

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
NEW JERSEY JAZZ SOCIETY

JerseyJazz

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JAZZ AT UCPAC

SPYRO
GYRA



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ON THE COVER — *Spyro Gyra. From left: bassist Scott Ambush, guitarist Julio Fernandez, saxophonist/leader Jay Beckenstein, keyboardist Chris Fischer, drummer Lionel Cordew. PHOTO BY DAVID WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY*

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ALL THAT'S JAZZ

BY CYDNEY HALPIN



“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, Queens from the Morris Museum in Morristown. 9:30am Departure at 5:30 p.m.
- » 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- and 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 njjs.org and click on the red “Donate” button. Scroll down and click on the red “One-Time Donation” button. The page will say “Donate.” Reference “LAHM TRIP” in the “MEMO” and provide your contact information where requested. Contact Elizabeth Kavlakian

at vicepresident@njjs.org if paying by check or if you have any questions.

Save the dates! The Jersey Jazz LIVE! concerts begin again on Sunday, October 5th with Songbook singer Anaïs Reno and pianist Jeb Patton. The Rising Stars opening act will be guitarist Desmond Diehl, leading a trio. Mark your calendars and plan on spending the afternoon Swingin’! Please see our website (njjs.org/october-jersey-jazz-live-anais-reno) for more complete details about this concert. For tickets: www.ticketleap.events/tickets/new-jersey-jazz-society/jersey-jazz-live-the-anais-reno-duo

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: Mariel Bildsten, Ted Chubb, Alvester Garnett, and Mary Ann McSweeney, 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. For tickets: www.ticketleap.events/tickets/new-jersey-jazz-society/jersey-jazz-live-njjs-2025-scholarship-winners

Our 2025 programming will conclude 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 in-

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

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

Please join me and my fellow Board members in welcoming Cate Archer to Jersey Jazz LIVE! as our NEW videographer. Archer is a student at County College of Morris, under the tutelage of Assistant Professor Raymond Kalas,

where she'll earn a degree in Broadcasting Arts & Technology. We're delighted she's "come aboard" to capture the magic of our LIVE! programming. Be sure to say hello and welcome her to the NJJS community.

That we have a "new" videographer is evidence that our previous camera woman Vanessa Gernant has graduated from CCM, and was subsequently awarded a presidential scholarship to Marist University. Gernant will graduate from Marist with a degree in Media Studies and Production, with a concentration in TV and Film. We're so proud of her and know she'll go on to be a driving force within the new generation of media and storytelling.

Both women speak very highly of Professor Kalas, who clearly recognizes and shepherds young talent and is part of an amazing program at CCM. We thank him for steering two of his best students toward NJJS.

Do you have any jazz CDs, records or books you no longer enjoy that you'd like to donate to NJJS? All proceeds generated from the sale of generously donated items goes directly to supporting NJJS programming.

On September 13th, the sales of gently used, past donations generated approximately \$1,000 at the NJJS booth at the Montclair Jazz Festival!

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

Please contact board members Jay Dougherty—info@njjs.org—or James Pansulla—jazzeducation@njjs.org—to arrange for donation pickup/delivery.

Please join me in celebrating the fact that Jersey Jazz LIVE! now has its own backline

drum set for use by our visiting Rising Stars and featured acts. Performers no longer need to lug their kits, and which also means no more intermission shuffle!

Please join me in thanking Board member Jay Dougherty for finding this set and for the legwork in making it ours. It will be making its LIVE! debut on Sunday, October 5th with the Rising Stars/Opening Act the Desmond Diehl Trio.

If you'd like to make a donation to offset this purchase, please do so at njjs.org/donate and note "drum set" in the Memo. You can also donate by check to: NJJS, 382 Springfield Ave, Ste. 217, Summit, NJ 07901

"The falling leaves drift past my window, the autumn leaves of red and gold ..." — JOHNNY MERCER



Melba Liston Gets Some Long Overdue Recognition

Melba Liston was a true pioneer. At age 18 in the early 1940s, she joined trumpeter Gerald Wilson's band as a trombonist and assistant arranger. In 1948, Dizzy Gillespie asked her to join his band. Then, she played with the Count Basie band that accompanied Billie Holiday on a tour of the South. She rejoined Gillespie in the late 1950s and, in 1958, Liston formed her own all-female quintet and recorded her only album as a bandleader, *Melba Liston & Her Bones*, on the MetroJazz label. In 1959, she joined Quincy Jones' band to play in the musical, *Free and Easy*, and she stayed in Jones' touring band as one of two female members until 1961.

On Wednesday evening, October 22, Liston will be honored at Diz-

zy's Club as one of six new members of Jazz at Lincoln Center's Ertegun Hall of Fame, named in honor of Atlantic Records partner Nesuhi Ertegun, who was also the record label's Vice President in Charge of Jazz.

The tribute to Liston will be presented by JALC's Future of Jazz Orchestra. One member of that orchestra, trombonist Mariel Bildsten, considers Liston "one of my biggest heroes. The first time I heard her play 'My Reverie' with Quincy Jones' big band," Bildsten said, "I was floored. Her tone and phrasing soared above the band with power and grace. She had an extraordinary ability to create beauty and strength through her arrangements and compositions. Liston paved the way for generations of women jazz mu-

sicians and remains a profound source of inspiration and artistic brilliance."

In 2006, *Melba Liston & Her Bones* was reissued on the Fresh Sounds New Talent label and was reviewed by *AllAboutJazz's* Hrayr Attarian. The album's reissue, he wrote, "is cause for celebration." Liston, he pointed out, was best known as an arranger and composer, but he added: "She was a virtuoso trombone player as well. On this recording, she joins a variety of other trombonists including Al Grey, Benny Powell, and Slide Hampton. Even in the company of high quality accomplished master musicians like these," he continued, "her musical skills stand out. Her lyrical improvisations are melodic, clear, and gay when she plays un-muted and mysterious and warm when muted. Liston has long been ignored as a composer and horn player, in large part due to gender bias, and so

this reissue is long overdue -- not just because of its historical value, but also the quality of the music."

In 1987, Liston was awarded a Jazz Masters Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts at about the same time that her health began to decline. She suffered several strokes and passed away in 1999 at the age of 73.

Five other jazz giants will be inducted into the Ertegun Hall of Fame: Thad Jones, Joe Henderson, Abbey Lincoln, Horace Silver, and Tadd Dameron -- all deserving. But Melba Liston, in particular, is someone whose story needs to be better known. In 2014, a children's picture book, *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* by Katheryn Russell-Brown was published by Lee & Low Books. When it was released, Kirkus Reviews said, "Readers will agree that Melba Doretta Liston was something special."

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

MEMBER BENEFITS

- You become an integral part of the NJJS community, and the history and future of jazz
- Access to 11 Digital Issues of our Award Winning *Jersey Jazz* Magazine — Featuring Articles, Interviews, Reviews, Events and More
- Discounts to our *Jersey Jazz* LIVE! Sunday Concerts
- Discounts at NJJS Sponsored Concerts & Events.

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New Jersey Jazz Society

EXCLUSIVE EVENT

to the
**Louis Armstrong
House Museum
& Archives**

Friday, October 17th

9:30am Departure - 5:30pm Return

"Pops comes to life in Corona, Queens"

Event Includes:

- Round trip coach to Corona, Queens
(pick up & drop off at the Morris Museum, Morristown)
- 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 Morris Museum

Event Price: \$88.00 (including a \$3 handling fee per ticket)

Tickets available at: www.njjs.org



NJJS Scholarship Winners Will Perform with Jazz Professionals at November Concert

All six New Jersey Jazz Society 2025 Scholarship Winners will perform live at the November 2nd Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert at the Madison Community Arts Center. They will be joined by veteran jazz professionals, including tenor saxophonist/flutist Don Braden, trombonist Mariel Bildsten, trumpeter Ted Chubb, drummer Alvester Garnett, and bassist

Mary Ann McSweeney. Braden, Bildsten, and Chubb are NJJS Advisors and judges in the scholarship competition. The Scholarship recipients are:

- » **Tenor saxophonist Joseph Foglia**, Raleigh, NC, William Paterson University Jazz Studies, \$1,000 prize for Instrumental Performance.
- » **Vocalist Kyra Cioffi**, Rutherford, NJ, William Paterson University Jazz Studies, \$1,000 prize for Vocal Performance.
- » **Multi-instrumentalist Matt Cline**, Edmonton, Canada/Shanghai, China, Princeton University Program in Musical Performance, \$1,000 Prize for Composition
- » **Alto saxophonist Nate Tota**, Clinton, NJ, William Paterson University Jazz Studies, \$500 prize for Instrumental Performance.



From left: tenor saxophonist Joseph Foglia; vocalist Kyra Cioffi; multi-instrumentalist Matt Cline

JERSEY JAZZ LIVE!

» **Vocalist Sophia Varughese**, Delray Beach, FL, Princeton University Program in Musical Performance, \$500 prize for Vocal Performance.

» **Alto saxophonist Aiden Woods**, Warwick, NY, William Paterson University Jazz Studies, \$500 prize for Composition.

Foglia has won an NJJS Scholarship for the third time. In 2023, he won the \$500 prize for Instrumental Performance, and last year he received a first-place scholarship for Composition. He graduated from William Paterson this year and is taking a year away from school “to focus on work/practice” before applying to grad school.

Cioffi, who is entering her senior year at WPU this fall, considers Betty Carter as her “chief musical influence. Her ability to carve spaces for vocalists in largely instrumentally-dom-



From left: alto saxophonist Nate Tota; vocalist Sophia Varughese; alto saxophonist Aiden Woods

inant spaces through the mastery of her instrument and of jazz languages has inspired me. A more contemporary vocalist who inspires me is Veronica Swift. I find her elasticity when navigating both the songbook and bebop canons mesmerizing.”

Cline is beginning his junior year at Princeton where he is a Public and International Affairs major and

a Music minor. A multi-instrumentalist (trumpet, bass, and drums), Cline attended Shanghai American School from fifth through 12th grade. His band teacher, Christy Wanamaker “introduced me to jazz in middle school, and, later, my trumpet teacher, Jeremy Sinclair, a Berklee and University of North Texas grad, really elevated my trumpet chops and provided

me with composition advice and gig opportunities.” During Cline’s freshman year at Princeton, he received “amazing instruction in big band composition from Darcy James Argue, without which I wouldn’t have been able to compose at the level I do now.”

Tota is in his final year at William Paterson. “Jazz,” he said “is my passion, and the music gives me the

most artistic fulfillment.” In high school, he attended a summer jazz camp at Moravian University in Bethlehem, PA. “It was the first formal jazz education I had,” he said, “and it gave me a solid foundation to build on.” His biggest influence on alto saxophone is Cannonball Adderley.

Growing up, Varughese played classical French horn and jazz trumpet. She didn’t begin singing until her sophomore year at Princeton. A senior, she is an Astrophysics major and Vocal Jazz Performance minor, but she plans to attend graduate school to pursue a Masters in Music for Jazz

Voice. Her current voice teacher at Princeton, Michelle Lordi, “pushed me beyond what I thought was possible for myself and really made me feel like my dreams are in reach.”

During his junior year in high school, Woods learned about the William Paterson Summer Jazz Workshop. “Prior to this,” he said, “I had little experience playing jazz music. I participated in my high school’s jazz band and various area jazz bands, but it hadn’t quite clicked for me yet. However, when I arrived at WPU, my perspective on the music completely changed. For the first time, I was surrounded

by some of the greatest active jazz educators in the world, and I loved it.”

The NJJS Juried Scholarship Competition was initiated in 2022, with \$1,000 and \$500 scholarships awarded for Instrumental Performance and Composition. This year, a Vocal Performance category was added, thanks to the support of NJJS Board members Mike Katz and Jackie Wetcher. The competition is also generously supported by Nan Hughes Poole and Board member Cynthia Feketie.

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

Along with the cash awards, winners receive guidance, mentorship, the opportunity to perform with an industry professional, and coverage in *Jersey*

Jazz Magazine. Judges, in addition to Braden and Bildsten were: Ted Chubb, trumpeter and educator; and Jason Olaine, Vice President of Programming at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

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: *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-njjs-2025-scholarship-winners*
.....

: *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.*

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**WHEN I ARRIVED AT WPU,
MY PERSPECTIVE ON THE
MUSIC COMPLETELY CHANGED.** 🎵🎵



Soweto
Gospel
Choir- *PEACE*

SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 5

OCT
5

OCT
18

Nella
SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 18



KEAN
STAGE

Sarah Vaughan Vocal Competition Winner April May Webb to Perform in Toms River on October 19

When April May Webb was attending William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ, more than 10 years ago, pianist Mulgrew Miller, who was Director of Jazz Studies, came to one of her ensemble classes and played a Sarah Vaughan record. “He kinda was trying to fool me,” Webb said. “He didn’t tell me who it was, and he asked me, ‘Do you know what this is?’ I said, ‘Yeah, that’s Sarah Vaughan.’ He said, ‘You need to study her even more because she encompasses all the attributes you would want to have in a jazz vocalist.’”

Last November, Webb won the 13th annual Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Competition, held during the New Jersey Performing Arts Center’s TD James Moody Jazz Festival. She credits Miller for having “a great influence on me. He’s the reason why, as a vocalist, I focused on Sarah Vaughan.” Miller served as WP Jazz Studies Director from 2005 until 2013 when he passed away at the age of 57 from a stroke.

At 3 p.m. on Sunday, October 19, Webb will be leading a trio at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts



PHOTO BY AKIRU BOLA OKOYA

JAZZ ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

in Toms River. She will be joined by Yayoi Ikawa on piano and Webb's husband, Randall Haywood, on drums.

At the Sarah Vaughan finals, Webb's three song selections were: her original composition, "Cottonwood Tree", John Coltrane's "Giant Steps", and "Round Midnight" by Thelonius Monk.

"Cottonwood Tree" is "one of the latest songs I've written," she said. "It's about my transition from Kansas to New Jersey, and it was difficult because I got really homesick. My family home (in Newton, about 30 minutes from Wichita) had a huge backyard, and my brothers and I had all the fun stuff in our backyard. In the middle of it was this enormous cottonwood tree. It provided so much shade and so much beauty for our yard. So, I would come home often from New Jersey, and one of the times I was home, I was sitting under the cotton-



Webb displays her Sarah Vaughan Competition Award.

wood tree. It was a beautiful fall day, and the leaves were falling, and I said to myself, 'I'm finding what I need. Oh, that's a song a few years later.'"

Webb started the Sarah Vaughan finals with 'Giant Steps' "because I wanted to use a piece you don't hear vocalists do a lot, and this is notori-

ously difficult to improvise over. Then, I thought, 'What's the hardest song that I could do?' It was 'Round Midnight'. I've sung that song so many times with T.S. Monk. It's the song we always close the sets with." Webb and Haywood, who also plays trumpet, co-lead The Sounds of A&R, a musical group that tours and often performs with drummer Thelonious Monk III.

Mulgrew Miller described Webb as "at once, lyrical and soulful." *Talkin' Broadway* reviewer Rob Lester noted that she "sings, whoops, and impressively scats." Yayoi Ikawa was born in Tokyo but has lived and worked in New York for several years. She studied jazz at the New School where she received the Henry and Gill Block scholarship and has worked with such jazz artists as National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master bassist Reggie Workman, drummer Michael Carvin, and violin-

ist Michael Urbaniak. Ikawa is Music Director at First Baptist Church in Piscataway NJ, and a Jazz Piano Instructor at City College of New York and Brooklyn College. Haywood earned his Master's Degree from Juilliard in 2023 and is currently on the jazz faculty at the University of Hartford's Hartt School of Music.

: *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 April May Webb concert begins at 3 p.m. on Sunday, October 19, 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.*

Jersey Jazz **LIVE!**



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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5 • 3:00 PM

Madison Community Arts Center

10 KINGS ROAD, MADISON, NJ
FREE STREET PARKING ON KINGS ROAD

\$15 MEMBERS | \$20 NON-MEMBERS

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*Made possible by funds from
the New Jersey State Council on
the Arts, a partner agency of
The National Endowment for the Arts.*

New Jersey **Jazz** Society





John Schreiber, left, and George Wein

John Schreiber Remembers George Wein

George Wein, Founder of the Newport Jazz Festival, would have celebrated his 100th birthday on October 3, 2025. We asked John Schreiber, President and CEO of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, to share some memories of his friend and mentor. Wein passed away on September 13, 2021, at the age of 95.

BY JOHN SCHREIBER

I've had a remarkably lucky life as a producer. As the CEO of NJPAC, we've presented thousands of concerts and events to millions of community members up and down the state of New Jersey over the course of my 15 seasons here. I've won Tony and Emmy awards for shows I've produced on Broadway and TV. Working in the film industry, I was part of the team that brought movies like *Good-*

night and Good Luck, An Inconvenient Truth, and Lincoln to the screen.

I credit my mentor, George Wein, for making all of this possible.

I'll never forget the first time I met him. It was almost 50 years ago, and I was fresh out of Haverford College and full of beans. As an undergraduate, I had booked our school's jazz/folk series, stocking it with my favorites: Marian McPart-

land, the Ruby Braff/George Barnes Quartet, Odetta, Jimmy Rowles, and other brilliant musicians.

I also produced an old-fashioned, ‘Hey, kids, let’s put on a show’ Haverford/Bryn Mawr College summer theater for two seasons. There, our intrepid troupe of two dozen student actors lived together in a big house on campus and staged a new production a week for eight weeks. I co-produced HBO’s first-ever standup comedy special: “Robert Klein Live at Haverford”.

I was an American Studies ma-

jor—a major that prepared a person for next to nothing. But that didn’t faze me. I knew I wanted to be a producer, and I wanted to work for the best. In theater, it was Hal Prince. In jazz, it was George Wein.

Thanks to Marian, the brilliant British jazz pianist, educator, composer, and longtime host of NPR’s *Piano Jazz* radio series, I met George first. At the time, George’s Festival Productions was the largest producer of music festivals in the world, presenting over 1,000 events a year. I had



George Wein and Sarah Vaughan at 1987 Newport Jazz Festival

attended the Newport Jazz Festival-New York, and I knew that George had produced the first concert I ever went to: Mabel Mercer and Bobby Short at Town Hall in 1967. I was 12 at the time. That concert ignited by lifelong love of American Song and jazz.

So, I was both excited and intimidated to meet the person whose life’s work exemplified so thoroughly my budding professional aspirations. Festival’s offices were housed in a beautiful old brownstone on 74th

Street between West End and Riverside on the Upper West Side. On a sunny afternoon in May 1976, I was escorted up the house’s grand stairs to George’s airy, bay-windowed office on the second floor. The door was open, George was on the phone; and his secretary told me to take a seat.

Later, I figured out that the “somebody” on the phone was George’s French promoter partner, Simone Ginibre. The Newport-New York festival was a few months from starting,


**WRITE ALL THE PRESS RELEASES
FOR THE NEWPORT JAZZ
FESTIVAL? WHERE DO I SIGN?** 



From left, Bobby Hackett, Louis Armstrong, George Wein

and right after that George and Simone would produce La Grande Parade du Jazz in Nice. They were discussing the logistics of the Nice Festival.

George finished the call, turned to me, gave me a brusque hello and asked me what I knew how to do. I

had been an American Studies major, so I didn't know how to do anything. "I can write," I said. He said: "Okay, Sarah Vaughan is appearing at Carnegie Hall at the Newport Festival next month with a full orchestra and strings. Write me a

GEORGE WAS A PIONEER. HE INVENTED THE AMERICAN JAZZ FESTIVAL AT NEWPORT IN 1954.

press release about the concert."

He reached across his big, cluttered desk and handed me a pad and pen. I took the cue, and, as he got back on the phone, I sat across from him and started to write. Twenty minutes later, with my heart in my mouth, I passed him back 500 words that would make or break my future.

George lowered his readers, gave my work a quick once over and said: "This is okay. You can write all the press releases for the Newport Jazz Festival this year. I'll pay you \$100

a week for the next two months. If you work out, I might have a staff job for you." Write all the press releases for the Newport Jazz Festival? Get paid \$100 a week? Where do I sign?"

George then did something that will forever be seared in my memory: He picked up the phone and called Bob Jones, Festival's Head of Production, in Cincinnati. "Bob, I got a kid here I'm going to put on for a few months to write all the press releases for Newport. When you come east for the festival, I want him to shadow you,

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learn a little about the business.” I’m sure it sounds silly, but at that time, to me, calling France or Cincinnati at the drop of a hat seemed the most glamorous thing anyone could do.

I was entering an exciting new world where long distance calls (which in those days could cost the equivalent of a tank of gas) were a commonplace. The next few months were a glorious whirlwind. Under the tutelage of the remarkable Charlie Bourgeois, George’s PR maven, I wrote about 30 releases describing the festival’s dozens of events.

Charlie was a wonder. He had started with George in Boston in the early ‘50s as the Manager of Storyville, George’s legendary jazz club. An impeccable dresser who bought all his clothes at the Andover Shop in Cambridge (where, thanks to him, I still shop), Charlie was known to seat those he thought inappropriate-



George Wein and Christian McBride at the 2019 Jazz Congress.

ly attired at the worst tables in the club. He also had ears like vacuum cleaners. Over the years to come, he would introduce me to Alberta Hunter, Ellis Larkins, Rose Murphy, Zoot Sims, Sylvia Syms, Tommy Flanagan, Teddi King, Barbara Carroll, and so many other elegant, swinging, and generous musicians and singers.

Bob Jones, another hero, took me backstage at Lincoln Center, Town Hall, and Carnegie Hall and also shared what it took to produce a jazz concert in venues like Central Park, the Staten Island Ferry, and the Whitney Museum. It was a remarkable introduction into the universe I would spend the rest of my life,

one way or another, engaged in. Bob taught me how to build a drum kit, set up a sound system, and read a light plot. And, like everyone at the festival, he operated in a culture where respect for the performer, whether sideman or star, was essential.

Halfway through my first Newport Festival, George asked to see me. “You’re doing okay,” he said. “Would you like to come with us to the Nice Festival next week? We could use another stage manager.” I provided a quick “Yes!” before he thought better of the offer. “And, I want you to stay on full time after Nice is over. How does \$200 a week sound?”

A trip to Nice, a permanent gig, and a salary that was double what I was making? I played it cool. “That sounds good.” And it was. Over the next 20 years, George was my true north.

I went from a jack of all trades production assistant to road manag-

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ing tours all over the world for Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Mel Torme, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Charlie Mingus, and many other brilliant creative artists; then, acting as George's Executive Assistant to becoming, eventually, President of Festival Productions.

Whether it was one of the dozens of KOOL Jazz Festivals we produced across America, the Benson and Hedges Blues Festivals, the JVC Jazz Fest in New York, or the American Express Gold Card events program, every new initiative was an opportunity to learn, grow, and collaborate.

George was a pioneer. He invented the American jazz festival at Newport in 1954, and in 1958 he broke down racial barriers when he married an African-American woman, Joyce Alexander. At that time, marriage between races was illegal in many states.

As we mark the 100th anniversary of George's birth, his legacy is every-

where. At NJPAC we'll produce the 12th edition of the TD James Moody Jazz Festival in November. Our Artistic Adviser for the festival is Christian McBride, the multi-hyphenate nine-time Grammy winning bassist who I first met almost 40 years ago as a teenager playing in a high school band in Philadelphia when I was producing the Mellon Jazz Festival for George.

At a time in the life of our country when collaboration and respect for differing voices are under attack, the work George led and the culture of inclusion, excellence, and diversity he championed every day of his life is more important to remember and model than it has ever been.

I am blessed to have grown up under his tutelage. The world today could benefit from his example. Happy 100th, George! Your unique and enduring contributions to world culture will last forever.





Ted Rosenthal



Tyshawn Sorey



Scott Wendholt



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At William Paterson, Ted Rosenthal Will Showcase His Trio Arrangements of Music by George Gershwin

“We Might Break Out a Newer Arrangement of ‘S’Wonderful’

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON



From left, Martin Wind, Ted Rosenthal, Tim Horner.

About 12 years ago, pianist Ted Rosenthal was approached about performing George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* in a small venue. "I said, as a matter of fact, I've been thinking of coming up with a trio arrangement, so why don't we make this an occasion where we actually put a trio arrangement together for this concert."

That was about two years before Rosenthal released his *Rhapsody in Gershwin* trio album on the Playscape label. The album was featured by National Public Radio's Kevin Whitehead on the program, "Fresh Air" with the title: "Jazz Pianist Ted Rosenthal Has a Feel for Gershwin." Pointing out that, "Rosenthal reduces 'Rhapsody In Blue's' lush orchestration," Whitehead added that, "he also opens the piece up, making room for improvising and loosening up the rhythm. That's when these players really make the 'Rhapsody' their own and

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make it modern again. (The other members of the trio were bassist Martin Wind and drummer Tim Horner).

AllAboutJazz's Dan Bilawsky wrote that Rosenthal's trio "gives Gershwin's melodies, harmonies, and rhythms their due but applies transformative touches to all of them. The 17-minute 'Rhapsody in Blue' is the perfect example ... Shifting roles, styles, and ideas enliven this performance of an oh-so-familiar classic."

At 3 p.m. on Sunday afternoon, October 19, Rosenthal, Wind, and Horner will play their trio versions of Gershwin at William Paterson University as part of its fall Jazz Room

series. In addition to "Rhapsody in Blue", the album included seven other Gershwin tunes: "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off", "Fascinatin' Rhythm", "I Loves You Porgy", "They Can't Take That Away From Me", "Strike Up the Band", "Someone to Watch Over Me", and "Love Walked In".

Will there be any surprises on October 19? "We might break out a newer arrangement of S'Wonderful'. It's an arrangement that hasn't actually been recorded yet. I've been doing 'Strike Up the Band' for years," he added. "I remember doing it with (bassist) George Mraz and (drummer) Terry Clarke. We were the trio backing



From left, Quincy Davis, Rosenthal, and Noriko Ueda.

up (vocalist) Helen Merrill, and we would have a trio moment in the show."

This past summer, Rosenthal recorded four different albums on

his TMR Music label, spreading their release over several months. "I hadn't released a trio CD since the Gershwin CD," he explained, "and I had lots of material." Two of the recordings were reviewed by Joe Lang in the September issue of *Jersey Jazz: High Standards*, released in March, and *The Ted Rosenthal Songbook*, released in June. "These albums," Lang wrote, "illustrate the versatility of Rosenthal's

●● **CLASSICS REIMAGINED, TO BE RELEASED THIS MONTH, HAS JAZZ INTERPRETATIONS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC SELECTIONS.** ●●

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musical imagination.” *High Standards* includes such American Songbook classics as Hoagy Carmichael’s “Skylark” and Burton Lane’s “Old Devil Moon”. *The Ted Rosenthal Songbook* features Rosenthal compositions, leading off with his opera, *Dear Erich*.

Rosenthal likes to mix and match between two bass and drum combi-

nations—the aforementioned Wind and Horner and bassist Noriko Ueda and drummer Quincy Davis. “I’ve had rich histories with both groups,” he said. “Noriko and Quincy, and I have gone to Japan almost every year together. Martin and Tim, and I work together as a trio and with (vocalist) Ann Hampton Callaway. Sometimes,

it could be Noriko and Tim or Martin and Quincy. They know my music, and they know my sensibilities.”

The third new album, to be released this month, is called *Classics Reimagined*, jazz interpretations of classical music selections. “I decided a few of the pieces on this album would be more effective with another voice in addition to the trio.” Those other voices will be clarinetist Ken Peplowski and violinist Sara Caswell. “Ken and I have done some of these things for years, off and on. He has an incredible clarinet sound and technique and enjoys classical music proper. The same thing with Sara Caswell, who I first met as a student of mine at the Manhattan School of Music. She’s also had serious classical training. So, we’ve collaborated a few times over the years as well. We’re going to be doing a concert on November 28 at

Tanglewood. Ken was unavailable, so Anat Cohen will be joining us on clarinet to do my *Classics Reimagined* repertoire. That will be fun.”

The last new album will be released in January. “It’s called *The Good Old Days*, a collection of both originals and standards but with slightly older styles of jazz—stride and swing and things like that.”

I first interviewed Ted Rosenthal about 11 years ago when I was working on my book, *Jeru’s Journey The Life and Music of Gerry Mulligan* (Hal Leonard Books: 2015). He was the pianist in Mulligan’s last quartet, which also included Dean Johnson on bass and Ron Vincent on drums. Mulligan’s melodicism, Rosenthal told me, “was second to none. I think that’s an echo of his composing and arranging tendencies.”

Rosenthal has played with several other jazz giants including trumpeter Art Farmer, alto saxophonist

Ted Rosenthal Trio at June 2023 Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert with Ueda on bass and Zach Adleman on drums. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.



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Phil Woods, and saxophonist James Moody. Farmer, he said, was “a man of a few but well-chosen words, and maybe that applies to his trumpet playing as well. He was very thoughtful and intelligent but focused. It was just great to experience his persona.

“I filled in for Bill Mays and Bill Charlap a few times with Phil Woods, and I got to do a duo concert with him at Wesleyan University. He had such amazing energy, intensity, and fire to his playing. He was just a force of nature.”

Rosenthal did a couple of short tours with Moody. “I was just sitting there with a big grin on my face the whole time. How great he played, and he was also very much an entertainer, but in the best sense of the word.”

In June 2023, Rosenthal led a trio, with Ueda and drummer Zach Adleman, at the New Jersey Jazz Society’s Jersey Jazz LIVE! concert series in

Madison, NJ, opening with two familiar standards – Richard Rodgers’ “People Will Say We’re in Love” and the previously mentioned “Skylark”. He demonstrated his ability to blend classical music and jazz, performing two pieces from Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5 “bebop style”. The concert also included music from *Dear Erich* and a stirring medley from a 2006 Venus Records album featuring music from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*. Among the songs: “Shall We Dance”, “I Have Dreamed”, and “Getting to Know You.”

.....
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Altin Sencalar: Determined to Elevate the Trombone to the Forefront of Jazz

“In Jazz There are More People Playing the Trombone at the Highest Levels It’s Ever Been Played”

BY ANDREW SCHINDER

The trombone is a wonderful instrument, but in the jazz idiom, it sometimes gets somewhat dismissed. It is not fashionable, and often gets relegated to New Orleans tribute acts or, at best, as a component of big bands. The trombone doesn’t often show up in small combos, few jazz trombonists are household names, and while the list of NEA Jazz Masters does include several trombone virtuosos, they are significantly outnumbered by geniuses of other instruments.

Altin Sencalar wishes to change all

that. He is part of a lineage that embraces the trombone for its strengths—it is a powerful, versatile instrument that can provide the basis for brilliant music. At age 31, Sencalar has established himself as one of his generation’s preeminent trombone masters. He has released seven albums as a leader already, along with many others as a sideman or big band member, and has worked with some of music’s most notable names—both in jazz and otherwise—including Michael Bublé, Christian McBride, and David Sanborn.



PHOTO BY ANNA YATSKEVICH

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Born in California but raised in Texas, the Lone Star State permeates his music. “There’s a lot of Texas in the jazz music scene,” Sencalar said. “And I take that with a lot of pride. There’s definitely a Texas tenor sound. There’s a certain kind of intention with a musician from Texas, whenever they talk, whenever they converse and agree and disagree and play. And so in my music, I really think of the intentional aspect of who I am.”


Sencalar took to the trombone in his pre-teen years, bolstered by his school’s strong jazz program. “We [Temple, Texas] had the very first jazz program for high school in Texas. So we always had jazz in the school curriculum. I started off by playing euphonium in the band. And then I found this Maynard Ferguson clip, back when there were like maybe 100 videos on YouTube. I was in sixth grade. And then I

thought, I’m going to play in the jazz band, because of Maynard.”

“So I picked up a trombone, and asked an eighth grader to teach me the slide positions, and then he showed me the seven positions and the B flat scale. And so, I really fell in love with that entire spectrum of music in the sixth grade. Since marching band is so huge in Texas, I was used to a big wall of sound. Maynard is high, fast and loud. I just love the energy, and

as a person, that’s just who I am, too.”

Sencalar soon found success with the instrument, while at the same time maintaining one foot in the classical realm. “Our school made the finals for the Essentially Ellington competition. I did a combo workshop at the University of North Texas, and then Tanglewood for the euphonium. I was 16, and still very serious about the euphonium. Mike Roylance, the Principal Tuba

A photograph of vibraphonist Behn Gillece. He is a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. He is sitting and holding several mallets with red and blue heads. The background is dark and textured.

Vibraphonist Behn Gillece is featured on Sencalar’s album, *Unleashed* and will be playing with him in Wayne.

of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was (and still is) the instructor for that. He had jazz experience, and he understood how special it was.

“Frankly, that was one of the only instances where I met someone in a serious orchestral position who actually respected jazz. And it was really encouraging. The following year was when my school’s jazz band made the finals for the Essentially Ellington competition. My fellow students and I were invited to do a jam session with two mentors, [trombonist] Elliot Mason and [trumpeter] Marcus Printup. Elliot is probably the reason I permanently switched from euphonium to jazz trombone. His generosity of time was something I’ve never seen before. And that kind of interaction and mentorship is something I fell in love with.”

Born to a Mexican-American mother and a Turkish-American father, Sencalar’s childhood had a diverse,

PHOTO BY ANNA YATSKIVICH

all-encompassing musical soundtrack. While raised primarily by his mother, music representing both sides of his ancestry was nevertheless a constant presence growing up. One can hear the Latin jazz influences throughout his oeuvre. In particular, Sencalar's Cordless Trio Project explores both his Mexican and Turkish heritages (the cover art for the resulting album, *Re-connected* (Next Level, 2021) incorporates elements from both the Mexican and Turkish flags). Sencalar's Mexican grandparents always kept traditional

Mexican music on the radio, and his Turkish grandfather was proficient in the Turkish flat harp, which is essentially the Turkish version of the steel guitar so common in country music.

It is frankly a blessing for the genre that an individual with such a rich heritage and background has chosen the trombone to express his artistry, differentiating himself from so many who have gravitated toward instruments that may be, according to many, cooler. Sencalar pays little mind to the detractors. "I re-



Unleashed, on the Posi-Tone label, is Sencalar's latest album.

ally think the trombone has always been a forefront instrument," he said. "While many people normally think of the immediacy of the trumpet and saxophone, it's always been evident that the trombone has always been part of the sound of music."

"And not just in jazz," he continued. "But in jazz there are more people playing the trombone at the highest levels it's ever been played. I think about someone like [trombonist] Slide Hampton. I just played his part in the

Dizzy Band. And it messed me up!"

"And so as far as how I see the trombone today, I think because of available media, we are able to broadcast the instrument in a positive light, to be more inclusive to trombonists today. You have people, at least in my generation, people like Mariel Bildsten, Kalia Vandiver and Nanami Haruta, you have that new side of the music. We are able to include multiple kinds of people from different walks of life."

"And then you have other contemporaries of mine, like Jeffery Miller, a wonderful trombonist, then someone just a little older than me, Nick Finzer. And then of course, Mike Dease. They're all pillars in their own way. All of these people have played in so many different ensembles, and I think to myself, oh man, I've never heard the trombone played that way! And I feel lucky to include myself with them. The trombone today is played

“IF YOUR AUDIENCE ISN'T
THERE WITH YOU, YOU'RE NOT
GOING TO BE EMPLOYED.”

JAZZ IN WAYNE

at such a high level, you can't ignore it anymore. And I do think for a number of years it was ignored on purpose."

Currently signed to Marc Free and Nick O'Toole's Posi-Tone Records, Sencalar's discography demonstrates the exhilarating versatility of the trombone and its ability to adapt to jazz's diverse twists and turns. His albums contain a mix of originals and covers—some of very well-known

jazz standards, such as a dynamic cover of Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage" on *Discover the Present* (Posi-Tone, 2024), which obviously was not written for the trombone.

"I always want to make sure [adaptations of standards] are recognizable. This is something that goes into the show aspect of being a musician. If your audience isn't there with you, you're not going to be employed. We

can be intellectuals, but if people can't understand it, why do we do it?"

"A lot of my writing does come from my background growing up playing salsa music, but specifically with "Maiden Voyage," Marc [Free] has been pushing me to unleash a pretty big palette of a lot of different things. I want to showcase the intention of the melody, but I also want to showcase what else is possible. Marc has been pushing me to do some outside [stuff], and I was like, okay, cool. I took "Maiden Voyage," and was like, I'm just going to push this up a half step and leave the melody where it's at."

"I don't have perfect pitch. But I do have resilience, and whenever something works, I know why it works. Whenever something doesn't work, I know why it doesn't work, and that's because I'm willing to try things that might have a negative effect. Something I've had to do with progressing

as a musician harmonically is, we can be organic. Sometimes the music will tell you, and sometimes it doesn't."

Sencalar's latest album, *Unleashed* (Posi-Tone, 2025), is his most ambitious yet, enlisting the services of veteran vibraphonist Behn Gillece, whose chemistry with Sencalar elevates the record to glorious heights. Once again, Free's tutelage and guidance results in an inspired outcome.

"Mark is an excellent producer. I think a lot of times, artists have such personal ownership of their work. But there's nothing wrong with having people to, you know, ask why. The *Unleashed* record really resulted in some distinguished stuff that I'm really proud of. Marc pushed me to ignore my initial gut reaction, and I'm glad I did. I started hearing the vibes, and whatever I wrote for *Unleashed*, I didn't give Behn a piano part. I gave him a vibraphone part. I didn't really write



PHOTO BY ANNA YATSKEVICH

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anything for piano on that record.”

An educator for almost as long as he has been a professional musician, this year Sencalar became Assistant Teaching Professor of Jazz Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Sencalar is as passionate about teaching as he is about playing.

“My students know I’m very much in their lives. I have a few people I’ve been mentoring for quite a while, and they know if they call me, I’ll answer on the second ring. That’s not an exaggeration.

“What I’m seeing with students, and I’m not that much older than a graduate student, is that they’ve figured out the resources they have at hand, which is great. Because of all the resources, it’s easy for students to not have an excuse. But it can also be overwhelming.

“News is much more attainable, no matter the platform. And I warn

my students about this. If you want to be a working musician or you want to be a front person, or you want to be a leader, it’s easy to use that platform for good. It’s also just as easy not to be.”

Shortly after this interview, the ever-prolific Sencalar was scheduled to enter the studio to record a new album for Posi-Tone.

The Altin Sencalar Unleashed Sextet will be performing at Our Lady of Consolation Church in Wayne, New Jersey, on Sunday, October 26 at 4 p.m. The other members of the sextet are: alto and soprano saxophonist and flutist Markus Howell, tenor saxophonist and clarinetist Willie Morris, vibraphonist Behn Gillece, bassist Boris Kozlov, and drummer Gary Kerkezou. Admission is free. Sencalar will also perform two sets with his quintet at Smalls Jazz Club in New York City on Thursday, November 6 and Friday, November 7.



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From left, Fernandez, Cordew, Beckenstein, Ambush, and Fischer



Spyro Gyra's Amazing Run: Jazz Blended with R&B, Latin, and Caribbean Influences

"We've Kept Things Alive by Staying on the Road, Constantly Touring, Never Stopping"

BY JAY SWEET

Spyro Gyra has enjoyed a 50-plus year run by presenting instrumental music that blends jazz, R&B, Latin, and Caribbean influences. Along the way, the band had hits such as "Morning Dance", "Shaker Song", and "Catching the Sun", which remain concert favorites and will be featured on their current tour, which

includes a performance at the Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway, NJ, on November 1, as part of WBGO Radio's *All That Jazz* series.

Much of the band's longevity comes not only from its high-quality, accessible music but also from the efforts of its founder and leader, saxophonist and composer Jay Beckenstein, who reflected on how the group has endured shifting music trends and lineup changes.

"There are many reasons for our longevity," he said. "For one, we've always played well. And we've kept things alive by staying on the road, constantly touring, never stopping. What we avoided were the usual internal conflicts. I kept great talent in the band, and I've always been able to do that by not treating it like 'my' band. Everybody gets to write, everybody gets a say, and everybody gets featured in the shows." That's why, "It's

not called the Jay Beckenstein Band.”

Beckenstein likes to compare the band to a basketball team. “We’re not a band with one guy sitting under the basket dunking and everybody else passing to him. We pass the ball around a lot. But when the moment comes where ultimate control is needed to prevent the whole thing from breaking up—that’s where I stand. There has to be authority. There simply has to be. That same meritocracy that brings great musicians into the band only works if someone is there to step in when a rot-

ten apple could ruin it for everyone.”

His path into music began early. “I grew up on Long Island and lived there until I was 16. (His family then moved to Germany to follow his father’s job offer). I was raised in a household where jazz was constantly playing, so I was well indoctrinated into the music before I was even four years old. I started on the saxophone at age six through my elementary school band program in Farmingdale.”

Beckenstein’s father had “the most magnificent record collection.



He was always introducing me to music. I remember being seven or eight years old when he brought home albums like Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue*, and *Birth of the Cool* and Charles Mingus records. Those recordings were my teachers, because I never really had a great private instructor growing up. I learned by listening, absorbing, and playing along. My father was also a keyboard player, and even before I turned five, he’d have me sit on the right side of the piano while he

laid down boogie-woogie bass lines. My household,” he continued, “was almost entirely classical and jazz. My first real step outside of that world was when I started secretly listening to the Beatles under the covers at night, tuning into WABC Radio in New York. I must have been 12 or 13, quietly soaking up pop music without anyone knowing. Growing up when I did—in the ’50s and ’60s, and then into my 20s in the ’70s—you couldn’t ask for three better decades musi-

**I WAS RAISED IN A
HOUSEHOLD WHERE JAZZ
WAS CONSTANTLY PLAYING.**

cally. The jazz scene was incredible, and pop music was being invented in real time. It was an extraordinary time to come of age musically.”

His introduction to live jazz came through “this program where musicians would come and play outdoor concerts for school kids. Through that, I got to see some incredible artists: Miles Davis, and Joe Zawinul playing with Cannonball. I was exposed to some of the greatest musicians when I was still very young. As soon as I was able, I started going into the city on my own. My favorite group to see was the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra. That band was just unbelievable, with players like Eddie Daniels and Jerome Richardson.”

That foundation would deepen dramatically when his family relocated to Germany. “Attending a military dependents’ school, I started playing music with soldiers. I joined a band with



Spyro Gyra's initial album, *Spyro Gyra*, reached No. 99 on *Billboard's* Top 200 Albums chart.. “Shaker Song” reached Number 16 on the Adult Contemporary singles chart.

three master sergeants, performing in NCO clubs, and that was my introduction to R&B. These were Black soldiers, and we were playing songs like “Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay”. Playing with them opened me up to a whole new world of music. When I eventu-

ally returned to the States, I added Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and other early R&B artists to my palette, and they became lasting influences”.

Beckenstein returned to the U.S. to attend the University of Buffalo. “I didn’t originally go for music. In fact, my parents wouldn’t allow it. My first year I studied biology and medicine, which is where I first came across the word *spirogyra* (fresh-water green algae). By my second year I had switched to English, and by the third year I had more or less ‘devolved’ academically into a music major because it turned out that was the only thing I really did well.

“The program was very classical, but the scene in Buffalo at that time was dominated by new music: wild, experimental, atonal pieces with graphic notation and all sorts of avant-garde ideas. I played with a group called SEM, which included

musicians from the Buffalo Philharmonic, and I was good enough to be brought into their ensemble. We performed some truly crazy works.

“I soon found myself in a great blues band, literally the opposite of what I had just been doing. I had gone from music that was completely mental, with no heart, to music that was all body and pure feeling. I remember playing the blues for the first time and getting goosebumps, thinking, ‘Oh man, this is what music is supposed to feel like.’ That was my introduction to the Buffalo music scene.”

The band was led by Elmo Witherspoon, “a powerful blues vocalist backed by strong musicians. The music wasn’t complicated, but it was full of depth and soul. That experience taught me so much—about performance, about feeling, about connecting with an audience. I worked in that Buffalo scene for two or three

years, playing in horn sections, working with R&B bands, and gradually making my way as a musician.”

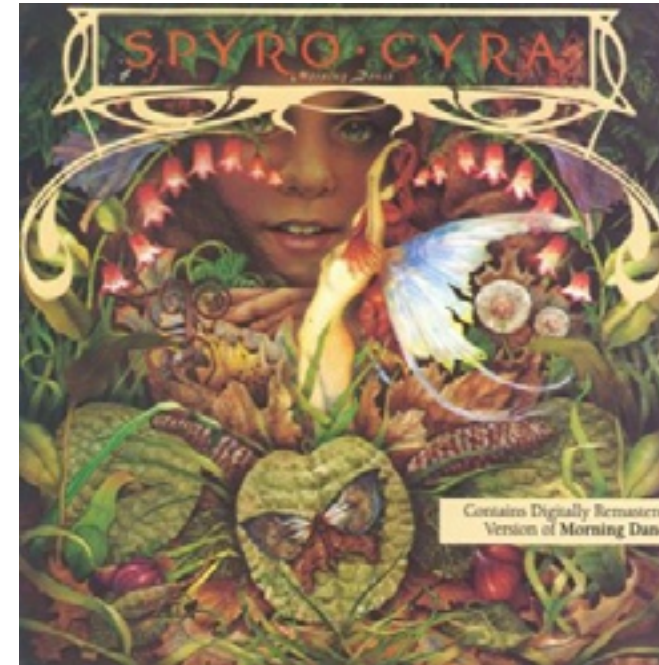
After graduation, Beckenstein stayed in Buffalo and became further immersed in the music scene, where Spyro Gyra formed almost organically. “I worked with a group called the Buffalo Jazz Ensemble, which was the brilliant idea of my mentor, tenor player Phil DeRay. In the early ’70s, Buffalo was still reeling from the terrible racial riots in the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination. The city was racially polarized, tense, and hurting. Phil had the remarkable idea to address it through music. He actually applied to FEMA for funding, arguing that the racial situation in Buffalo was, in its own way, a disaster. Incredibly, he got the grant.

“The Buffalo Jazz Ensemble was built on a simple but powerful principle: it was half African- American mu-

sicians and half white musicians. We toured both Black and white neighborhoods, trying in our own way to bring a little healing, a little love, through jazz. It was an extraordinary experience, and many of the musicians I later played with in Spyro Gyra were people I first met in that ensemble.”

The band itself began taking shape in the Buffalo clubs around 1974 and ’75. By 1976, Beckenstein had gone into business with Richard Calandra, producing all kinds of commercial projects—disco, rock, rockabilly—for local Buffalo artists. They rented a studio and whenever time remained at the end of a session, Beckenstein would use it to record Spyro Gyra.

“The production company was going nowhere,” he remembered, “and the players in the band were getting ready to leave Buffalo for New York, L.A., maybe Nashville. What



Spyro Gyra’s second release, *Morning Dance*, went platinum.

we didn’t realize was that in those spare sessions, I had put together a whole record’s worth of Spyro Gyra material. It was, in effect, a farewell record—utterly self-produced, naïve, and made without any expectations. We thought we were saying goodbye.”

Instead, the record took on a life of its own. The initial 500 copies sold

out almost immediately, and local radio gave it a spin. When the band approached Lenny Silver, owner of the Record Theater chain, he agreed to take 50 copies. They sold in a day. The next week he wanted 100. Then 500. Finally, he offered the band a contract. “For me, a little hippie kid in Buffalo, it was an obscene amount of money. I signed my life away, but to Lenny’s credit, he poured energy and resources into promoting that first record, and it sold 100,000 copies.” (The album, *Spyro Gyra*, reached No. 99 on *Billboard*’s Top 200 Albums chart. “Shaker Song” reached Number 16 on the Adult Contemporary singles chart and Number 90 on the Hot 100 singles chart).

By the time of the band’s second release, *Morning Dance*, the stakes had risen. Silver realized the band was getting too big for him to handle, so he sold the contract to MCA Records. Spyro Gyra was placed on MCA’s new



subsidiary, Infinity Records. “It was a strange outfit. They were trying to build a major rock label, signing acts left and right. But the label collapsed. Ironically, the little jazz group they had picked up almost as a favor ended up being the one that took off. *Morning Dance* went platinum, and suddenly we were the only thing selling on Infinity. That meant we got all their promotional push and before long we

were getting rock star treatment. The album launched like a rocket. I never thought it was unusual for an instrumental band to reach that level; I just thought it was unusual that it was us. But it was really a perfect storm of good fortune, timing, and opportunity that launched Spyro Gyra.”

Later, in his late 20s, Beckenstein experienced one of his personal career highlights: touring with Miles

Davis. “To describe my impression of Miles—let’s just say complex. He was simultaneously the greatest musician I grew up with and, at the same time, a pretty tough personality. My father had raised me on Miles music. The highlight of every year was when he’d bring home the newest Miles record. So, I grew up worshipping Miles. To me, he was the greatest creator, always moving forward, never sitting on his laurels, producing one brilliant new idea after another.

“Then suddenly, we found ourselves as his warmup band, probably around 1981. By that time, Miles had become quite the curmudgeon. He was limping around and not exactly cheerful. Still, we went out of our way to ingratiate ourselves. At every concert—even though he never said hello—we’d send him a big bouquet of flowers with a note thanking him for everything he had given us. By the

third concert, at Red Rocks in Colorado, we were in our dressing room when the door cracked open. There was Miles. He looked at us and said only, ‘Spyro Gyra! Okay.’ For me, it was like being blessed by the Pope.”

Decades later, after years of recording and touring, Beckenstein remains energized by what lies ahead. “The next project we’re working on is a documentary about the band with a company in Hollywood. It’ll be a four-part series, each episode an hour long. They’ve already been filming shows, and we’ve got some really strong performances recorded on multitrack. I think the next release will probably be a live concert to go along with the documentary.”

Judging by the vitality of its recent recordings and the continued enthusiasm of audiences, it seems clear that, like the living organism from which the group takes its name, Spyro Gyra will continue to grow and flourish.

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Trumpeter Nathaniel Williford: 'A Once in a Generation Talent'

*"Not Only Did He Have a Natural Ability on the Trumpet,
But He Was Also an Incredibly Hard Worker"*

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

Nathaniel Williford's jazz education began when he entered the sixth grade at Osceola County School for the Arts in Kissimmee, FL. "The magic started happening at our instrument trial day," he recalled, "selecting what we'd play in the band program. The trombone was what stood out to me. I could make some basic sounds on the trombone."

Things began to change, however, when he heard Osceola's top high school jazz band play. "I heard the lead trumpet sitting on top of

the band. That was so cool. I kind of made up my mind without really knowing what I wanted to do."

In the seventh grade, Williford continued to play the trombone, "but I started learning the trumpet a little bit at home. I would just follow along with the trumpet players (on recordings and videos) and see what corresponded to my slide positions. But I didn't play trumpet at school for a very long time."

In his freshman year of high school, he auditioned only on trumpet and started playing trumpet in the





jazz band, but then Covid hit. Williford spent his entire sophomore year at home, but in the middle of his freshman year he had met his trumpet mentor, the late Dan Miller. “I was meeting with Dan Miller at least once a week on Zoom. He was a tremendous trum-

pet player and educator. He toured with Harry Connick, Jr.’s big band, but he moved to Florida a few years ago to take care of his aging parents. He was very influential in my instrumental development and connected me with other great trumpet teachers. He

was just the best mentor, best friend.”

Williford was back at school for his junior year in 2021, and that’s when his budding career as a jazz trumpeter began to escalate. Osceola had a new Director of Jazz Studies, Jason Anderson. “He got us into shape pretty fast, gave us the right mindset, the right attitude.” Under Anderson’s leadership, the Osceola jazz band not only became a finalist at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Essentially Ellington competition, it won First Place.

“We didn’t even have conversations about what would happen if we won,” Williford said. “Osceola had attended Essentially Ellington before, but that was before any of us were there. Nobody in the program had been there before. The first-place announcement was a huge surprise to us, but it was really, really awesome. And it would eventually play a big part in why I wanted to move to

New York.” The 20-year-old Williford is now in his junior year at Juilliard.

The importance of Williford’s mentorship by Dan Miller was also driven home to him while competing at Essentially Ellington. “I got the chance to speak to (trumpeters) Kenny Rampton and Marcus Printup, and I let them know I was studying with Dan Miller, who used to play in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (predecessor of the JALC Orchestra). When I first met Wynton Marsalis and shook his hand for the first time, all he said to me was, ‘Dan Miller’. He didn’t say anything before that, anything after that. We gave each other a hug. Dan was still with us at that time, and I was able to call him up and tell him about the whole experience.”

Miller passed away in August 2022 at the age of 54. A resident of Fort Myers, FL, he helped organize the Naples Youth Orchestra and

RIISING STAR

taught improvisation classes in the Jazz Studio of the University of Central Florida's School of Performing Arts. Shortly after he died, a colleague, pianist Jerry Stawski, told the *Naples Daily News*, "Dan was an incredible educator. The kids loved him. He was a walking encyclopedia of jazz. You could play any record from any era, and he could tell you the tune, what musicians were playing on it, even what arrangement they were using."

Jason Anderson vividly remembered his arrival at Osceola in the fall of 2021. "When I got the job as Director of Jazz Studies," he said, "I reviewed the previous year's concert videos and quickly realized that I would have a solid lead (trumpet) player -- Nathaniel. I remember greeting him for the first time as 'Nate the Great!' I had no idea how great he really was, though. I quickly realized that, not only did he have a natural ability

on the trumpet that many professionals spend years striving to achieve, but he was also an incredibly hard worker and an even greater leader -- with a refreshing dose of humility, I might add. He was a constant source of inspiration to everyone in the program, and the example he set four to five years ago continues to leave a lasting impact on the next generation of jazz students here." Osceola followed up its 2022 Essentially Ellington First Place with another First Place Award in 2023.

Anderson, a graduate of the Berklee College of Music, has toured with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and the Illinois Jacquet Big Band and played saxophone with artists such as bassist Christian McBride, trumpeter Roy Hargrove, and pianist Cyrus Chestnut.

In the summers of 2022 and 2023, Williford was invited to be a member of Carnegie Hall's NYO Jazz Ensemble, a program that selects about 22



NYO Jazz Orchestra 2022; Nathaniel Williford, back row, 5th from left.

high school students from across the country. Trumpeter Sean Jones, who is NYO's Artistic Director, pointed out that, "Every now and then, a once in a generation talent appears. They tend to set a level of excellence that becomes the gold standard for their peers regarding their specific discipline or disciplines! Nathaniel is truly one of those voices in his generation."

At Juilliard, Williford has "a lot of classmates that I did one or both programs (EE and NYO) with. In my class alone, there are five of us that I did NYO with." He's currently a member of JALC's Future of Jazz Orchestra and, at the end of last month, he performed in a tribute to (pianist) Kenny Kirkland with trumpeter Etienne Charles' Big Band at Dizzy's Club.

PHOTO BY TODD ROSENBERG

RIISING STAR

He'll also be playing at Dizzy's in December with drummer Ulysses Owens, Jr.'s Big Band, "and then we're going into the studio to record an album."

In March, he and three other Juilliard students spent a week in Havana, Cuba. "It was great," he said. "The pianist in the group was William Schwartzman. It was his idea. We all attend Juilliard, but it wasn't a Juilliard trip. William had a past relationship with the previous Ambassador to Cuba. We visited three different schools. We put on a few shows, and did some recording projects. The whole idea behind the trip was to go there and learn as much as we could about their music and show them as much as we could about our music. It was just such a rich experience. We met people at all levels -- people still in school, people that are the local legends on the scene." The other two Juilliard students on the trip were

bassist Daniel Song and drummer Isaiah Bravo (an Osceola classmate).

The memory of that first lead trumpet performance when he was in sixth grade lingers with Williford. But he also pointed out that he might never have gotten to Osceola if not for a teacher at Kissimmee's Koa Elementary School. In elementary school, he said, "I had played the recorder but didn't know too much about actual instruments. I had a great teacher, Anielka Silva-Berrios. She advocated for me to go to Osceola."

In New York, Williford said, "What I do primarily is work as a lead trumpet player. One of my favorite lead trumpet players of all time," he added, "is Ryan Kisor of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. He's one of my big inspirations." As for the people he grew up listening to, "There's a short list. I'd say: Clifford Brown, Roy Hargrove, and Clark Terry."



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Akiko Tsuruga, ‘One of the Best Organ Players in the World’

“She Could Get Sounds Out of the Organ That Were Just Incredible”



Akiko Tsuruga and Mike LeDonne at the Vail Jazz Festival.

More than 30 years ago, keyboardist Mike LeDonne was playing the organ with vibraphonist Milt Jackson’s quartet in Osaka, Japan. Recalling that experience on Facebook, LeDonne said, “Somebody set up an after-hours performance/master class for a bunch of young students at a place called Subway. At one point, this young lady raised her hand and asked me how I was able to accompany Milt Jackson when he played his out-of-tempo intros ... My answer was brief and to the point. I said, ‘Listen.’”

The questioner was a high school

student named Akiko Tsuruga, the superlative jazz organist who passed away in Brooklyn at the age of 58 on September 13, 2025, after a short illness. LeDonne said she would always remind him about his answer to her question.

Moving to New York in 2001, Tsuruga and a friend traveled to Showman’s Jazz Club in Harlem on the night of her arrival to see LeDonne and tenor saxophonist Jerry Weldon. LeDonne let her sit in that night, and, “We became lifelong friends and colleagues. I would go see her

play with Lou Donaldson, and both Lou and Akiko would come to see me when I was at Smoke every Tuesday. . . She had so much energy in her playing ... It was wonderful to hear her growth and watch her ascend to becoming one of the best organ players in the world. When she played, you could see the joy on her face because she was living her dream.” Alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson featured her in his band for more than 15 years.

Tsuruga was married to trumpeter Joe Magnarelli, who told WRTI Radio’s Nate Chinen that, “She took

the baton from Jimmy Smith and Jack McDuff, legends like that. I worked with Jack McDuff, and I can tell you that she definitely got that sound, the Harlem jazz organ sound. Not many people have it. She had it. She could get sounds out of the organ that were just incredible.”

In a 2024 interview with *Hot House Magazine*, Tsuruga recalled “the day when the organ arrived at my house (in Japan). The representative from the music store came and played a couple of tunes on it, and I just thought, ‘Wow.’ I fell in

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

love with the organ immediately. I couldn't reach the pedals, so I was playing the bass with my left hand and chords and melody with my right hand." She studied at the Osaka College of Music, and, while playing at the Osaka branch of the Blue Note Jazz Club, she was discovered by drummer Grady Tate, who encouraged her to move to New York.

Her most recent album as a leader was last year's *Beyond Nostalgia* on the Steeplechase label. Reviewing it for *The New York City Jazz Record*, Ken Dryden wrote that, "Over the past 20 years, organist Akiko Tsuruga has been building a career that has placed her in the top echelon of jazz organists active today." The album, he added, "is full of delightful originals, as well as works by earlier organists, plus one standard. One can hear the influence of various predecessors in Tsuruga's approach on the Hammond B3, but it

is subtle as she draws snippets from many sources to create her own distinctive and personal sound." She was joined on the recording by Magnarelli, Weldon, guitarist Ed Cherry, and drummer Byron Landham.

When keyboardist Leonieke Scheuble was playing the organ in the USA Pavilion at the Osaka Expo 2025 earlier this year, she and Tsuruga were writing back and forth. "She was writing me about the history of Osaka and how it was the organ capital of Japan," Scheuble recalled on Facebook after learning of Tsuruga's death. "She told me which organ clubs to check out and gave me the names of some organists while I was there. She was just so kind and excited about the music. I can't believe she passed away."

In addition to Magnarelli, Tsuruga is survived by her mother, Hiroko Tsuruga; a brother Shingo Tsuruga; and a sister, Naomi Tsuruga.

Trumpeter, Bandleader, and Educator Stephen Fulton

He Collaborated on Several Albums with His Daughter, Pianist/Vocalist Champion Fulton

IN THE EARLY 1970S IN HOUSTON, high school student Stephen Fulton fell in love with jazz after hearing albums such as Lionel Hampton's *Silver Vibes* (Columbia: 1960). His career as a trumpeter, bandleader, and educator began while he was a student at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

Fulton, who passed away September 4, 2025, at the age of 71 in Norman, OK, began meeting some of his jazz heroes in the late 1970s and became a lifelong friend of the legendary trumpeter Clark Terry. During the 1980s, he was on the road with big bands, returning home to Norman in 1985 for the birth

of his daughter, Champion, who today is a well-known pianist and vocalist.

Through his friendship with Terry, he began teaching at jazz camps and playing with other musicians such as tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon, vocalist Joe Williams, and trumpeter Snooky Young. In 1991, he moved his family to Houston and formed a collaboration with alto saxophonist Jimmy Ford.

In 1993, Fulton was a finalist in the Thelonious Monk Trumpet Competition and was asked by Terry to become the Director of the Clark Terry Institute of Jazz Studies in LeMars, Iowa. He also spent 10 years teaching at the Birch Creek



Stephen and Champion Fulton

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

Music Academy in Egg Harbor, WI.

His most important student, though, was his daughter, Champian. After moving back to Norman, they formed their first band in 1997, performing regularly until 2023. He and Champian recorded six albums together, and Stephen was Executive Producer of more than 10 of her albums. Together they played with such jazz giants as drummers Jimmy Cobb and Louis Hayes, alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson, and tenor saxophonist/flutist Frank Wess. They also formed a quartet with drummer Fukushi Tainaka and bassist Hide Tanaka.

Fulton and his wife Susan lived in New York City from 2010-2020, but, with his health failing, they moved back to Norman in 2021. In addition to Susan and Champian, he is survived by a brother, William Sean Fulton, and several nieces, nephews, grand-nieces and grand-nephews.

Ronny Whyte: A Fixture on NYC's Cabaret/Jazz Scene

*He Hosted the Midday Jazz Series at
Saint Peter's Church for Several Years*

BY JOE LANG

ON AUGUST 19, 2025, RONNY WHYTE left us at the age of 88. A fixture on the New York City cabaret/jazz scene as a singer/pianist for 60 years, Whyte was born in Seattle on May 12, 1937, spending the first six years living in a log cabin built by his father on the outskirts of the city.

Following a period in the United States Air Force, Whyte moved to New York where he soon found regular work in the many clubs that were nightlife mainstays of the city. For several years, he often performed with singer/pianist Travis Hudson. They made two albums



for the Monmouth Evergreen label, *We Like a Gershwin Tune* and *It's Smooth, It's Smart, It's Rodgers and Hart*. It was through these albums that I became familiar with Ronny.

Sometime in the 1970s, my wife and I went to see him at Tavern on the Green in Central Park. The room in which he was playing and singing was mainly an eating room with most of those present paying more attention to their food than to Whyte. We were seated near the stage where we were having drinks, enthusiastically applauding his performance. He noticed that we were paying attention to him.

When his set finished, he came over to our table to thank us for our response and to get our names for his mailing list.

About six months later, we received a card from him announcing that he would be appearing at a restaurant on Madison Avenue. We went in one evening to see him. He was appearing in the lounge and had started his first set when we arrived. After the set, he made a beeline to our table, saying, "Hi Joe, Hi Donna!" We were impressed that a man who had briefly met us about six months earlier remembered our names.

While he was mostly thought of as a singer/pianist with a smooth voice and jazz-influenced phrasing, Whyte was also a fine jazz pianist and an accomplished songwriter. He composed melodies and wrote an occasional lyric. His most popular song was "Forget the Woman," co-written with Ettore Stratta, and included in *The Art of Excel-*

BIG BAND IN THE SKY

lence, Tony Bennett's first album when he returned to the Columbia label in 1986 after a 14-year absence.. Whyte recorded a fine album titled *Whyte on Whyte* containing 15 of his songs. One in particular, «Hamptons Blues», with humorous lyrics by his partner and husband for 40 years, Jack Burns, was always a favorite with audiences.

Over the years we saw Whyte at many different venues in New York City and New Jersey. On one occasion, he informed us of a one-night gig at the Hyatt in New Brunswick. When he started playing, he was joined by a young tenor sax player who was most impressive. That was Harry Allen, then a junior in the jazz program at Rutgers. Soon thereafter, Whyte had Allen in support on his next album, *All in a Night's Work*, the second of the 11 albums that Whyte recorded for the Audiophile label; and the first commercial recording on which Allen appeared.

Among the most memorable of the Ronny Whyte gigs that we experienced was a concert at the 92nd Street Y where he presented a suite of tunes from *Porgy and Bess*, a program he performed with Symphony and Pops orchestras throughout the country. When The Oak Room opened in 1980, Ronny was one of the first performers to appear in the new music venue at the legendary Algonquin Hotel

There was also an extended run at the Conservatory, the lounge at the Hotel Mayflower on Central Park West. For those gigs, he had a bass player to accompany him, usually either Jack Six or Frank Tate. It was in this room where we first heard "Forget the Woman." I told him it sounded like a perfect song for Tony Bennett. He said that Tony had been in a few nights earlier and asked for the music as he would like to record it. As mentioned above, the song was on

Bennett's Columbia comeback album.

For several years, Whyte ran the Midday Jazz Series at Saint Peter's Church in New York. He did a marvelous job of booking the finest jazz and cabaret singers and musicians for a one-hour concert weekly on Wednesdays at 1p.m. Most of the performers were from the New York City area, but he would often engage artists from out of town who happened to be visiting New York. These concerts always drew large and enthusiastic audiences to the intimate performing space. I personally attended dozens of them.

Whyte traveled extensively, performing in major cities in the U.S. and internationally. Among the other venues where he performed in New York were Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, Michael's Pub, and the Village Gate. He also had many gigs at Shanghai Jazz in Madison, NJ. One evening, we saw him

at a restaurant in Hackensack and he sang Cole Porter's "I Happen to Like New York" which contains the lines, "Last Sunday afternoon, I took a trip to Hackensack, And after I gave Hackensack the once-over, I took the next train back." Naturally this brought forth laughter from those present.

He was a fabulous host, often giving intimate dinner parties for a few friends. Anyone who was fortunate enough to attend one of these gatherings learned that Whyte was also a fine chef.

He endured a lengthy illness that preceded his passing. Fortunately for him, vocalist Ben Cassara provided Ronny with much of the needed caretaking during his last months.

There will be a celebration of his life at St. Peter's Church on Tuesday, October 14 at 5:30 p.m. A host of his peers will offer musical tributes to his memory.

PELOTE'S PLACE

BY VINCENT PELOTE



This month will mark the 86th birthday of tenor saxophonist Leo Johnson, one of Newark's legendary music icons, so I am dedicating this column to the master jazz saxophonist. Johnson was born on October 19, 1939, in Daytona Beach, FL. He came to Newark in the late 1950s before joining the service where he was a member of the U.S. Air Force Band while stationed in Europe. After his tour of duty ended, he returned to Newark and has been a mainstay on the Newark jazz scene ever since performing in many of the now defunct jazz venues like Sparky J's, the Front Room, the Key Club, and the Playbill Lounge to name just a few legendary Newark clubs. These days, Leo fronts his own bands but in the past he has performed in groups led by Specks Williams, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Bill Doggett, Brother Jack McDuff, Jim-



Leo Johnson

my McGriff, and Chico Mendoza.

I first encountered Leo when we were both in the music department at Rutgers-Newark in the early 1970s. In 1974 he dropped out of Rutgers to tour Europe with organist Rhoda Scott performing at the Club Saint-Germain, even producing an album on the Barclay label. He also played with organist Jimmy McGriff while in Paris. When producer Creed Taylor

launched his soul-jazz label Kudu, Leo was involved on the first album issued: Johnny Hammond's *Breakout*.

Leo did return to Rutgers-Newark to earn his Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Performance and a Master's in Jazz History. He went on to work for 11-plus years at Essex County College, teaching private lessons as well as jazz history. He also taught at Rutgers-Newark leading the student band Mosaic, and he taught at the Newark School of the Arts.

Over the years, Leo has also served as a mentor to any number of young musicians who either lived locally or came to the New York metropolitan area seeking a career in jazz. The list of mentees is impressive and includes Cassandra Wilson, Winard and Phillip Harper, Terence Blanchard, Victor Jones, Andy McCloud, Dave Eubanks, Alan Watson, and Regina Belle. He has released

HE IS STILL AT THE TOP OF HIS GAME MUSICALLY WITH A BIG TONE ...

two CDs in recent years: *It's About Time* (2006) and *Message to Mankind* (2009). He is the Musical Director of the Newark Jazz Elders.

Leo and I have been friends since those early days at Rutgers. His impish sense of humor is often on display on and off the bandstand. His annual birthday concerts are a treat as he is still at the top of his game musically with a big tone and interesting improvisations on standards, original compositions, and the blues. While

he was in the Rutgers program he could sometimes be seen with a clarinet and I would cajole him to play something from the Benny Goodman songbook to which he would tell me to stop being such an old fogey. But years later, one night during one of his birthday concerts, he strolled over to my table with his tenor sax and serenaded me with a beautiful rendition of "Memories of You." I'll always treasure that moment. Happy Birthday Leo and many happy returns!

JOSEPH J. BELL, ESQ.

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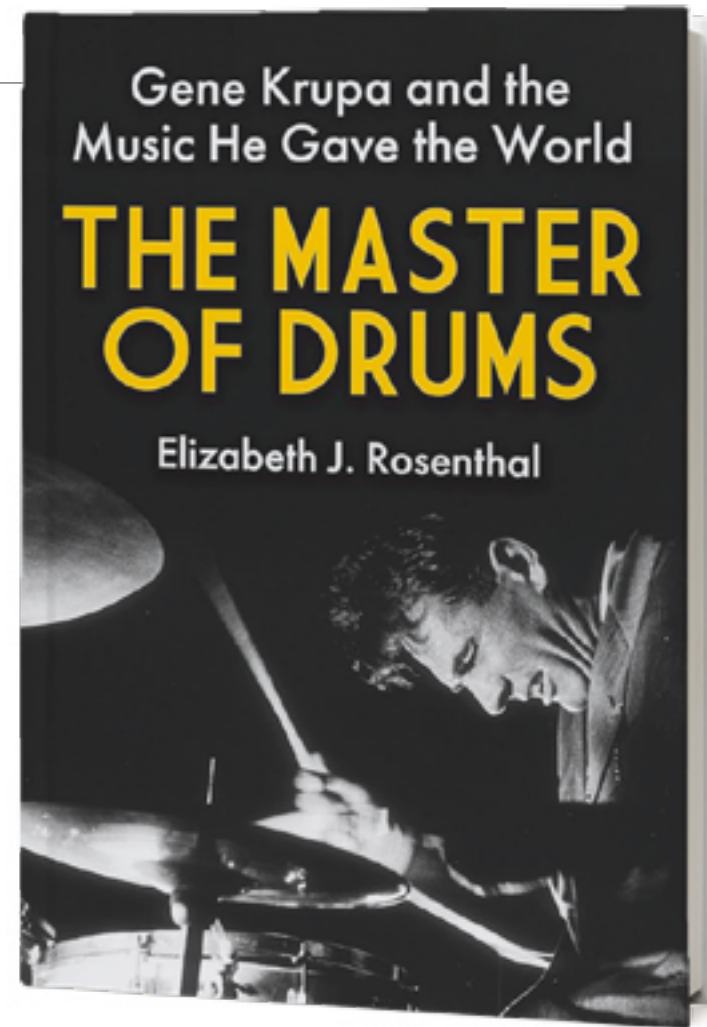
Gene Krupa and the Music He Gave the World.

BY ELIZABETH J. ROSENTHAL, CITADEL PRESS, NEW YORK: 2025

BY JOE LANG

When the subject of jazz drummers is discussed, one of the first names certain to be mentioned is that of Gene Krupa. In *The Master of Drums: Gene Krupa and the Music He Gave the World*, Elizabeth J. Rosenthal makes an impressive case that Krupa was the most significant and influential drummer in jazz history.

While this is nominally a biography, it is much more than that. Woven into the chronology of his life are analyses of his recordings, the influence that Krupa had on all drummers who followed him within and outside



of the world of jazz, his commitment to fighting racism, and commentaries from a variety of other drummers.

Krupa was born in 1909 in Chicago. His mother was the daughter of Polish immigrants and his father was born in Poland. He became interested in drums at about the age of 11 and saved enough money to purchase a rudimentary drum set. He became obsessed with becoming proficient on his instrument of choice and soon began getting occasional local jobs. Eventually, he became a part of the Chicago jazz scene with contemporaries like Eddie Condon and Bud Freeman. The call of New York City became irresistible, and Krupa headed there with several of his Chicago peers.

Rosenthal describes the various musical experiences that Krupa had in New York which led to his big breakthrough in 1934 as the drummer

for Benny Goodman. The Goodman band became a leading band during the Swing Era, and Krupa was an essential part of both the big band and the trio and quartet that were formed within the band, originally Goodman, Krupa and pianist Teddy Wilson and then with Lionel Hampton added on vibes. Krupa and Goodman often had different ideas about the role of a drummer in the band, but worked through their differences.

By 1938, after the legendary Goodman Carnegie Hall concert, Krupa opted to go out on his own to form his own big band. He enjoyed great success that was cut short by his 1943 arrest for marijuana possession in San Francisco. Rosenthal provides the details about this period of Krupa's difficulties. While he was an occasional marijuana user, the situation leading to his arrest was

BOOK REVIEW

filled with questionable tactics by the San Francisco District Attorney and the local police. The bottom line was that Krupa served a 90-day jail sentence on a misdemeanor charge, but the District Attorney filed additional felony charges that could have resulted in a lengthy sentence. While Krupa was in limbo as an appeal process proceeded, he was unable to keep his band going. It was temporarily led by trumpeter Roy Eldridge. While his case was eventually dismissed, he found interim work with both Goodman and Tommy Dorsey. In 1945, Krupa formed a new big band that became one of the first to incorporate the sounds of bebop into its repertoire. While the band enjoyed critical acclaim and attracted enthusiastic audiences, the days of the big bands were fading, and by 1952, Krupa, who had already cut the size of his band to 10 pieces, gave up fronting a big band.

During the balance of his career, he primarily fronted trios or quartets, although he occasionally sat in with Goodman for big band or small group reunions and recorded a few albums with big bands assembled for the recording projects.

The coverage of Krupa's career includes mention of the many players who performed in his bands, most notably vocalist Anita O'Day, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, and tenor saxophonist Charlie Ventura.

Krupa's personal life included three marriages, two to Ethel Maguire, the second of which lasted until her death in 1955, and the third being to Patty Bowler, a marriage that lasted about 10 years.

Throughout his life, Krupa's fellow musicians and friends admired his kindness. Another attribute that played a major role in his personal and professional life was his



contempt for racism. He often took principled stands when confronted with venue producers, hotels, or restaurants that would discriminate against Black musicians.

Rosenthal gives extensive attention to the influence that Krupa had on jazz and rock drummers of many

generations. She includes many comments from these drummers, with Kevin Dorn and Bruce Klauber being the most cited sources. Of particular interest is the relationship that existed between the relatively humble Krupa and the other drummer whose reputation rivals his, the super egotistical Buddy Rich. While Rosenthal acknowledges the genius of Rich, she is of the firm opinion that Krupa was the more influential—even though Krupa is quoted as regarding Rich as the greatest of all jazz drummers. Her point is that Rich was influenced by Krupa.

This volume presents a balanced portrait of one of the giants in the world of jazz, one whose talent and personal attributes are presented in flowing detail by a writer who has done the extensive research necessary to tell Krupa's story in a highly readable fashion.

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BY JOE LANG

San Francisco 1948 (Glory) is a hip collection of big band music from the **Steve Rosenbloom Big Band**. Rosenbloom, based in Montreal, has had a dual career as a psychoanalyst/psychologist and a musician, playing alto sax and writing original compositions. Five of the pieces were written by Rosenbloom and arranged by Christopher Smith for the McGill Jazz Band about 25 years ago. With the addition of four tunes by Rosenbloom, arranged by Michael Johancsik, there was enough material for an album, so Rosenbloom assembled a 16-piece aggregation to record these compositions. The players are from the Montreal area. They dig smartly into the charts, and there are impressive solos sprinkled throughout the performances. *San Francisco 1948* is a fine example of modern big band music, well-conceived and well-executed. (Available as a download from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and for streaming on most major platforms.)



For 18 years, **The Birdland Big Band** has held down the 5:30 p.m. time slot on Fridays at the Birdland Jazz Club in New York City. *The Birdland Big Band Presents Storybook: The Music of Mark Miller* (Birdland Records) has 11 selections, all arranged by trombonist Mark Miller, who also composed four of them. In addition, there are two standards, “Tenderly” and “Close Your Eyes,” with vocals by Nicole

Zuraitis; three jazz tunes, Kenny Barron’s “Water Lily,” Tom Harrell’s “Sail Away” and Chick Corea’s “Spain;” Joaquín Rodrigo’s piece for classical guitar, “Concerto de Aranjuez;” and a bit of fluff written by Miller and Zuraitis titled “Nonsense” that Zuraitis renders with the appropriate humor. This outing demonstrates why this fine band has had longevity. birdlandjazz.com

The motto of Turtle Bay Records is “The Best Jazz Players of Today Playing the Best Tunes of Yesterday!” This mission is nicely fulfilled by **The High Society New Orleans Jazz Band** on *Live at Birdland* (Turtle Bay - 25006). The seven-member band, co-led by pianist Conal Fowkes and trumpeter Simon Wettenhall, also includes trombonist Harvey Tibbs, clarinetist Tom Abbot, guitarist/banjoist Josh Dunn, bassist Brian Nalepka, and drummer Kevin Dorn. Their

program is chock full of songs from the teens, ‘20s and ‘30s including “Flee as a Bird/Oh, Didn’t He Ramble,” “Here Comes the Hot Tamale Man,” and Dallas Blues”. The playing is robust and joyful. Vocals are provided by Fowkes, Wettenhall, and Nalepka. If you are looking for music that will leave you smiling, this set would be a wise choice. turtlebayrecords.com

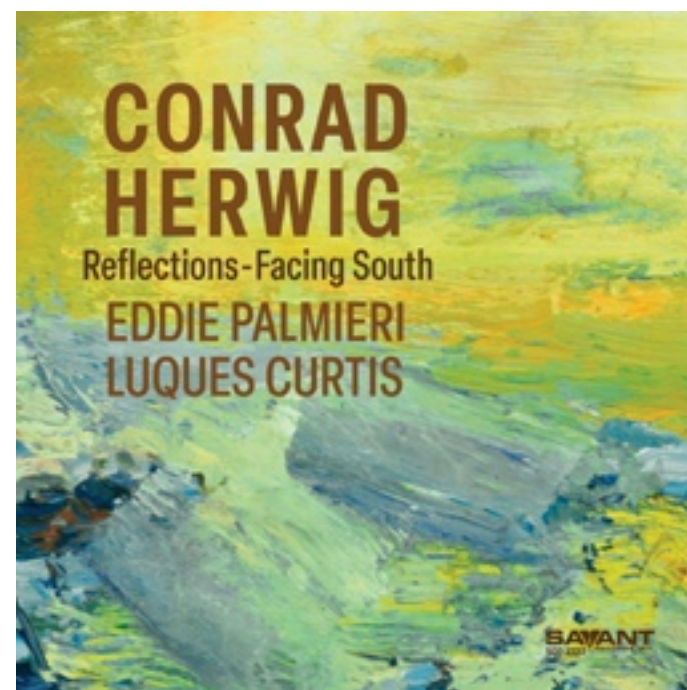
It took almost 90 years for tenor saxophonist **George Coleman** to have the opportunity to record an album with strings. It was well worth the wait for *George Coleman with Strings* (HighNote - 7349). Although the album runs just a bit over 35 minutes, the program of five selections plus two alternate versions, is a pleasure to hear. Coleman’s quartet includes Dave Hazeltine on piano, John Webber on bass, and Joe Farnsworth on drums with Edson Da Silva Café added on percussion for three tracks,

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plus a full string section arranged and conducted by Bill Dobbins. The songs are “Dedicated to You,” “Moment to Moment,” “Stella by Starlight,” “A Time for Love”, and “Ugly Beauty,” with takes on the last two containing the full orchestral introductions. The inclusion of “Thelonious Monk’s “Ugly Beauty one of his most beautiful melodies, is a wise choice. Coleman, who has been a major presence in jazz for over 60 years, plays with sensitivity reminiscent of Ben Webster. jazzdepot.com

When trombonist **Conrad Herwig’s** album, *Reflections - Facing South* (Savant - 2227) was recorded in 2020, he was 61, and his close friend, pianist Eddie Palmieri was 84. They had often been musical partners, usually in bands led by Palmieri. We lost Palmieri this past August at the age of 88. This recording, with bassist Luques Curtis, is a fitting remem-

brance of the artistry of Palmieri. The musical empathy among this trio of exceptional musicians is on display throughout as they play nine compositions written or co-written by Herwig and Palmieri. All of them have the Latin feeling which they both favor. Having a trombone front and center with sole support from piano and bass is a challenging format. These gentlemen handle the challenge with aplomb. jazzdepot.com



Embraceable Brazil (Versa Records) is a project of love for Philadelphia-based drummer **Tom Cohen**. Cohen has had a lifelong affection for the sounds of bossa nova music. He undertook this recording over several years with many interruptions and retakes. Over the years, he used 20 American and Brazilian musicians in various combinations to create 13 tracks of music, mostly by Brazilian composers. He adapted the music to bossa nova arrangements. One track in particular, “The Girl from Ipanema/A Garota de Ipanema,” is memorable for the tenor sax magic of the late Larry McKenna, his only appearance on the album. Overall, Cohen has created an interesting blend of songs and charts that attract you with their ever-shifting combinations of instruments and occasional vocals. *Embraceable Brazil* provides an uplifting escape from the often confusing world around us. tomcohenproductions.com

Bassist **Neal Miner** has been a strong presence on the New York scene for about 35 years. He has led his own groups and been a sideman for many of the most prominent mainstream jazz players and vocalists. *Invisibility* (Cellar Music - 032025) is his seventh album as a leader, and finds him in a trio setting with tenor saxophonist Chris Byars and drummer Jason Timemann, his current working group. They perform a program of 11 Miner originals, five contrafacts of “There’s No You,” “Indian Summer,” “Sweet and Lovely,” “Lullaby of the Leaves”, and “Best Thing for You Is Me,” four straight-ahead jazz compositions; and two blues. The trio is tight with ears constantly tuned into the playing of the other members. As is to be expected, Byars’ voice is the most prominent, and he shines throughout with a wonderful tone and a mind that pours forth improvisational masterpieces. Miner is ever

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present, often supplying impressive solos. Tiemann is a truly supportive third part who dazzles when given space. cellarmusicgroup.com

Northbound to Finch (Flat 6th Records - 1001) is an album of original compositions by pianist **Maria Kaushansky**, inspired by her years of growing up and attending school in Toronto. Now based in New York City, Kaushansky plays jazz as well as playing for ballet students. Her compositions are imaginative and nicely executed, abetted by bassist Paul Gill and drummer Anthony Pinciotti. The inspiration for each tune is described in the liner notes, and the music captures the feelings that she is expressing. Also included are alternate takes of six selections that include some of recording studio chatter. On a separate disc, she has released alternate versions of the tunes executed in a style empathet-

ic to performance by ballet students. This is Kaushansky's first entry to the world of recordings, and it is an auspicious debut. mariakaushnsky.com

For enthusiasts of the Great American Songbook, it is heartening that there are several young vocalists including these songs in their repertoire. One listen to *It's Magic* (Decca -602478510953) by **Stella Cole** and you will be convinced that she is among the best of these singers. Her support for the 10-song program includes pianist/arranger Alan Broadbent, bassist Michael Migliore, and drummer Hank Allen-Barfield, plus a 12-piece string section. Cole's song selection is superb, "Till There Was You," "Say It," "It's Magic," "Stairway to the Stars," "Alfie," "As Time Goes By," "The Touch of Your Lips," "Imagination," "My Ideal" and "Fools Rush In." Her voice is warm and pure.



Her phrasing is spot on, demonstrating a maturity that belies her 26 years. Broadbent is his usual magnificent self as both accompanist and arranger. *It's Magic* is an album that will find itself frequently on your playlist. stellacole.net

With Halloween on the horizon, vocalist **Hannah Gill** is releasing *Spooky Jazz Vol. 3* (Turtle Bay - 25007), a follow up to her 2020 EP *Spooky*

Jazz and last year's *Spooky Jazz Vol.2*. Following a spoken Intro, she sings such songs as "Spider in the Web," "Old Devil Moon," and "The Richest Guy in the Graveyard." Jazzy is a good description of the music on this album for it features a swinging band: Gabe Terracciano on violin, Ricky Alexander on clarinet and sax, Danny Jonokuchi on trumpet, theremin and slide whistle, Justin Poindexter on guitar, Gordon Webster on piano, Philip Ambuel on bass, and Ben Zweig on drums. Gill had to dig deep to find most of these tunes and invests most selections with wry campiness. As on her earlier albums, she must have had fun putting together the program, and it comes through in her performances. turtlebayrecords.com

Antonia Bennett has a gentle voice that she applies to the 13 selections on *Expressions* (self-produced). It is difficult for the offspring of a

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major star to readily establish a career out of the shadow of a famous parent, in her case the late Tony Bennett. *Expressions* is the latest album in her catalog, and she has a mix of standards like “Exactly Like You,” “Once I Loved,” “Comes Love,” “True Love,” “Ain’t Misbehavin’” and “After You,” some contemporary tunes, “Baby,” “Right on Time” and “See You on the Other Side,” plus “Hushabye Mountain,” with a guest appearance by trumpeter Randy Brecker. There is also the Charles Trenet classic, “Vous Qui Passez Sans Me Voir.” One of the premier piano accompanists, Christian Jacob, who also provided the arrangements, is joined by guitarist Larry Konse, bassist Kevin Axt, and drummer Kendall Kay.. Her dad is surely smiling down at this collection. (Available as a download from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and for streaming on most major platforms.)

Live at Vic’s Las Vegas (la reserve records) is the new release by vocalist **Nicole Zuraitis & Friends**. She arranged and plays piano on this 11-tune program with her friends, Kenton Harrold on trumpet, Tom Scott on saxophone, Rachel Eckroth on organ, Idan Morim on guitar, Sam Weber on bass, and husband Dan Pugach on drums. The songs include familiar tunes like “I Got My Mojo Working,” “The Nearness of You,” and “Jolene”, plus three songs which are uncredited, but are probably originals by Zuraitis—“All Stars Lead to You,” “Middle C,” and “The Coffee Song.” Zuraitis is a confident singer, whether swinging out or caressing a ballad. Her band is spirited and they nail her charts. This recording captures the excitement that Zuraitis creates in person. [nicolemusic.com](https://www.nicolemusic.com)

Peter Campbell is a vocalist in the tradition of pop/cabaret jazz-

influenced vocalists who once were staples of smart supper clubs and piano bars. His latest release, *Haunted Melody* (self-produced) has an eclectic 10-song program with backing from jazz musicians like tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm, flutist Bill McBernie, guitarist Reg Schweiger, trumpeter/flugelhornist Kevin Turcotte, and pianist Adrean Farrugia, with orchestral programming by Ernesto Leite. Of particular note is his inclusion of “Lost in a Summer Night,” a rarely recorded gem by Andre Previn and Milt Raskin that was one of the selections on the classic June Christy album, *Gone for the Day*. Campbell is devoted to the lyrics of the songs that he sings and renders them with a personal touch that makes each one feel special. It is nice that there are still performers who perform and record this kind of material in this manner. [petercampbellmusic.com](https://www.petercampbellmusic.com)



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