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JAZZ on the BACK DECK

**BRIA
SKONBERG**



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ON THE COVER — *Bria Skonberg*. PHOTO BY BILL WESTMORELAND

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ALL THAT'S JAZZ

BY CYDNEY HALPIN



It's with great sadness that I announce the death of longstanding Board member and V.P. of Programming Mitchell Seidel who passed away June 2nd. The Board and I send our deepest condolences to Mitchell's girlfriend Liz Heuser Bevan, and to his family, friends, and colleagues. Mitchell will be greatly missed. Please see page 32 for detailed information.

Jersey Jazz LIVE! programming is on summer hiatus, but will return Sunday, October 5th with the Anaïs Reno Duo. Mark your calendars and plan on spending the afternoon swingin' with this wonderful singer along with pianist Jeb Patton.

Admission is \$15 members, \$20 non-members. Doors open at 2:30 p.m., concert starts at 3:00 p.m. Light refreshments for purchase. Free street parking is available.

Madison Community Arts Center, 10 Kings Road, Madison, NJ.

Perhaps you'd like to sponsor or co-sponsor a Jersey Jazz LIVE! event? Funding for the Jersey Jazz LIVE! events has been made possible, in part, by funds from Morris Arts though the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/ Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

While we're very grateful for this support, this funding doesn't cover the full costs of our programming. If you or someone you know would like to help sponsor or co-sponsor one of these programs, please contact me at pres@njjs.org or at 973-229-0543 for more information.

Did spring cleaning find that you discovered jazz CDs, LPs and books that you're no lon-

ger enjoying? Perhaps you'd consider donating them to NJJS!

Thanks to the ongoing dedication and efforts of Board members James Pansulla and Jay Dougherty, generously donated "merchandise" is sold at specific events throughout the year with the proceeds benefiting our LIVE! programming.

We're seeking CDs and LPs released on the following 13 labels: Blue Note, Concord, Impulse, Milestone, Mosaic, MusicMasters, Prestige Riverside, Savant, Savoy, Steeplechase, Storyville, and Verve.

Please contact James Pansulla at jazzeducation@njjs.org or Jay Dougherty at info@njjs.org if you have an CD's, LP's or books you'd like to donate to NJJS. Arrangements can be made for local pick up or delivery.

NJJS is a a qualified 501(c)(3) cultural organization. All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

The "Jazz on the Back Deck" series at the Morris Museum is in full swing and Saturday, July will showcase the following: 7/3 John Lee & Friends, 7/12 The Fumos, 7/17 Bria Skonberg, and 7/24 Lynette Sheard. August will feature: 8/2 Richard Baratta, 8/7 Cuarteto Latinoamericano, 8/8 The Alaya Project, and 8/14 Evan Sherman. The jazz series will end September 4th with Mike Davis and the New Wonders. All shows are at 7:30 p.m.. Bring a chair and a picnic. For information & tickets: <https://morrismuseum.org/outdoor-concerts-on-the-back-deck>

Summertime, and the livin' is easy. —
PORGY AND BESS



Leonieke Scheuble's Japanese Adventure

As someone whose passion for jazz developed when I lived in Japan in the mid-1960s, I was fascinated to learn that keyboardist Leonieke Scheuble was spending nine weeks there to perform in the USA Pavilion at the Osaka Expo 2025.

Scheuble led a band called Leonieke and the NY Groove which included her father, Nick, on drums, guitarist Ilan Eisenzweig, and saxophonist/flutist John Michalak. "I played Hammond organ the whole time," she told me. "The organ was graciously provided by the partnership of Hammond/Suzuki Japan-USA."

Thanks to Japanese organist Akiko Tsuruga, who now lives in New York, Scheuble was able to meet and hear several Japanese organists during her time away from the out-

side Expo bandstand. "We reached out to Akiko," Scheuble said, "and she explained that Osaka is known to be a very popular organ spot, and she got us in touch with a few excellent female organists such as Midori Ono, Atsuko Hashimoto, and Yuki Hyoda. We went to hear each of them perform and became fast friends. It was a thrill to see how many jazz clubs housed Hammond organs."

There were also opportunities for jam sessions, and one was with Japanese guitarist Hiroshi Hata. "We first saw him at the Expo in Osaka playing with saxophonist Harry Allen," Scheuble said. "After that, everyone in our band went to a session he led in the days that followed and sat in. I played at a session in Kyoto with a 92-year-old guitarist named

Yutaka Terai. He's a legend there and is just sensational. We also met and played with a trombonist, Nick Marshall, when we attended a session in Kobe. Nick is originally from Canada but is now living in Japan."

Another highlight took place in Yokohama where the organist Midori Ono invited Scheuble to come onstage and perform a duo organ piece with her—"two organs facing each other. That was so much fun!"

The 23-year-old Scheuble estimated that her band performed eight to 10 sets a week at the Expo for a total

of about 80 performances. "After each performance, we would take photos with many people from the crowd, and they would often present us with gifts. One of the most touching experiences I've ever had occurred on the last day of our performances. We were into June, and monsoon season had just begun. The rain was heavy, yet when we looked out into the crowd of umbrellas, we recognized many of the friends and familiar faces we had come to know. They bid us farewell with handwritten notes, desserts, and gifts of all kinds." (The musicians were covered, but the audience wasn't).

Although jazz is an original American art form, it's clearly more popular outside the country—not only in Japan but throughout the rest of the world. "Performing in Japan," said Scheuble, "was an absolute honor and a life-changing experience. I cannot wait to return again sometime soon."

Leonieke, right, with Midori Ono



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.

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Oscar Peterson: One of the Most Significant Contributors to Jazz of the 20th Century

He Performed and Recorded with Just About Every Important Musician Spanning the Swing, Bebop, and Post-Bop Eras

BY NOAL COHEN



At 6 feet 3 inches and 250 pounds, Canadian pianist Oscar Emmanuel Peterson was an imposing figure. He was gifted with perfect pitch and large hands that facilitated the development of unsurpassed keyboard technique. Classically trained and determined from an early age to excel in every situation he found himself in, it is hardly surprising that he became one of the most popular, ubiquitous, and important contributors to jazz of the 20th century.

Born in Montreal, Quebec, on August 15, 1925, to emigres from the Caribbean, his career lasted over 60 years. He would have celebrated his centennial birthday this August.

He performed and recorded with just about every important musician spanning the swing, bebop and post-bop eras including such iconic figures as saxophonists Benny Carter, Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Ben Webster, and Lester Young; trumpet-

ers Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, and Dizzy Gillespie; vibraphonists Lionel Hampton and Milt Jackson; and vocalists Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. As a leader, co-leader or featured artist, Peterson amassed nearly 160 albums, recorded in a variety of settings and for several labels.

His early influences were Teddy Wilson, Art Tatum, and Nat King Cole although he assimilated the rhythmic and harmonic complexities of bebop to formulate a compelling, hard driving style that, in concert hall or club, commanded the attention of audiences and musicians alike. As an accompanist, he could light a fire under a horn soloist or provide the most sensitive and supportive background for a vocalist. But he had his detractors who felt his exceptional technique fostered grandiloquence and lack of originality. Among his musical contemporaries, Miles Davis was one of the pianist's most outspoken critics.

The careers of Oscar Peterson and impresario/record company owner Norman Granz were interconnected over a period of 52 years. In 1950, Granz gave the pianist his first opportunity in the USA and installed him as the “house pianist” for his Jazz at the Philharmonic tours, allowing widespread exposure as well as numerous recording opportunities on Granz’s record labels: Clef, Norgran, Verve, and Pablo. It is my opinion, and that of others, that the 1950s-early ‘60s were Peterson’s most productive years.

Most of Peterson’s substantial oeuvre involves exceptional trios and quartets, first piano, bass and guitar (Herb Ellis 1953-1958) then with drums replacing guitar (Ed Thigpen 1959-1965) and, towards the end of his career, the quartet format with both guitar and drums. Bassist Ray Brown was a frequent collaborator whose sense of time was the perfect fit for the pianist. Others who worked with

him were some of the finest musicians available including bassists Sam Jones, George Mraz, and Neils-Henning Ørsted Pedersen; guitarists Barney Kessel, Joe Pass, and Ulf Wakenius; and drummers Louis Hayes, Bobby Durham, and Martin Drew.

If I had to suggest an album that represents Peterson at his very best it would be *Night Train* from 1962 with Brown and Thigpen (Verve Records) which got a five-star review from critic Leonard Feather in the October 10, 1963, issue of *DownBeat* Magazine. This recording session provides classic examples of blues improvisation and includes an early version of “Hymn to Freedom,” one of the better known of Peterson’s hundreds of compositions, which became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. Other albums worthy of mention are *The Jazz Soul of Oscar Peterson* (Verve, 1959). *Oscar Peterson Plays the George Gershwin*



Oscar Peterson in 1944.

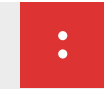
Song Book (Verve, 1959) and *Nigerian Marketplace* (Pablo Live, 1982).

In addition to his pianistic skills, Peterson was an accomplished singer with an approach strikingly similar to that of Nat King Cole. He recorded several vocal albums including *Romance – The Vocal Styling of Oscar Peterson* (Verve, 1961) and *With Respect to Nat* (Limelight, 1966).

Peterson won eight Grammy Awards including the Instrumental Soloist Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997. Among many other awards bestowed upon him were the Order of Canada (1972), the Glenn Gould Prize (1993) and the Praemium Imperiale Medal (1999). He was the first jazz artist to win the latter.

Throughout his career Peterson was outspoken about racial intolerance of which he was a target on many occasions. He was also appalled by the widespread scourge of drug abuse within the jazz world.

In 1992, he underwent two hip surgeries and then suffered a stroke which resulted in lasting impairment of his left side. After a lengthy period of convalescence and rehabilitation, he returned to performance but with diminished abilities. Peterson died of kidney failure in his Mississauga, Ontario, home on December 23, 2007, at the age of 82.



Sitting In with Oscar Peterson Nearly 70 Years Ago

I have a personal experience with Peterson from many decades ago that I would like to share with you. It was December 1957 in my hometown of cold and snowy Rochester, NY. I was 19 years old, in my junior year at the University of Rochester, and one of the few drummers in town capable of keeping time in a manner that simulated, to a degree, the approach of masters like Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones and Max Roach. Rochester had many fine jazz musicians and the Eastman School of Music. Although this was years before it offered a jazz studies program, Eastman did have a few students interested in jazz.

The Oscar Peterson Trio with Herb Ellis (guitar) and Ray Brown (bass) was booked into a local club called the Ridge Crest Inn for December 3-8, 1957. (Remember when jazz groups would do a week in one place?) One of my classmates

was a pianist from New York City named George Schutz (1938-2007) who was active in the campus jazz society and, like me, a frequent visitor to local jazz clubs. At the time, George seemed older and more erudite than I was, even though we were the same age. Although plagued with poor eyesight from early childhood, he had a strong personality and seemed to know everyone. He went on to become a noted impresario, producing both jazz and classical events. In 1966, he was one of the founders of the Mostly Mozart Festival.

1957 jam session at the University of Rochester: From left, Noal Cohen, Chuck Mangione, Ron Carter (partially hidden), Waymon Reed, Benny Salzano (partially hidden), Oscar Peterson



One of the people that George knew well and had taken lessons from was Oscar Peterson and, incipient event planner that he was, George came up with the idea of having the famous pianist appear at a jam session featuring some of Rochester's "young jazz stars." The free concert was set for Friday, December 6, during the afternoon, at Strong Auditorium, on the University campus. Of course, when George invited me to participate in this event—even after getting a stern and intimidating lecture from him on the dynamics of playing with Peterson—I was thrilled!

The other local musicians chosen for this unusual opportunity included two Eastman students, bassist Ron Carter from Ferndale, MI—at the time 20 years old and in his third year of undergraduate studies—and 17-year-old trumpeter Waymon Reed (1940-1983) from Fayetteville, NC, who even at that young age sounded like a seasoned professional. Reed would go on to play with James Brown, Count Basie, and many other jazz and blues artists including Sarah Vaughan to whom he was married for three years.

Carter graduated, as I did, in 1959 and went on to become one of the most recorded and influential of jazz bassists. Interestingly, despite their long careers, Carter (still very active at 88) and Peterson never recorded together.

Rounding out the ensemble were two high school students born and raised in Rochester, 17-year-old trumpeter Chuck Mangione and his close friend 16-year-old tenor saxophonist Benny Salzano (1941-2023). Mangione was another prodigy who later received a B.M. degree from Eastman before embarking on a unique career that combined jazz quartets with symphony orchestras in the 1970s. His fame and fortune made him one of Rochester's greatest musical success stories.

Salzano was an interesting character with a saxophone approach heavily influenced by Sonny Rollins. He also had a fascination with Russian history and was fluent in the language. He spent most of his life in New York City working as a Russian translator and playing club dates, but, either by fortune or design, nev-

er really secured a foothold in the jazz world.

As for the jam session performed by the sextet of Peterson and the five young local musicians, it turned out to be something of a disappointment. Things got off to a rather shaky start when Peterson misinterpreted Mangione's count off and the anticipated relaxed medium tempo blues became instead a rather tense slow blues. We also did Dizzy Gillespie's bebop classic "Groovin' High", before the pianist's trio with Brown and Ellis gave us and the unexpectedly large audience a proper lesson in jazz performance – a classic teaching (and humbling) moment. Because the trio had to get to the evening's gig at the club, we had no time to socialize and I never got to speak with Peterson or his trio mates.

A brief review in the campus newspaper (University of Rochester Campus Times, December 13, 1957) offered the following: "Strange as it may seem, modern jazz came to the UR last Friday in the person of one of the finest performers in today's ivory league, pianist Oscar Peterson. Ably accompanied by Herb Ellis (gui-



Jam session
producer
George Schutz

tar) and Ray Brown (bass), Peterson showed his enthusiastic audience that modern music has something more to offer than the insipidity of [Pat] Boone or the cacophony of [Elvis] Presley. On the same stage were local hopefuls, not as advanced as Oscar, but definitely heading in the right direction ... Peterson's performance was unusual in one way—no admission fee was charged. This feat was made possible due to the fact that he is a former teacher of G. Schutz and agreed to perform as a personal favor to George."

For the other young players who participated in this event, it was a stepping stone in their musical careers, possibly an important one. For me, it was a unique experience and one that I will never forget, even though just a few years later, I had abandoned any dreams of a career in music. —NC

Happy Anniversary!



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Bria Skonberg: Music from *What It Means* and a Hint of What's Coming Next

"I Really Like Playing 'The Beat Goes On'. It Kind of Pulls Your Ear in Three Directions."

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON



Trumpeter/vocalist Bria Skonberg plans to go back into the studio at the end of July or the beginning of August to record her next album. When she performs at the Morris Museum's Back Deck concert series on July 17, she'll "probably be fine tuning some things," and the audience will "get to hear a little bit of some new stuff."

In addition, the Morris Museum crowd will definitely get to hear selections from Skonberg's last album, *What It Means* (Cellar Music: September 2024). That recording was named one of the Best Albums of 2024 by *DownBeat* Magazine, earning a five-star Masterpieces designation. It pays homage to New Orleans, combining seasoned favorites such as Eddie DeLange and Louis Alter's "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans" and Louis Armstrong's "Cornet Chop Suey" with jazz-flavored versions of Sonny Bono's "The Beat Goes On" and Van Morrison's "Days Like This".

PHOTO BY SHERVIN LAINEZ

JAZZ ON THE BACK DECK

DownBeat's Larry Applebaum described the recording as “a program of standards and imaginative covers.” *Jersey Jazz*'s Joe Lang, wrote that Skonberg “always puts her unique take on each song ... and she does so effectively.” And, *AllAboutJazz*'s Jerome Wilson pointed out that Skonberg “continues her usual style of mixing traditional jazz and soulful vocals with classic jazz and rock motifs ... This feels like an intimate celebration of the simple joys of home and neighborhood.” Other selections include Sidney Bechet's “Petit Fleur”; and “Comes Love”, now a jazz standard that was first sung by Judy Canova in the 1939 Broadway show, *Yokel Boy*.

“Petit Fleur”, Skonberg said, “is a classic. I never get tired of hearing Sidney Bechet's songs. There's just a nice drama and romance and push-pull that's beautiful. We'll probably do that one in Morristown. I've always done ‘Comes Love’ as a showpiece closer but on *Live at Emmet's Place* (streamed in April with tenor saxophonist Chris Lewis) we opened it up for more solos and improvisation in the middle. Now, that's part of the arrangement. That's why I love playing with different people because you bring fresh ideas to the mix.” (*Live at Emmet's Place* is a weekly live-streamed concert series started by pianist Emmet Cohen in his New York



Bria Skonberg and Benny Benack on the Jazz Cruise.

City apartment during the pandemic).

During the April *Live at Emmet's Place*, Cohen described Skonberg's trumpet playing as a combination “of Clark Terry and ‘Sweets’ Edison.” Her whimsical reaction: “That works for me! Actually, leading up to that session, I was listening to a lot of Clark Terry, just to get in the zone.

“As time goes by,” she continued, “I have started to recognize my signature style—signature offerings that are based on things that interest me,

quirky arranging of something traditional, some sort of mashing up of grooves. How can I puzzle these two together in a way that accesses groovy and the blues? I really like playing ‘The Beat Goes On’. It kind of pulls your ear in three directions. There is Sonny Bono and Cher, but you put it over Lee Morgan's ‘Sidewinder’ as well as Buddy Rich's version with the big band. We're having a lot of fun, especially playing that one live.”

Skonberg's quintet at the Morris

**I NEVER GET TIRED OF HEARING
SIDNEY BECHET SONGS.**

JAZZ ON THE BACK DECK

Museum will include drummer Darian Douglas, bassist Eric Wheeler, pianist Joel Wenhardt, and saxophonist Birsa Chatterjee. “I’m really excited about this combination and what we’re going to be able to do,” she said. Douglas has been in many of her previous bands. Wenhardt, she said, is “the next one to watch” on piano. “He can play Fats Waller to Herbie Hancock if he needs to.” Chatterjee, Education Coordinator for Jazz House Kids and recipient of the 2015 TD James Moody Scholarship, is currently touring with harpist Edmar Castanega. Wheeler has toured with pianist Cyrus Chestnut, vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, and trumpeter Theo Croker.

What It Means was Skonberg’s first album in five years—“the most tumultuous five years of my life to date—some good, some bad.” The bad, of course, was the pandemic. The good was that, “I became a parent. My son will be five this year. The result is that I



Joel Wenhardt, says Skonberg, is “the next one to watch’ on piano.

feel like I’ve approached music making and recording with even more empathy, connecting with people that are there, playing some things that make you feel good but address the emotions on a more subtle undercurrent. And, maybe now that I’m a parent, I want to make people feel like it’s going to be ok.”

In early 2024, Skonberg and fellow trumpeter/vocalist Benny Benack III headed a Jazz at Lincoln Center national tour called “Sing and Swing: Our American Songbook”. The tour was previewed in November 2023 at Dizzy’s Club and performed on the

2024 Jazz Cruise before taking off around the country for 10 weeks.

Skonberg also performed a duet with Benack on Duke Ellington’s “In A Mellow Tone” on Benack’s 2023 LaReserve/Bandstand Presents album, *Third Time’s the Charm*. Reviewing it for *Jazz Buffalo*, Tony Zambito wrote: “One of the highlights of the album is Benack’s remarkable collaboration with the incredible Bria Skonberg on ‘In A Mellow Tone.’ Their rendition of the song showcases their musical prowess as they alternate between singing and

playing the trumpet, creating a truly memorable and special performance.”

What’s somewhat amazing is that, according to Skonberg, “Benny and I had never made music together until that recording. We had already signed up to do this huge tour. It was a little bit of a risk, a little bit of a leap of faith. We did two versions of ‘In A Mellow Tone’, and the first take is what we kept. Making music with Benny is easy for me because we’ve heard a lot of the same things. We have the same musical priorities when it comes to working


**I HAVE A LONG HISTORY WITH
MORRISTOWN, SPECIFICALLY,
THE BICKFORD THEATRE.** 

JAZZ ON THE BACK DECK

with people. I love playing with him.”

Skonberg is originally from Chilwack, British Columbia, Canada. She first performed in New York in 2006 at an International Association for Jazz Education conference, and then began appearing at the Morris Museum’s Bickford Theatre in 2008 before moving to New York in 2010. She’s looking forward to the July Morristown concert. Anticipating good weather, she said, “Hope-

fully, we’ll be outside on the Back Deck, which should be super fun. I did play for this series a couple of years ago, and, of course, I have a long history with Morristown, specifically the Bickford Theatre.”

It seems like only yesterday that the 41-year-old Skonberg was a Rising Star. Now, she’s positioned to let us know about some of the stars of the next generation. In addition to the previously mentioned Wenhardt,



What It Means was named one of the Best Albums of 2024 by *DownBeat*

she singled out trumpeters Summer Camargo, Kellin Hanas, Skylar Tang, Adrienne Bazile, Janelle Finton, Sarah Uyar, Andrew Stevens, Alexandra Ridout, Bell Thompson, Rachel Therrien, Leslie Vonner, and Kal Ferretti—“There are so many!” She also mentioned alto saxophonist Veronica Leahy and tuba player Norah Nalepka.

Camargo, Hanas, Tang, Leahy, and Ferretti have all been featured as *Jersey Jazz* Rising Stars. Hanas was mentored by Skonberg three years ago as part of the Women in Jazz Organization program, and they played a

concert together in May at the International Trumpet Guild conference.

Skonberg also manages to carve out some time as a jazz educator. “Education is still a big part of what I do,” she said. “Right now, I’m teaching a course on Roy Eldridge at (JALC’s) Swing University. And, I ‘m still running a Jazz Camp in New York with (vocalist/guitarist) Molly Ryan.”

: *The Morris Museum is located at 6 Normandy Heights Road in Morristown, NJ. All Back Deck concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. Attendees must bring their own chairs and are welcome to bring refreshments. Audience members are welcome to arrive as early as 6:30 p.m. to enjoy their picnics. In the event of inclement weather, the performances will be held in the Museum’s Bickford Theatre (general admission seating). For more information or to order tickets, log onto morrismuseum.org or call (973) 971-3706.*



The Back Deck Jazz Schedule

- JUL 03** » Bassist John Lee & Friends with Roberta Gambarini
- JUL 17** » Trumpeter/Vocalist Bria Skonberg
- JUL 24** » Vocalist Lynette Sheard
- AUG 02** » Drummer Richard Baratta
- AUG 14** » Drummer Evan Sherman
- SEP 02** » Trumpeter Mike Davis & The New Wonder

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"It's Got That Vibe, That Swing, That Soul. It Was My Way of Saying Thank You to the Ones Who Built This Music ..."

BY JAY SWEET

Joe Farnsworth has been one of jazz's most impressive, hardest swinging, and most sought-after drummers of the past few decades. Growing up in South Hadley, MA, Farnsworth came from a musical family and studied with greats such as Alan Dawson and Art Taylor early on, while also attending William Paterson University. His skills and incredible adaptability led him to play and record with so many greats, such as pianist Harold Mabern, saxophonists Benny Golson and Pharoah

Sanders, and vocalists Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross, to name a few.

In addition to enhancing every group he plays with, Farnsworth has recorded several albums as a leader. His new album, *The Big Room*, is set for release on July 25 on Smoke Session Records and features an all-star band: trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, alto saxophonist Sarah Hanahan, vibraphonist Joel Ross, pianist Emmet Cohen, and bassist Yasushi Nakamura.

"The 'big room,'" he explained, "is something I remember hearing Max



PHOTO BY JOSEPH BERG

JOE FARNSWORTH'S 'BIG ROOM'

Roach and Jackie McLean talk about. I think maybe they picked it up from Charlie Parker. It's like this next dimension you enter when you're playing, this space where there's nothing there at first, but you can arrange everything however you want. You furnish it your way. It's freedom. Pure freedom. You're not thinking, you're not strategizing—you're just being. It's like a fourth dimension.

"Very few people get there," he continued. "Coltrane did. Bird did. Max talked about doing it with Bird. I remember asking Billy Higgins once how he played the way he did, how he smiled so much while playing. And he said something like, 'I'm just grateful I get to live and play free, just be myself.' I didn't understand it then, but the older I got, the more I felt it.

"I spent so many years trying to sound like Max Roach or trying to fit in—playing with guys like Cedar Wal-



Sarah Hanahan, left, and Joe Farnsworth have been playing together since the pandemic. Said Farnsworth: "We've grown together musically."

ton or following up Billy Higgins. I tried to play a perfect Max Roach solo for 40 years—and I never did. Not once. And when you're chasing someone else's perfection, it's hard to be free. That's what the 'big room' is about: reaching that place where you're musically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually free, to say what you mean

and mean what you say honestly."

He recalled playing with Ron Carter one time for "four nights, eight sets. We were so excited. Every tune, he just played quarter notes. Pounding them into us. And it was beautiful. But on the last song, he suddenly played this triplet—hit this note that stopped everything. It was so bad, in

the best way. And he just looked at us as if to say, 'Welcome to the big room.'

"Man, that moment stuck with me. It was as if he had opened the door, let us peek in, and then closed it because we were finally ready. I used to see Jackie McLean with Cedar Walton and Billy Higgins. They'd be playing 'Lover' or 'rhythm changes', and the energy between them, especially the rhythmic thing Billy and Jackie had, was so intense." ("Rhythm changes" is the name given to a popular 32-bar jazz chord progression based on George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm". It's a familiar arrangement used in jazz improvisation and is the basis for many jazz standards).

To get to the "big room," Farnsworth chose a special group of musicians, each with a unique sound and concept, and each representing a different background and age demographic. Was he was able to get

JOE FARNSWORTH'S 'BIG ROOM'

“the big room” on this recording?

“I was trying to. The first person, of course, was my friend Sarah Hanahan, from Marlborough, Massachusetts. We’ve been playing together since the pandemic started. We’ve traveled a lot and grown together musically. And, honestly, just before Covid hit, I lost three of my biggest mentors—people I based my whole musical life around: Harold Mabern, Pharoah Sanders, and McCoy Tyner. When they passed and the world shut down, everything had to be reassessed. Everything. (Sarah Hanahan was a *Jersey Jazz Rising Star* in the September/October 2020 issue. Her Blue Engine album, *Among Giants*, was named one of *Down-Beat*’s 12 Best Albums of 2024).

“During that time, I saw Emmet Cohen doing all these livestreams and getting like 10 million views. I thought, “Let’s join in on the fun!” So

we did one—and got about 10 people watching. The following week, 15. I joked, ‘At this rate, in 50 years we’ll catch up to Emmet.’ But we kept going.

“And then, one week, this young woman showed up holding an alto saxophone. The way she held it—it was like she was sparring, hitting the speed bag. It had that kind of energy. And then she sat in and played, and it was incredible. Playing with her gave me that same feeling I had when I played with Pharoah.. She became the focal point of the record. Then I just needed to surround her with people I love being around.

“Emmet Cohen is a fantastic pianist. I call him a modern-day Benny Golson. He brings this majestic energy to everything he does—musically, personally, spiritually. Yasushi Nakamura on bass is a young legend to me. His sound is royalty. His bass lines feel like Tommy Flanagan meets Billy Stray-



The Big Room will be released in July on Smoke Session Records.

horn meets Oscar Pettiford. You can go anywhere with him. I also brought in Joel Ross, whom I’d seen online but hadn’t played with before. He was everything I hoped for and more. And then, of course, Jeremy Pelt—a real pro’s pro. Having him there just gave me confidence. It’s like going into a game seven, Celtics vs. Sixers, and

you’ve got Bill Russell anchoring the team, you just feel good. That’s what Jeremy brought. So yeah, I really do feel like we got to the Big Room.”

Farnsworth took a unique approach with the album, relying on each member to offer a tune to showcase, not only their musicality as players, but also as composers. “The great thing about this record,” he said, is it’s a record. We made it like a vinyl. That’s what we grew up on, vinyl. It told a story. You had 18 minutes on Side A, then you’d flip it over to Side B. There was a beginning, a middle, and an end. And it all worked together; it flowed. So that’s how we approached this one. For example, I knew if Sarah was going to offer a tune like ‘Continuence’, I wouldn’t follow that up with something random. It had to go somewhere new. That’s where Joel Ross came in with ‘What Am I Waiting For’. His sound took us to a different space we hadn’t ex-

JOE FARNSWORTH'S 'BIG ROOM'

plored before. He brought a spiritual dimension that expanded everything.

“Then there was Jeremy Pelt. Every time I put on a record, I always go looking for the blues. I want to hear how people play the blues. That’s how you really know what a band is about. So I asked Jeremy to write me a blues for this album, and that’s the role he played with ‘All Said and Done.’ Emmet Cohen wrote this tune ‘You Already Know’ that we’ve been playing live, and I just love it. It’s freewheeling. I didn’t have to overthink. I could just let go and play with energy and joy. And then there’s ‘Primetime’, a tune I wrote. That one’s an homage to Harold Mabern, Jackie McLean, Billy Higgins, Curtis Fuller—all the Blue Note cats I love. It’s got that vibe, that swing, that soul. It was my way of saying thank you to the ones who built this music, who showed us the way. That’s how the album came together.

Each piece served a purpose, contributing to a cohesive narrative arc from start to finish. We weren’t just laying down tracks. We were telling a story.

“We recorded the album at Smoke, which was special. What made it extra cool is that we weren’t in some isolated studio booth. We were up on the actual stage, just like we were playing a gig—only without an audience. That made all the difference. The sound, the feel; it had the energy of a live set. We knocked it out in about four hours. From September 3-7 at Smoke, the whole band from the album will be back together, and we’ll bring this music to life, on the same stage where we recorded it.” (See Joe Farnsworth’s comments about the late Al Foster on page 44)

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: To hear the full interview with Joe Farnsworth, along with a past interview, go to *The Jazz Real Book Podcast*.



Pianist Ben Collins-Siegel: Heading for Carnegie Hall This Summer

“A Formidable Technique, a Sophisticated Sense of Harmony, and a Great Feel—Especially for Such a Young Musician!”

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

I first saw Ben Collins-Siegel play piano in July 2019 at the Roselle Park Jazz Festival. Then a 12-year-old seventh grader at Maplewood Middle School, he led off a performance by the JTole Jazz Orchestra of Thad Jones’ “Counter Block”, written for the Count Basie Orchestra. It was stunning.

JTole stands for Julius Tolentino, the Jazz Director at Livingston, NJ’s Newark Academy and Director of the RP Festival. Collins-Siegel had already been studying with Tolentino and began attending Newark Academy in eighth grade. When I asked Tolen-

tino about that performance six years ago, he said, “He is playing well beyond his years and has a passion and drive for this music that is for real.”

Collins-Siegel graduated from Newark Academy last month and will be attending the University of Miami’s Frost School of Music in the fall on a full scholarship. He will be part of Frost’s Stamps Scholars Program, which forms a very selective chamber ensemble every year. Three of the four years, the ensemble is a classical group. This fall it’s a jazz quintet.

Before he heads off to Miami,

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though, the 18-year-old Collins-Siegel will spend his summer as a member of Carnegie Hall's NYO Jazz Orchestra, one of 23 high school students from across the country selected to tour with this orchestra, led by trumpeter and Artistic Director Sean Jones. The orchestra will present a concert at Carnegie Hall on Saturday, July 26, and then will tour Latin America. Vocalist Luciana Souza will be a special guest performer.

At the time of our mid-June interview, Collins-Siegel was beginning to play through the music for the Carnegie Hall concert and tour, "to get a little more comfortable with it before we play together in person. None of us have played together yet. We meet at SUNY Purchase. We'll have a couple of weeks to rehearse the music and then we perform at Carnegie Hall and tour for a couple of weeks." The music will include works by Anto-

nio Carlos Jobim, Count Basie, and a Carnegie Hall-commissioned work by Cuban-American drummer and composer Dafnis Prieto. Jones is "incredibly excited to have Ben with NYO Jazz this summer. His audition was spectacular, and we're sure he'll be a welcome addition to the band."

Collins-Siegel recalled that he was "always set on going to a New York school for college—either Juilliard or the Manhattan School of Music—because New York is the jazz capital of the world. But, I feel I've already experienced a lot of the New York scene since I live in New Jersey, and I'm pretty close by. I'm interested in having a different experience, being in a different environment, meeting new people, and immersing myself with different people. I think I'll get a more well-rounded experience at the Frost School of Music—more of a college experience. I can study non-musical



At Steinway Hall with, from left, Russell Malone, trombonist Coleman Hughes, and Christian McBride.

classes like psychology and philosophy, whereas if I was at a conservatory, it would be just focused on music."

Another reason he was attracted to the Frost School was the opportunity to study with pianist Martin Bejerano, who is on the faculty. "He has a lot of Cuban influence; he's very rooted in the tradition but also in a lot of contemporary music. Out of all the schools and all of the piano teachers, he's the one I wanted to study with the most."

Bejerano described Collins-Siegel as "a wonderfully talented young pianist whose creativity, maturity, and musical taste immediately drew me to his playing. He possesses a formidable technique, a sophisticated sense of harmony, and a great feel—especially for such a young musician! However, it is most impressive how he uses these abilities in musical and intentional ways. I am very much looking forward to work-

RIISING STAR

ing with him these next four years!”

Collins-Siegel began playing piano at the age of four. A few years later, he started participating in the program at Jazz House Kids. His private piano teacher for the past five or six years has been Bob Himmelberger, who Collins-Siegel said, “has been such a meaningful mentor in my life. He really exposes me to a lot of challenging music and gets me really comfortable playing a lot of tunes that have complicated chord changes.”

Himmelberger, who teaches at Newark Academy, remembered meeting Collins-Siegel when the pianist was 12 years old. “He studied classical and some jazz before he met me, so he could read music. He also had perfect pitch, but not just hearing single notes—he could hear all the inner voices of the chords. Plus, he could remember lines that a soloist played and play them back in tempo with small fingers. For in-



Collins-Siegel at June 2022 Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert

stance, he knew all the tunes from a Louis and Ella album, including intros and endings, which is crazy, as if he did this in a previous life.

“There are so many things that we went through together,” Himmelberger said, “checking out all the greats, from Bud Powell to Bill Evans, Chick Corea, Wynton Kelly. I’m so grateful for the experience and privilege of meeting and teaching Ben.”

When Collins-Siegel played “Counter Block” in 2019, he hadn’t

been playing jazz that long. “But, Mr. T is such a great educator,” he said.

“He has the right balance about bringing it down to your level but challenging you to play beyond your comfort zone. I remember being so nervous to play that in front of hundreds of people. Just the experience of working through that intro and getting it right got me playing to the next level.”

Six years since that performance, Tolentino simply said, “Ben—BCS as we call him—is an incredible talent.

I’ve been fortunate to work with him at Newark Academy since middle school. By sophomore year, I started bringing him on my own gigs, where he’s played alongside greats like (trumpeter) Bruce Harris, (trumpeter) Josh Evans, (trombonist) Steve Davis, (bassist) Mike Karn, and (drummer) Winard Harper. Through Karn, he even began subbing with the John Pizzarelli Trio. He’s grown tremendously, and I’m excited to see him continue his journey at the Frost School in the Stamps Group.”

While attending middle school and high school, Collins-Siegel has collected a long list of musical awards and accomplishments. They include: Outstanding Soloist awards at the Charles Mingus Festival & High School Competition, being part of the Next Generation Jazz Orchestra at the Monterey Jazz Festival, playing solo piano at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Gala, being named a 2023

RIISING STAR

Young Arts finalist, receiving the 2023 Steinway & Sons Jazz Piano Award and Scholarship, and playing at the 2024 Vail Jazz Workshop.

The most memorable experience, though, was the opportunity to perform three times in the finals of JALC's Essentially Ellington Competition, topped off by Newark Academy's First Place win in 2024. "It's always inspiring," he said, "to be surrounded by kids who have the same passion as you do and to know that in so many places you've never been or never heard of, there are kids committed to the music and mastering it. It was a really great experience to show off all of our hard work and get a first-hand experience of all the hard work all of these other bands across the country have put in." In fact, one of the student musicians Collins-Siegel met at Essentially Ellington—bassist Laesio Littlejohn from Plano West High School in Dal-

las—will be joining him as a member of the Frost School's Stamps Quintet.

Another special memory, in April 2023, was being invited to Steinway Hall for a performance by bassist Christian McBride and his band, which included guitarist Russell Malone and pianist Benny Green. "They brought three younger pianists. The other two were Caelan Cardello and Esteban Castro. There was sort of a meet and greet before the performance, we all played on the fancy Steinway piano, and we all sat in with Christian McBride's performance at the very end."

Collins-Siegel's piano hero is Oscar Peterson. "He's my Number 1 influence. But I've exposed myself to some more modern players like Keith Jarrett, Mulgrew Miller, and Brad Mehldau, and I've also exposed myself to a lot of classical artists like Ravel and Stravinsky. And, Sondheim is also one of my favorite composers."

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2025 Summer Jazz Performances

Monday, July 21 | 7:30 p.m.
The Dan Pugach Big Band

Tuesday, July 22 | 7:30 p.m.
Manuel Valera and New Cuban Express

Wednesday, July 23 | 7:30 p.m.
April May Webb and Sounds of A & R

Thursday, July 24 | 7:30 p.m.
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Friday, July 25 | 7:30 p.m.
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THE HEART OF JAZZ

Lynne Mueller

Southwest



Hunter Pullen to Celebrate the Music of Pepper Adams at Hopper House Music in the Garden

“An Amazing Musician and Leader. His Playing is Tasteful and Mature in Every Way”

The *Pepper-Knepper Quintet*, featuring baritone saxophonist Pepper Adams and trombonist Jimmy Knepper, was released on the MetroJazz label in 1958. Reviewing it for *AllMusic*, Scott Janow described it as “state-of-the-art modern mainstream jazz.”

On July 17, when baritone saxophonist Hunter Pullen leads a quintet at the Edward Hopper House Music in the Garden jazz festival in Nyack, NY, he’ll be playing some selections from that album as well as

other Pepper Adams’ collaborations with Knepper and trumpeter Thad Jones. To the 24-year-old Pullen, Adams’ sound “is just so huge and in your face. His style of playing is witty and eloquent. It’s everything that you want to hear in a baritone solo.”

Growing up in Nyack, Pullen didn’t start out planning to play the baritone sax. “The baritone,” he recalled, “was just kind of handed to me in high school. My love for the instrument came after I had spent a little more time checking

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out Pepper Adams and Ronnie Cumber. I love the meaty sound of it.”

His introduction to jazz came from his middle school music teacher, Michael Humphrey. “When I moved up to ninth grade, he moved up to the high school, too, just by coincidence. So, I ended up having the same teacher for seven years. He’s become a very important person in my musical development. He showed me Sonny Rollins for the first time. That was like a life-changing thing for me.”

In his senior year at Nyack High School, Pullen received the Hopper



House Museum’s Toni and Ed Fallon Jazz Scholarship, created to honor the memory of pianist Bill Evans. It recognizes Rockland County high school seniors who have demonstrated a passion for jazz music. Up to

two \$1,000 scholarships are awarded annually to promising graduates to help with formal jazz studies.

Pullen continued his jazz studies at Purchase College and, while there, won third prize in the annual Vandoren Emerging Artist Competition for U.S. musicians between the ages of 18 and 23 who have attained a high level of musical achievement. He was encouraged to apply by several of the Purchase faculty members—baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan, tenor saxophonist Ralph Lalama, and multi-reedist Albert Rivera. “I recorded a few tunes to throw my name in the hat, and it ended up being a really cool experience.” It was the first time a baritone saxophonist won a Vandoren prize.

Other important mentors for Pullen have been pianist Adam Birnbaum (Co-Chair of the Purchase Jazz Studies program) and percussionist Mayra Casales, a Nyack resident.

Birnbaum will be playing in Pul-



Music in the Garden Concert Schedule

Concerts are held at 7 p.m. on Thursday evenings at the Hopper House Museum, 82 North Broadway in Nyack, NY. For more information or to order tickets, log onto hopper-house.org or call (845)358-0774.

- JUL 10 » Scott Colley Trio
- JUL 17 » Hunter Pullen Quintet
- JUL 24 » Anita Brown Jazz Orchestra
- JUL 31 » Jim Donica Quartet
- AUG 07 » Ariadne’s Quartet
- AUG 14 » Ray Levier and Friends
- AUG 21 » Marya Lawrence Quartet
- AUG 28 » 45th Anniversary All-Star Concert (Shirley Crabbe, Mayra Casales, Steven Bernstein, Erik Lawrence, Mike Holober, Cameron Brown, Ben Perowsky)

HUNTER IS ONE OF THE BEST STUDENTS I’VE EVER HAD AT PURCHASE COLLEGE.

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len's quintet on July 17. "Hunter," he said, "is one of the best students I've ever had at Purchase College. He took all the information I gave him and ran with it, showing a strong desire to excel in all areas as a musician. It's so great to see that he is now beginning to thrive in the jazz scene in New York, and I'm looking forward to perform with him at this concert."

Pullen and Casales met while attending services at Nyack's Grace Church. "She became a really great family friend and musical mentor to me," he said. "She was always inviting me to her shows and inviting me to sit in." Casales described Pullen as "an amazing musician and leader. His playing is tasteful and mature in every way ... super professional and always on point. I love it when I have the opportunity to call him to play in my group."

Other members of Pullen's Music in the Garden quintet will be trom-

bonist Robert Edwards and "some of my friends from Purchase—Zach Malian on drums and Jason Clotter on bass." Casales will be performing at Music in the Garden on August 28 as part of the 45th Anniversary All-Stars (see complete schedule on page 27).

The Music in the Garden festival was founded 45 years ago by the late Bert Hughes, a baritone saxophonist and music teacher, who retired from Nyack High School in 1999. He launched the high school's Nyack Jazz Ensemble program and served on the Hopper House Museum's Board of Trustees. The festival, said Hopper House Executive Director Kathleen Motes Bennewitz, "celebrates the history of jazz as a wonderful form of American music, just as it honors the artwork and legacy of Edward Hopper, one of America's most iconic painters of the 20th century." —SANFORD JOSEPHSON

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Two Home-Grown New Jersey Musicians Will Play with The Jazz Ambassadors in Morristown

“New Jersey is Always Going to be Part of My Upbringing Musically, and It’s Good to be Back and Have a Good Bagel”

Pianist Anthony Pocetti grew up in Hamilton, NJ, studying piano, “doing sort of traditional piano lessons. I have an uncle who was always encouraging me to get into the jazz thing. He gave me the (Miles Davis) *Kind of Blue* CD, and he knew that the jazz pianist Jim Ridl was living in Hamilton.”

During his freshman year at Steinert High School, Pocetti began taking lessons from Ridl, who remembers him as “one of the most talented students I’ve ever taught. It’s been wonderful to watch and hear him evolve and become an excellent jazz pianist.”

Trombonist Dave Mosko, from Marlton, NJ, became interested in jazz, thanks to Earl Phillips, the Band Director at Cherokee High School. “I still consider him to be one of my biggest mentors today,” the 26-year-old Mosko said. “He got me hooked on the music, big band, specifically.”

Phillips recalled that Mosko “saw our big band as an eighth grader, so he came to us as a freshman. He was so driven, a very hard worker. I had him write his own chart as a freshman.” Phillips has directed the Cherokee High School jazz program for 18 years.



Anthony Pocetti



Dave Mosko

(One of Mosko's classmates was trumpeter Grace Fox, winner of a New Jersey Jazz Society scholarship in 2023).

Pocetti and Mosko will be playing with the Jazz Ambassadors, the United States Army's premier big band, on August 16 at the Morristown Jazz & Blues Festival.

While at Steinert High, Pocetti honed his skills, playing in competitions and festivals as part of the jazz program directed by Joe Bonjovi. Founder of the Philadelphia Jazz Orchestra, Bonjovi is now the Band Director at Princeton High School. Pocetti received his Bachelor of Music degree at New York University and received his Master of Music degree from Manhattan School of Music.

At NYU, one of his instructors was pianist Don Friedman. "That was kind of cool," he said, "getting that perspective of someone like that. His first record came out the same year as Bill Evans' first record. He was some-

body who was there during the history of things." Friedman, who died in 2016 at the age 81, played for many years with trumpeter Clark Terry.

While at MSM, Pocetti took private lessons from pianist Ted Rosenthal and "picked up some things from Garry Dial, who was teaching an improv class. Also, (saxophonist) Dave Liebman had a very big influence on me."

After finishing his education in 2013, Pocetti was "just doing the freelance musician life for a few years; I was also teaching, and I had a church gig on Sundays." From 2014-2017, he lived in Teaneck and began applying to military bands. The Jazz Ambassadors was "the third one I applied to." The timing just happened to be right because some of the band's veterans were retiring. "Once someone gets into one of those jobs," the 36-year-old Pocetti said, "they might be there for 20 or 30 years. The Jazz Ambassadors Jazztet came to NYU when I was

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there. That was the first time I realized this opportunity exists in the military.”

Mosko received his Bachelor of Music degree from Rutgers University’s Mason Gross School of the Arts in 2021. While there, he studied with trombonist Conrad Herwig (Chair of Jazz Studies), who Mosko described as “a phenomenal educator and, of course, trombonist. He really pushed me in a way I hadn’t experienced before and just opened up my eyes to some different things happening musically. It was a very inspiring experience studying with him.”

Herwig remembers that Mosko “was always hungry for new ideas and influences and soaked it up like a sponge. He pushed the envelope as the best young trombonist on the planet, winning international competitions and impressing musicians and jazz fans. Now he’s tearing it up with the Army Jazz Ambassadors. It was in-

spiring to work and perform with him. He’s the future of the jazz trombone.”

While at Rutgers, Mosko won the American Trombone Association competition and the International Trombone Association’s Carl Fontana Soloist competition. He also received a *DownBeat* award for Outstanding Undergraduate Performance and was one of 11 musicians from around the U.S. to be selected as a Yamaha Young Performing Artist.

“Those competitions,” he recalled, “were pretty incredible. I got to meet trombonists from all over the world. The Yamaha Young Performing Artists Workshop was a very memorable experience because that was part of the Music For All camp that Yamaha runs every year at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. It’s a music camp for middle school and high school students. We put on a concert for all these kids. It was the biggest

audience I’d ever played for. I’m just up there playing my stupid tune, and the kids were going crazy. Most of the 11 musicians picked are classical musicians. They pick maybe three or four jazz musicians and make it a small band with those people.”

Mosko also got to meet and learn from legendary trombonist Slide Hampton, while at Rutgers. Trombonist Peter Lin, a graduate student when Mosko was an undergrad, was Hampton’s manager. “I got to meet Slide through him,” Mosko said. “We got to just play for hours, and he had so many amazing stories to tell about his life and different things compositionally as well. It was incredible to get a sliver of wisdom from someone like that.” Lin remembered that Mosko “came with me to do small sessions at Slide’s apartment. We used to just play tunes and would trade choruses on jazz standards.”

During Mosko’s junior year at



Morristown Jazz & Blues Schedule

The Morristown Jazz & Blues Festival will be held from noon-9:30 p.m. on the Green in Morristown. The music is free.

- 12-1:30 » Vocalist Dani G and Friends
- 2-3:30 » The Jazz Ambassadors
- 4-5:30 » Blues People
- 6-7:30 » Guitarist King Solomon Hicks
- 8-9:30 » Guitarist/Singer-Songwriter Samantha Fish

SUMMER FESTIVALS

Rutgers (2019-2020) he auditioned for the Jazz Ambassadors. “My audition,” he remembered, “was on the day of the (Covid) lockdown. They wanted to hire me, and they wanted me to leave school, but, because of Covid, the band was not doing much, so they let me finish school before going off to basic training.

The Jazz Ambassadors are based at Fort Meade, MD, about halfway between Washington, DC, and Baltimore. Pocetti and Mosko are excited about performing in New Jersey in August. “It’s always good to get back to the home state,” said Pocetti. “For awhile, I was the only one from Jersey. Now, Dave is there. New Jersey is always going to be part of my upbringing musically, and it’s good to be back and have a good bagel. They don’t really do them the same anywhere else. And, people outside of New Jersey don’t know what a pork roll is. It will be good to reconnect with friends and family.”



Mosko, left, and Jerry Weldon

(At the time of our interview, Pocetti was on paternity leave from the band, the father of a 10-day-old son, Hal).

Mosko tries to get back to New Jersey about once a month. “It will always feel like home to me,” he said. One of his musical heroes is New Brunswick-based tenor saxophonist Jerry Weldon, “who I was fortunate enough to play with when I was in college. I played with him at Smalls the night before I left for basic train-

ing, and I make an effort to see him quite often when I’m back in Jersey.”

Weldon recalled meeting Mosko at a New Brunswick Jazz Project gig at the Hyatt Regency. “During the pandemic,” he said, “I put together a little band, and he was my trombonist. We played outside at Smalls, Tavern on Green, and Django.” When Weldon played in March at the Jazz & Blues Showcase in Cherry Hill, NJ, Mosko sat in with him. — SJ



Bridgemusik Jazz Festival

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Nyack Library, 59 South Broadway, Nyack, NY

» David Budway, piano; Bill Moring, bass; Tony Jefferson, drums; Tanya Witek, flute; Krystof Witek, violin

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» Albert Ahlf, piano; Bill Moring, bass; Tony Jefferson, drums; Bob Magnuson, saxophone; Mark Patterson, trombone; Bill Hughes, trombone.

For more information, email info@bridgemusik.com



Mitchell Seidel: A Photographer Who Liked to Catch Jazz Musicians ‘Out of the Spotlight’

He Was First Exposed to Jazz in High School by a Saxophonist/Educator Who Lived Next Door

For Mitchell Seidel,” wrote former *Jersey Jazz* Editor Tony Mottola in October 2007, “the most interesting images of jazz musicians aren’t found on stage, but on the sidelines—a backstage dressing room, a table out front—just about anywhere out of the spotlight.”

Seidel, who provided photographs to *Jersey Jazz* for more than two decades, passed away at Bayonne Medical Center on June 2, 2025, at the age of 68. Cause of death was congestive heart failure. Born in Newark, Seidel grew up in Springfield, NJ. He attended Jonathan Dayton Regional High

School and graduated from New York University with a Master’s Degree in Journalism. Before retiring, he spent most of his career at *The Star-Ledger* where he was a reporter and Assistant Photo Editor. He served on the Board of the New Jersey Jazz Society for many years in a variety of roles including VP, Music Programming, and Contributing Photo Editor.

Some of Seidel’s most memorable photographs cited in Mottola’s article, were: “a barefoot Dexter Gordon at home with his also barefoot son, Benjamin Webster Gordon ... Maxine Sullivan evincing a wide

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

and beaming smile ... a somewhat chagrined Mel Torme, embraced by a camera-mugging Buddy Rich.”

Mottola wrote that during Seidel’s high school years, “his first exposure to jazz came at the home of Springfield neighbor Morty Geist, a saxophonist who played with Ray McKinley’s big band.” Geist was also a music teacher in the Union, NJ, school district and a charter member of the National Association of Jazz Educators.

One of Seidel’s closest friends in the jazz world was trumpeter Mark Morganelli, who owns the Tarrytown, NY-based jazz club, Jazz Forum. Morganelli was introduced to Seidel in 1979 at NYU by Morganelli’s cousin, Michael J. Lysak, who worked for WNYU Radio. On Facebook, Morganelli described Seidel as “a fine photographer, who captured many memorable musical moments. We also collaborated on many album covers for Candid Records. Mitch and



Left: Photo of Mel Torme and Buddy Rich by Mitchell Seidel; Right: Photo by Mitchell Seidel at NJJS 50th Anniversary concert: From left, Derick Campos, Don Braden, Bill Crow.



I were rabid Mets fans, often attending games at Shea, then Citi Field. He took pictures at my wedding 40 years ago, and we regularly welcomed him here at Jazz Forum. He was just here for Bria Skonberg three weeks ago.”

In addition to *Jersey Jazz*, Seidel’s photographs appeared in such publications and websites as *Jazz Times*, *Jazz Journal International*, *Swing*

Journal, *Musica Jazz*, *DownBeat*, and *AllAboutJazz*. His photos have appeared on the covers of albums by Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie, Benny Carter, and many others. Photos by him have been exhibited at such venues as the Sweet Basil and Fat Tuesday’s jazz clubs, the studios at WBGO Radio, and Rutgers University’s Institute of Jazz Studies. (See “Pelote’s

Place” column by IJS’ Vincent Pelote, page 34, for more about Seidel).

Survivors include: his brother Scott; sister-in-law, Diane Cardinal-Seidel; stepmother Gerry Seidel; girlfriend of many years Elizabeth Bevan; several nephews and nieces; and his cat, Nikki.

Big Band in the Sky continued on page 43

PELOTE'S PLACE

BY VINCENT PELOTE



I decided to scrap my original idea for this month's column because of an unexpected development. On June 2, 2025, Mitchell Seidel died after a struggle with congestive heart failure. He was 68. Mitchell was a long-time member of the Board of the New Jersey Jazz Society and a Contributing Photo Editor to this magazine.

I have known Mitchell for over 40 years. He was a marvelous, talented photographer who worked for many years at the *Star-Ledger* in Newark just a few blocks from the Institute of Jazz Studies. Because he worked so close to the IJS (housed at that time in 110 Warren Street) and because our Associate Director, Ed Berger, and Archivist, Tad Hershorn, were both talented photographers, Mitch would often drop in to have lunch or just to hang out. We got to be friends, not because I was a photographer, but be-



Photo of
George Wein by
Mitchell Seidel

cause we both loved jazz and the New York Mets! In fact, the two of us took in a Mets game at Shea Stadium and had a blast! Last year he even contacted me with an offer of a Mets play-off ticket, which I refused because I thought the price was rather steep! As

for football, Mitch was a loyal Minnesota Vikings fan and took great delight in teasing me about my team, the New York Jets, every chance he got.

When the Institute moved into its new quarters on the fourth floor of the John Cotton Dana Library in 1994,

PELOTE'S PLACE

Mitch continued to make occasional appearances. He sometimes would show up for our research roundtable lectures or one of our concerts and would have his camera ready to do what I believed he loved more than anything. I know he left behind a treasure trove of jazz photographs. He graciously lent me a photo of George Wein when I needed one, and I am happy to say that the Institute does have a collection of his photos. The collection includes photos of Art Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie, Buddy Rich, Freddie Hubbard, Philly Joe Jones,

members of the Marsalis family, and George Duvivier. Also of note in this collection are images of Thelonious Monk's funeral, as well as photographs of the Newport Jazz Festival and Kool Jazz Festival (1977-1988).

I was happy to hear that Mitch moved to my hometown of Bayonne, NJ, just a few blocks from my house. I met his then wife Juanita and their neurotic dog; and my wife and I spent at least one delightful afternoon being entertained at the Seidel's home. I was sad to hear that they divorced.

In 2015 the New Jersey Jazz

Society honored me with its Jazz Advocate Award and Mitch was responsible for nominating me. It was a very nice gesture from someone who had a reputation for being a sourpuss. It was George Kanzler, the former *Star-Ledger* reporter (now an album reviewer for *Hot House Magazine*) who knew and worked with Mitch, and who summed him up best when he wrote: "Mitch was a complicated, often curmudgeonly guy who loved jazz a lot more than people."

Sadly, because of his staunch support of the current occupant of the White House, he and I were not on good terms when he died. I blocked him on Facebook after a rather contentious exchange between us and I feel bad about that. I would rather remember the good times we spent together, and if the Mets make it to the World Series this year, I hope it brings a smile to the old curmudgeon's face wherever he is.

“**I KNOW HE LEFT BEHIND
A TREASURE TROVE OF
JAZZ PHOTOGRAPHS.**”



**Sandy
Sasso**

SandySasso.com

for more Sandy info

CLASSIC VANGUARD JAZZ PIANO SESSIONS

BY JOE LANG

Classic Vanguard Jazz Piano Sessions (Mosaic - MD6-281) is the second set of recordings from between 1953 and 1958 on the Vanguard label released by Mosaic Records. Like the *Classic Vanguard Small Group Swing Sessions*, this six-disc set is a delight from start to finish. While the set, with one exception, has a pianist as leader or co-leader, the music has great variety in terms of group size and stylistic bent.

Disc One opens with nine tracks by the Jo Jones Trio with Ray Bryant on piano, Tommy Bryant on bass, and Jones on drums. Bryant is front and center as well as being the composer of four of the tunes. Jones' presence is always felt, and he takes the spotlight on "Ol' Man River," one of four standards on the session, the others being "Satin Doll," "Sweet Lorraine", and "Sometimes I'm Hap-



py." The original LP was titled *Jo Jones Plus Two* and was one of the last jazz releases from Vanguard.

Next up are the four tracks from *Sir Charles Thompson Quartet*, a 10-inch LP with Thompson on piano and the classic Count Basie rhythm section of Freddie Green on guitar, Walter Page on bass, and Jo Jones on drums. Thompson was grounded as a swing player, but

eventually incorporated bebop into his approach. The tunes are "Springtime in the Rockies," "Honeysuckle Rose," "These Foolish Things", and "Sweet Georgia Brown."

The second disc begins with a trio led by Thompson with guitarist Skeeter Best and bassist Aaron Bell as bandmates. There are six tracks on *Sir Charles Thompson Trio*, a Vanguard 10-inch LP: Thompson's "Sonny Howard's Blues," Best's "Best By Test," and four standards, "Hey There," "Love for Sale," "Stompin' at the Savoy", and "Mr. Sandman," a tune not often played in a jazz context.

The balance of Disc Two is taken from *Handful of Keys* by Bobby Henderson. Henderson and Vanguard producer John Hammond were acquaintances in the 1930s, but Henderson left the New York City scene to settle in Albany, NY. It

was during a trip back from Canada that Hammond stopped in Albany where he went to a local club to hear a pianist named Jody Bolden. Upon seeing and hearing Bolden, he realized that it was Henderson, who had changed his professional name. Hammond got Henderson to record *Handful of Keys*, a 10-tune program that includes six Fats Waller pieces, "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now," "Jitterbug Waltz," "Squeeze Me," "Blue Turning Grey Over You," "Ain't Misbehavin'", and "Handful of Keys;" Henderson's "Blues for Fats;" plus "Sugar," "Sweet Lorraine" and "Twelfth Street Rag." Henderson has influences from Fats, but developed his own style, one that is eclectic and full of energy and surprises.

Discs Three and Four contain groups of various sizes led by pianist Mel Powell. The variety of music and mix of musicians is well described in

CLASSIC VANGUARD JAZZ PIANO SESSIONS

the extensive liner notes by Thomas Cunniffe who also wrote the notes for the other Vanguard set. Powell started out as a classical pianist who eventually turned to jazz. He initially played stride and Dixieland. He then became a member of Benny Goodman's band where his exceptional pianism and composing talent earned him accolades. After graduating from Yale, where he studied with Paul Hindemith, he established himself as a classical composer. His recordings for Vanguard marked a return to jazz.

There were *Mel Powell Septet*, a 10-inch album, and three 12-inch LPs, *Borderline*, *Thingamagig*, and *Out on a Limb*. Among the musicians were trumpeter Buck Clayton; trombonist Henderson Chambers; clarinetist Edmund Hall; tenor saxophonist Paul Quinichette guitarist Steve Jordan; bassist Walter Page; and drummer Jimmy Crawford. Most of the tunes are standards with a few Powell originals included. The music here ranges from Dixieland to chamber jazz, and all of it is ear-catching.



The 1955 duo albums of Ellis Larkins and Ruby Braff are featured on Discs 5 and 6.

The duo albums by trumpeter Ruby Braff and pianist Ellis Larkins are on Discs Five and Six. Larkins was considered one of the premier accompanists for vocalists, and Braff captured much of the feeling and phrasing of fine vocalists in his approach to songs; so, the pairing was a natural one. They did two sessions in 1955 that resulted in a pair of 10-inch LPs, *Two Part Inventions in Jazz - Vol. 1* and *Two Part Inventions in Jazz - Vol. 2* and a 12-inch LP, *2 X 2*. The word magnificent

barely describes the music that they produced. Larkins and Braff were two of the most sensitive jazz musicians ever on the scene. They produced beautiful and engaging music that had a subtle swing and never resorted to any kind of histrionics. If you have never heard these sides, you are in for a treat. If you are familiar with them, revisiting them will bring back the smiles to your face that surely resulted from your initial exposure.

Mosaic has done a wonderful job of presenting this memorable music. The sound is typical of its wonderful attention to detail in offering music released in the most listenable manner. Cunniffe's extensive liner notes enhance the experience of enjoying this music. Kudos to Vanguard for having excellent taste in choosing what to record and to Mosaic for making these sounds available once again.

**MOSAIC HAS DONE A
WONDERFUL JOB OF PRESENTING
THIS MEMORABLE MUSIC.**

OTHER VIEWS

BY JOE LANG

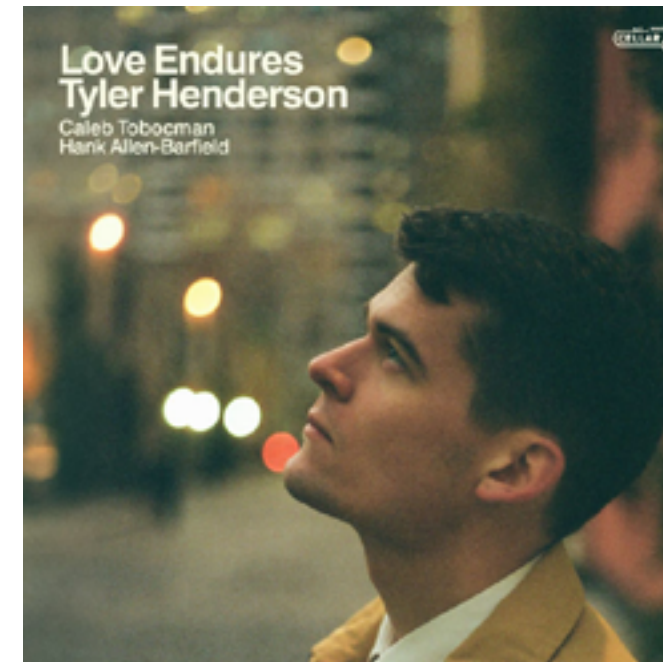
Over many decades, two tenor sax front lines have been favorites on the jazz scene. Al Cohn and Zoot Sims, Dexter Gordon and Gene Ammons, Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis and Johnny Griffin are among the most noted. **Cory Weeds** and **Jerry Weldon** fit right into this tradition as can be heard on *Cory Weeds Meets Jerry Weldon* (Cellar Music - 102724). Cellar Music Group owner Weeds, brought Weldon out to Vancouver from New York City to join him and a wonderfully supportive local rhythm section of pianist Miles Black, bassist John Lee, and drummer Jesse Cahill for a swinging nine-tune session. They explored six jazz compositions—Eddie Davis’ “Hey Lock!,” Clifford Jordan’s “Princess and “Toy,” Freddie Redd’s “Olé,” Cedar Walton’s “One Flight Down”, and Weeds’ own 323 Shuttle;” plus three standards, “Just As Though You Were

Here,” “Lady Be Good”, and “I Had the Craziest Dream.” Weeds and Weldon fit together perfectly, creating what one hopes will be more than a one-time partnership. cellarlive.com

The **Eliot Zigmund Quartet** has a recently released an album titled *Golden* (New Direction Records) that features drummer Zigmund with trumpeter/flugelhornist Rick Savage, pianist David Janeway and bassist David Kingsnorth playing an 11-tune program. The selections include two originals by Zigmund, four by Savage and three by Janeway plus Thelonious Monk’s “Jackie-ing” and “The Touch of Your Lips. Zigmund has done a fine job of assembling a tight quartet that plays the material with an infectious intensity. Savage is the main focus of attention, while Janeway offers many fine solo interludes as Zigmund and Kingsnorth

provide strong rhythmic support. While most of the tunes are original pieces by the band members, they are nicely conceived and feel comfortably familiar as they evolve. *Golden* does indeed produce musical gold. eliotzigmundquartet.com

Pianist **Tyler Henderson** has, in a relatively short time, made his presence known on the Big Apple jazz



scene. Having arrived from Texas to study at Juilliard in 2019, he now has added a Master’s Degree and played with many front line artists such as John Pizzarelli, Joe Magnarelli, Rodney Green, and Grant Stewart. *Love Endures* (Cellar Music - 111024) is his first release as a leader, and it is an impressive debut. He has support from bassist Caleb Tobocman and drummer Hank Allen-Barfield for a 10-song program that is split between standards such as “On a Clear Day,” and “I’ll Never Smile Again,” and five of his own tunes that fit seamlessly among the familiar material. Henderson has a fertile improvisational mindset, making the listener feel he is further along in his development than is the reality. *Love Endures* offers music of enduring quality that you will be drawn to immediately. Henderson was a *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star in May 2021. cellarlive.com

A new album by the **Bill Mays Trio** is always guaranteed to be filled with great playing and brilliant improvisations. His longstanding partnership with bassist Dean Johnson and drummer Ron Vincent has created a trio that has empathy beyond description. The new album is *Soundscape* (No Blooze Music - 6), an eclectic mix of originals and standards, plus Claire Fischer's "Interlude for Piano," a tribute to pianist Terry Trotter, and "Waltz for Bill," a song written for Mays by bassist

Tommy Cecil with whom Mays recorded two delightful duo albums of songs by Stephen Sondheim. Mays is ever full of surprises, while Johnson and Vincent sparkle throughout, most notably on one of the Mays originals, "You've Forgotten Me." This is an album from which you will find new delights each time you listen to it. billmays.net

When you hear the name **Bill Mays**, you probably think of one of the best jazz pianists extant. Well, give a listen

to *Bill Mays Sings* (No Blooze Music - 5), and you will discover there another side to Mays as an engaging vocalist. The key to putting over a song most effectively is in the phrasing. As a jazz musician, Mays understands this and, while he does not have a classic voice and sometimes kind of talk sings, his phrasing is spot on. In addition, Mays has a terrific sense of humor and it comes through in his song selection and execution. He has included Dave Frishberg's "Do You Miss New York," Tommy Wolf's "I'm Always Drunk in San Francisco," Red Mitchell's "I'm a Homebody", and Murray Grand's "April in Fairbanks," each of which has a humorous underpinning. He also has created some clever lyrics on "Have You Heard Hank Jones?"/"Have You Met Miss Jones?" where he combines the original Rodgers and Hart lyric with his own paean to the great

pianist Hank Jones. He also has added some special lyrics to "I Love a Piano," and has written the lyrics for "The Coronavirus Song," a commentary on the lockdown using the tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." This is just a sampling of the delights to be found on this recording which has been taken from various live appearances with a variety of accompaniment, many having his piano as the sole support. billmays.net

Just the Three of Us (Pacific Coast Jazz - 25614) is an impressive undertaking by trumpeter **Alan Chabert**. He has combined his trumpet artistry with his ability to also play piano and has produced a 10-song program on which he plays the trumpet with his right hand while comping on the piano with his left hand with accompaniment by bassist Beldon Bullock and drummer Jon Di

 **BILL MAYS IS EVER FULL OF SURPRISES,
WHILE JOHNSON AND VINCENT
SPARKLE THROUGHOUT.** 

OTHER VIEWS

Fiore. The selections include “Well You Needn’t,” “Poinciana,” “For All We Know,” “Mysterioso” and two takes on “I Will Say Goodbye.” His choice of two Thelonious Monk tunes—“Well You Needn’t” and “Mysterioso” is interesting. The latter is a particularly challenging selection. There is no overdubbing. This is not a gimmick recording, rather a serious blending of Chaubert’s two instruments to produce some relaxed jazz that makes for a pleasant listening experience. [amazon.com](#)

If you dig straight-ahead, swinging takes on songs from the Great American Songbook, *Standards Vol. 2* (Jojo Records - 011) by Israeli guitarist **Yotam Silberstein** should be right up your alley. Silberstein is joined by bassist John Patitucci and drummer Billy Hart for eight Songbook tunes, “Blue Gardenia,” “Just



As Though You Were Here,” “Love Thy Neighbor,” “Answer Me, My Love,” “Delilah,” “Portrait of Jennie,” “Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams”, and the Girl Next Door.” In addition, they move over to the jazz world for Sonny Red’s “Bluesville” and “Tenor Madness” by Sonny Rollins with George Coleman’s tenor sax added on the latter. Silberstein’s fluent lines are nicely supported

by Patitucci and Hart, two of the premier players on their instruments. *Standards Vol 2* is likely to become a standard part of those albums in your library, bearing repeated hearings. [jojorecords.com](#)

Many jazz musicians have found a fertile resource for inspiration in classical music. *The Brahms Project* (Heartcore Records - 31) by guitarist **Kurt Rosenwinkel** and pianist **Jean-Paul Brodbeck** is a spectacular blending of their jazz artistry with 10 pieces composed by Johannes Brahms. Brodbeck, who studied classical piano before expanding his musical horizons, has arranged an eclectic program of Brahms compositions that include pieces written for solo piano, cello, voice, and orchestra for the quartet, which includes Rosenwinkel on guitar, Brodbeck on piano, Lukas Traxel on

bass, and Jorge Rossy on drums. The arrangements are full of intensity. Brahms melodic creations combined with his harmonic sophistication provide the base for the improvisations that flow from this superb quartet. Listen to the way that they play “Wiegenlied,” most commonly known as “Brahms’ Lullaby,” and it will forever change the way that you probably think of it as simply a song primarily used to sing a baby to sleep. Another interesting aspect of this recording is the way in which Rosenwinkel’s lines sometimes make it sound as if he was playing a flute. Expose some of your friends who prefer classical music to *The Brahms Project* and they might find that you have expanded their musical horizons. [heartcore-records.com](#)

One of the most exciting voices to arrive on the scene is that of **Anäis**

OTHER VIEWS



Reno. *Lady of the Lavender Mist* (Club44 Records - 4207) is her second studio recording. Now 21 years old, she has been performing since the age of eight. Her first release, *Lovesome Thing*, a collection of songs by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, was recorded when she was 17, and she sang on that album with a maturity that was amazing. The new release finds her in

the company of Peter Bernstein on guitar, David Wong on bass, and Joe Farnsworth on drums. The songs include, “Autumn Leaves,” sung in both French and English, “When Lights Are Low,” “Gravy Waltz,” “Lady of the Lavender Mist,” an Ellington song to which Reno added the lyrics, “I’ll Remember April,” “Take Love Easy,” “Poinciana,” “Round Midnight”, and “Kiss and Run.” It is a program that doesn’t rely on a lot of the same old, same old material that is so often found on vocal albums. The jazz influence in Reno’s vocalizing has become more pronounced, and she is a pure pleasure to hear. The presence of Bernstein is a bonus as he is a fine accompanist and a superior soloist. Wong and Farnsworth keep it all together. Anais Reno is a star on the rise! club44records.com (Reno was a *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star in March

2022, and she will be performing at the October 5th NJJS Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert in Madison, NJ).

Kieran Brown is a welcome addition to the vocal scene. On her debut album, *Loving You* (Cellar Music - 110725), Brown is accompanied by pianist Tyler Henderson, and, on most tracks, bassist Joey Ranieri and drummer Joe Peri. There are other instrumentalists on various selections from the 10-tune program, which includes eight standards, such as “You’re Gon-

na Hear From Me,” “Do It Again,” “Emily”, and “Loving You”. There is also a pair of originals. Brown has a smooth, mellow voice, and her jazz sense is always present. “Loving You” is a moving ballad from Stephen Sondheim’s *Passion*, and this is the only jazz style version that I have heard of this song, a nice variation from the norm. Special note should be given to Henderson’s sensitive accompaniment. Brown’s debut album is one that should portend many more to come from her. cellarlive.com

“**KIERAN BROWN HAS A SMOOTH, MELLOW VOICE, AND HER JAZZ SENSE IS ALWAYS PRESENT.**”

OTHER VIEWS

England has proven to be a fertile ground for jazz singers. The critically acclaimed **Emma Smith** has issued her first U.S. release, *Bitter Orange* (La Reserve Records). With aid from pianist Jamie Safir, bassist Conor Chaplin, and drummer Luke Tomlinson, Smith sings 10 standards, such as “I’m the Greatest Star,” “Frim Fram Sauce,” Bewitched Bothered and Bewildered”, “Tonight”, and adding an original by herself and Safir, “What Took You So Long.” Smith has a distinctive style, with interesting phrasing and jazz sensitivity, often selecting tempos that are unusual for the song. For instance, she swings “Tonight,” while taking “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered” at an intensely slow pace. Her inclusion of such rarely heard songs as “Make It Another Old Fashioned Please” and “I’m in the Middle of a Muddle” shows that her knowledge of interesting songs that have been ignored for too

long is impressive. Safir’s accompaniment fits her choices perfectly. Welcome to these shores Emma Smith! emmasmithmusic.co.uk

Carrie Jackson (an NJJS Board member) has a robust new album, *Jersey Bounce* (Arabesque Jazz - 232). Jackson has compiled an eclectic program of 11 songs for this recording on which pianist/organist Radam Schwartz, who penned the arrangements, is joined by Rodrigo Romero on tenor sax, Charlie Sigler on guitar, Takashi Otsuka on bass, and Gordon Lane on drums. The album opens with a swinging take on “Jersey Bounce,” Other selections include a couple of Beatles songs, “And I Love Him” and “In My Life,” Bruce Springsteen’s “Fire,” Al Green’s “Let’s Stay Together,” and three standards—“In the Evening When the Sun Comes Down,” “Give Me the Simple Life” and “When I Fall in Love”, plus two songs with music by

“EMMA SMITH HAS A DISTINCTIVE STYLE, WITH INTERESTING PHRASING AND JAZZ SENSITIVITY.”

Schwartz, “Evening for Two,” a duet with Kuumba Frank Lacy, and “Behind the Wind.” Jackson is in fine vocal form, varying the pacing throughout. She puts her unique touch on each selection with her jazzy phrasing making for a consistently interesting listening experience. (cjrecords.com)

For *Let’s Fall in Love* (Arden House Music - 202501), vocalist **Judy Whitmore** is backed by a terrific big band led by Chris Walden who also supplied the arrangements. The program digs into the Great American Songbook for classics such as “I’ll

Take Romance,” “All of You,” “A Time for Love”, and “Taking a Chance on Love”. Walden’s charts for a big band are played by top drawer Los Angeles musicians, and a full string section. They lay down a luscious bed of sound for Whitmore to lend her smooth vocalizing on each selection. Josh Nelson is a standout accompanist with his sympathetic pianism. This pop/jazz vocal album recalls the times when recordings like this were at the core of non-rock popular music. It is good to realize that there are still artists who are willing to venture into this territory. judywhitmore.com

Jack Kleinsinger: Producer of More Than 300 Highlights in Jazz Concerts

“I’ve Had Experiences That Don’t Happen to the Average Lawyer”

JACK KLEINSINGER, WHO DIED JUNE 11, 2025, at the age of 88, due to complications from a fall, produced more than 300 Highlights in Jazz concerts in New York. The first one was in 1973 at Theatre de Lys in Greenwich Village. The artists included tenor saxophonists Zoot Sims and Al Cohn, bassist Dr. Lyn Christie, drummer Bobby Rosengarden, trumpeter Joe Newman, guitarists Bucky Pizzarelli and Gene Bertoncini, and special guest, clarinetist Phil Bodner.

The last Highlights in Jazz concert was held on March 27, 2025, at the Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library in Hewlett, NY. The performers were pianist/vocalist Daryl Sherman,

bassist Harvie S, and multireedist Scott Robinson. Kleinsinger wasn’t able to attend because of his fall.

The final Highlights in Jazz concert, with Kleinsinger, took place on February 23, 2023, celebrating

the series’ 50th anniversary. Held at Manhattan’s BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center, it featured NEA Jazz Master vocalist Sheila Jordan, guitarists Russell Malone and Roni Ben-Hur, bassists Jay Leonhart and Harvie S, drummer Danny Gottlieb, and trombonist Art Baron.

In the 1970s, Kleinsinger was an Assistant Attorney General in New York City. He was also an avid jazz fan. According to Highlights in Jazz

spokesman Jim Eigo, Pizzarelli and Sims suggested to Kleinsinger that he buy a club or rent a hall to put on a concert. They apparently thought that would “get the jazz bug out of his system.” According to Eigo, “putting on a show did nothing to quell his enthusiasm for the music.”

Kleinsinger’s concerts were often covered by *The New York Times* jazz critic, John S. Wilson. One of those Wilson articles reported on a salute to trumpeter Roy Eldridge, held in December 1979 at New York University’s Loeb Auditorium. The concert, Wilson wrote, “was an overstuffed Christmas stocking, flowing over with jazz goodies. In addition to Mr. Eldridge, those who took part in the tribute included Clark Terry, the flugelhornist and singer; Slam Stewart, the humming bassist; the singer Maxine Sullivan; and (drum-



Jack Kleinsinger at a Highlights in Jazz concert with, from left, Dick Hyman, Derek Smith, Ken Peplowski, and Houston Person.

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

mer) Panama Francis and his nine-piece band, the Savoy Sultans.

“Mr. Eldridge, who has been playing at Jimmy Ryan’s for the last 10 years, is rarely heard in New York outside that club. For anyone who might have feared that he has been absorbed in Ryan’s Dixieland atmosphere, his performance at his ‘Salute’ was reassuring. At 68 years of age, Little Jazz, as Mr. Eldridge is known, is still playing a trumpet that crackles with excitement, spitting out phrases made up of bright cullets of sound and getting a gorgeously dark, burry tone when he goes down in the lower register on a ballad such as ‘I Can’t Get Started.’”

Kleinsinger grew up in the Bronx and graduated from the New Lincoln School in Manhattan. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wisconsin, and a law degree from St. John’s University.

“I’ve had experiences that don’t happen to the average lawyer,” Kleinsinger once said. “I never became a movie star or star on Broadway, but with the concerts, I got half-way there. I got to be in the business. I’m certainly not unhappy with how my life turned out. It’s been a good ride: Look at the fun I’m having!”

February 5, 1998, was proclaimed Jack Kleinsinger and Highlights in Jazz Day by the city of New York. Kleinsinger also was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from the University of North Florida, which houses his archives in the UNF Digital Commons Jack Kleinsinger Library. The collection includes live recordings of every Highlights in Jazz concert and more than 2,000 documents including photos, reviews, and programs.

No information was available regarding survivors.



Al Foster: A Drummer Who Could ‘Really Swing a Band’

“Who’s Gonna Turn Down a Job with Miles Davis?”

DRUMMER AL FOSTER, WHO PASSED away on May 28, 2025, at the age of 82, was probably best known for his collaborations with Miles Davis. However, he also played with several other jazz giants including trumpeter Blue Mitchell and saxophonists Joe Henderson, Jim-

my Heath, and Sonny Rollins.

Foster’s first professional performance happened in 1964 when he was hired to be part of Mitchell’s quintet at Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem. He also recorded on Mitchell’s 1964 Blue Note album, *The Thing To Do*, staying with Mitchell for three years before leaving to play with pianist Larry Willis and trumpeter Hugh Masekela.

Davis hired Foster in 1972 for his fusion band, succeeding Jack DeJohnette. Foster appeared on Davis’ 1973 Columbia album, *In Concert: Live at Philharmonic Hall*. In *Miles: The Autobiography*, written with Quincy Troupe (Simon and Schuster: 1989), Davis said Foster “knocked me out because he had such a groove, and he would just lay it right in there.”

In a 2009 interview with *All-AboutJazz*, Foster indicated that

he wasn't all that thrilled with the funky jazz-rock that Davis was playing when he joined the band. "I never cared for what I did with him in the '70s," he said, "but who's gonna turn down a job with Miles Davis?" He stayed with Davis, though, up until the trumpeter's death in 1991.

After a brief stint with Rollins in the late '60s, Foster returned to the tenor saxophonist's band in 1978 and worked with him intermittently until the mid-'90s. In a phone inter-

view with *The New York Times*' Hank Shteamer, shortly after Foster's death, Rollins said, "I could never be disappointed playing with Al Foster. He was always playing something which I related to ... Al had a lot of what it took to really swing a band."

In the mid-1990s, Foster headed a band that included saxophonist Chris Potter, pianist David Kikoski, and bassist Doug Weiss. Weiss, who played with Foster for 20 years, posted a tribute to him on Face-

book. Pointing out that he was 16 years old when he first heard Foster play, Weiss wrote: "You were playing with Miles in Chicago. I saw you the next summer with Sonny Rollins. I never thought I would get to play in your band someday, or even more important, become your friend.

"You heard something in my playing that you liked," he continued, "and you gave me a chance when I really needed one. All those years we played together, all I wanted to do was support your vision ... You had this way of feeling what was happening on the bandstand that's really unlike anything I've ever experienced."

Drummer Joe Farnsworth remembered getting to know Foster when Farnsworth was a sophomore in college in 1987. "He'd come to see me play sometimes, and he was always incredibly supportive," Farnsworth told *Jersey Jazz*'s Jay Sweet.

"For a young musician, that meant everything." What struck Farnsworth about Foster's playing was "just how happy he looked when he played—completely immersed. And then came the dynamics—His soft playing was so soft, and when he got loud, it hit hard. That contrast was powerful." (See Sweet's interview with Farnsworth on page 18).

Foster also recorded with a group called ScoLoHoFo, a quartet co-led by him, guitarist John Scofield, tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, and bassist Dave Holland. In a review of the band's 2003 Blue Note album, *Oh!*, Paul Abella of *AllAboutJazz* wrote of "Al Foster's steady-as-a-rock drumming," adding that, "No one hogs the spotlight, and no one is relegated to the back of the stage. *Oh!* is four of jazz's best going at it, and we, the listeners, are clearly the winners."

From 2010 until his death, Fos-


**THERE'S ALWAYS BEEN
SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT
THE DRUMMING OF AL FOSTER.** 

ter was most closely associated with the Upper West Side jazz club, Smoke. His last two albums as a leader, *Inspirations and Dedications* (2019) and *Reflections* (2022) were recorded on the club's Smoke Sessions label. Reviewing *Reflections* for *JazzTimes*, Ken Micallef wrote: "There's always been something special about the drumming of now-octogenarian Al Foster. His light but firm touch, spacious yet driving time phrasing, and buoyant drum tone set him apart as much as any of the drummers he worshipped coming up." Foster's last live performance was at Smoke on January 18, 2025, his 82nd birthday.

Foster is survived by his wife, Bonnie Rose Steinberg; four daughters, Kierra Denise Foster Ba, Simone Foster, Michelle Morris, and Monique Magestro; five grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Trumpeter Rob Henke: 'A True Renaissance Man' *"He Elevated Everyone Around Him"*

BY JAY SWEET

ROB HENKE, WHO PASSED AWAY LAST month at the age of 59, was an immensely talented trumpeter, composer, actor, educator, and beloved friend. His impact was felt far and wide, across bandstands, rehearsal studios, theater stages, and beyond. For several months, I had the pleasure of playing alongside Rob in a monthly rehearsal band held at my studio. That experience led to a memorable performance in Red Bank, NJ. From the very first downbeat, Rob's spirited energy and profound musicality were unmistakable. Though our conversations were brief, his warmth, vitality, and authenticity came through with clarity and grace. Although I was fortunate

to have known him only briefly, the impression he left was unforgettable.

To better understand the depth of Rob's musical journey and life, I reached out to Mike Kaplan, the saxophonist and bandleader who led those monthly sessions and who knew Rob for decades.



"I can say without hesitation that Rob Henke was on more gigs with me than any other musician I've worked with in my 50 years of playing," Kaplan said. "Rob grew up in Lombard, Illinois, and moved to New Jersey to attend William Paterson's Jazz Performance Studies program just months after high school. We first met at a gig with a local Paterson-area salsa band called Orquesta Royal. He was already an incredibly dedicated trumpeter—he'd buzz on his mouthpiece during car rides to gigs, and it quickly became clear that Rob was not only a great musician but a thoughtful, intelligent, funny, and original human being.

"Over the years, we played together in a wide range of musical contexts—some strange, some strictly for the paycheck, but most were musically rewarding. Rob helped make them so. He brought a singu-

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

lar combination of intense focus, irreverence, open ears, creativity, and musical integrity to every setting. He served as lead trumpeter in my Mike Kaplan Nonet for more than 30 years, beginning in 1988. I wrote music with him in mind; his sound and approach were that unique. He also contributed his compositions and arrangements to our book, which provided an engaging and effective contrast to my writing. His versatility was remarkable.

“Rob played a diverse range of music,” Kaplan continued, “from avant-garde and experimental to Latin jazz, as well as commercial gigs and weddings. He was a long-standing member and musical director of Daoud Williams’ Spirit of Life Ensemble, which toured Europe and held a weekly Monday night residency at Sweet Basil in New York City. Rob was also a founding member and

composer in Diane Moser’s Composers Big Band based in Montclair, NJ.”

In addition to his musical accomplishments, Henke was a true renaissance man. A gifted visual artist, his sketches were used for several album covers. He was also a dedicated actor, performing with Leese Walker’s *Strike Anywhere and Lunatic Fringe* (an improv ensemble), as well as other theater groups.

Trombonist Ben Williams, one of Henke’s close friends and collaborators, also shared some heartfelt memories. “I loved playing with Rob,” Williams said, “because he was always so present in the music, and he elevated everyone around him. We shared many gigs, and so many moments stick with me. One that I’ll never forget was his rule when we drove to jobs: If we passed a batting cage, we had to stop and take swings. The image of the

two of us, tux shirts rolled up, big grins, taking hacks at flying pitches—that’s the kind of joy Rob carried with him. He will be missed.”

Another close friend was pianist Matt King. “Rob Henke,” said King, “was uncompromisingly artistic and compulsively creative. While his trumpet playing evidenced the influence of Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Kenny Wheeler, and Lester Bowie, among others, he had his unique approach to music and everything else. He never played a passionless note in his life, and his ‘joie de vivre’ elevated all those around him, on and off stage. His passing is a significant loss for New Jersey’s jazz community and the world.”

Henke’s wife, Natascha, passed away in May of 2025, after fighting a year-long battle with ovarian cancer. He is survived by his mother, Matilda.



Rigmor Newman: A Champion of Jazz and Civil Rights

*She Accompanied Her Husband,
Trumpeter Joe Newman, on Tours
of the Jim Crow South*

RIGMOR NEWMAN, WHO DIED ON April 26, 2025, at the age of 86, from complications of Parkinson’s disease, was a champion of both jazz and civil rights. Originally a Swed-

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

ish singer and beauty queen, she arrived in New York in the early 1960s after marrying trumpeter Joe Newman. At a time when interracial marriage was against the law in several states, she accompanied Newman on tour with Count Basie's band on trips throughout the Jim Crow South.

"She was absolutely aware of the symbolism," said her daughter, Annie Newman, in an interview with *The New York Times*' Alex Williams. "It felt very natural to her to do what she thought was right."

Her activism was never more apparent than in 1960 when she and Joe appeared on the cover of his Metronome album, *Counting Five in Sweden*. "They posed together," said Annie Newman, "because that was her statement about her belief in

civil rights. She showed what she believed through her actions."

Newman also served as the Executive Director of Jazz Interactions, a nonprofit organization, which Joe Newman helped create in the early 1960s to promote jazz in the New York area.

After divorcing Joe Newman in the mid-1970s, Rigmor Newman began managing the dance duo, The Nicholas Brothers. She also began a relationship with Harold Nicholas. She produced concerts with Newport Jazz Festival founder George Wein and partnered with him on the opening of the New York version of his Boston club, Storyville, on East 58th Street, eventually taking over the venue.

In addition to her daughter, Annie, Newman is survived by a sister, Britt-Marianne Hayes, and a grandson.



Julia Hyman, Sculptor and Wife of NEA Jazz Master Dick Hyman

After Living in New Jersey and New York, the Hymans Moved to Venice, FL, in 1989.

JULIA ANN HYMAN, A SCULPTOR AND wife of NEA Jazz Master pianist, Dick Hyman, passed away on June 16, 2025 in Venice, FL, at the age of 96.

After studying at Parsons School of Design in New York City in the late 1940s, Julia worked for Terrytoons, an animation studio in New Rochelle, NY, hand drawing Mighty Mouse cartoons. Her talent in an-

imation ultimately led to a career in interior design and renovation.

The Hymans lived in Tenafly and Montclair, NJ for 14 years and then moved to the West Village. During that period, Julia studied sculpture at the Art Students League under artist José Mariano de Creeft. This began her career as a sculptor, which she continued to pursue for the rest of her life.

In 1989, the Hymans moved to Venice, FL. They owned two houses, side by side. One they lived in. The other contained Julia's sculpture studio and Dick's recording studio and music collections. Some of Julia's sculptures are on display at the Venice Art Center.

The Hymans were married for 77 years. Julia is survived by Dick, who is 98; three children: Judy, Beth, and David; three grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

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