

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
NEW JERSEY JAZZ SOCIETY

JerseyJazz

SEPTEMBER 2025
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FESTIVAL MONTH

...

MONTCLAIR

...

CENTRAL JERSEY

...

WEST ORANGE

...

MIDDLESEX COUNTY



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ON THE COVER — *Clockwise, from top left: Abena Koomson Davis (Somerville), Birsa Chatterjee (Montclair), Leigh Pilzer (Metuchen), Matthew Whitaker (West Orange). LEIGH PILZER PHOTO BY SUZETTE NIESS.*

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ALL THAT'S JAZZ

BY CYDNEY HALPIN



After several years with a Board opening, I'm delighted to announce that NJJS has a new Executive Vice President: Elizabeth Kavlakian.

Born and educated in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Kavlakian is well-versed in the world of non-profit management and brings her skills in public relations, marketing, and development to NJJS. Steeped in the call for social responsibility, she also shares her talents with The Elizabeth Coalition in Elizabeth, NJ, and the Argentinian organization Pata Pila.

No stranger to jazz, her son Alejandro (Alex) is a drummer and a sophomore in Jazz Studies at Montclair State; and performed as part of this past June's LIVE! concert Rising Stars Opening Act. She also has a younger son Maximo who loves all things cars.

We look forward to the energy, ideas, and expertise that Eliza-

beth will bring to NJJS. Please join me in welcoming her to the Board.

SAVE THE DATES! The Jersey Jazz LIVE! concerts begin again on Sunday, October 5th with Songbook singer Anaïs Reno and pianist Jeb Patton. Mark your calendars and plan on spending the afternoon Swingin'! Please see page 08 for more complete details about this concert.

The November 5th LIVE! will showcase the NJJS 2025 Scholarship winners Joseph Foglia and Nate Tota (Performance), Matthew Cline and Aiden Woods (Composition), and Kyra Cioffi and Sophia Varughese (Vocal Performance) alongside industry professionals, under the musical direction of NJJS Advisor, saxophonist and educator Don Braden. Come support these amazing musicians and get to know the future of jazz.

Our 2025 programming will con-

clude on December 7th with our Annual Meeting featuring the dynamic guitar duo of Frank Vignola and Vinny Raniolo. These cats are NJJS fan favorites and are the perfect "gift" to give yourself and friends for the holidays!

If you've attended these events, you know they're a great value and that the talent of our featured performers and the showcased Rising Stars is incredible. If you haven't yet attended a LIVE! event, come be a part of the musical celebration, and bring a friend!

Admission is \$15 members/\$20 non-members/\$5 Student/Child. Doors open at 2:30 p.m., concerts begin at 3:00 p.m. Refreshments are available for purchase. Madison Community Arts Center, 10 Kings Road, Madison, NJ. Free street parking is available.

More complete details regarding each event will be in subsequent issues of *Jersey Jazz* and on our website njjs.org. We look for-

ward to seeing you this fall at Jersey Jazz LIVE! performances.

Pops Comes to Life in Corona, Queens." Don't miss out! Join us for an Exclusive Excursion to the Louis Armstrong House Museum & Archives on Friday, October 17th. The event includes the following:

» *Round trip coach to Corona,*



ALL THAT'S JAZZ

- Queens from the Morris Museum in Morristown. 9:30am Departure—5:30pm Return*
-
- » *Admission to LAHM & Archives*
 - » *Private archives presentation by “Pops”expert, LAHM Archivist, jazz scholar, and musician Ricky Riccardi on the 100th Anniversary of Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five.*
 - » *Box lunch in LAHM gardens.*
 - » *Pre & post event guided discussion*
 - » *Free covered parking at the Morris Museum*
-

The historic Louis Armstrong House tour requires the ability to climb two sets of steep stairs and

stand for approximately 45 minutes.

Event price: \$88.00 per person (including \$3 handling fee per ticket). Participation is limited. Advance payments and reservations required.

To purchase tickets go to the njjs.org website homepage and click on the red “Donate” button. The page will say “Donate.” Please reference “LAHM trip” in the “memo” line and provide your contact information where requested.

Please contact Elizabeth Kavlakian at vicepresident@njjs.org if paying by check or if you have any questions.

September is jazz Festival Month in New Jersey, and this issue of *Jersey Jazz* is chock full of information on all the amazing talent that will be on outdoor (and indoor) stages this season.

NJJS will have a booth at the Montclair Festival Saturday, Sep-

tember 13, selling vinyl records, CDs, and books—generously donated by patrons, whose proceeds benefit NJJS programming. Stop by and say hello and maybe you’ll find the perfect gift for someone, or the perfect treat for yourself! Please see page 32 for more details.

We’ll also be part of the Middlesex Festival supporting Metuchen programming on Saturday, September 27th. No NJJS merchandise will be sold at this event. Please see page 40 for more details.

The New Jersey Jazz Society would like to thank the Morris Museum and Jess Van Nostrand, Director of Public Engagement and Curatorial Strategies,, Laurel Smith—Manager, Bickford Theater, Lewis Perlmutter—Technical Director Bickford Theater, Jimmy Warren—Assistant Techni-

cal Director, and all the other staff and volunteers who made “Jazz on the Back Deck” 2025 another smash season! We’re grateful for their hard work and commitment to providing jazz programming in a fun environment—for the sixth summer in a row!

Don’t miss the last shows of the season: Mike Davis and the New Wonders, Thursday, September 4, and Evan Sherman, Saturday, September 20th, both at 7:30 p.m.

We look forward to the upcoming indoor season and thank all involved in advance for supporting and showcasing jazz! For more information and tickets visit [morris-museum.org/performances & film](http://morris-museum.org/performances&film).

In what seems like the “blink of an eye,” summer has come and gone, kids of all ages are going back to school, and the start of fall is upon us ... and the holidays will be here before we know it!



September Festivals Full of Rising Stars

As we cover the September festivals in this issue of *Jersey Jazz*, we are witnessing the continuation of a very encouraging trend -- the blending of youth and experience in many of the performing bands.

Nowhere is that more apparent than at the Montclair Jazz Festival where the Jazz House Collective is paying tribute to the late, great saxophonist James Moody. The saxophone section will be a mix of three veterans -- alto saxophonist Bruce Williams, tenor saxophonist Mike Lee, and baritone saxophonist Jason Marshall, joined by young alto saxophonist Zoe Obadia and tenor saxophonist Birsa Chatterjee.

As JHC Director, trumpeter Na-

than Eklund, pointed out, "There's something special about having some of these students who have come up through this program. Both Zoe and Birsa have spent tons of time studying with Bruce and Mike. To see them sitting next to each other in the section, kind of working as professionals together, is a really cool experience to witness."

Obadia was a *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star in September 2022, and a member of the JHC trumpet section, Kal Ferretti, was a *JJ* Rising Star in May 2025. Chatterjee was the first winner of the James Moody Scholarship in 2015, and you may remember him as a sideman with Bria Skonberg if you attended her July Jazz on the Back

Deck concert at the Morris Museum.

Another blended band at the Montclair Jazz Festival will be Christian McBride's Ursa Major Quintet featuring four young artists -- tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover, pianist Mike King, guitarist Ely Perlman, and drummer Savannah Harris. Perlman calls Ursa Major "an amazing platform because we play each other's music. It's a real learning experience."

At the Central Jersey Jazz Festival in Somerville, trumpeter Jon Faddis will lead his Next Generation Quartet featuring three young musicians -- guitarist Andrew Latona; his brother, drummer Christopher Latona; and bassist Jayla Chee.

Plenty of young emerging artists will be on display at other festivals. In West Orange, Dr. Anthony Branker will lead the Rutgers John Coltrane Ensemble. And the Middlesex County Jazz Festival will feature

the Woodbridge High School Jazz Choir and the Metuchen High School Jazz Combo, Ensemble and Orchestra. A sextet from Metuchen High School performed as the Rising Stars opening act at last May's Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert in Madison and amazed the audience with an explosive performance of Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo a la Turk". All six of the performers displayed outstanding musicianship and stage presence, but special kudos went to pianist Daniel Afkhami for his skillful mastery of this very complex piece.

Another *Jersey Jazz* Rising Star, pianist Caelan Cardello (January 2022) has just released his first album, *Chapter One* on Jazz Bird Records. Joe Lang reviews it on page 55 and says Cardello's playing "grabs your attention and never lets it go."

All good signs for the future of jazz.

ABOUT NJJS

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

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

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Anaïs Reno: ‘Among the Top Young Interpreters of the Great American Songbook’

“Because Everyone Loves This Music, It Has a Natural Way of Bringing People Together”

Vocalist Anaïs Reno recently released her second studio recording, *Lady of the Lavender Mist* (Club44 Records), and *Jersey Jazz*’s Joe Lang wrote: “She is a pure pleasure to hear.” *AllAboutJazz*’s Pierre Giroux added that Reno, “continues to strengthen her reputation among the top young interpreters of the Great American Songbook.”

When Reno performs at the October 5th Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert at the Madison (NJ) Community Arts

Center, she will be singing some selections from her new album, which includes such standards as “Autumn Leaves” and “I’ll Remember April” as well as the title track, a Duke Ellington tune to which she added lyrics. But, she’ll also be singing songs from her first album, *Lovesome Thing*, which celebrates the music of Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. And there will be some original music as well.

Reno was featured as a Rising Star in the March 2022 issue of *Jer-*



PHOTO BY SOPHIE ELGORT

JERSEY JAZZ LIVE!

sey Jazz, and, in that article, she talked about the magic of the Ellington/Strayhorn songbook. “I became very aware of how human, complex, and beautiful it is,” she said. “You have the beautiful, romantic ethereal quality—some of those Strayhorn ballads like ‘A Flower is a Lovesome Thing’ and, of course, ‘Lush Life’. Then you have those wonderful Ellington tunes that we all know. And then there are some more obscure ones.”

When she was eight years old, Reno (now 21) began taking voice lessons from singer/songwriter Sarah Tolar. “I feel very grateful to her,” Reno said, “because after a couple of months of working together, she sensed that maybe some older American Songbook music would be good for me.” Reno’s love of the American Songbook has continued unabated since those early lessons. “Because everyone loves



this music,” she said,” it has a natural way of bringing people together.”

At Jersey Jazz LIVE!, Reno will be accompanied on piano by Jeb Patton, a member of the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band who has also performed with such jazz giants as tenor saxophonists Jimmy Heath and George Coleman and alto saxophonist Charles McPherson. While earn-

ing his Master of Arts Degree from the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, Patton studied piano with Sir Roland Hanna.

Reno and Patton will be preceded by a Rising Stars opening act featuring a trio led by guitarist Desmond Diehl, a senior at Ridge High School in Basking Ridge, NJ. Diehl performed at the Umbria and Ancona Jazz Festivals in Italy this summer with the Jazz House Kids Big Band. He was also a featured soloist with JHK at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Essentially Ellington event and the Charles Mingus Festival and International High School Competition at The New School. He is a two-time winner of the Young Arts Award for Jazz Guitar and a past member of the New Jersey All-State Jazz Ensemble.

Desmond will be joined by his brother, drummer Beckitt Diehl, a Jazz Studies major at William Pat-

erson University, and bassist Lark Villinski, who lives in Long Island City, Queens, NY, and attends the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts.

.....
: *The Madison Community Arts Center is located at 10 Kings Road in Madison, NJ. The Jersey Jazz LIVE! concerts begin at 3 p.m. Admission is \$15 for NJJS members and \$20 for non-members. Student admission is \$5 with valid ID. There will be light refreshments for purchase. To order tickets in advance, log onto **ticketleap.events/tickets/new-jersey-jazz-society/jersey-jazz-live-the-anais-reno-duo***
.....

: *Funding for Jersey Jazz Live! has been made possible, in part, by funds from Morris Arts through the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of The National Endowment for the Arts.*

PHOTO BY PAIGE PURCELL



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Swingadelic to Celebrate the ‘Three Louies’

Armstrong, Prima, and Jordan Each Left Behind a Hit Catalog That Will Make This Show an Exercise in Joy

BY RICKY RICCARDI

Opera fans might remember “The Three Tenors,” but in the jazz world, there are “The Three Louies”—Armstrong, Jordan, and Prima! On September 21, Swingadelic will return to the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts at Toms River’s Ocean County College to pay tribute to these three legendary artists with a program guaranteed to put attendees in a good mood. The afternoon will also feature the sensational vocals of Vanessa Perea, who will play the roles of Louis Prima’s

wives, Keely Smith and Gia Maione.

When it comes to the “Louies,” almost everything in the world of jazz and American popular music springs from Louis Armstrong. Though perhaps best-known for latter-day hits such as “What a Wonderful World” and “Hello, Dolly!,” Armstrong’s innovations in the 1920s changed the way musicians played music on instruments, how they soloed, and perhaps, most lastingly, how they sang.

Listening intently were two young acolytes, Louis Prima and Louis Jor-

JAZZ ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

dan. As a vocalist and trumpeter, Prima initially broke into the jazz world as something of an Armstrong copycat, but he soon fused Armstrong's style with his gregarious, Italian-seasoned personality and a relentlessly driving rhythm section to create the Prima sound that transformed Las Vegas and captivated listeners on hits like "Just a Gigolo/I Ain't Got Nobody" and "Jump, Jive and Wail."

Meanwhile, alto saxophonist Jordan made his recording debut with Armstrong before joining the big band of Chick Webb in the 1930s. Jordan soon formed a small group, the Tympany Five, and, utilizing the leader's Armstrong-inspired personality, a tightly riffing horn section, and a boogie-woogie beat, he became a grandfather of rock 'n' roll with his string of popular recordings such as "Caldonia" and "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie."

Thus, when you add it up, Arm-

strong, Prima, and Jordan each left behind a hit catalog that will make the September 21 show an exercise in joy--and Swingadelic is the perfect ensemble to perform this tribute. Swingadelic was founded in 1998 in Hoboken, NJ, by bandleader and bassist Dave Post. Initially the band played jump blues in the style of Jordan and Prima to ride the neo-swing craze, but by 2002 the band was maintaining a residency as an 11-piece "little big band" at Maxwell's in Hoboken. The band now holds down Monday nights at Swing 46 on New York City's Restaurant Row in the theatre district and has performed at festivals from Maine to Atlanta including Bele Chere in Asheville, NC, MusikFest in Bethlehem, PA, and Lincoln Center's Mid-Summer Night Swing.

The whole concept for "The Three Louies" actually came from the New Jersey Jazz Society. "Some years ago,



Vocalist Vanessa Perea will play the roles of Louis Prima's wives, Keely Smith and Gina Maione.

Frank Mulvaney, ex-officio President of NJJS, called and asked if we could do a tribute to Louis Prima for the 2012 JazzFest," Dave Post recalled. "Since Louis Armstrong and Louis Jordan were major influences on Prima, we gave it a bit of thought and got back to Frank saying why not include Armstrong and Jordan, and call it A Tribute to the Three Louies due to the current popularity of The Three Tenors. Popular is a key word here. Unlike

much of today's jazz artists, these three great performers produced much of the popular music of their day and their hits were routinely charted in *Billboard*. We had a great time learning some of these tunes that were not in our repertoire and we are sure that for those of a certain age there will be an enjoyable nostalgia factor."

: *The New Jersey Jazz Society is a proud supporter of the Jazz on a Sunday Afternoon series, which is made possible through funding from the Wintrode Family Foundation and the Ocean County College Foundation. The Swingadelic concert begins at 3 p.m. on Sunday, September 21, on the Main Stage. The Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts is located on College Drive on the campus of Ocean County College. For information and tickets, log onto grunincenter.org or call (732) 255-0500.*

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Charlie Byrd: 'Without Flash or Pretense ... His Musical Honesty Reached People'

Guitarist Charlie Byrd Would Have Turned 100 on September 16, 2025. Drummer/Vibraphonist Chuck Redd played with Him for 19 years.

BY CHUCK REDD

One of the things I miss most about Charlie Byrd is the atmosphere he effortlessly created with his music and his presence. When he arrived at a club or at a concert hall, there was an anticipation that an elegant, refined artist was about to perform. This was always exciting.

He was a soft-spoken southern gentleman, originally from Chuckatuck, VA. He retained a good bit of the Tidewater drawl, yet had a sophisti-

cated, worldly manner. Charlie was an excellent conversationalist, often discussing a book he was reading, a political issue or music; but he didn't care much for small talk, or emotional sharing in conversation. He did become animated while talking about his latest recipe, usually for something like rockfish. He also had an intelligent sense of humor. I always felt good if I could make him laugh. He didn't mind long periods of silence when the two of us were driving to-



From left, Red Norvo, Chuck Redd, Charlie Byrd, 1982.

JAZZ HISTORY

gether. I'd usually create a playlist on a cassette that featured music I knew he'd enjoy. On one of our many drives to New York, Louis Armstrong's vocal version of Rodgers and Hart's "Little Girl Blue" started playing, and I saw tears of joy in Charlie's eyes. He once said to me, "You know Chuck, speaking is not the ultimate form of communication." He demonstrated that belief with each performance.

Charlie had a way of getting to the essence of a piece of music without flash or pretense. He almost invariably played the harmony that was in the original sheet music and once told me that in order to know what tempo to play a song, simply sing the lyrics. When he played the Bossa Nova music that helped establish him as a respected and popular musician internationally, he did it his way, with no attempt to sound Brazilian or "authentic". He played all



Central American tour, 1984, from left, Joe Byrd, Chuck Redd, Charlie Byrd.

of his repertoire his own way, which was soulful and sincere. His musical honesty reached people; it moved them. And there was always a trace of his rural roots in his music. I remember a fan requesting that we play a blues. Charlie's reply was, "There's a little blues in everything we play."

I received a call from Charlie's longtime manager, Pete Lambros in

late 1979 when I was 20. It was the luckiest day of my professional life. Charlie had requested that I join his trio on drums for a six-week tour beginning in February 1980—three weeks in New Orleans, three in Australia. I ended up staying with the trio for 19 years, until Charlie passed away in 1999. Everything in my career began with that phone call—it

was the proverbial "big break". Over the nearly two decades, he taught me how to be a consistent, professional musician, how to travel, how to record, lead a band, and how to eat, ("Chuck Redd, you're a drummer and you don't use chopsticks?"—at a Chinese restaurant in Denver in 1981. (By the next tour, I had mastered the chopsticks). Almost all of his teaching was by example. He rarely gave me any musical direction; he seemed to trust my instincts, which were still developing when I joined him.

During that first tour, I mentioned to him that I noticed he never got nervous on stage. He said, "It's my job to not let you know if I am." He always appeared relaxed and in the moment. I witnessed his natural leadership skills in action with The Great Guitars, the all-star group that featured Charlie, Barney Kessel, and Herb Ellis, along with Charlie's



Great Guitars quintet, 1989, from left: Joe Byrd, Charlie Byrd, Barney Kessel, Herb Ellis, Chuck Redd.

younger brother Joe on bass and me on drums. Charlie was excellent at programming a set and suggesting to Barney and Herb, who could be featured and when during a set. These three guitar giants had a mutual affection and respect for each other. We

toured in Europe extensively with the Great Guitars. Their performances were high level and swinging every evening, regardless of fatigue and the other rigors of the road. There was always lots of laughter, too. Barney had endless hilarious stories;

“THESE THREE GUITAR GIANTS HAD A MUTUAL AFFECTION AND RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER.”

Herb’s humor was deadpan and gently sarcastic; and Charlie would occasionally write a witty limerick.

Charlie didn’t dole out compliments indiscriminately. He only gave me about six during my 19 years with him, and I remember them vividly. One that comes to mind was in the first couple years of my stint with him. We were hanging out after a gig in Fort Lauderdale. He said, “Chuck, I hope I’ll be able to play for another 50 years, and I hope you’ll be playing with me.” I think that statement reveals how

passionate he was about music and how close we had become. We never talked about our relationship and didn’t need to. Soon after I joined him, everything was very comfortable—it was family. The trust and communication we had on the bandstand and off was deep. When we finished a set, there was a sense of mutual fulfillment and satisfaction that didn’t need to be discussed. I think Joe (Byrd) felt this, too. That close feeling in the trio helped to create the refined atmosphere that I mentioned above.

JAZZ HISTORY

But, as with anything meaningful, it took some time to achieve this unity.

In my early days with the Charlie Byrd Trio, we'd sometimes end the set with an Irving Berlin song called "Walking Stick". Charlie would sing this one, and the tempo was an easy, medium groove. I was channeling my inner Art Blakey, playing a hard driving shuffle. Charlie said, "You're trying to make too much of this tune. Think of it like a guy sitting on his front porch sharing a song with his friends." That statement gave me an insight into his general approach and to why his performances always felt intimate, even in large venues.

Charlie had an articulate, concise way of sharing his wisdom. When he asked me include the vibes with the trio beginning about 1990, I mentioned that I was frustrated that I was struggling to create or invent something brand new and unique on my in-

strument. His response was, "If you're not going to be an innovator, you can't force it, and if you are going to be one, you can't stop it so just keep practicing, learning and getting better."

He practiced and continued to learn his entire life and was certainly an original and, perhaps, an innovator. When he was in hospice, he mentioned that he'd like to possibly have Joe and I come up to the apartment to record "one more" album. That one didn't happen, but I'm honored to have recorded 20 with him as well as many soundtracks to the PBS *Great Chefs* series. Hopefully our musical bond is obvious on these recordings. I know that the atmosphere that he created is there. I told Charlie that I loved him only once, toward the end of his life and he said he loved me too. But, for nearly two decades, we'd been exchanging those feelings every night on stage.

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Must-See Events this Fall



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Jacob Collier The Solo Show

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Art Pepper: The Brilliance of His Saxophone Playing Was Overshadowed by his Addictions

Artistically the 1950s Were an Extremely Fertile Decade as He Created Some of the Era's Finest Jazz Music

BY ANDREW SCHINDER

Art Pepper was doing time for narcotics at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Its innocuous-sounding name notwithstanding, the hospital was full of junkies, hardened criminals, and the mentally ill. While certainly less nasty than the Los Angeles County Jail, where Pepper was previously incarcerated, this hospital embodied the archetypical image of an uncompromising mental institution, despite its founding mission statement of narcotics addiction treatment.

Since he was a famous musician, Pepper eventually found his way to the hospital's "Music Department." As described in Pepper's brilliantly detailed, harrowing autobiography *Straight Life* (Schirmer Books:1979), written with his third wife Laurie Pepper and released three years before his death in 1982, the hospital's Music Department wouldn't exactly be mistaken

for Berklee or Juilliard, but it allowed him a space to practice and hone his craft. Eventually, Pepper formed a makeshift jazz group with a few other inmates, and they played regularly for the patients, offering bursts of pleasure to society's most downtrodden:

"We played, and while we played, I noticed that almost all of [the patients] showed signs of hearing the music, moving their feet or some part of their bodies in semblance of the rhythm we were playing in. Some of them would

even smile—a silly smile. And that showed us that what we were doing was getting through to them. I talked to the aides and the nurses and asked them if they thought we were doing any good, if there was any point to it, and they said that they thought there was because on the days we played, they found that the patients were a lot more manageable; there were less violent flare-ups. It was as if we anesthetized them with our music."

Tragically, Pepper's time in



Art Pepper and
Elvin Jones
in the late '70s

Fort Worth marked only the beginning of his lifelong battle with addiction. Nevertheless, notwithstanding his tragic circumstances, Pepper performed as all great artists do, providing a respite to those navigating despair and desolation.

The previous decade, in the waning days of World War II, Pepper served with the U.S. Army in London. On a day off, he met an attractive young girl in Piccadilly. The two spent the day together, talking and flirting, sharing Pepper's supply of whiskey.

It got late, and Pepper, who spends much of *Straight Life* describing in great detail his voracious sexual appetite and exploits, propositioned the girl. He was continuously rebuffed, despite his fervent insistence. Pepper ultimately came to the conclusion that, having spent all day with the girl and providing her with an abundant provision of whiskey and cigarettes, he was entitled to be reimbursed for his efforts. Therefore, upon nightfall in a deserted cemetery, Pepper took what he believed he was owed.

PEPPER DISCOVERED MUSIC
IN HIS PRE-TEEN YEARS—FIRST THE
CLARINET, THEN THE SAXOPHONE.

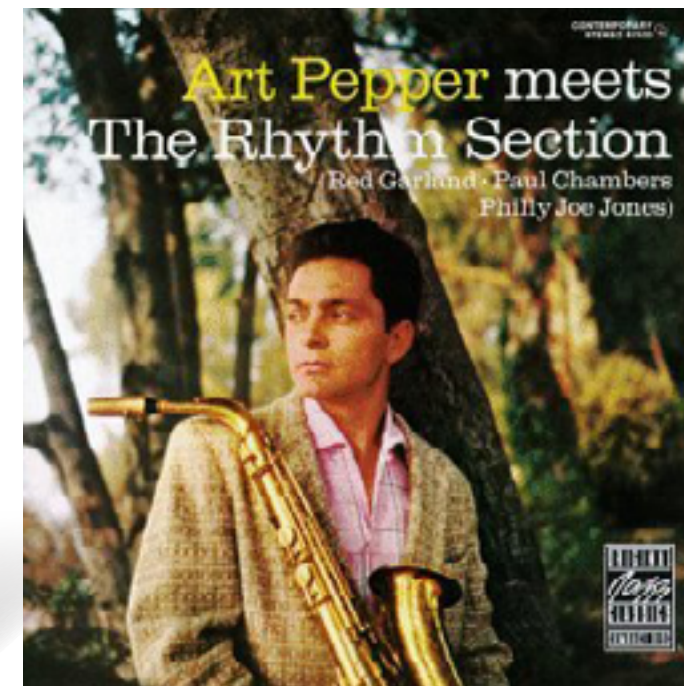
“I hated her guts and really despised myself,” described Pepper after committing the heinous act. “I would liked to have killed her for causing me to go through such feelings as that.”

Consumers of art are often faced with the dilemma of reconciling their appreciation of creations of beauty with the sometimes despicable acts of the creator. Pepper has certainly borne his share of masterpieces, but despite his musical achievements he is not often included in the pantheon of the top tier of mid-century jazz masters. His legacy is most certainly tainted, if not outright ruined, by a lifetime of criminal acts, culminating with an extended stint in the San Quentin State Prison (though not for his most odious crime, for which he remained unpunished). Pepper would have turned 100 this year, but there will be few, if any, commemorations or retrospectives celebrating his centennial.



Above left: Pepper rose to prominence as lead alto saxophonist with Stan Kenton in the '40s and early '50s. Above right: Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section is a classic.

One can argue that Pepper's greatest achievement is not his musical output but rather his autobiography. *Straight Life* is a crowning achievement, not only of Pepper for his almost superhuman ability to recall in graphic detail the events of his life, but also of Laurie, who spent a



decade recording her husband's stories, thoughts and musings, and then adapting them into something virtually unheard of—a cautionary tale that doubles as a page-turner. *Straight Life* remains not only the definitive jazz autobiography but also one of the most vivid, intense, and at times stom-

ach-turningly disturbing accounts of a life of drug abuse and crime.

And yet, this argument may be ultimately doomed to fail, simply because Pepper was also possibly the greatest jazz alto saxophonist to ever live not named Charlie Parker.

Pepper would have celebrated his centennial birthday this month. He was born in Los Angeles on September 1, 1925, to a merchant seaman and his 15-year old lover. Perhaps his propensities for drugs, alcohol and crime were preordained, as his biological parents, both of whom were severely alcoholic, discarded him shortly after his birth, and he was raised by his cold, hard-hearted grandmother. Pepper discovered music in his pre-teen years—first the clarinet, then the saxophone. His early proficiency with music probably kept him from full-on juvenile delinquency (though he certainly had his moments, in-

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cluding early rampant drinking).

As a teenager, Pepper began frequenting Los Angeles' Central Avenue jazz scene, a hotbed of African-American culture, where the prodigious musical talents of Pepper, who was white, resulted in acceptance by some of the scene's leading performers (including a young Dexter Gordon) despite his race. Pepper eventually found his way, working in Benny Carter's big band.

After his aforementioned stint in the Army, Pepper rose to prominence as lead alto saxophone in Stan Kenton's progressive jazz orchestra. The Kenton band offered the young Pepper a chance to hone his craft in a hyper-structured environment that nevertheless still allowed him to develop his own voice, and, musically Pepper thrived. He became a star due to both his astonishingly affecting, mellifluous playing as well as his matinee idol

good looks. At the same time, Pepper, who had been abusing alcohol and pills ever since he was able to acquire them, made the fateful decision to try heroin for the first time. In his own words, he fell in love with the substance immediately and spent the rest of his life feeding, managing, or dealing with the consequences of his addiction.

Despite his flourishing heroin dependency and the depths to which he would sink to acquire the drug, artistically the 1950s were an extremely fertile decade for Pepper. When not incarcerated due to his running afoul of the era's draconian and misguided narcotics laws, he created some of the era's finest jazz music, most notably with Los Angeles's Contemporary Records and its founder, and Pepper benefactor, Lester Koenig. Pepper recorded *Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section* (Contemporary, 1957) joined (rather spontaneously) by Miles Da-



Art Pepper in Los Angeles, 1979

vis' rhythm section during one of their West Coast tours. The album is a classic—blending the dulcet, cool jazz vibes that were fashionable in Los Angeles at the time with the more hard-edged brashness favored by the visiting New York combo. Pepper followed *Rhythm Section* three years later with *Gettin' Together* (Contemporary, 1960), accompanied by another iteration of Davis' band, and the results are similarly stunning, with the Pepper originals “Bijou the Poodle” (named after Pepper's beloved, yet ill-fated dog) and the title track among the highlights. Pepper changes course a bit with *Art Pepper + Eleven* (Contemporary, 1960), opting for a big band format, and eschewing longtime standards for interpretations of tunes written by the bop and post-bop luminaries of the day. It is a tour-de-force, Pepper's honeyed tones elevated by the exceptional backing musicians.

The songs, while mostly written for small combos, lend themselves to the big band treatment beautifully.

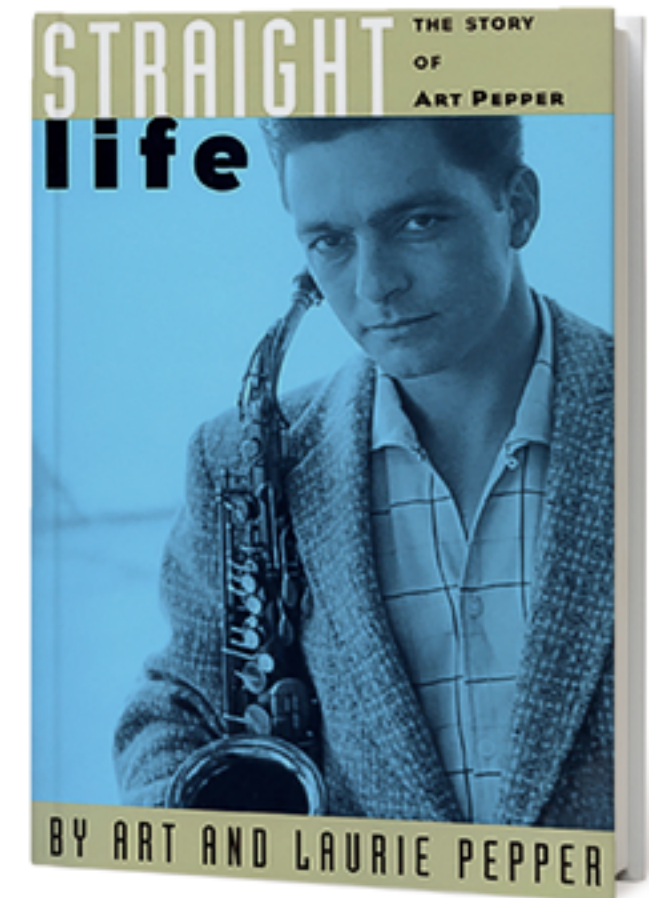
Alas, due to continued heroin arrests and property crimes, by 1961 Pepper found himself sentenced to San Quentin. He initially served three years at the prison, but again thereafter found himself in and out of institutions. During this period, however, other than a stint in the Buddy Rich Orchestra, he was significantly less productive while on the

outside. Extended incarceration did nothing to curb Pepper's demons.

Ultimately, after he alienated his then-girlfriend and—basically—anyone else even remotely close to him, Pepper checked into the Synanon residential drug rehabilitation facility. He responded somewhat to Synanon's unorthodox (for the time) treatment methods (it should be noted that Synanon could also be accurately classified as a cult, and indeed it finally shut down following accusations of

resident abuse and tax evasion). In between frequent trysts with the facility's female residents and staff, Pepper met Laurie, herself a resident at Synanon, and they moved in together after their discharge, eventually marrying.

Pepper's post-Synanon life by no means represented his redemption, and certainly not anything resembling sobriety. With Laurie managing his affairs, finances and image—with mixed results—Pepper did achieve an artistic comeback during the late 1970s and early 1980s, creating some of the most brilliant music of his career—his live sessions recorded at the Village Vanguard (with Elvin Jones on drums), excursions to Europe and Japan, and studio albums including the beautifully orchestral *Winter Moon* (Galaxy, 1980) and radiantly back-to-basics *Straight Life* (Galaxy, 1980) among the many highlights. However, Pep-



Straight Life, written with his third wife, Laurie, is a harrowing autobiography.

per's straight-ahead, post-bop West Coast style (though at this point also informed by John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman free jazz influences) did not fit within the fusion wave dominating jazz at the time. And while he embarked on a Methadone regimen to finally control his heroin intake, he (as well as Laurie) continued to abuse alcohol and cocaine.

At the end, Pepper offered little

PEPPER DID ACHIEVE AN ARTISTIC
COMEBACK DURING THE LATE
1970s AND EARLY 1980s.

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remorse for his past actions. *Straight Life* handles his crimes and sins rather matter-of-factly. Up until his death, on June 15, 1982, at age 56, due to complications following a stroke, he continued to do the only things he frankly knew how to do—abuse himself and others, and create beautiful music.

It is a testament to Pepper's musical brilliance that despite a lifetime of addiction, crime, and incarceration, his overall output is as deep and masterful as it is. Nevertheless, Pepper remains relatively unheralded, despite Laurie's best efforts in maintaining his legacy (she tells her own story in her memoir *Art: Why I Stuck with a Junkie Jazzman*). Pepper is certainly not the only jazz master whose career was derailed by addictions and prison time, or (unfortunately) who has committed atrocities against the opposite sex. A bias against West Coast Jazz may have

harmed his stature, but that didn't seem to adversely affect Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, or others. Pepper's status as a white jazz master carries complications that are too thorny to explore here (Terry Martin's article "Art Pepper: Toward a New White Jazz" and Gary Giddins' "The Whiteness of the Wail," both included in the *Art Pepper Companion*, are great places to start), though it should be noted that Pepper's relationship with race was, at best, problematic, especially troubling given that Pepper's livelihood and legacy is tied to Black music (*Straight Life* is filled with casual racism). Ultimately, as with so many artistic geniuses, the burden of balancing the beautiful with the monstrous lies with the appreciator.

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: *Andrew Schinder is an attorney and a Staff Writer at New York City Jazz Record.*



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Jazz House Collective Will Honor James Moody

The Music Selection Will Be a Combination of Moody Compositions and Standards that He Was Well Known for Playing.

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

In 2015, tenor saxophonist Birsa Chatterjee was the first recipient of the James Moody Scholarship co-presented by Jazz House Kids and Linda Moody, Moody's wife. On Saturday, September 13, when the Jazz House Collective band honors Moody at the Montclair Jazz Festival, Chatterjee will be one of the tenor saxophonists. "Birsa," said Jazz House Collective Director Nathan Eklund, "is kind of part of that James Moody lineage. He was the Director of our Summer Workshop this year, so he's really

involved in the fabric of Jazz House, but he also has this connection to Moody, being that first award winner."

Pointing out that Moody, a Newark native, would have turned 100 on March 25th of this year, Eklund explained that, "We're not going to be featuring any one person specifically in the role of Moody. Our sax section is going to be either Jazz House alums or long-time instructors." In addition to Chatterjee, the other saxophonists will be: altos Bruce Williams and Zoe Obadia, tenor Mike Lee, and bari-



tone saxophonist Jason Marshall.

“There’s something special,” Eklund continued, “about having some of these students who have come up through this program. They’re starting to become great jazz musicians in their own right but they’re still interested and invested in coming back and being part of

this community. Both Zoe and Birsa have spent tons of time studying with Bruce and Mike. To see them sitting next to each other in the section, kind of working as professionals together, is a really cool experience to witness.”

The music selection will be a combination of Moody compositions and standards that he was well known

**I’VE BEEN LUCKY TO BE INVOLVED
WITH LINDA MOODY THROUGH
THE SCHOLARSHIP PROCESS.**



Nathan Eklund

for playing. Among the tunes will be “Moody’s Mood For Love”, plus other Moody originals such as “Last Train From Overbrook” and “Darben the Redd Fox” (a tribute to the late comedian). One of the standards will be Arthur Johnston’s “Pennies From Heaven”, for which Eddie Jefferson wrote new lyrics. “The plan,” Eklund said, “is to utilize some of his actual solos as vocalese for a couple of vocal tunes, shout choruses, and different vocal pieces to really take some of his music from when he performed it and incor-

porate those into the arrangements.”

“Moody’s Mood For Love”, which became Moody’s signature, was recorded in Stockholm in 1949 on his first album, *James Moody and His Modernists* on the Blue Note label. Based on the chord changes of Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields’ “I’m in the Mood for Love”, it propelled Moody into instant popularity and fame. It has sometimes been called “The National Jazz Anthem”. Lyrics were added by vocalist Eddie Jefferson, and Moody once said: “If I don’t do

MONTCLAIR JAZZ FESTIVAL

that song, I may as well not show up.”

“Last Train From Overbrook” refers to Moody’s 1958 recovery from alcoholism as a patient at Overbrook, a psychiatric hospital in Cedar Grove, NJ. It became the title track of an Argo album he released in ‘58 shortly after his release from the hospital. Writing about the album in 2014, *NJArts.net*’s Jay Lustig said, “You can feel the pent-up energy; he can’t wait, it seems, to get on with his life.”

Eddie Jefferson called his “Pennies From Heaven” parody, “Benny’s From Heaven”. In a review of a Moody performance of it in 2004 in Anguilla, British West Indies, *AllAboutJazz*’s Bill Milkowski wrote: “James Moody is up on his tiptoes, mugging and yodeling his way through ‘Benny’s From Heaven’, the tongue-in-cheek parody of ‘Pennies From Heaven’ that his erstwhile partner Eddie Jefferson concocted back in the 1950s. By the time



The Saxophone Section, clockwise from top left: Birsa Chatterjee, Zoe Obadia, Mike Lee, Jason Marshall, and Bruce Williams.

MONTCLAIR JAZZ FESTIVAL

he gets to the paternity punch line— ‘Well, then Benny’s from heaven ‘cause he damn sure ain’t from me!’ Moody’s got the audience eating out of his hand. They howl with good cheer, raising their glasses in salute as he launches into a robust, swinging tenor solo.”

Moody spent seven years living in Las Vegas, playing in the Hilton Hotel pit band so he could stay in one spot to raise his daughter. One of my favorite Moody stories happened there. It was related to me by vocalist Janis Siegel, a charter member of Manhattan Transfer. “We did our first Las Vegas appearance,” she said, “opening for Bill Cosby at the Hilton. We were doing a sound check with the big band, and we called the tune, ‘You Can Depend on Me’, a Basie vocalese which called for a tenor solo in the middle of the arrangement. The four of us were singing, singing, singing and then stopped for the solo ...



From top: Kal Ferretti, Ted Chubb, and Freddie Hendrix will join Nathan Eklund in the JHC trumpet section.

Suddenly, we all stopped dead in our tracks because the solo that was coming from the big band was so magical that we all turned around at the same time, astonished to see the great James Moody. We were completely blown away by the fact that was a member of the Hilton house band.”

Moody was the recipient of several awards: the American Jazz Hall of Fame in 1996; National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master in 1998; Kennedy Center Living Jazz Legend Award in 2007; and a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Jazz Journalists Association in 2010. In November 2010, Moody and his wife, Linda, announced that he had pancreatic cancer and had decided not to undergo any chemotherapy or radiation treatment. He passed away on December 9, 2010.

The \$10,000 James Moody Scholarship, Eklund said, is for a

student studying jazz from the state of New Jersey. The other recipients, in addition to Chatterjee, have been: drummer Iyonna Herbert, trumpeter Andrew Wagner, pianist Caelan Cardello, alto saxophonist Jalin Shiver, trombonist Rayner Perez, bassist Paul Reinhold, bassist Ryoma Takenaga, drummer Mecadon McCune, and drummer Alex Kavlakian.”I’ve been lucky enough to be really involved with Linda Moody through Moody Scholarship selection process,” Eklund said.

Other members of the Jazz Collective on September 13, in addition to the saxophones, will be Eklund on trumpet along with Kal Ferretti, Ted Chubb, and Freddie Hendrix; Caili O’Doherty on piano; Charlie Sigler, guitar; Andy McKee, bass; Darrell Smith, drums; and Dylan Pramuk, vocals. The trombone section was being finalized at presstime.

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Guitarist Ely Perlman: One of the Rising Stars in Christian McBride's Ursa Major

*"We Did a Two-Week Run and Since Then
We've Been Playing All Over the World"*

After graduating from Israel's Thelma Yellin High School for the Performing Arts about four years ago, guitarist Ely Perlman came to the United States to attend Boston's Berklee College of Music. The summer before school started, he went to the Jazz Aspen Snowmass Academy, a music education program in Aspen, CO, directed by bassist Christian McBride.

"It was June 2021," the 26-year-old Perlman recalled, "during the

last period of Covid. Christian was just forming his band, Ursa Major. About four or five months later, he offered me a chance to join the band. It was an incredible honor. We all got together in June 2022. We did a two-week run and since then we've been playing all over the world."

In addition to Perlman, the Ursa Major quintet, which will be performing at the Montclair Jazz Festival, includes tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover, pianist Mike King, and

MONTCLAIR JAZZ FESTIVAL

drummer Savannah Harris. When the quintet played at Britain's Love Supreme Jazz Festival in July 2024, *UK Jazz News*' Adam McCulloch described the young band members as "phenomenal and characterful musicians still in their 20s and early 30s. Each contributed delightfully contrasting solos: Nicole Glover has a thoughtful, dexterous narrative approach on tenor; Savannah Harris—who played gigs early in her career with Kenny Barron—brings huge flamboyance to the kit, a riveting presence; Michael King was virtuosic and imaginative; and Ely Perlman brought sonic landscapes through sustained chords and great lyricism to more boppy tunes."

In an interview earlier this year with WRTI Radio's Nate Chinen, McBride recalled meeting Perlman at the JAS program and said, "He just blew my mind." Perlman feels Ursa

Major is "really an amazing platform because we play each other's music. Christian allows us to play our music. Every time we play as a band, it's an incredible honor. The other people in the band are really amazing. It's a real learning experience. It's unbelievable having a chance to

play with Christian, a living legend."

Perlman picked up a guitar for the first time when he was 11 years old, and composing, he said, "has always been a big part of it—creating in addition to just playing the guitar itself. Creating and producing is really a huge thing for me."

One of his compositions, "Elevation", has been featured in several of Ursa Major's performances.

His jazz guitar heroes are Pat Metheny and Kurt Rosenwinkel. But Perlman is also influenced by folk music and folk guitar, and one of his current favorites is Adrienne Lenk-

Ursa Major, from left: McBride, Harris, Glover, King, Perlman.



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er, a guitarist and singer/songwriter who leads an indie folk-rock band called Big Thief. “I also studied classical guitar for a bit,” he said, “so I really try to mix all of these together.”

The *Utah Jazz Review*, writing about one of Perlman’s performances, compared him to one of his heroes, writing, “Guitarist Ely Perlman showed off incredible solo skills that reminded listeners of the gold standard musicianship of legendary jazz and jazz fusion guitarist Pat Metheny.” Reviewing Perlman’s performance at the Garana Jazz Festival in Romania, the *New York City Jazz Record* wrote: “The newest name... guitarist Ely Perlman, was one of the primary takeaways from the festival. His solos kept arriving at striking original ideas. Watch for him.”

Perlman is planning to self-produce an album, which he hopes will be released in the next few

months. On it he will feature several musicians who he has worked with, including McBride. Others will be Israeli pianist Shai Maestro and saxophonist Braxton Cook. “It will be a mix,” he said. “For a long time, I’ve tried to merge a sound, based in jazz but kind of with electronic and folk influences.”

The 38-year-old Maestro attended the same Israeli performing arts high school as Perlman. “He’s an incredible piano player,” Perlman said. “He joined some of my shows with my band in Israel. I’m really excited about the track on my album that he will be featured on.”

On October 8, Perlman will be leading a band at Close Up, “a great club on the lower east side.” Band members will be drummer Ofri Nehemya, bassist Yonatan Farhi, guitarist Tim Watson, and keyboardist Vittorio—**SJ**



Montclair Jazz Festival Schedule

Saturday, September 13, Noon-8 pm

Lackawanna Station and Grove Street; Performance Times unavailable at presstime

- » Trumpeter Alphonso Horne and the Gotham Kings
- » Saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin and Phoenix
- » Vocalist Jazzmeia Horn
- » Bassist Christian McBride and Ursa Major
- » Jazz House Collective Celebrating James Moody
- » Percussionist Lusito Quintero
- » Jazz House All-Stars

Admission is free; no tickets required



Lakecia Benjamin

Newest Jazz Couple, Steve and Abena Koomson Davis, to Perform Selections from *Where Is Love?*

“I Was Fascinated by Jazz Vocalists—How They Could Turn a Phrase and Reinterpret Melodies”

BY JAY SWEET



The jazz world has long celebrated dynamic couples who share both life and the stage. Among them are pianists Renée Rosnes and Bill Charlap, pianist/vocalist Eliane Elias and bassist Marc Johnson, vocalist Nicole Zuraitis and drummer Dan Pugach. Now, you can add vocalist Abena Koomson Davis and trombonist Steve Davis. The two recently collaborated on *Where Is Love?* (WJ3 Records), Abena's first jazz album as a leader. They will be performing music from the album at the Central Jersey Jazz Festival on September 14 in Somerville, NJ. Both Worcester, MA natives (like this writer), Abena and Steve share a musical bond that was decades in the making.

When asked how they first met, Abena laughed and credited “the Facebooks,” noting that mutual friends helped bring them together. But their very first introduction

CENTRAL JERSEY JAZZ FESTIVAL

happened much earlier. As a college student, Abena's close friend, saxophonist Jimmy Greene, insisted she meet his professor at the University of Hartford's Hartt School. That professor was Steve Davis. Greene told her: "He's a great trombone player." The meeting was brief, just a few minutes. Afterward, Abena mostly knew of Steve through his recordings. At the time, Greene was still a junior playing in Davis' quintet, while Abena was also studying trombone.

Two decades later, fate intervened. The pair exchanged a quick hello at Smalls Jazz Club in New York. Not long after, they reencountered one another at Smoke Jazz & Supper Club, where Steve was performing in a trombone showcase with Steve Turre, Frank Lacy, and Andre Hayward. Abena, who had started her own musical journey on trombone, came to listen. The two have been together ever

since. Performing together felt just as natural as their personal connection. Abena recalls with a smile: "It's awesome. We have a ball—we love to travel together." Steve remembers the very first time Abena sat in with him. It was at a jam session in Stamford, CT at a club called The Ninth Note.

"We didn't even live in Stamford yet. Abena was still in Harlem, spending time up in the Hartford area. There was no microphone, but she said, 'It's okay, I'll be fine.' And she just filled the room." He described the feeling: "It was like standing next to a fellow horn player, a really strong one. I thought, wow, this is happening. Our sounds blended, and the way she phrased was so strong. It just felt natural. We bounced ideas off each other well, and as a trombone player, I've always enjoyed orchestrating on the spot. With Abena, it clicked immediately."



Top: Abena Koomson Davis' debut album, *Where is Love?* blends standards and originals. Above: Steve Davis' *We See* is a live album recorded at Smoke.

Steve Davis has been firmly rooted in jazz for decades, performing with legends such as Art Blakey, Jackie McLean, and Chick Corea. Abena's artistic path initially leaned toward theater, funk, and soul. She even starred as a lead in the Broadway show *Fela!* But she always carried a love for jazz. It was Steve who encouraged her to make her debut recording. "He was really the impetus for this album. He and I have a love of jazz music that we've shared throughout our relationship. From my teenage years, I was fascinated by jazz vocalists—how they could turn a phrase and reinterpret melodies. That inspired me to pursue singing in the first place. Jazz vocals always felt like home."

With Steve's support, and drummer Willie Jones III producing for WJ3 Records, Abena recorded *Where Is Love?* with a stellar lineup: pianist



Rick Germanson, bassist Nat Reeves, guitarist Tony Davis (Steve’s son), trumpeter Josh Bruneau and saxophonist Mike DeRubbo. The album, released in 2024 blends standards with striking originals. One highlight, Freddie Hubbard and Abbey Lincoln’s “Up Jump Spring,” came at Steve’s

suggestion after introducing Abena to Abbey Lincoln’s lyrical version. For Abena, it was fresh territory; for Steve, it carried nostalgia from his years performing with Hubbard and Eddie Henderson. It also connected back to one of the first songs Steve ever played with Henderson, decades earlier at the 880 Club in Hartford.

Another standout, Abena’s composition, “Perseverance,” came to life just before the pandemic. Abena wrote lyrics for it in the summer of 2020, when the two escaped to the Catskills to stay at a friend’s home. Within 20 minutes, she had words on the page. At the time, the couple was also grieving the loss of their dear friend, pianist Larry Willis. Abena’s lyrics honored the way those we love remain present in our lives, helping us persevere even through loss.

The title track, Lionel Bart’s “Where Is Love?,” holds a personal



Central Jersey Jazz Festival Schedule

Saturday, September 13, Downtown Flemington

6:30–7:50 PM » Percussionis Annette Aguilar and her Quintet

8:20–9:50 PM » Violinist Kersten Stevens and her Quintet

Sunday, September 14, Downtown Somerville

MAIN STAGE

1:30–2:40 PM » Greg Murphy and his band, “The Fusicians”

3:00–4:10 PM » Vocalist Abena Koonson-Davis and her Quintet featuring Trombonist Steve Davis

4:30–5:40 PM » Trumpeter Jon Faddis and his Next Generation Quartet

DIVISION STREET

2:30–3:45 PM » Percussionist Kahlil Kwame Bell and Friends

4:30–5:40 PM » Drummer Dom Palombi and Game Night

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CENTRAL JERSEY JAZZ FESTIVAL

place in both their hearts. “I started singing that song many years ago because it’s one of my favorites,” Abena explained. “Steve loved it, too, and we both bonded over it. The song asks a big question—where is love?—and it resonated with us. When it came time to name the album, it just felt right. Given the times we’re in—political unrest, the ravages of war—it seemed like the perfect title and the right song for this moment.”

While Abena celebrated her debut, Steve also released a live album, *We See* (Smoke Sessions, 2024), his fifth record for the label. He’s joined by saxophonist Ralph Moore, Eddie Henderson, Renee Rosnes, bassist Essiet Essiet, and drummer Lewis Nash in a series of performances at Smoke. Davis credits Smoke’s Paul Stache and Damon Smith with the idea for the album. “They said, ‘Why don’t you guys play a couple nights, then by Friday

and Saturday we’ll just put up some mics and record?’ With a band like that, I knew good music would come out of it. We just played tunes we all loved. No fixing, no editing—what you hear is what you get. It was unpretentious, just real jazz.” Abena laughed as she admitted: “You can hear me screaming on the record. It’s so embarrassing. I wanted to be on that record in some way.” Steve added, “The sound of the room was so good. Having the audience there feeds the band and gives the music authenticity. I couldn’t dream of a better sextet—it was a real honor.”

Looking ahead, the couple plans to balance individual projects with more collaborations. Their partnership, in music and in life, has already proven to be a powerful blend.

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: To hear the full interview go to
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FESTIVAL

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Elizabeth Bougerol (of the Hot Sardines)

Brass Queens • Woodbridge HS Jazz Choir (Director Lisa Romero)

Fri, Sept 26 | 7:00 – 8:30pm | CARTERET Performing Arts Center, 46 Washington St.

Lezlie Harrison

Sat, Sept 27 | 5:30 – 9:45pm | METUCHEN Metuchen High School, 400 Grove Ave.

Sherrie Maricle and The DIVA Jazz Orchestra

AAPJ Jazz Collective led by trombonist Peter Lin

Metuchen High School (MHS) Jazz Ensemble and MHS Orchestra

Metuchen Dance Centre plus MHS Jazz Combo

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Antoinette Montague • Mike Noordzy & Rutgers Alumni Jazz Orchestra

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Matthew Whitaker Will Pay Tribute to His Organ Heroes

“I’m Gonna Do Stuff from ‘On Their Shoulders’, So, Get Ready. There’s Going to Be A Lot of Energy”

In his 2024 MOCAT album, *On Their Shoulders: An Organ Tribute*, Matthew Whitaker pays tribute to some of his organ heroes: Jimmy Smith, Charles Earland, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Joey DeFrancesco, and Elbernita “Twinkie” Clark. When he leads an organ trio at the West Orange Jazz Festival on September 20, Whitaker will be repeating those tributes. “I’m gonna do stuff from *On Their Shoulders*,” he said, “so, get ready. There’s going to be a lot of energy.”

Jimmy Smith, he pointed out, “started the whole jazz organ

scene. If it wasn’t for Jimmy and that strong foundation, we wouldn’t have anybody else who followed behind.” The Smith selection will be “Organ Grinder’s Swing” originally recorded in 1956 on a Verve album called *Organ Grinder Swing*, featuring a trio with guitarist Kenny Burrell and drummer Grady Tate.

With “Organ Grinder’s Swing”, Whitaker said, “I wanted to keep it like the original.” But with Charles Earland’s “Happy ‘Cause I’m Goin’ Home”, he added some horns on the recording. “I got some friends from

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Juilliard to play the horn parts,” he said. “The intro is inspired by Frank Zappa. The solo that leads into that is an Isely Brothers type thing.

“Dr. Lonnie Smith,” he said, “was one of the first organists I ever listened to. The stories he was able to tell with that instrument were just absolutely incredible.” On Smith’s “Pilgrimage”, Whitaker “didn’t want to change too much from what had already been recorded by him. I wanted to keep that soulful gospel feel.”

DeFrancesco’s “In the Key of the Universe,” Whitaker said, was “pretty fun to do. He was absolutely a fantastic organist. I wanted the recording to have sort of a big bandish type vibe with flute, horns, and guitar.”

The last honoree on the album, Elbernita “Twinkie” Clark isn’t as well known as the others. “‘Twinkie,’” Whitaker explained, “was the gospel organist. If you grew up in church, you



know. I was at a live performance by her in New York last year. That’s what inspired me to do the arrangement of ‘Expect Your Miracle’. I wanted to keep that old school gospel type feel. I also had some members of our church do some stompin’ and clappin’.” In West Orange, Whitaker will be joined by guitarist Marcos Robinson and drummer Isaiah Johnson.

In a review of *On Their Shoulders* for *Audiophile Audition*, Jeff Krow

wrote, “As a Hammond organ fan for decades, it hits all the bases head on.” Added Thierry De Clemensat, USA Correspondent for *Paris-Move*: “Whitaker is an artist who knows where he is going because he knows where he comes from ... It is noteworthy that this album almost follows a historical chronology in its tracks, and Matthew Whitaker imposes his style as the energy developed throughout this album electrifies us.”

When Whitaker, who is blind, was three years old, he was given a toy piano by his grandfather. His musical talent became apparent when he sat down and played “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” by ear. At age five, he began taking piano lessons from Dalia Sakas, Director of Music Studies at the Filomen M. D’Agostino Greenberg Music School in New York City, a school for the visually impaired. He has been performing professionally since he was 11.

Whitaker, who grew up in Hackensack, NJ, studied at The Harlem School of the Arts and the Manhattan School of Music’s Pre-College Jazz program. He was also a member of the Big Band and Organ Messengers at Montclair’s Jazz House Kids. Asked if he recalls sitting down at the toy piano, the 24-year-old keyboardist said, “I actually remember a few moments of that. If it wasn’t for my grandfather giving me that instrument, I

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don't know what I would be doing."

He still studies with Sakas. "We work on classical techniques and stuff like that," he said. Other important mentors have been bassist Christian McBride, keyboardist Radam Schwartz, and pianist/composer D.D. Jackson.

While his West Orange appearance will be exclusively on the organ, Whitaker moves back and forth between it and piano. A highlight of an earlier album, *Connections* (Resilience Music: 2021) is a duet with Whitaker on piano and Regina Carter on violin, playing Duke Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore".

The connection between Whitaker and Carter goes back to the 2017 Monterey Jazz Festival. "She invited me to come up on stage. After that, I thought, 'We have to do something together.' When I heard Duke Ellington's recording of 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore', which

he did featuring a string player, I thought, 'Oh, my gosh. Regina would absolutely kill this.' I told my producer that I would love to get Regina in the studio, live with no edits. It was absolutely fantastic and so much fun to play. Her husband (Alvester Garnett) was on drums. Everybody on that record is absolutely incredible."

Connections also included a piano duet with Jon Batiste on Thelonious Monk's "Bye-Ya" and an organ/piano combination on Chick Corea's "Spain". Whitaker has known Batiste "since I was nine years old. We actually added Chick Corea's 'Spain' days before we went into the studio because we found out that Chick had recently passed." In his review of the album, *Down-Beat*'s Frank Alkyer wrote, "Matthew Whitaker is an inspiration as a person and as an amazing young artist. It will be fascinating to see what the future brings." —**SANFORD JOSEPHSON**



West Orange Jazz Festival

Saturday, September 20

Oskar Schindler Performing Arts Center, 4 Boland Drive

- 1:00–2:00 PM » Kids Jazz Concert with Jerome Jennings
- 2:15–3:00 PM » Rutgers John Coltrane Ensemble directed by Dr. Anthony Branker
- 3:15–4:00 PM » Harpist Riza Printup and her Trio
- 4:15–5:00 PM » Matthew Whitaker Organ Trio
- 5:15–6:00 PM » Pianist/Vocalist Champion Fulton and her Trio
- 6:15–7:00 PM » Alto saxophonist Bruce Williams and his Quintet
- 7:15–8:00 PM » Drummer Bobby Sanabria and Tres Magos

Kids Jazz Concert is free. Admission to rest of the festival is \$11.50, General Admission; \$21.40, Premium. To order tickets in advance, log onto ticketleap.events/tickets/pvpospac/west-orange-jazz-fest-1178339553



Champion
Fulton

Leigh Pilzer: Hearing the Basie Band was Like ‘a Bolt from the Blue’

“My Very First Job with DIVA was on Bari, But, Over Time, I’ve Played All Five Saxophone Books in the Band”

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

Baritone saxophonist Leigh Pilzer likes to recall a scene in the movie, *The Godfather*, “where the son (Al Pacino), who falls in love in Italy, says, ‘It was like a bolt from the blue.’” That’s how Pilzer felt when she first heard the Count Basie big band.

Pilzer was “either a senior in high school or I just graduated, and I was playing cello. Growing up in D.C. I had heard world class jazz ensembles like the Airmen of Note and the Navy Commodores. I’d loved all the woodwinds, that fancy stuff. But when I heard the Basie band—just saxo-

phones and trumpets and trombones, and a rhythm section—that groove, that organic swing, that ensemble feel—it was like, ‘Oh, I want to do that.’ Don’t ask me why I didn’t want to play bass. That would have made more sense. But I picked saxophone.”

She started off on alto sax, but as a member of the Montgomery County College big band at a concert in Rockville, MD, led by drummer/vibraphonist Chuck Redd, she was asked to play the baritone saxophone when the bari player couldn’t make it. “They handed me the bari,” Pilzer said, “and it was



PHOTO BY SUZETTE NIESS

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like, ‘Oh, this is the right sound.’ My parents, when I graduated high school, said they would get me another cello. After about two years, I went to them and said, ‘Remember that cello? I’d like the baritone saxophone instead.’

On Saturday night, September 27, Pilzer will be playing baritone sax as part of the DIVA Jazz Orchestra concert at the Metuchen segment of the Middlesex County Jazz Festival. Pilzer has been part of DIVA since 2003, although her first performance with drummer Sherrie Maricle’s big band was in 1997 at Penn State University when she was “first call on the sub list.”

Back in the day, Pilzer recalled, “you were the only women in the band, so, for me, DIVA was about being around a bunch of women who played their asses off. We were just there to play, and nobody was the only this or the only that. It was just kind of fun to meet more women. We were a concert

jazz ensemble playing super challenging music. My very first job with DIVA was on bari, but, over time, I’ve played all five saxophone books in the band. That was a super valuable experience to have those opportunities. I was terrified of Sherrie. If you’d have told me many years ago that she would be one of my best friends in life, I would have thought you were insane.”

Are we past the biases against women instrumentalists? “I don’t think we are,” Pilzer said. “I think it’s important for young high school women to see us. And, more importantly, why is it that men can play with their friends and colleagues and the people they’ve come up with together, and if they have a band, it’s just a band? But, if I put a band together, with like-minded musicians and friends, and they happen to be women—all of a sudden, it’s an all-woman band. That needs to go away. That needs to stop.



DIVA SynxNyx at the Deer Head Inn. From left, Bormet, Pilzer, Krupa, Shook, and Maricle.

When do we get to just have a band?”

Pilzer’s most recent album, her 2024 Strange Woman Records release, *Beatin’ the Odds*, featured dual septets and an octet on one of the tracks. “One of the reasons I used two different bands,” she explained, “was because if I had a CD of just the seven-piece band comprised of women, it was going to become an all-woman septet. Nobody was going to listen to it for the writing and the fabulous musicianship of the players. That

was all going to get overshadowed.”

Eight of the nine tracks on *Beatin’ the Odds* are Pilzer’s original compositions. The one exception was written by bassist Amy Shook. With the album, Pilzer went public for the first time about having had cancer. “I was hearing songs, and felt there was a way to express it or share it or gain some power over it. I just hit eight years out from my diagnosis. It’s a highly recurrent cancer, so I felt I’m living with this.” The first five tracks refer to Pil-

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zer's cancer; the remaining tracks to Covid. "The Covid material," she said, came directly from being in lockdown."

Jack Bowers, reviewing the album for *AllAboutJazz*, called it "a series of bright and engaging songs marvelously performed by Pilzer's dual septets," adding that, "Not only has Leigh Pilzer beaten the odds, but

she has also celebrated her victory by recounting the journey in the best way she can ... SKCC, a salute to Billy Strayhorn's classic 'UMMG' (Upper Manhattan Medical Group), travels a similar melodic and harmonic path while applauding Pilzer's caregivers, the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center. The smooth and mellow 'Lin' refers

to her surgeon, Dr. Jeffrey Yen Lin, the light-hearted 'Waterkress' to her oncologist, Dr. Bruce Kressel."

After switching from cello to baritone saxophone, Pilzer earned her Bachelor of Music in Jazz Composition and Arranging from Berklee College of Music; Masters Degrees in Jazz Studies and Saxophone Performance from the University of Maryland; and a Doctorate in Saxophone Performance with Jazz Emphasis from George Mason University.

Her dissertation for the doctorate was titled, "Gerry Mulligan, Soloist: Transcription and Analysis of His Small-Group Solos on 'Line For Lyons', 'Curtains', and 'The Flying Dutchman'".

When I interviewed Pilzer in 2014 for my book, *Jeru's Journey: The Life and Music of Gerry Mulligan* (Hal Leonard Books: 2015), she told me she was more influenced as a player by Pepper Adams than Mulligan.

But Mulligan's impact on her would be "counterpoint and real awareness of what another instrumental player is doing. I really appreciate Mulligan's sensibility and interactivity."

She explained why she selected Mulligan as the subject of her dissertation. "Yes, he had the Concert Jazz Ensemble," she said. "Yes, he wrote in *The Birth of the Cool*. But this is a guy who traveled the world in his own small groups. This, to me, was the lion's share of his output and his impact. Yet, when I looked at what they call scholarly work that had been done on Mulligan—the four dissertations were mostly about his writing, although one drifts heavily into biography. There was material out there about his writing but not so much about him as an improvising jazz musician. I thought, 'This is weird. This is work that needs to be out there.' I thought it was important to focus on that aspect of his musicianship.

DIVA Jazz Orchestra celebrates its 30th anniversary at Dizzy's Club. Pilzer is at bottom right.



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“His improvisation,” she explained, “is really compositional. He returns to a melodic fragment, expanding on it, turning it upside down. I look at an overall line of his solo and say, ‘Oh, my God, there’s this arc of melodic activity. He’s telling a whole melodic story over the course of these two choruses. It has a logical start and continuation and ending. It’s astounding. It’s subtle. It’s not brassy. It’s not like he’s playing so fast or so high and superimposing these chords. Holy cow, what he just did with these five notes over the space of 12 bars—it’s insane.’”

People see Mulligan, she added, “as a collaborator. I’m going to go out on a limb here about Mulligan and Chet Baker. Baker was just doing his thing. Mulligan was making up the counterpoint, and he was the support instrument when Baker was soloing.” Conversely, “I feel like the Mulligan/Bob Brookmeyer combination

was just exquisite because they both brought that compositional brain to it. There really was a mutual effort, playing behind one another. Even if they didn’t play a tune the same way every time, they had a concept about the tune that was beautiful.”

In addition to her participation in DIVA and her own bands, Pilzer is a member of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra. That, she said, has been “an incredible experience.” Her bands include the Leigh Pilzer Startet, a quartet or quintet; an organ group called Leigh Pilzer’s Low Standards; a septet known as Leigh Pilzer’s Seven Pointed Star; PALS, a duo with bassist Amy Shook, and JLQ, a quintet co-led with trombonist Jen Krupa.

Pilzer is beginning work on a new album with Paul Bratcher on Hammond B3 organ and Greg Holloway on drums. There will also be contributions on “a tune or two” by

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Ted Rosenthal

Tyshawn Sorey

Scott Wendholt

Eliane Elias

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trumpeters Hany Albrecht and Kenny Rittenhouse. “I was gonna call it ‘Low Standards’, she said, “but I realized I have some of my own tunes that I haven’t recorded. But I’m still going to call it ‘Low Standards’. All the tunes sound like something that was written in 1952.” Pilzer is on baritone sax in DIVA’s recently released album, *Tappin’ Thru Life*, music from the theatrical production celebrating the life and legacy of the late dancer/singer/choreographer Maurice Hines. See Joe Lang’s review on page 53.

On the day of our interview, Pilzer was preparing for a Saturday night gig at the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap, PA, in a sextet called DIVA SnyxNyx with Shook on bass, Maricle on drums, Amy Bormet on piano, Jaime Dauber on trumpet, and Krupa on trombone. “We’re going to play some standards and originals and swing and have fun,” she said.



Middlesex County Jazz Festival Schedule

Admission is free

Wednesday, September 24,
Woodbridge

Parker Press, 400 Rahway Ave.

7:00–7:30 PM

Woodbridge High School Jazz
Choir (Lisa Romero, Director)

7:30–8:00 PM

Brass Queens

8:30–10:00 PM

Vocalist Elizabeth Bougerol
(of The Hot Sardines)

Friday, September 26, Carteret

Carteret Performing Arts Center,
46 Washington St

7:00–8:30 PM

Vocalist Lezlie Harrison

Saturday, September 27, Metuchen

Metuchen High School Auditorium,
400 Grove St., advance registration
required: bit.ly/metuchen-jazz-092725

5:30–6:00 PM

Metuchen Dance Center
and MHS Jazz Combo

6:00–6:45 PM

MHS Jazz Ensemble and Orchestra

7:00–8:00 PM

Asian American Pacific Islander Jazz
Collective led by Trombonist Peter Lin

8:15–9:45 PM

Sherrie Maricle and the
DIVA Jazz Orchestra



Conrad Herwig

Sunday, September 28,
New Brunswick

11 Livingston Ave. in front of the New
Brunswick Performing Arts Center

1:00–1:45 PM

Mike Noordzy and the Rutgers
Alumni Jazz Orchestra

2:15–3:30 PM

Vocalist Antoinette Montague

4:00–5:30 PM

Trombonist Conrad Herwig and
the Latin Side All Stars



How the Ray Brown-Oscar Peterson Partnership Began

Ray Brown His Life and Music by Jersey Jazz Contributing Editor Jay Sweet was published in June by Equinox Publishing Ltd. Following is an excerpt from Chapter 7, taking a look at the relationship between Brown and pianist Oscar Peterson. A review by JJ's Joe Lang follows.

BY JAY SWEET

From 1950 onward, Ray Brown and Oscar Peterson began a tight-knit association that would continue throughout most of Ray's life. The amount of quality music they produced together is monumental. Both men shared similar musical values: tradition over wild experimentation, and virtuosity over gimmickry. They aspired to achieve technical mastery and worked extremely hard to reach their goals.

Oscar Peterson was born in Montreal, Canada, on August 15, 1925. Fueled by his father's passion for musical education, Peterson's piano training began early, and he developed quickly. While his early training was strictly classical, his fascination with jazz piano began in his early teens after hearing Art Tatum. Determined to match Tatum's technique, Peterson changed his musical direction and developed an impressive jazz style and repertoire.

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

RAY BROWN HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

At fourteen, he won a national amateur talent contest hosted by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, earning \$250 and a slot on a weekly radio program called *Fifteen Minute Piano Ramblings* in Montreal. By seventeen, having built a strong reputation around Montreal's St. Antoine district, he joined the Johnny Holmes Orchestra, where he stayed for five years.

Peterson first recorded in Canada in 1946 and soon attracted the attention of famous American musicians such as Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Coleman Hawkins. Despite impressive job offers from top bandleaders, Peterson chose to remain in Canada, leading his own trio at Montreal's Alberta Lounge from fall 1947 through September 1949, enjoying great success. It was during this time that he first met jazz promoter Norman Granz. Peterson recounted their meeting in an interview:

“[Granz] came up to Montreal to promote an upcoming Jazz at the Philharmonic tour. He was in a cab on his way back to the airport after doing some promotion when the cabby happened to have the radio on. Norman inquired, ‘Who is that? What record is that?’ The cabby said, ‘That’s not a record. That’s Oscar Peterson.’ Norman said, ‘What are you talking about?’ The cabby thought Norman was a Montrealer and said, ‘Don’t you know who Oscar Peterson is?’ Norman said, ‘No.’ The cabby said, ‘He’s playing at the Alberta Lounge.’ Norman said, ‘Turn around. Never mind the airport. Let’s go down there.’ And that’s when we first met.”

Once Norman Granz heard Peterson play, he instantly had a career plan for him. During their initial meeting, they agreed Peterson would make his American debut on stage with Jazz at the Philharmonic (JATP)



Ray Brown and
Oscar Peterson, 1965.

at Carnegie Hall on September 18, 1949. Carnegie Hall was the perfect setting to introduce Peterson to the American public, as Granz had established a tradition since 1940 of introducing surprise guests at the annual concert — previous guests included Lionel Hampton and Billie Holiday.

The concert and Peterson's debut were memorable, especially for Ray Brown, who was the only

other musician on stage. Brown and Peterson have often spoken about why it was only a duo performance. Ray Brown remembers:

“Buddy [Rich] had a drum solo to play. And you know Buddy, when he plays his solos, he plays until he is exhausted—just two inches from dead. His solos usually came before intermission. That night at Carnegie Hall, Buddy played his solo and came

RAY BROWN HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

off completely wiped out. Norman said, 'Okay, I'm going to bring Oscar on.' Buddy said, 'Norman, I don't think I can go back out there.' Norman said, 'What am I going to do?' Oscar said, 'Ray Brown and I'll do it.' So that's how it happened. Out of these things, sometimes good always happens. We went out and played and

tore it up anyway. We played 'Tenderly,' and later went into the studio and made a record of it, which was a hit. That is how the duo started because Buddy was too wiped to play."

Peterson recalls the event differently: "Norman Granz wanted me to play solo. He said, 'Yeah, all right, you're gonna come on the second half

and play solo piano.' I said, 'Norman, I haven't been playing solo piano recently, and that's another venue altogether. Let me use a rhythm section.' He said, 'No, I want people to hear exactly what you're doing without anything getting in your way.' We talked for a few minutes, and he said, 'I'll make you a concession; you can have Ray Brown, but leave the drums out.' Mainly, I remember we melded very easily together. We didn't rehearse; we just discussed what we would play and what key it would be in. He said, 'We'll lay out an intro and we'll go for it,' which we did. It was very easy. Immediately it was a fix, as we say."

Despite the conflicting stories, it is certain that only the two of them were on stage, and Peterson's debut was a great success. It quickly became apparent to Peterson, Brown, Granz, and thousands of fans that Peterson and Brown were a perfect musical match.

Though the Carnegie Hall debut was their first official collaboration, the two had already met and jammed together in Montreal when Brown visited as part of JATP. Peterson had noticed Brown's playing on Dizzy Gillespie's records as early as 1946 and had even told his childhood friend, bassist Hal Gaylor, that he would someday lead a trio with Ray Brown on bass — years before they actually met.

Peterson's foreshadowing soon became reality, but the pair had to wait before working together again. As 1949 came to a close, Peterson returned to Canada following his Carnegie Hall debut. Meanwhile, Ray Brown and his wife, Ella Fitzgerald, continued to tour with JATP, but a seed had been planted on the evening of September 18, 1949 — a seed that would grow into one of the most celebrated musical partnerships in jazz history.



Ray Brown and Oscar Peterson at a Jazz at the Philharmonic concert at Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, April 1959. The drummer is Ed Thigpen.

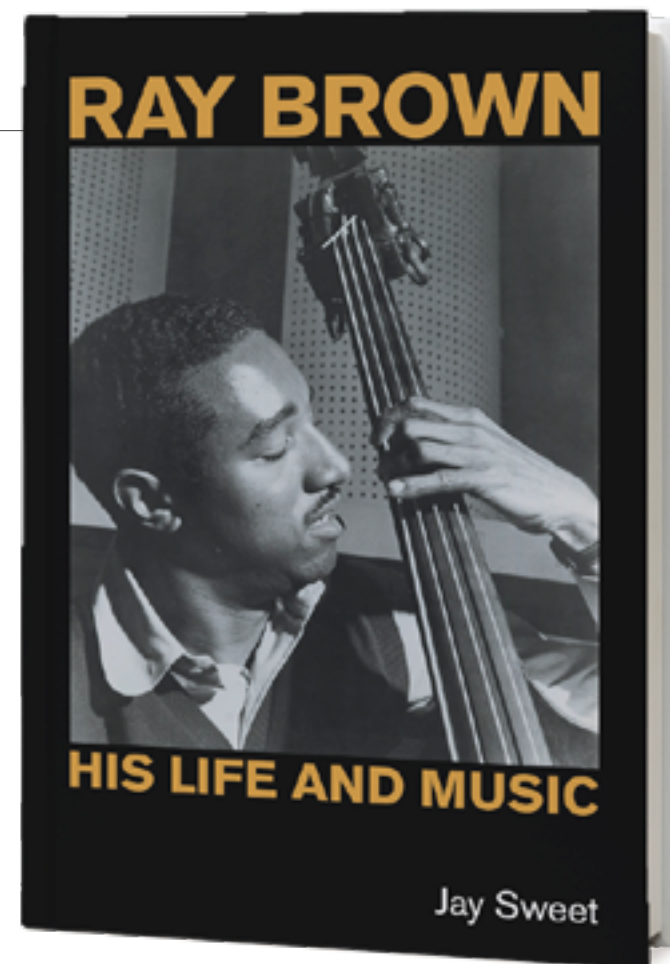
BNA PHOTOGRAPHIC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

New Biography Provides a Unique Overview of a Great Jazz Bassist

The Oscar Peterson Trio with Ray Brown Became One of the Most Popular Small Groups in Jazz

BY JOE LANG

Ray Brown was among the most acclaimed bassists in jazz history. An examination of his life and career is a worthy undertaking, one that Jay Sweet has given us with *Ray Brown: His Life and Music* (Equinox Publishing Ltd.: 2025). Sweet, a jazz bassist and jazz educator, currently teaching at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, and a *Jersey Jazz* Contributing Editor, has the background and writing skills to bring



unique insight to Brown's story.

Brown was born in Pittsburgh, the hometown of scores of jazz greats, in 1926. His early exposure to playing music was on the piano. He decided that he wanted to play trombone, but his family could not afford to buy one, so he opted to take up the bass as his school orchestra needed a bass player and had a bass available for the person willing to fill that chair. This proved to be fortuitous as Brown ascended to a special place among jazz bassists.

After sitting in on jam sessions in Pittsburgh, Brown was soon known enough to be hired as the bassist for some territory bands. In 1945, he opted to move to New York. Soon after his arrival, he was introduced to Dizzy Gillespie and was hired on the spot to join Gillespie's band. He also played on Gillespie's big band.

In 1947, he played on his first Jazz at the Philharmonic concert and soon became a regular presence on JATP.

Another participant on JATP was Ella Fitzgerald with whom Brown had become romantically involved. They married in December 1947. They had become musical partners as well, but their marriage ended in 1953, mostly due to conflicting career paths. Brown had become a member of the Oscar Peterson Trio in 1951, and the constant touring with Peterson kept him and Fitzgerald apart too frequently both personally and musically. However, they both continued with the JATP tours, with Brown often part of the bands backing her.

Brown recorded extensively with Peterson, mostly in a piano, guitar, and bass trio; the guitarists were initially Barney Kessel

RAY BROWN HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

and then Herb Ellis. The Peterson group became one of the most popular small groups in jazz under the guidance of JATP producer Norman Granz who also managed Peterson and Fitzgerald, both of whom were signed to Granz's Verve record label.

As time permitted, Brown was also busy as a sideman on many recording sessions throughout his career. After leaving Peterson, he moved to Los Angeles where he became active in the studio scene. Throughout his post-Peterson days, there were many times when he was reunited with both

Peterson and Fitzgerald, especially on many recordings done for Granz's new label, Pablo.

Brown recorded several sessions as a leader, mostly with small groups, but a few times fronting a big band. He had a trio with Gene Harris in the 1980s and led his final trio from 1991 through 2002 with a variety of pianists, mostly recording for the Telarc label.

Following a round of golf earlier in the day, Brown passed away in his sleep July 2, 2022, at the age of 75. He was known among his peers as a man who was committed to



One of Brown's Telarc albums: *Seven Steps to Heaven* (1995) with pianist Benny Green, drummer Gregory Hutchinson, and guitarist Ulf Wakenius.

his music and a person willing to share his knowledge with younger musicians. Over the years, he served as a mentor to many jazz stars, most notably pianist Benny Green and vocalist Diana Krall.

Sweet presents a detailed analysis of Brown's music, examining the nuances of most of the recordings on which he appeared. He discusses the evolution of how Brown's singular prowess as a bassist developed from his first major influence, Jimmy Blanton, the legendary bassist with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Along the way, Sweet provides biographical details of Brown's life along with pertinent information about many of the musicians with whom he was associated. This volume offers a comprehensive overview of the life and music of Ray Brown, an exceptional and influential musician in the world of jazz.

**BROWN RECORDED SEVERAL SESSIONS
AS A LEADER, MOSTLY WITH SMALL GROUPS.**

FROM THE CROW'S NEST

BY BILL CROW



During a couple of years, 1971 and '72, when my employment in the jazz world had dwindled and before I began playing Broadway shows, I was with Peter Duchin's club date band. We flew out to play at wealthy affairs all over the country. At a country club in Texas, we were booked for two days, first on New Year's Eve, and the next day at the opening of a new building on the premises. The New Year's Eve party was held in a huge tent, and the entire ceiling was covered with netting that held hundreds of inflated balloons.

At 12 o'clock we went into "Auld Lang Syne", and the waiters pulled the cords to release the balloons.

The net fell to the floor, but the balloons all stayed up at the tent's ceiling. Whoever had prepared the balloons had filled them with helium! Helium balloons were appropriate for the celebration on the following day, an outdoor affair, but they spoiled the intended effect at the indoor party. I guess someone thought that filling them with ordinary air wasn't classy enough.

When I first got out of the Army in 1949, I was playing drums at the Cirque Club in Seattle. Sammy Davis was with the Will Mastin Trio, which was playing at another Seattle club, and they came to visit us. Sammy sat in and did his whole dance act, then imitated comedy stars from the Apollo, and then sat in on drums and trumpet, playing better than any of us did. I had never seen anyone dance that well, and he

continued to be my favorite hoof-er, even after the wonderful Gregory Hines appeared on the scene.

In the days when men were wearing medallions, Papa Jo Jones wore a miniature Zildjian cymbal on a cord around his neck. Sometimes, when he saw someone wearing any kind of a medallion, he would tap on it and say, "I EARNED mine, Daddy. Where did you earn yours?"

When I was in the Second Army Band at Fort Meade, MD, in 1948, a new jazz club opened in Washington, DC, that was called Duke Ellington's. It was meant to be Duke's home base in his home town, and it had been designed to present the band elegantly. When you walked in the front door, you stood on a wide carpet that ran forward across the large floor, up onto the bandstand,

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FROM THE CROW'S NEST

and up the wall to the ceiling. The lighting and sound were excellent. Sonny Greer's famous drum set was centered on the top riser, complete with chimes, gong, and tympani.

On the wall above Duke's piano was a little wrought iron balcony, with a door through which Kay Davis would step, to sing—without a microphone—her vocal lines as though she were another instrument in the band. Her voice carried beautifully throughout the large room. A long bar was at one side of the room, and they also sold soft drinks to patrons who were too young to buy alcoholic drinks.

I went there on three different nights, and I was lucky one night to catch Ben Webster sitting in with the band. On the other nights, Al Sears was the featured tenor player.

The other reeds were Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton and

Harry Carney. The trombones were Lawrence Brown, Tyree Glenn, Quentin Jackson, and Britt Woodman. In the trumpet section I recognized Shorty Baker, Al Killian, and Ray Nance. Wendell Marshall was the bass player.

The band sounded wonderful, and I looked forward to hearing them live again. But Ellington only stayed at the club for a month, and then he took the band back on the road.

The club booked several other big bands, including Illinois Jacquet and Buddy Rich, but those bands didn't attract enough business, and, by the end of 1949, Duke Ellington's was no longer Duke's home base. That space eventually became a radio station.

I was on a Birdland tour with the Gerry Mulligan Quartet one winter. In one arena that we played, Count Basie had the only

dressing room with heat, so everybody from the six groups on the tour was in there with him. There was an upright piano in there, and Basie started playing, so I joined in with him. Then I realized that there were five bass players in the room with us, so one of us had to be on stage. Sure enough, it was me. I had never played with Basie before, but I quickly stopped playing with him and ran out on stage, just in time.

Terry Gibbs told me that, when he played on a TV show with Benny Goodman, Bernie Leighton was subbing for Teddy Wilson. After the tune that was supposed to end the program they needed a little more time, so the MC asked Benny to name the musicians. Benny named everyone, but when he came to Bernie, he blanked out. Instead, he said, "And on piano, Teddy Wilson!"



Sandy Sasso

SandySasso.com

for more Sandy info

OTHER VIEWS

BY JOE LANG

It has been a while since there have been many exciting big band albums that have crossed my desk, so I am pleased that this column starts off with five of them.

From November 2013 through February 2016, tap dancer/vocalist Maurice Hines, backed by **The DIVA Jazz Orchestra**, performed *Tappin' Thru Life*, a much acclaimed musical biography of Hines. On *A Celebration of Maurice Hines: Tappin' Thru Life* (DIVA Jazz -2025), DIVA, with guest artists—vocalists Clint Holmes and Ann Hampton Callaway and tap dancer/vocalists John Manzari and Leo Manzari—recreate the music from the Hines show. The album captures the musical magic that made the show such a success. Throughout the 18 tracks, the band is at its roaring best, and the vocalists each do a superb job of singing the program of standards, with the Manzaris adding some fine

tap interludes. Anyone who got to see Hines will appreciate this loving tribute to his artistry. divajazz.com

Sean Nelson and the New London Big Band has released a winner with *Don't Stop Now: The Lost Music of Thad Jones Written for Harry James* (Outside In Music). At one point in the 1960s, Harry James enlisted the great composer/arranger Thad Jones to create one chart a month for the James band. Many of these arrangements were never recorded, and Nelson has chosen 11 of them for this program—nine Jones originals plus “If I Could Be with You (One Hour Tonight)” and “Sweet Georgia Brown.” James wanted a Count Basie feeling to the music that he commissioned from Jones, and that influence is evident in the music found on this album. Nelson is the Musical Director/Trombonist/Staff Arranger for the Coast Guard concert band and

jazz ensembles. The band is tight with superb soloists and is joined for this session by renowned trumpeter Wayne Bergeron and drummer John Riley. seannelsonjazzorchestra.com

The Jazz Orchestra Volume 1 (Outside In Music) is the first big band album released by leader/trombonist **Nick Finzer**. A stellar lineup of up-and-coming New York City musicians are in this 18-piece aggregation. Finzer



has recorded a six-tune program with four of his originals—“The Guru,” “We, The People,” “Again and Again” and “Just Past the Horizon”—plus two JJ Johnson compositions, “Say When” and “Lament.” Finzer wrote five of the charts with the other penned by Jack Courtright. The album was recorded in one session by this enthusiastic collection of musicians who perform the charts with tight precision. Nifty soloists are sprinkled throughout. outsideinmusic.com

Big band leader Ira B. Liss and arranger Dan Radlauer came up with an interesting concept, matching a variety of soloists from various music genres with the **Ira B. Liss Big Band Jazz Machine**. The result is *Unexpected Guests* (self-produced). The guest artists range from country music superstar Vince Gill to ukulele master Daniel Ho. Most of the tunes were composed by the

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guest artists on the tune with the others penned by Radlauer, who did all of the arrangements. The variety makes for interesting listening. The constant is the fabulous big band that handles the many music styles with aplomb. bigbandmachine.net

For more than 50 years, trumpeter, Greg Hopkins, arranger and leader of **The Greg Hopkins Jazz Orchestra**, has been writing scores of arrangements for his bands. On *Chronography* (Un-Gyve Records), Hopkins has selected 10 of his charts. The program includes standards, such as “Body and Soul,” “Spring Is Here,” and “Old Folks,” plus a medley of tunes by Dizzy Gillespie—“Hot House,” “Con Alma” and “Night in Tunisia”—and a challenging original, “For ‘O,’” that is based on an unnamed popular song. Hopkins creates charts that are consistently interesting and full of surprises. The band executes them with swinging

precision. Vocalist Renese King renders impressive vocal takes on “Like a Lover” and “Come Sunday.” “Body and Soul” features tenor saxophonist Billy Pierce who offers a scintillating approach to this tune, a favorite of jazz musicians. greghopkinsjazz.com

For several years, **Peter & Will Anderson** have been presenting programs featuring the music the Great American Songbook. *The Best of Berlin* (Arbors - 19494) is their first album devoted to Irving Berlin. To perform a baker’s dozen of these Berlin classics, the Andersons have gathered a top-flight crew with Peter on tenor sax and clarinet, Will on alto sax, clarinet and flute, Wycliffe Gordon on trombone and vocals, Rossano Sportiello on piano, Neal Miner on bass, and Chuck Redd on drums. The selections include “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “Always,” and “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm,” among others. Gor-



don’s vocals are featured on “Cheek to Cheek” and “Puttin’ on the Ritz”. The band executes Peter Anderson’s charts with imagination and outstanding musicianship. If you dig straight-ahead, mainstream jazz, this one is a must for you. arborsrecords.com

Turtle Bay Records is proving to be a go-to resource for the finest of classic jazz music. *Cat & the Hounds* (Turtle Bay - 25005) by **Colin Hancock’s Jazzhounds featuring Catherine Russell** is guaranteed to bring a smile to your face and get your toes tapping. The players are Russell on vocals, Hancock on cornet and C-melody sax,

Dion Tucker on trombone, Evan Christopher on clarinet, alto sax and soprano sax, Jerron Paxon on banjo, guitar, harmonica and vocals, Jon Thomas on piano, Ahmed Johnson on drums, and Kerry Lewis on tuba, with occasional contributions from Vince Giordano on bass sax. The program contains a dozen jazz and blues tunes from the 1920s. Most will only be familiar to those who are enthusiasts of music from that era, but it will not be a hard choice for anyone who takes the time to dig into the music on this album to react positively. Having new vocals by Russell is always a joy, and the support that she receives from these musicians is superb. Hancock and Paul Kahn provide detailed and informative liner notes that enhance the listening experience for *Cat & the Hounds* turtlebayrecords.com

In the summer of 2024, pianist **Ted Rosenthal** recorded four albums of material with his two trios, one with

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Martin Wind on bass and Tim Horner on drums; and the other with Noriko Ueda on bass and Quincy Jones on drums. The first two of these albums are available. On *High Standards* (TMR Music), the trios perform such standards as “Skylark,” “Old Devil Moon”, and “Everything Happens to Me,” along with a jazz standard, “The Cup Bearers” by Tom McIntosh. In all instances, Rosenthal’s approach to the selections is fresh and original. *The Ted Rosenthal Songbook* (TMR Music) opens with four selections from Rosenthal’s acclaimed opera, *Dear Erich*, which was based on the real life story of his father who escaped to America from Nazi Germany and the letters that he received from his mother who, like most of the family, could not get out of Germany. The other six pieces are tunes that Rosenthal has composed in recent years. Two of these selections are contemplative ballads, “Nine Lives”

and “Crossing the Rubicon.” “Just for Kicks,” “Partly Sunny”, and “Pizzette” are spirited and up-tempo, while “Radiance” is a mid-tempo delight.

These albums illustrate the versatility of Rosenthal’s musical imagination. He links well with his rhythm mates, both teams feeling equally tight. The remaining two albums in this series will be released this coming October and in January 2006. tedrosenthal.com

Pianist **Caelan Cardello** is a Jersey guy through and through. He was raised in Teaneck, was involved with the Jazz House Kids program in Montclair, and is a graduate of the Jazz Studies program at William Paterson University. He was also featured as a Rising Star in the January 2022 issue of *Jersey Jazz*. His first album as a leader, *Chapter One* (Jazz Bird Records - 082925), is a trio effort with Jonathon Muir-Cotton

on bass and Domo Branch on drums; Chris Lewis adds his tenor sax on three tracks. Their program includes “All of You,” Harold Mabern’s “John Neely,” Cedar Walton’s “Groundwork,” plus eight Cardello originals. Cardello has the three things that set the primo players apart: great chops, a wide imagination, and exquisite taste. His playing grabs your attention and never lets it go. The support from Muir-Cotton and Branch is unrelenting and strong. *Chapter One* should be the first of many such chapters in the evolving musical life of Caelan Cardello. caelancardello.com

Very Early: Remembering Bill Evans (Joplin & Sweeney Music - 204) by the **Jim Witzel Quartet** is a unique Evans tribute, being led by guitarist Witzel. Joining Witzel on this nine-song program of songs that were part of the Evans repertoire are pianist Phil Aaron, bassist Dan Feiszli

and drummer Jason Lewis. Among the selections are: “Beautiful Love,” “How My Heart Sings,” and “Some Other Time”. The influence of Evans is evident in the playing of both Witzel and Aaron. Evans’ unique approach to harmonics had an indelible effect on scores of musicians as did the way in which he developed his trios to be integrated units rather than having the bass and drums serve primarily as support for the piano. Witzel and his bandmates have produced a fitting nod in Evans’ direction. jimwitzelmusic.com

It is a pleasure to hear a young tenor saxophonist whose influences reach back beyond the seemingly all-pervasive effect that John Coltrane has upon so many players currently on the scene. **Jacob Chung** is one who has obviously listened to many of the pre-Coltrane masters. On *Live at Frankie’s Jazz Club* (Cellar Music

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- 110924), he is supported by the Tyler Henderson Trio, Henderson on piano, Caleb Tobochman on bass, and Allen Barfield on drums. They assay an eight-song program that includes standards such as “The Touch of Your Lips,” “This Is No Laughing Matter” and “Beautiful Friendship;,” some jazz tunes such as Duke Pearson’s “Jeannine,” George Shearing’s “She,” and Bud Powell’s “Oblivion,” with two Henderson originals, “Love Endures” and “Goodbye/The Architect.” Chung is full of ideas that he deftly offers with a wonderfully listenable tone. The trio is a treasure, with Henderson being equally adept at accompanying and reeling off some sparkling jazz. Keep an eye out for opportunities to catch a Chung gig, as he is now based in New York City. cellarmusicgroup.com

Split Decision (Smoke Sessions - 2503) is the third album by ten-



or saxophonist **Eric Alexander** and alto saxophonist **Vincent Herring** as co-leaders. Their musical empathy is immediately evident, and, with the support of pianist Mike LeDonne, bassist Jon Webber and drummer Lewis Nash, they offer up a program of six selections: Steve Turre’s “Pharoah’s Dance,” Horace Silver’s “Strollin’,” Hank Mobley’s “A Peck a Sec” and “Soft Impressions,” Rob Bargad’s “Mo’s Theme,” and the Rodg-

ers and Hart standard “My Romance.” Alexander and Herring are among the most acclaimed current saxophonists. They are stylistically simpatico, and each is a monster on their instruments. The ideas freely flow forth from both of them, feeding off the other’s improvisations. LeDonne and crew are solid in support with some tasty piano interludes from the pianist. Alexander and Herring’s playing really defies categorization. They are masters of what is generally recognized as modern jazz. No matter what your stylistic preferences are, you are sure to find this music accessible and a joy. smokesessionsrecords.com

When it comes to jazz enthusiasts, **Miles Davis** is a major figure, one who is controversial for some. The line of demarcation for many occurred when he turned toward a fusion approach. For this writer, his most appealing music was that which he created

while signed to the Prestige label. Craft Recordings has been reissuing much of the material from this period with the most recent release being *Miles Davis 55* (Craft Recordings). There were three sessions recorded by Davis in 1955. On July 7, he had a quartet with Red Garland on piano, Oscar Pettiford on bass, and Philly Joe Jones on drums for six tunes: “Didn’t,” “Will You Still Be Mine,” “Green Haze,” “I See Your Face Before Me,” “A Night in Tunisia”, and “Gal in Calico,” released on the album *The Musings of Miles*. On August 8, he was joined by Jackie McLean on alto sax, Milt Jackson on vibes, Ray Bryant on piano, Percy Heath on bass, and Art Taylor on drums for “DR. Jackie,” “Bitty Ditty,” “Minor March”, and “Changes,” for the album, *Miles Davis and Milt Jackson Quintet/Sextet*. The final 1955 session took place on November 16 with the first recording of his classic quintet with John Coltrane

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on tenor sax, Red Garland on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, and Philly Joe Jones on drums for “Just Squeeze Me,” “There Is No Greater Love,” “How Am I to Know,” “S’posin’,” “The Theme”, and “Stablemates” released as *The New Miles Davis Quintet*.

These are three sessions with distinctly different feelings, the constant being the mid-range musings of Davis on trumpet. The last of these sessions marked a milestone moment as the quintet became one of the most popular and influential groups of its time. This album has two CDs of music that features the East Coast complement to the cool style that was defining West Coast Jazz. It is memorable music worth revisiting. craftrecordings.com

Vocalist/lyricist **Mark Winkler’s** *Hold On* (Cafe Pacific Records - 6031) is the latest in his fine catalog of releases that have featured his

swinging vocalizing, often singing songs for which he wrote the lyrics. The musical backing is varied with a stellar cast of first-rate Los Angeles musicians in a variety of combinations. Winkler wrote the lyrics for seven of the selections, while he also offers his takes on the witty Dave Frishberg/Johnny Hodges tune, “A Little Taste,” “If I Were a Bell,” “It Was a Very Good Year,” and Billy Joel’s “Vienna.” Winkler’s lyrics are well-conceived and crafted, always having a story and/or a message. Usually they examine various facets, stages and situations in life with interesting insight. He has an accessible baritone and an innate sense of swing that is unrelenting. The arrangements are jazz-oriented and the musicians execute them joyfully. *Hold On* is another in a decades long series of hip albums from one of the few true hipsters still on the scene. markwinklermusic.com

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