music program and to New Jersey residents currently enrolled in an out-of-state college undergraduate program. For the latter, proof of residency is required.

Along with the cash awards, winners receive guidance, mentorship, the opportunity to perform with an industry professional, and coverage in *Jersey Jazz* Magazine. Judges are: Don Braden, tenor saxophonist/flutist, composer and educator; Ted Chubb, trumpeter and educator; Jason Olaine, Vice President of Programming at Jazz at Lincoln Center; and Mariel Bildsten, trombonist, bandleader and educator.

NEW RELEASE!

JUNE 6 2025



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Dr. David Demsey Leaves His Legacy at William Paterson After 33 Years as Coordinator of Jazz Studies

“An Extraordinary Human Being ... A Magnificent Musician, a Brilliant and Insightful Educator”

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

When David Demsey was studying for his Master of Music degree at Juilliard in 1980, and temporarily living in Tenafly, NJ, he would sometimes travel to William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ, to see jazz concerts by leading performers such as alto saxophonist Phil Woods.

In 1992, after spending 12 years on the faculty at the University of Maine at Augusta, Dr. Demsey became aware that William Paterson was looking for a Coordinator of Jazz Studies to succeed the program’s founder,

Martin Krivin, who was retiring.

“I applied,” he said, “but I thought, ‘How am I even going to be considered for it?’ What I didn’t realize is they were looking for someone with Dr. Krivin’s administrative experience who was also a jazz musician. And, of course, there aren’t many of those. So, I was stunned when I got the call.”

Thirty-three years later, the 70-year old Demsey, is retiring this month. He will be succeeded by Dr. Mitch Butler (See page 21). The Director of Jazz Studies when Demsey



PHOTO BY FRED H. POLITINSKY



Mulgrew Miller, left,
with Dr. Demsey

arrived at WPU was bassist Rufus Reid who had succeeded the first head of the program, Thad Jones. “To work with Rufus was incredible,” Demsey said. “He was a great mentor and colleague at the same time. Just watching how he worked with those gifted students, how he challenged them, how he spurred them on—with warmth and love but, at the same time, with direct feedback to them. I consider myself the luckiest person ever—to have worked with Rufus, James Williams, Mulgrew Miller, and, now, Bill Charlap. Those four people have been my partners in this program. Each of them had a huge career, but they made it fit with their huge commitment to these students.”

Reid remembers his interview with Demsey. “He was very organized, and he was quite aware of what we were trying to do. And, he was also an excellent (saxophone) player. We

needed someone who really understood what we were doing. I’m pleased that the program continues to survive at a very high level. (The William Paterson Jazz Studies program celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2023. See the April 2023 *Jersey Jazz* cover story).

Pianist Tomoko Ohno was the only student on the search committee for Krivin’s replacement in 1992. “I had to be on the committee,” she recalled, “because having a female/minority was mandatory by law. So many PhD applicants who had published books filled up the office quickly, and, finally, David visited, and everybody loved him immediately, including Dr. Krivin. Rufus told me quietly, ‘I think the search is over.’”

Charlap, the current Director of Jazz Studies, described Demsey as “an extraordinary human being. He is a magnificent musician, a brilliant and insightful educator, a thought-

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ful and generous colleague, and a treasured friend. His legacy at William Paterson University is forever.”

Trumpeter Freddie Hendrix, who graduated from William Paterson in 1996, pointed out that the jazz program “has flourished superbly for five decades, due to its long line of jazz luminaries that served as directors and faculty members. At the heart of all that greatness is Dr. David Demsey, facilitating a smooth foundation as its backbone for these jazz luminaries to do what they do best. In the midst of all these great artists, composers, performers, educators, and mentors is Dr. Demsey, smack dab in the middle of it all.”

Demsey received his B.S. in Music Education from the University of Maine at Orono and his Doctor of Musical Arts, Performance, and Literature from Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. He recalled that when he started teaching, “We were still kind of in the fusion era. We

had to teach the students to swing. Getting them to play standards was like pulling teeth. What they wanted to do was only to play Chick Corea, Weather Report, Gary Burton, Herbie Hancock. Those guys all came from acoustic. Weather Report had Wayne Shorter and Joe Zawinul. Joe Zawinul’s first gig was with Ben Webster. Since that time, jazz has evolved. The students are more interested in the history of the music. Our program has been accused of being more of a traditionalist program. But I would argue that we are one of the few programs nationally that really wants them to build that foundation.

“Some of our students graduate,” he continued, “and are very modern. Some are very electric. Some are very traditionalistic/acoustic. That’s the point. We give them the foundation and then let them create their own voice.”

When high school students visit William Paterson, “the first thing we



Dr. Demsey, making a guest appearance on saxophone with Christian McBride at the April 7th Jazz Room.

do,” Demsey said, “is spend an hour with them and, usually with their parents. We call it Jazz Major for a Day. We show them where all the rehearsals are and say, ‘Go to any of those rehearsals.’ We’re looking for young students who really have command of their instruments. They already have the beginnings of a sound concept, and they have vocabulary. They can communicate, but do they understand how to play over chord changes

and make it clear? We’re not looking necessarily for the next superstar, but we’re asking, ‘Is this young person four years away from being part of the jazz community?’ We only accept one in five or six. There are about 20 students per class, 80 in all.”

Demsey teaches the WPU improvisation class, “first with (drummer/arranger) Rich DeRosa and now with (trombonist/vocalist/arranger) Pete McGuinness. How do you have a class

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in improvisation?” he asks. “It really is a class in deepening their vocabulary, so they understand what these people—Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker—were thinking that got them to play like they did. To me, one of the great things this program can do is to help students learn how to learn. A lot of young students are so gifted, and they can do what they do so well, but if you move them, at age 18, a quarter of an inch to another tune, another tempo, same key but different tune, all of a sudden they lose it. Our job is to make their playing more consistent, make them sound as good as they sound, all the time.”

Through the years, William Paterson, in addition to permanent faculty members, has been fortunate to have excellent artists in residence. Among them were tenor saxophonists Michael Brecker and Jimmy Heath, trumpeter Clark Terry, and pianist



Freddie Hendrix and Dr. Demsey

Dr. Billy Taylor. Some of them, like Terry and Brecker, have their works on display in WP’s Living Jazz Archives, which have been administered and nurtured by Demsey. In addition to Terry and Brecker, the Living Jazz Archives include collections of Art Farmer, Thad Jones, Lee Konitz, Harold Mabern, and James Williams.

“When Clark Terry first came to us,” Demsey recalled,” he said,

“The reason I’m coming to William Paterson is that this would be the only archive that’s connected to an active major jazz program. I want a copy of my music on the music stand played by a renewable talent of young jazz players—not just now but 75 years from now when there’s nobody around who knew anybody who heard me—charts, manuscripts, audio, albums, horns.”

Demsey knew Michael Brecker for 30 years “We both studied with a legendary saxophonist named Joe Allard. Michael was one of the great relationships of my musical life. The reason we have the Michael Brecker archives, though, is really because of Randy (trumpeter Randy Brecker, Michael’s brother). Randy was a guest here. He sometimes played with the William Paterson Big Band. And, he said, ‘I want to see Clark’s archives. I owed my whole career to Clark. He not only put me into his and Duke Jordan’s big bands, but Clark got me into the studios.’” After seeing the Clark Terry archives at WP, Randy Brecker decided that his late brother’s collections should be there as well. (Michael Brecker died in January 2007 at the age of 57 from complications of leukemia).

In his three-plus decades at WPU, Demsey has experienced several spe-

cial moments, but one stands out. “For our Jazz Room series, we had booked Marian McPartland, but, unbeknownst to us, three weeks before the event, she had broken her arm. It was a reunion of the (Hickory House) trio with Joe Morello on drums and Bill Crow on bass. So, a week before, Marian calls us and lets us know she has broken her arm. This was while Rufus was the Director. Marian asked if James Williams could play another piano with her. James couldn’t make it, so

she asked Mulgrew Miller, who could do it. When Mulgrew soloed, it was Mulgrew Miller. Marian had broken her left arm, so her right hand was 100 per cent. When they played together, within 16 bars, Mulgrew had internalized Marian’s comping style. So, if you closed your eyes, it didn’t sound like Mulgrew Miller accompanying Marian McPartland. It sounded like Marian.”

For several years, until his death in 2010, Dr. Billy Taylor was an Artist-in-Residence at William Pater-

son’s Summer Jazz Camp for high school student musicians. “What an amazing teacher he was,” Demsey recalled. “He would be here the day before his concert and would go room to room, 20 minutes to a half hour with each band.” Taylor’s successor was Jimmy Heath, who, Demsey said, “shared the same history of the music. He grew up in Philadelphia with John Coltrane. He heard Charlie Parker.”

The Jazz Room Series at William Paterson is in its 47th year. It was created by Martin Krivin, and Krivin’s retirement created another special moment. “When Marty retired,” Demsey said, “we asked each other, ‘What do we get this guy?’ We got him Sonny Rollins, who played in the Jazz Room.”

But the best memories, Demsey added, are of “working with these students and seeing light bulbs go on—the ability to help someone who’s already destined for a career, if they deal with it right.”



Dr. Demsey, with Joe Lovano, center, and Bill Charlap.



Dr. Mitch Butler

Dr. Mitch Butler will become Coordinator of Jazz Studies at William Paterson in September. Most recently, he was Director of Jazz Education at the ColaJazz Foundation, a Columbia, SC-based nonprofit dedicated to growing, supporting, and promoting jazz through events, education, recordings, resources, and advocacy.

A trombonist and arranger, Dr. Butler has served in several jazz education positions including Coordinator of Jazz Studies at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, Director of Jazz Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at California State University, East Bay in Hayward, CA; and Director of Jazz Studies at Claflin University in Orangeburg, SC.

He received his Bachelors and Masters degrees in Music Performance from East Carolina University and obtained his Doctor of Music Arts degree in Music Performance, with an emphasis in Jazz Studies, from the University of Texas at Austin.

PHOTO BY FRED H. POLITINSKY



Bassist Marcus Miller: A Mix of ‘New Stuff’ and ‘Stuff I’ve Written Over the Years’

*“One Day, I Got the Call. ‘Can You Make
This Record Date with Miles Davis?’*

BY JAY SWEET

As a bassist growing up in the 1980s and ’90s, Marcus Miller was one of my musical heroes—an icon shared by countless others who saw in him the future of the electric bass. His blend of groove, virtuosity, and compositional brilliance made him stand out in every context, whether leading his band or holding down the bottom for musical icons. Back then, as I studied his music and technique, I could never have imagined I’d get to speak with him one day. But that’s precisely what happened.

We connected via Zoom, and from the moment his image appeared, Miller acted casually, bass by his side, sheet music scattered on the couch, and his signature pork pie hat perched perfectly upon his head—what was meant to be a short conversation stretched into an hour-long masterclass. With a resume that includes solo records and collaborations with Michael Jackson, Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Luther Vandross, Eric Clapton, and so many others, it was a true privilege to

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learn firsthand from one of the most influential voices in modern music.

Miller will bring his current band to the Carteret (NJ) Performing Arts Center on June 6. I started by asking him about his current band and its music.

“On drums, I’ve got Anwar Marshall—a tremendous drummer,” he said. “On keyboards, Xavier Gordon from Atlanta. He’s got range and depth in every style. Donald Hayes is on the saxophone. If you’ve been listening to gospel from the late ’90s on, you’ve probably heard him. He’s played on just about everything and brings so much energy. On trumpet, I’ve got Russell Gunn. He’s been with us for a few years—people know him from his *Ethnomusicology* records or from playing in Branford Marsalis’ Buckshot LeFonque. That was a cool, funk-jazz fusion band. And then there’s me—on bass, and occasionally on bass clarinet. We’ve been touring with this

group for about three or four years.

“Repertoire-wise,” he continued, “I change it up a lot. We play some things from my last album, which came out before Covid. I’ve also written new stuff I haven’t recorded since then. And I like to return to songs I’ve written over the years—things I did with Luther Vandross, stuff I wrote with David Sanborn. And of course, we include some Miles stuff. I try to give people a sense of who I am. Show them how all this music is connected. I like exposing people to all of it.”

I asked Marcus how he first got into playing bass. “My dad was a piano player and organist—mostly classical music: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms. He also played hymns in church. It was an African Orthodox Episcopal Church, a West Indian version of the English Protestant Church. My grandfather, who was on my father’s side, was a bishop there. So, my dad



played hymns. He could read those four-part harmonies like they were nothing.” Every Christmas, he’d pull out *Handel’s Messiah*, and we’d do special concerts at church. I joke about it now, but my brother and I had to be great sight-readers because we were the page-turners. We were eight, 10 years old. If you didn’t turn that page two bars from the end, you could mess up the whole *Hallelujah Chorus*.

But we got good at it,” he laughed. “We were some bad page-turning dudes.

“The New York City school system had three instruments: clarinet, drums, or trumpet. I wanted to play drums, but we lived in an apartment, so that was out. My dad said, ‘You already play recorder, pick the clarinet.’ So, I did. And the clarinet opened the door to the saxophone later, but the early ‘70s—R&B, soul, and

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funk were slamming. There wasn't much room for a clarinet in that.

"I got into the Jackson 5, just like everybody else. And through them, I discovered Motown. They'd have three hits on an album; the rest would be Smokey Robinson and the Temptations covers. That's how they filled out the records. I was getting a masterclass

in James Jamerson's playing without knowing who he was. One of my buddies got a bass for Christmas, and I was over at his house playing it all the time. Eventually, I convinced my folks to get me one, too, and the timing couldn't have been better. It was a magical time for bass. The bass lines were amazing—Isaac Hayes, Kool & the Gang,

Chic, Larry Graham, Sting, Bootsy, Stanley Clarke, Jaco. It was an incredible time. That's when I got turned on."

Miller credits much of his early musical foundation to his time at the prestigious LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, which has launched countless music, theater, and arts careers.

"It's named after Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who was committed to giving New York City youth access to a broad range of educational opportunities. The education was rigorous, but also flexible enough to support different paths. You got an excellent music education there, but it wasn't just about training for a performance career. It was an incredible environment.

"You had to audition to get in, so you were constantly surrounded by other talented young musicians. Being around those peers was at least as valuable as what I learned in the classroom. I remember Béla Fleck

was there—I didn't know him well, but that was the environment it was. This amazing clarinetist, David Krakauer, and drummers like Omar Hakim and Kenny Washington were there. It was like the high school version of going to Berklee College of Music—you were part of a real music community. I read clarinet music daily—Tchaikovsky, Charles Ives, you name it. That foundation helped me later. I started doing studio work when I was 18 or 19. At the time, there was a need in the studios for bass players who could read music. A lot of bassists came up learning by ear—playing rock, funk, whatever. But there weren't many great readers. The working guys—Will Lee, Neil Jason, Anthony Jackson, Francisco Centeno—could all read."

Miller's big break came through legendary percussionist and producer Ralph MacDonald. "Ralph was a big deal," Miller said. "He played on everybody's records. He wrote 'Where Is the

Miller with drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, center, and singer/songwriter Ruthie Foster at International Jazz Day in Abu Dhabi



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Love’ for Roberta Flack, Donny Hathaway; ‘Mr. Magic’ and ‘Just the Two of Us’ for Grover Washington Jr. and Bill Withers, which I’m on. He asked me, ‘Can you read music?’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ He said, ‘Don’t bullshit me, man. I’m about to recommend you for these jingles.’ I said, ‘Man, I play classical clarinet.’ He said, ‘All right.’ And he put my name out there. Next thing I know, I’m working from 9 a.m. to midnight—doing jingles in the morning, recording dates starting around noon, then playing downtown at clubs like Sweet Basil or Seventh Avenue South at night. It was an experience that I don’t even know is possible anymore, but it all started with that Music & Art training—learning how to navigate arrangements, and, most importantly, being surrounded by other deeply talented musicians.”

As technology began to evolve, the landscape for working musicians shifted. Drum machines, synthesizers, and, eventually, computers began

replacing live players. I asked Marcus how he remained active—and in demand—through that transformation.

“Well, you know, the computers changed everything, man. First, somebody walked into the studio with a drum machine, and then bass synthesizers started coming into fashion. So, all the bass players were like, ‘Oh man, this is not good!’ Now you just had to pay the arranger to program the whole thing, and then get some singers to sing about whatever the product was. So I changed my style to find a space the computers couldn’t reach. I started playing more with my thumb—that slap style, like what Larry Graham introduced to the world in R&B. But once it got to the ’80s. I’m playing alongside all these sequencers, I started using a brighter bass sound that could cut through the machines.”

Our conversation shifted toward jazz, specifically, whether Miller ever felt the need to play upright bass in



Miller recorded the soundtrack of the movie, *Siesta*, with Miles Davis

a traditional jazz context. “Not long after I got into R&B, a guy named Kenny Washington—a great drummer and classmate of mine—turned me on to jazz. That was in high school. Around that same time, I also met Omar Hakim, who lived in my neighborhood. Omar introduced me to all the bad, bad musicians I didn’t know about. They played funk and straight-

ahead jazz with equal intensity. Our concerts would go from *A Love Supreme* by John Coltrane straight into ‘*Slippin’ into Darkness*’ by War—with the same respect and energy.”

“I didn’t feel the necessity to look at the upright,” he explained, “because, in that era, there were a lot of jazz musicians using electric bass. You had Herbie Hancock, Weather Report, Sonny Rollins with Bob Cranshaw on electric ... so it didn’t seem necessary. As I got deeper into jazz, I became more interested in the upright. I had access to one but was already carrying a double case from school because I was playing clarinet. I loved the sound of the upright, but I didn’t love standing on Broadway trying to hail a cab with it, so I found a way to make the electric swing.”

Naturally, any conversation with Marcus Miller eventually turns to Miles Davis. Although he has undoubtedly talked about his connection with

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the trumpet innovator many times before, he seemed more than willing to discuss his connection to the master.

“Miles was in retirement from around ’75 or ’76 until 1981,” Miller recalled. “He was a total mystery. Even more mysterious than he already was when he was playing. People would say, ‘Man, I think I saw Miles in the back of a club...’—like he was a ghost. That changed thanks to Dr. George Butler at Columbia Records. Dr. Butler convinced Miles to come out of retirement. He’d visit him at his house and keep working on him. Eventually, Miles called Dave Liebman, looking for young players. Liebman recommended saxophonist Bill Evans. Bill Evans then recommended me.

“So, one day, I got the call. ‘Can you make this record date with Miles Davis?’ I got over to Columbia Studios, and that was it. I’ve told the story a



million times—he gave me these contradictory instructions. He’d say, ‘Play this.’ Then when I’d play it, he’d say, ‘That’s all you gonna play?’ Then I’d switch it up, and he’d say, ‘You playing too much—just play what I told you!’ Eventually, I found the middle ground. He invited me to his house the next day and asked me to join the band. I stayed for about two years. Our first gig was at a club in Boston called Kix. Our second was Avery Fisher Hall

in New York. Then we went to Japan—I don’t think I’ve ever played for more people, except maybe Live Aid with Bryan Ferry. You couldn’t even see the end of the audience.

“Miles wasn’t in the best health. But during that time, he married Cicely Tyson. She brought him back to life. After two years, I told him I needed to focus on producing and composing. I was nervous as hell, but he gave me his blessing. Then Tommy LiPuma

was producing at Warner Bros., and he knew I’d been writing for David Sanborn and other Warner artists. He said, ‘Hey, Miles is over here now. Got anything?’ That’s when I came up with *Tutu*, which started our second phase. We did *Tutu*, the movie score, *Siesta*, and *Amandla*. We got really tight. That’s when I started hearing all the bebop stories. One day he said, ‘These designers made me some clothes, but I can’t see what I look like in them. Come over here and put them on.’ So, I walked around acting like Miles, and he goes, ‘I don’t like that—you keep that.’ I stuffed it in my bag!”

As our conversation wound down, the topic turned to legacy—and the pressure young musicians feel trying to live up to giants. “I’ll tell you what—the most important thing I learned was that these guys are human beings. People study them like gods, and it can get unhealthy. If you

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think they're unattainable, you'll never try to do what they did.

"Imagine if Miles had revered Dizzy Gillespie forever," he said. "At some point, he had to say, 'I've got my own thing.' Same with Charlie Parker, who started out mimicking Johnny Hodges. Same with Coltrane. They all eventually found their own space. That's what inspired me. Not that I could be them, but I could try to find my voice. I was a Jaco [Pastorius] head. Stanley Clarke, Paul Chambers, Ron Carter, Rocco Prestia—I loved them all.

"Omar Hakim told me in high school, 'Okay, we've finished listening.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'We've got to find our own thing. Then I met Jaco Pastorius in a hotel room. He asked me to play. And I thought, 'If you're gonna sit in front of the guy and play his stuff, you're gonna feel like a fraud.' That's when I knew I had to move on. Meet-

ing your heroes will do that—it'll inspire you to carve your path."

It's been a few years since Miller's last album as a leader, and I asked him if he had any plans to do another. "Oh yeah, I'm working on a new record now. I'll probably have something out in the next month or so—or at least start putting out singles that will lead to an album. I've been working extensively on it for the last three or four months. The album will feature my current touring band, with some special guests. I'll be adding other people, which I like to do. People call it a 'phone book album,'" he says, laughing. "But I've been doing a lot—just returned from International Jazz Day in Abu Dhabi with Herbie Hancock, playing with incredible musicians. We'll see how many of them I can get involved."

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Clara Campbell's 'Unique Voice' Stood Out at Ella Fitzgerald Vocal Competition

"A Musical Maturity and Versatility That Goes Beyond Her Years"

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

More than 100 vocalists competed in this year's Blues Alley Ella Fitzgerald Vocal Competition. What separated Clara Campbell from the other applicants, according to vocalist/judge Nicole Zuraitis, "was her unique voice. She didn't sound like someone else. And, the arrangements were exciting and interesting. She didn't play it safe, and I think that's the most important part of being a jazz singer today—taking risks."

The 25-year-old Campbell grew

up in Bountiful, Utah, a Salt Lake City suburb, playing piano and flute. In high school, she played piano in the big band and started singing with the big band and a combo. Her father, trumpeter Todd Campbell, is the Woods Cross High School Band Director. "My family comes from a big jazz background," she said. "My dad was always putting on records, so I was hearing jazz a lot. Early on, it was Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Later, Miles Davis and Sarah Vaughan."



PHOTO BY KAITLIN NUMBERS



When Campbell attended the Horne School of Music at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah, “I finally took voice lessons.” Her voice teacher was vocalist Jennifer Madsen, a Snow College Adjunct Professor. “She was a big mentor to me,” Campbell said. “She was amazing—the most caring and selfless and giving musician.”

Madsen described Campbell as “one of the most intelligent and intuitive vocalists I’ve had the honor of mentoring. I offer a 100-Song Challenge to my students: memorize 100 songs, identify the composers and lyricists, understand the key in which they would be sung, and be able to perform them from

memory. Clara not only completed the challenge, but she also exceeded every expectation by playing all 100 songs from memory while accompanying herself on the piano.”

Other inspirations to Campbell at Snow were bassist Philip Kuehn, who was the Director of Jazz Studies, and drummer Carl Allen. Kuehn said Campbell “is easily among the top five most talented and hardworking students I have ever taught. She has a musical maturity and versatility that goes beyond her years.”

Allen ran summer camps at the college, and Campbell met him while she was still in high school. Campbell graduated from Snow with a Bachelor of Music degree, with an emphasis on Commercial Music.

The theme of this year’s Blues Alley Competition was “Ella Sings Arlen”, with each contestant selecting three Arlen tunes. Campbell’s choices were: “That Old Black Magic”, “I’ve Got the World on a String”, and “Stormy Weather”. She “arranged them in my own way, kind

PHOTO BY BILL GUILLIAM

“ONE OF THE MOST INTELLIGENT AND INTUITIVE VOCALISTS I’VE HAD THE HONOR OF MENTORING.”

RISING STAR

of putting my own twist on them.”

Campbell is currently in the Air Force as vocalist for the Airmen of Note, a band created in 1950 to continue the tradition of Major Glenn Miller’s Army Air Force dance band. The AON has 17 active-duty instrumentalists and one vocalist. The group is headquartered at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington, DC.

“They announce auditions to the musician world,” Campbell said. “I auditioned in 2022. At first, I didn’t think it was for me, but I thought ‘I’m just going to give it a try, and we’ll see.’ I sent in my preliminary tapes, and then I was invited to the live audition in Washington, DC. Then, a few days later I got the phone call that I was the one; it was really surreal.

“Every year, the Airmen of Note invite luminaries in the jazz scene, and we do a separate concert with each of them. We play their music

and feature them and get to collaborate with them, record a few things and make a compilation record. This year we had (vocalist) Catherine Russell on March 6 and (guitarist) Pasquale Grasso on April 3.”

When the Ella Fitzgerald winner was announced, Campbell was on tour with the Airmen of Note, so she couldn’t be in DC to accept the award. However, “I have a gig at Blues Alley on July 21, and that will kind of celebrate the win. The other candidates were really incredible, so i feel very honored.”

The second-place winner was Aanya Sengupta of New Delhi, India; and the three third place winners were: Jameson Falconer of St. Louis, Angelina Kolobukhova of Minsk, Belarus , and Ale Nunez of Toronto. The first-place winner receives \$2,500; second place, \$1,000; and each third-place winner gets \$500.

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Being Honored Alongside Warren Vache was a ‘Personal Special Moment’

With a ‘Roaring Twenties’ Theme, How Could This Celebration Be Anything Other Than a Fun Time?

BY GILDA ROGERS



Warren Vache, second from left, with the Anderson Brothers band.

I love jazz because it is fun, hypnotic, and intelligent all in one. From the playful sound of Louis Jordan’s Jump Jazz to the seriousness of Wayne Shorter’s saxophone, jazz touches every emotion of the human spirit, and that is the beauty of America’s Original Sound.

Being named and presented with the “Jazz Arts Hero” Award on April 30, was truly an honor, alongside the great trumpeter Warren Vache, who, too, was honored by The Jazz Arts Project, led by Executive Director, Joe Muccioli. “I fashioned this event to showcase the spirit of the “Jazz Age,” said Muccioli.

For 20 years, this organization has kept the holy spirit of jazz alive in Red Bank, the home of Count Basie, and mine also. Through its Jazz Arts Academy for youth to the Summer Jazz Café series at Triumph Brewery, where this fundraiser was

held, the Jazz Arts Project is vital to sustaining the rich legacy of jazz.

With a “Roaring Twenties” theme, how could this celebration be anything other than a fun time? There were the many versions of the “Flapper” look worn by the ladies along with the dapper outfits of gentlemen. The overall gaiety of the crowd was a throwback to a time when optimism in the country was at an all-time high.

During the 1920s, the Great Migration and The Harlem Renaissance intersected to produce a talented wave of Black artists, musicians, writers, and dancers whose cultural heritage was recognized and appreciated by a new audience, white people. Places like The Cotton Club, though segregated, opened its stage to Black performers, such as Duke Ellington and his orchestra, along with many others, including Lena Horne and the Nicholas Brothers.

PHOTO BY KNOW BOGDAN

JAZZ ARTS HERO AWARDS

Despite the zeitgeist, the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem's all-inclusive invitation welcomed an integrated crowd, who enjoyed the music and danced together. The arts have the power to bring people together. Sadly, the National Endowment for the Arts, which funds so many organizations like the Jazz Arts Project, has been hit with deep budget cuts and proposed elimination by the current administration.

However, the vibe of the Savoy Ballroom was alive at this fundraiser. Starting with the identical twins' frontmen - The Anderson Brothers' Rip Roarin' 1920s Orchestra. Vache then joined the band and serenaded us with a hypnotic horn solo.

A highly respected veteran of the trumpet and flugelhorn, Vache has recorded and performed with a who's who of jazz—Zoot Sims, Gerry Mulligan, Benny Goodman, and so many more.

Considering I was first introduced

to this music by my grandmother when I was a youngster, and that my ongoing support of jazz would forever render me a Jazz Arts Hero, being honored alongside Warren Vache, was a personal special moment.

"I accept this award in honor of my grandmother, who is smiling from heaven," I said, with my daughter and brother looking on. "She loved this music, and my love of jazz is because of her."

A big fan of saxophonist Lou Donaldson, my grandmother played him unceasingly on her Westinghouse Hi-Fi Stereo. Years later, as a journalist, I had the pleasure of covering Donaldson as a musician. However, I also got to know him as a person, and, like my grandmother, he also hailed from North Carolina. Jazz is evergreen and extends from one generation to the next -- from my grandmother to me and now to my daughter. (See "Lou Donaldson: A Leading



Jersey Jazz Contributing Editor Gilda Rogers accepts her Jazz Hero award.

Player in Blending Bebop with the Blues," *Jersey Jazz*, December 2024).

Ending my speech I said, "Jazz is the most democratic genre of music there is, and these musicians come together to make good music in the spirit of love. And it don't get no holier than that. Be kind to one another. Thank you," was my small attempt to spread love.

After the presentations were made, the party was revitalized, and on the second stage was The Eddie Allen Quintet along with selected students,

honing their ax, with the best of them. Also, on the second stage there was The Sunken City Saxophone Quartet.

"Warren Vache and the Anderson Brothers on one stage playing to the Charleston and foxtrot," said Muccioli, whose orchestration of this event was firing on all cylinders – including the 1930 Dodge DD Six automobile parked in front of the venue, that set the tone. He continued: "Then people migrated to the other stage, showcasing the music of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, with dancers falling into the Lindy Hop, Black Bottom and the shimmy."

There was no resisting it. Nostalgia was everywhere and everyone was having a good time and enjoying themselves. It was as visceral as it was palpable. On this special occasion the holy spirit of jazz reigned supreme and nothing else seemed to matter. A good time was had by all. Thank you, Jazz Arts Project.

Trombonist Al Grey: 'Last of the Big-Time Plungers'

*"Al Made Sure Everyone Knew of His Presence ...
Flashing That Great Big Grin of His"*

BY ART BARON

Trombonist Al Grey was known as "the last of the big-time plungers," a reference to his use of a plumber's plunger to influence the sound of his instrument. The result, according to a National Public Radio 2008 profile of Grey, was "a soulful quality that sounds as if he's singing the blues."

Grey started using the plunger when he was playing with Lionel Hampton's band in the late 1940s and early '50s. Although he also played with bands led by Benny Carter, Jimmy Lunceford, and Dizzy Gillespie, Grey is best known for his long-time

association with Count Basie.

Born June 6, 1925, Grey would have celebrated his centennial birthday this month. He died March 24, 2000, at the age of 74. Basie tenor saxophonist Frank Foster once said about Grey: "He played a great role in changing the conceptualization of the trombone as an instrument in jazz and influenced lots of young players..." One of those young players, now 75, was Art Baron, who played with Duke Ellington's band in the early 1970s. Following are some of Baron's memories of one of his musical heroes.



PHOTO FROM THE WILLIAM P. GOTTLIEB COLLECTION

There are many accounts of Al's prowess behind a trombone, and there are other stories about him without a trombone! He had a real personality, one that could be depicted with the trombone and without it for sure. And there are plenty of written accounts about Al. So, I am leaving my comments to personal experiences with him. Doing this has been quite a romp, putting it mildly. So where do I begin? He was a million stories rolled into one rollicking, swingin' Gentleman of Jazz!

HE WAS FOREMOST
A BELIEVER IN HIS
OWN ABILITIES.

My first meeting with him went something like this. I was doing some gig, a festival in New York City, and I had nice solo space, perfect vehicles for plunger and the 'little' mute, like Tricky Sam (Nanton) style. And I knew Al was backstage, flashing that great big grin of his!

Al made certain everyone knew of his presence, just by being Al Grey! He introduced himself to me. Of course, I knew who he was! And his sincere compliment to me was, 'Nice plunger.' He was foremost a



This album was originally released in 1960 on Argo Records and reissued in 2010 by Fresh Sounds Spain. Reviewing it for *All Music Guide*, Scott Yanow described Grey as “a boppish trombonist who was a master at using the plunger mute ... Swinging and witty music.”

believer in his own abilities, taking advantage of the moments to put voice to these facts. And damn, he wasn't just shooting off his mouth; he was correct. He knew what he had and wasn't shy about letting us know. Of course, just hearing and experiencing Al was all that you needed!

Another encounter was at the

JVC Jazz Festival, in New York City. I was in the 'bone section' for Clark Terry's Big Band. The band was rife with great players and friends. My dear friends, trombonists John Gordon and Jack Jeffers, both of them rock steady and fun to play with. There was another trombonist, whose name escapes me, making it 4 'bones'. It promised to be a great band and a fine trombone section. I'd known Clark since high school so I was greatly looking forward to the concert.

Then, at the last possible moment, as we were readying to take the stage, another chair and music stand, sans music, was put in place at the end of the four-member trombone section!

The additional trombonist could have been carried in, like the King of Siam! He was none other than Al Grey! The gig went fine, with Al adding his 'bone' voice to Clark's fine arrangements. All was cool.

JAZZ HISTORY

When Clark called a blues, he instructed the band to ‘open it up’, i.e., have a bunch of solos. It was a great swingin’ tempo, a blues in D-flat, a great swingin’ key. All of this aptly spelled out: Plunger trombone solo.

Mr. Grey knew his calling and his craft, and so, without looking anxious, like a youngster, he was up and running as the first soloist! It was a classic Al solo, grabbing everybody in a 10-block radius. That solo alone was worth the price of admission.

Now, with the soloing still going on, I’m thinking, I wanna get my hands on some of that! So, I put in my trumpet straight mute, as others from Duke Ellington’s team—Tricky Sam, Tyree (Glenn), and ‘Butte’ (Quentin Jackson)—had been doing since the ’20s. I jumped in and found my voice. And, I saw Al’s big, ornery smile as I bowed.

After the applause died down, I

jokingly told Al, ‘Man I was really nervous playing a solo in front you after you soloed’! And his response, without missing a beat, was, ‘Well ya oughta be’! With that big AG grin!

I certainly heard Al live many times and on recordings. What I love is the trickster/magician that he was! He was so very special and knew it!

One other story. Way back in 1976, I sat in with one of saxophonist Richard Fenno, Jr.’s ensembles at UC Santa Cruz. I soloed on a few numbers and received accolades and happy smiles from the band and others. When the class was over, one of the trombonists was looking for me, asking ‘Where’s that Al Grey character?’ I overheard this and took it as a slight put down wrapped in a compliment at the same time. As I think of it now, it was the greatest form of appreciation that was ever bestowed on me!

JOSEPH J. BELL, ESQ.

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FROM THE CROW'S NEST

BY BILL CROW



When I first moved to New York City in 1950, I met Dave Lambert, who became a good friend. He introduced me to the songwriter Jack Segal, and we spent many happy hours at Jack's East Side apartment, singing songs, reading plays aloud, and enjoying Jack's friendship. One day, two sharply dressed young mobsters who Jack knew dropped by with a young singer. They asked Jack to listen to him and give his opinion. The guy sang a couple of songs, and Jack gave them the thumbs up; and a little while later we found out that the guy had a hit on Columbia records; and Tony Bennett was on his way to stardom.

• Bill Crow is a freelance musician and writer. His books include *Jazz Anecdotes*, *Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around*, and *From Birdland to Broadway*. This column is reprinted with permission from *Allegro*, the monthly magazine of AFM Local 802.

Many years later, when I was at the New York Playboy Club with the Walter Norris Quartet, a similar situation arose. Two wise guys brought a singer to one of our rehearsals and asked Walter to evaluate his singing. The guy didn't have much of a voice, and Walter was trying to be diplomatic about telling them so. One of them said, "Don't worry about it, Walter. I think we make a fighter out of him."

Dave Lambert once told me about a time when he was a young man living in Boston. There was a radio disc jockey that he knew who asked him to go over to his house one day and help him sort out a pile of 78 RPM records, which had been sent to him by various record promoters. There were all kinds of records, and he wanted to eliminate the uninteresting ones. Dave and the disc jockey sat among the

records, sorting them into two piles, keepers and trash. At one point the disc jockey broke one of the trash records over Dave's head. This started a ritual of alternate breakage on each others' heads. They were having so much fun doing this that they ended up breaking all the trash records and all the keepers as well!

In 1979 I played in a Jerry Herman Broadway show starring Joel Grey. It was called *The Grand Tour*. The preview audiences liked it, but most of the critics didn't, so we only ran a few weeks. Around that same time, I got a call from Joel's conductor, Artie Azenzer, to do some club work with Joel, with Maurice Mark on drums. Joel did well all by himself, with a steamer trunk full of props and material from vaudeville and from his hit performances in *Cabaret*, on Broadway and in the movie.

FROM THE CROW'S NEST

Joel's father was the comedian Mickey Katz, who played with Spike Jones and made comedy recordings under his own name. One of Joel's nightclub bits may have been borrowed from his father. Joel would say, 'Now, I think I'll sing a country song.' And then he would sing, "Rumania, Rumania, Rumania!" When the audience laughed, he would inquire, "Rumania is not a country?"

Back in the 1950s, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis was with the Count Basie band at Birdland. It was the last set, and Lockjaw was taking a solo, but his attention was really on a young woman in the audience, who he was ogling at the expense of what he was playing. The piano was an upright at that time and was on the top riser of the bandstand, behind Lockjaw. Basie crumpled up one of his piano parts into a ball

and hurled it, whacking Lockjaw squarely on the back of his head. Lockjaw didn't even look around ... he knew who had hit him, and quickly got busy playing his solo without any other distractions.

Leo Ball once told me he was in an airport, going down some stairs to get his luggage, when he saw Rolf Erickson below him, talking to someone. Leo hadn't seen Rolf for a while, and he ran down the stairs and embraced him, as the man Rolf was talking to walked away. Rolf said, "Leo, I love you, but I was just hitting Duke Ellington up for a raise, and you let him get away."

Bill Wurtzel sent me this: On a break at Jimmy Nottingham's Sir Jame's Pub, the bartender said a patron wanted to buy the band a drink. When it was my time

to order, I said I'll pass. One of the other band members poked me and said: "You're having Scotch."

I had the same experience the first time I played with Vic Dickenson. We were playing with Jimmy McPartland's band at Toots Shor's, and Toots offered the band a drink. I wasn't drinking, so I asked Vic what he was having and ordered the same; and so he got two drinks. We were good friends from then on.

Many years ago, when Lee Konitz moved to Hoboken to take advantage of the lower rents there, he dropped into the Half Note one night while I was playing there. That jazz club was on Spring Street near the entrance to the Holland Tunnel. Lee was annoyed that they wouldn't let him walk through the tunnel from Hoboken to the Half Note. He wanted to save the bus fare.



Sandy Sasso

SandySasso.com

for more Sandy info

OTHER VIEWS

BY JOE LANG

Excitement is the word that comes to mind when listening to *Big Band Brasil* (Height Advantage - 004) by the **CCCN Jazz Orchestra & Hendrick Meurkens**. The band performs a nine-song program, including two by Antonio Carlos Jobim, “A Felicidade” and “Caminhos Cruzados,” plus seven Meurkens originals. The CCCN Jazz Orchestra, founded in 2018 by drummer/percussionist Carlomagno Araya, is based in Costa Rica and has quickly become heralded internationally. For this project they are joined by Meurkens on harmonica and vibraphone. Well-regarded on both instruments, Meurkens shows himself to also be a composer of great imagination on the melodies included here. The band is wonderfully cohesive and sprinkled with fine soloists. On the album, there are several guest artists including Paquito D’Rivera on alto sax, Diego Urcola on trumpet, Claudio Spiewak on guitar, Ismael

Vergara on clarinet, José Valentino on flute, and Gia “Mali” Chaverri on vocals, each of whom is on a single track. The charts by Carlos Franzetti, Diego Garbin, Russ Spiegel and Steve Sacks provide great settings for the music on this collection. *Big Band Brasil* is an album that should fill you with consistent pleasure.

hendrickmeurkens.bandcamp.com

Hendrick Meurkens’ latest small group release is *The Jazz Muerkengers* (Cellar Music -080824), and it is a delight. Meurkens has a rhythm section of Steve Ash on piano, Chris Berger on bass, and Andy Watson on drums, with guitarist Ed Cherry and tenor saxophonist Nick Hempton sitting in on four tracks each. Meurkens provides five originals on the nine-song program, and his composing is on a par with his playing. Particularly notable is his tribute to Toots Thieleman, “A Tear for Toots.”

The other selections are Horace Silver’s “Silver’s Serenade,” “Dreamsville,” “If I Were a Bell” and “Smada,” a Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn rarity that first appeared on the 1951 Ellington album, *Blues in Orbit*. The contributions of Hempton and Cherry are welcome, and Ash shows throughout why he is a major piano presence on the New York City scene. All in all, the Jazz Meurkengers send a terrific musical message. cellarlive.com

The Pete McGuinness Jazz Orchestra has been around for about 20 years, but *Mixed Bag* (Summit - 834) is only its fourth album. As the title implies, McGuinness who arranged the 11 tracks, has a variety of approaches in creating the charts so well-executed by his 17-piece big band. The program includes standards such as “From This Moment On,” “Body and Soul,” and “So in Love”; some jazz classics, “Djan-



go” and “Round Midnight; plus four McGuinness originals and one by trumpeter Chris Rogers. McGuinness adds vocals on “From This Moment On,” “So in Love” and “Where Do You Start.” Two tracks deserve special mention, “The Sly Fox,” a tune inspired by the arranging genius of Bill Holman, and “Where Do You Start” which has a string section added to a 10-piece jazz ensemble. With the mix of styles and tempos, *Mixed Bag*

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provides an ever-changing listening experience. summitrecords.com

6th Avenue (Hexproof Records) is the debut recording for the big band led by **Mike Thompson**, who has written very hip and swinging charts for the 10-tune program convincingly played by his 17-piece aggregation. This is a mix of standards, including “All the Things You Are,” “Let’s Do It,” “There Will Never Be Another You,”; a bossa nova gem, Jobim’s “Chega de Saudade;” and four tunes by Thompson, “Durango Drive,” “Parisian Deception,” “6th Avenue”, and “May.” Vocalist Charlize Vermaak adds her voice to a spirited “Let’s Do It,” and the flute of Sarpay Ozcagatay is featured on “Someday My Prince Will Come.” Whether a standard or an original, Thompson’s arrangements give each selection an individuality that makes the flow of the music natural

and highly listenable. amazon.com

Back in the January issue of *Jersey Jazz*, there was an enthusiastic review of the first of a planned series of three volumes by **Terry Waldo & The Gotham City Band**. Well, *Treasury, Volume 2* (Turtle Bay -250001) is now available, and like the first volume, it was recorded partially in 2018 and partially in 2022. For most of the tracks, the basic rhythm section is Waldo on piano. Brian Nelepka on bass and Jay Lepley on drums. Added in various other combinations are Mike Davis on trumpet, Ricky Alexander or Evan Arntzen on clarinet, Jim Fryer on trombone, Dan Levinson on saxophone, Jay Rattman on bass saxophone, and Nick Russo, Arnt Arntzen or Jerron Paxton on banjo or guitar.. The songs include “Guess Who’s in Town,” vocal by Veronica Swift, “Snake Rag,” “Wabash

Blues,” vocal by Paxton, and “Muscle Shoals Blues.” Most of the tunes are from the 1920s, with an occasional 1930s entrant. The informative background notes by Colin Hancock add to your appreciation of this recording project. Regardless of the mix of musicians, the music fits the category of delightful, and you should look forward the the final volume in this series. turtlebayrecords.com

The clarinet has fallen a bit out of favor on the current jazz scene with most of those playing the instrument pretty much playing music of the Swing Era and before. Now, there comes along a 28-year old Australian clarinetist, **Adrian Galante**, who on his debut album, *Introducing Adrian Galante* (Zoho -202502), plays standards from the 1940s-1980s with his own approach, one that is basically mainstream, but with an individual-

ism that has a contemporary feeling. As mentioned in Will Friedwald’s comprehensive liner notes, when you hear Galante play, you hear the “whole song,” as his playing brings the lyrics to your mind as you listen to his performances. The eight-song program includes, “It Amazes Me,” “You’re All the World to Me,” and “With Every Breath I Take.” The selections, while not obscure, are not ones that are over-used. Most of them are quite lyric-oriented, so it takes the kind of approach and sensitivity displayed by Galante to make them most effective as instrumental pieces. His extensive use of the celeste, played by either himself or Tamir Handelman, who also plays piano on several selections, adds an element of understated sensitivity to those selections on which it is used. The band is rounded out by three mainstays of the LA jazz scene, guitarist

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Larry Koonse, bassist Alex Frank, and drummer Joe LaBarbera. Galante is a welcome addition to the ranks of jazz clarinetists. zohomusic.com

The current owner of Livia Records, Dermot Rogers, is continuing the mission undertaken by the original owner, Gerald Davis, to make available recordings featuring the legendary Irish jazz guitarist **Louis Stewart**. *I Thought About You* (Livia 2501) is a reissue of a 1977 album that was not well received in its initial release due to sound issues, but, as now remastered, is a pure delight. The story of the album and its history is described in Philip Watson's liner notes. Stewart was joined by pianist John Taylor, bassist Sam Jones and drummer Billy Higgins for the seven-song program including "I Thought About You," Chick Corea's "Litha," and Jimmy Heath's "Smiling Billy It is obvious from listening to Stewart that he

was a special player indeed. With the support of his outstanding rhythm section, he has produced a gem of an album that it is now getting its deserved attention. liviarecords.com

Sometimes you hear an album that just makes you smile and hope that it will go on and on and on. That is the way this listener reacted to *Eternity and a Day* (Summit - 838) by pianist **Michika Fukumori**. Fortu-



nately, this album lasts for 70 minutes and, of course, you can always replay it as often as you please. The program, on which she is joined by bassist Steve Whippe and drummer Adam Nussbaum, has seven engaging originals by Fukumori plus "Speak Low," Chopin's "Prelude Op. 28 No. 4" paired with Jobim's "How Insensitive," "Jitterbug Waltz" and "Be My Love." Fukumori is a natural swinger with a fertile imagination. Her touch is lovely and her musicianship is sublime. This is her fourth album, leading this reviewer to seek out her earlier work. summitrecords.com

Guitarist **John Stein** was taken with jazz when he lived in Vermont. There were not many jazzers where he lived, but he did develop a musical partnership with cellist Chris White. He subsequently moved to Boston where he often worked as an accompanist for vocalists. The singer with whom

he developed a particular empathy was Fay Whittaker. In 1997, he got these two friends together to create an album, recorded in Stein's home and office, which is now remastered by John Mailloux and finally reaching public release as *Among Friends* (JS Jazz - 002). There are five tracks with all three artists, "I Thought About You," "Prelude to a Kiss," "Our Love Will See Us Through," "Summertime" and "Time After Time;" four with Stein and Whittaker, "It Might As Well Be Spring," "Since I Fell for You," "Route 66" and "Autumn Nocturne;" and two duos by Stein and White, "Sarlat" and "Switch-A-Roo," both Stein compositions. The result is simple, straight-forward and understated music that is easy on the ears. johnstein.com

Vocalist **Tatiana Eva-Marie's** parents were a Swiss-French father and Romanian mother,; and she has gypsy roots on her mother's side. She is a

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versatile artist, a composer, and collage artist. After moving to New York City, she founded the Avalon Jazz Band. Her recent project, *Djangology* (GroundUp Music) is a tribute to Django Reinhardt, the legendary Gypsy guitarist. She has written lyrics for a dozen Reinhardt compositions in a variety of languages, English, French, Romanian and Romanian, the gypsy language. Also included in the program are “Caravan” and “Lady Be Good,” songs recorded by Reinhardt. Eva-Marie has an appealing voice that is full of emotion. Her band of unidentified musicians gives solid support, capturing the spirit of the Reinhardt recordings without slavish imitation. *Djangology* is an interesting and highly individual approach to Reinhardt’s music that hits the spot! tatianaevamarie.com

Many artists have tried to adapt rock songs to a jazz setting with mixed

results. Vocalist **Deborah Silver** approached Scotty Barnhart with the idea of recording some classic rock songs with **The Count Basie Orchestra**, led by Barnhart. He dug the idea, and the result is *Basie Rocks!* (Green Hill - 6559). The lineup of songs includes “Paint it, Black” by the Rolling Stones, “Benny and the Jets” by Elton John, “Baby, I Love Your Way” by Peter Frampton, who adds his guitar to the track “Tainted Love” by Soft Cell, “Band on the Run” by Paul McCartney, “A Hard Day’s Night” by the Beatles, “Joy to the World” by Three Dog Night, “Fly Like an Eagle” by Steve Miller, “Every Breath You Take” by Sting, “Old Time Rock & Roll” by Bob Seeger, and “Life’s Been Good” by Joe Walsh. The arrangers—John Clayton, Barnhart, Andy Farber and Kris Johnson—have done a marvelous job of taking these songs and writing swinging big band arrange-

ments in the Basie style. Silver does a fine job of making this material sound natural in these settings. She has vocal assistance on two tracks, Kurt Elling on “Tainted Love” and Wycliffe Gordon on “Old Time Rock and Roll,” who also adds some trombone as only he can do. *Basie Rocks!* is a challenging idea brought winningly to life. deborahsilvermusic.com

Vocalist **Gillian Margot** and pianist **Geoffrey Keezer** have been musical and life partners for about 10 years. Each of them has had albums under their own names, but *Gillian Margot & Geoffrey Keezer* (MarKez Records - 004) is their first duo effort. It is well worth the wait. They chose a balanced program that includes “Blame It on My Youth,” “Thou Swell,” and “Lush Life”. Margot’s rangy voice and Keezer’s sublime accompaniment produce the kind of empathy

that is natural in a long-term partnership. The listener is fortunate to have this opportunity to enjoy their work together. gillianmargot.com

When I saw the title, *Spicy, Classy (and a little) Sassy* (self-produced) on the new album from vocalist **Jamie Shew**, I was intrigued. Well, the title is well chosen. Shew offers all these attributes in her vocalizing. In addition, she can swing and is a fine interpreter of lyrics. With aid from pianist Jeremy Siskind, bassist Lyman Medeiros and drummer Mark Ferber, she offers a fine mix of familiar tunes, including “Invitation,” “Comes Love,” and “Close Your Eyes”, plus three nicely conceived original pieces, “Each Time,” “Enough”, and “Letters From You.” Shew incorporates jazz phrasing in her singing, and has created the hip arrangements. This album will serve

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as a welcome addition to your vocal collection. jamieshewmusic.com

It takes a brave and confident singer to offer a fresh look at a revered Billie Holiday album. Vocalist **Kandace Springs** has undertaken such a challenge on her new album, *Lady in Satin* (SRP Records), and she has succeeded in giving her own life to the 12-song program of Great American Songbook classics. For those unfamiliar with the original album, it contained “You’ve Changed,” “You Don’t Know What Love Is,” “For All We Know,” “I’m a Fool to Want You,” “But Beautiful,” “I’ll Be Around,” “For Heaven’s Sake,” “The End of a Love Affair,” “It’s Easy Remember,” “Violets for Your Furs,” “I Get Along Without You Very Well”, and “Glad to Be Unhappy. To accomplish this project, Springs opted to go to Portugal where she enlisted Diego Costa to get local arrangers to create



orchestrations complementing her voice and personal interpretations of the material. Her voice is richer and deeper than that of Holiday, so there was no chance of her attempting to channel Lady Day. She does it her way, and that is fine. The orchestra, Orquestra Clássica de Espinho, conducted by Costa provides lush accompaniment to the singing of Springs. On *Lady in Satin*, an old classic becomes a new gem. amazon.com

Miranda Sage

RECENTLY, I RECEIVED A NEW ALBUM IN THE MAIL, *Music of the Spheres*, from Miranda Sage, a superb singer based in Victoria, British Columbia. There is something about jazz and jazz-influenced vocalizing that attracts numerous singers to dedicate their careers to a music genre that has a limited, but enthusiastic audience. Many of these vocalists have their exposure restricted to the areas in which they live but are able to gain some attention from a wider audience through recordings. Noting that this is Sage’s seventh album, and considering the quality of her performance and the interesting program of songs on the album, I decided to look more deeply into her background.

Sage was born in England, but her family moved to Victoria while she still a toddler. Her musical training started with piano at the age of five, then clarinet at eight. Her interest in jazz derived from hearing her father play Louis Prima’s “Sing, Sing, Sing.” Her particular jazz favorite was saxophonist Stan Getz, and she added the alto sax to her musical bag, becoming the only saxophonist in the Victoria Junior

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Symphony. Sage studied music at the University of Victoria where she was taken with music of the Renaissance. This led her to adding the lute and harp to her instrumental lineup. When she began playing her own songs in local venues, she also took up the guitar for self-accompaniment, spending some time performing in Europe before settling back in Victoria. Along the way she studied with singers such as Jay Clayton and Sheila Jordan, and the individualistic English jazz vocalist Norma Winstone.

After taking some time out from her performing to raise a family, Sage returned to performing in the mid-1990s. This led to her meeting the pianist/composer/arranger Hugh Fraser who encouraged her to make a recording for his Boathouse Records label. The result was her debut album, *Standards and Originals in a Jazz Key*, released in 1997. She was the vocalist on big bands, primarily the Swiftsure Big Band, as well as working with small groups and has also appeared at a few festivals in the British Isles.

There are several things that are striking about



Sage's seven albums. Her singing has a three-octave range, a smooth jazz-influenced delivery, and a strong commitment to the lyrics of each song, delivered with spot-on phrasing. As you listen to her albums, you find her artistry quickly evolving. She starts at a high level, and it is evident that her innate talent swiftly took her to a level deserving of comparison with the best vocalists on the scene. She sings ballads with deep feeling and swings nicely on quicker tempos. The strength of her ballad artistry is especially evident on her third album, *Timeless Places*, where she does

an entire album of ballads and maintains your interest throughout, a choice that most singers avoid.

Sage's current album, *Music of the Spheres*, was initially conceived by Sage and Canadian pianist/bassist Don Thompson in 2019, but the Covid pandemic arrived on the scene, delaying the recording, which was eventually made in two sessions in Toronto in May 2022 and March 2023. The musicians include Thompson as musical director and arranger, saxophonist Phil Dwyer on tenor sax, Thompson or Attila Fias on piano, Reg Schwager on guitar, Neil Swainson on bass and Richard Brisco on drums. The 12-tune program includes a Cahn/Van Heusen rarity, "I Don't Think I'm in Love," "Stranger in Paradise," "I See Your Face Before Me," and "A Face Like Yours," plus three Sage originals, one with music by Thompson. As described above, Sage's singing is thoroughly engaging, but special note must be made of Dwyer's wonderfully creative work on tenor sax. Listen to *Music of the Spheres*, and you are sure to make the effort to add some of Sage's prior albums to your library.—JL

Vocalist Andy Bey

“Unique Voice, Phrasing, and Effortless Playing and Scatting”

THE FIRST TIME SAXOPHONIST/VOCALIST Camille Thurman heard Andy Bey sing was at her alma mater, LaGuardia High School of Music & Art. “He was a special guest for the Senior Jazz Ensemble spring concert,” she recalled on Facebook. “I remember he played and sang the most swingin’ version of ‘Satin Doll’. His unique voice, phrasing, and effortless playing and scatting intrigued me ... Many years later, I performed at the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, where I had the opportunity to thank him for his music and share my love for him. He was very loving and supportive.”

Bey, a vocalist inspired by Nat King Cole, passed away on April

26, 2025, at the age of 85, in Englewood, NJ. His career had four phases: child performer, part of a trio with his sisters, vocalist with jazz giants such as Sonny Rollins and Horace Silver, and solo vocalist.

One of the best-known Bey solo albums was *Ballads, Blues & Bey*, released in 1996 on the Evidence label. Reviewing it for *AllMusic*, Alex Henderson wrote that, “Andy Bey was 56 when he recorded *Ballads, Blues & Bey*, and despite the fact that his voice had more rough edges than it did in the ‘60s and ‘70s, he still had an impressive range and was among jazz’s most expressive male singers. For this project, the Newark, NJ, na-



tive didn’t employ a band—his only accompaniment is his own acoustic piano, and this spare, intimate approach really makes Bey’s heartfelt vocals stand out on such chestnuts as ‘Someone to Watch Over Me,’ ‘Embraceable You,’ and ‘You’d Be So Nice to Come Home To.’” Asked in 1991 by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* about being compared to Nat King Cole, he

responded: “I would never be tired of the comparisons. Nat King Cole was one of my idols and a major, major influence. He’s still the one for me.”

In the mid-’90s, Bey disclosed that he was gay and was HIV positive. On a 2002 panel moderated by critic Francis Davis, he said: “Once you’ve found out who you are, you can express your feminine side, your

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

masculine side, you're not afraid to let it all out, and I think a lot of gay people want to hear that."

Bey was named Best Male Jazz Vocalist several times by the Jazz Journalists Association, and he was nominated for two Grammy Awards: Best Jazz Vocal Album in 2004 for the Savoy Records album, *American Song*; and Best Jazz Vocal Album in 2013 for the HighNote recording, *The World According to Andy Bey*.

Keyboardist Mike LeDonne paid tribute to Bey on Facebook. "What an incredible musician he was," LeDonne wrote. "I first met him when I was in my early 20s, playing in Widespread Depression. I seem to remember we were playing our gig at the Blue Note, and Andy agreed to sing with us. What a joy it was to hear him sing those Basie tunes we played. The jazz community has lost another old master, the likes of which we'll never see again."

Tenor Saxophonist Ray Blue

"Above All, a Man of Melody"

TENOR SAXOPHONIST RAY BLUE, WHO passed away May 22, 2025, at the age of 74, was an in-demand New York musician, performing with such jazz stalwarts as pianists Kenny Barron and Kirk Lightsey and drummers Bernard "Pretty" Purdie and Steve Johns, among many others.

Blue's last album as a leader, *#People* (Jazzhead: 2023) was described by jazz writer David Adler (now Editor of *JazzTimes*) as a presentation of "two compelling lineups ... one his deeply swinging working band, the other a special collaboration with the great Kenny Barron on piano. Barron and Blue play duo on Ellington's *In a Sentimental Mood*, and their refined chemistry tells you

all you need to know." As for the title track, Adler pointed out, "Ray takes it at a medium tempo, citing Eddie Harris as a model. There's pathos in the message—people who need people are the luckiest people in the world—and Ray intends it as such ... He is, above all, a man of melody, as every Ray Blue release to date has made clear."

The New York City Jazz Record, reporting Blue's death, called him "a fixture on the NYC and Westchester, NY, jazz scenes." Blue was mentored

by some of the giants of the tenor saxophone such as Houston Person and George Coleman. Although entrenched in the New York jazz community, he and his wife lived in Berlin for 10 years, from 2002-2012.

Johns posted an homage to Blue on Facebook, describing him as "a dear friend and saxophonist that played from the heart ... He loved his musicians that played in his bands and was the true spirit of the scene here in NYC."



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