



Texas Jazz Educators Association Newsletter

Highlighting Jazz Activities in the State of Texas

November 2025



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear TJEA Members,

Finding inspiration for your teaching—or even your own playing—has never been easier in today's world of computers, social media, and online resources. There are

countless invaluable tools to help answer questions about improvisation, rehearsal techniques, and artists. YouTube and the Jamey Aebersold website are just two of the best-known places to start.

Still, even with this abundance of access, seeking guidance from accomplished jazz practitioners remains the best way to unlock the deeper mysteries of jazz performance.

I'm fortunate to be able to visit with educators and schools around Texas, often in jazz clinic settings where I hear the same kinds of questions:

- *"I don't improvise. How can I teach the fundamentals if I don't fully understand them?"*
- *"What recordings should I play for my students?"*
- *"How can I help my students develop that true swing-feel like Count Basie's band?"*
- *"I'm comfortable with the horn players, but how do I connect with the rhythm section?"*

So, in an effort to help both the students and their directors, here are a few quick answers:



Sam Houston State's latest CD release, a tribute to a friend and colleague, p. 15.

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1. **Improvisation:** Visit the Jamey Aebersold website at www.jazzbooks.com. Click the 'FREE JAZZ' tab at the top of the page then click the JAZZ HANDBOOK. The free PDF file covers everything—scales, piano voicings, recommended books, and more. Truly, a goldmine of everything you need to get started.
2. **Listening:** Introduce your students to the Count Basie Orchestra, especially the recordings of Sammy Nestico's arrangements. These provide an excellent foundation for understanding ensemble balance, phrasing, and articulation. Listening to these performances helps students *hear* what great section playing sounds like.
3. **Swing Feel:** To develop authentic swing, have your students immerse themselves in *Atomic Basie* and other classic recordings. Encourage them to listen repeatedly, internalize the rhythm, and try to emulate that feel in rehearsal. Swing can't be memorized—it has to be *felt*, and the best way to learn that is by listening and imitating.
4. **Rhythm Section:** Early in my career, working with rhythm sections was intimidating. Over time, I learned that observation and listening are key. YouTube offers countless videos that demonstrate how great rhythm sections lock in together. Watch their interactions with each other—your eyes can teach you as much as your ears. Today, the rhythm section is my favorite part of the band to work with—they are the heartbeat of the ensemble.

As we move into November and football season winds down, it's time to get your jazz ensemble rolling. Some of you are fortunate to have jazz during the school day, while others are gearing up for after-school rehearsals. Either way, all it takes is your love of music and an eager group of students.

I know scheduling can be tough, but adding jazz into your program can be deeply rewarding. And remember—you don't have to do it alone. Reach out to a seasoned jazz educator in your area, or use the TJEA website to source names of qualified educators, and invite them to work with your group. You'll be amazed at how energizing and insightful the experience can be—for you and your students alike.

Best wishes to all of you, and please don't hesitate to reach out if I can ever be of help.

Warm regards,
Noe Marmolejo

Do You Need a Clinician?

Are you planning an upcoming event and need a clinician to work with your groups? Check out the TJEA web site under the FIND tab for available individuals able to serve your needs. There are nearly 100 jazz educators listed and organized by 'Region' to make it easier to find someone near you. [Start your clinician search here.](#)



16th Annual

SHSU Bill Watrous Jazz Festival

Friday and Saturday, March 27 & 28, 2026

The State's Oldest Jazz Festival...
68 years running!

Guest artist.... **Eric Marienthal**

Afternoon and evening concerts,
and awards ceremony, are **FREE**
and open to the participating
schools and the general public.

**Featuring the SHSU
Jazz Ensemble, directed
by Aric Schneller**

PAYNE CONCERT HALL, GPAC
815 17TH Street, Huntsville, TX 77340

For registration and information please email Dr. Aric Schneller at
schneller@shsu.edu

Sam Houston State University's Bill Watrous Jazz Festival

The longest running jazz festival in Texas returns again for its 16th year as the 'Bill Watrous Jazz Festival'.

The SHSU festival is a competitive, educational event where high school and college jazz bands perform at 30-minute intervals throughout the day. All participating ensembles receive critique sheets from each of the nationally renowned jazz educators. Ensembles are strongly encouraged to hear performances of at least two other bands. This provides valuable listening opportunities for young, developing musicians, plus ensures appreciative and dedicated audiences for all of the performing groups.

Division ratings appear on each band's critique sheet and trophies are awarded on

the consensus of the judges at the awards ceremony. First, Second, and Third place are awarded within each category: college, high school, and middle school. Outstanding Soloists and Musicians are also recognized. Awards are announced and presented during the SHSU Jazz Ensemble's closing evening concert.

Each group's registration fee of \$450 includes the adjudication, an audio CD of the performance, access to clinics and the daytime performances, as well as admittance to the evening concert. Afternoon and evening concerts, and awards ceremony, are FREE and open to the participating schools and the general public. Contact Dr. Aric Schneller at schneller@shsu.edu to register and for additional information.

JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK

JEN's story begins in 2008 when two jazz industry veterans, Mary Jo Papich and Dr. Lou Fischer, sought to fill a void in the jazz education scene. They brought together 34 leaders in the jazz community, developing the mission and bylaws for what was to become the Jazz Education Network. This gathering and subsequent gatherings, led to the organization's first conference in 2010 in St. Louis, MO, with 1,500 attendees.

Now the Jazz Education Network is gearing up for its seventeenth conference, running January 7-10, 2026. This one will be back where so much of our jazz history began; New Orleans, Louisiana—and Texas jazz education will be well represented!

Here's a (partial?) listing of Texas ensembles and individuals pulled from the conference's online listings—sincere apologies if anyone was omitted.

THURSDAY JAN. 8

10:00 AM - 10:50 AM CST... Location: New Voices/Empire A

Plano East High School Sound Invention

Director: **Daniel Knight - Plano East High School**

10:30 AM - 11:30 AM CST... Location: Strand 10

Temple HS Blues

Director: **Brent Mathesen – Temple High School**

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM CST... Location: Strand 13

Diaz Music Institute Caliente

Director: **Jose A. Diaz – Jazz Education Network**

1:00 PM - 1:50 PM CST... Location: Visions/Empire C

John Sturino & BLOW GLOBE

Lead Performer: John Sturino

Co-Performer: Brendon Wilkins

Co-Performer: Summer Camargo

Co-Performer: David Smith

Co-Performer: **Nick Finzer – University of North Texas**

Co-Performer: Evan Harris

Co-Performer: Adam M. Birnbaum

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM CST... Location: Strand 13

Austin HS Jazz Ensemble

Director: **Abigail West - Austin HS**

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM CST... Location: Strand 10

Moises Vela MS Jazz I

Director: **Erika Uribe - Moises Vela MS**

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2:00 PM - 2:50 PM CST... Location: Bolden 6

"How Harmony Can Characterize a Melody"

Lead Presenter: **Richard DeRosa – University of North Texas**

3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CST... Location: Strand 10

Moises Vela MS Jazz 2

Director: **Erika Uribe - Moises Vela MS**

4:30 PM - 5:30 PM CST... Location: Strand 13

Temple HS Highlighters

Director: **Marcos Duran – Temple High School**

9:10 PM - 10:00 PM CST... Location: Inspirations/Celestin

Diaz Music Institute Caliente

Director: **Jose A. Diaz – Jazz Education Network**

FRIDAY JAN 7

9:00 AM - 9:50 AM CST... Location: LeJENds/Storyville

Texas A&M University-Kingsville-Javelina Jaht 7

Director: **Theresa Chen – Texas A&M University-Kingsville**

Director: **Dr. Thomas Zinninger – Texas A&M University-Kingsville**

12:00 PM - 12:50 PM CST... Location: Foster 2

"I Thought Recording the Album Was the Hard Part... I Was Wrong"

Lead Presenter: **Nick Finzer – University of North Texas**

1:00 PM - 1:50 PM CST... Location: Foster 1

"From Transcription to Transformation: How Jazz Guitarists Can Personalize Vocabulary for Improvisation"

Lead Presenter: **Bailey A. Ehr Gott – University of North Texas**

8:10 PM - 9:00 PM CST.... Location: Inspirations/Celestin Ballroom

Houston Latin Jazz Orchestra

Director: **Jose A. Diaz – Jazz Education Network**

SATURDAY JAN 10

4:00 PM - 4:50 PM CST.... Location: Visions/Empire C

Jazz Strings and Fiddle Society of Texas

Director: **Eugen Kim – Weatherford College**

5:00 PM - 5:50 PM CST.... Location: Bolden 6

"Latin Styles for Jazz Rhythm Section"

Lead Presenter: **Andy P. Smith – University of Texas at El Paso**

Check out the JEN
conference and
membership [HERE!](#)



JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK

17TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
THE SPANISH TINGE

JAN. 7-10, 2026
NEW ORLEANS, LA

College of the Mainland Jazz News

The College of the Mainland Jazz Ensemble, under the direction of **Sparky Koerner**, will present a concert on November 18, 2025 at 7:30 pm in the Fine Arts Building theatre on the COM Campus in Texas City.

Sparky says, "I've put together a varied program that I believe the audience will enjoy. Two great classic Stan Kenton charts composed by Hank Levy—"Time for a Change" and "Decoupage"—take us out of the 4/4 feel for a bit, along with Michael Mossman's arrangement of Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue" in 3/4.

Ron Bocek (tenor sax) and **Shawn Rampy** (trombone) will be featured on "Alone Together", arranged by Dave Wolpe.

"Miss Fine" by Oliver Nelson and "Beauty and the Beast", arranged by Gordon Goodwin, are two great swing charts that both have a nice groove. "Tribute to Miles", arranged by Mark Taylor, features four great Miles Davis tunes: "So What", "All Blues", "Seven Steps to Heaven" and "Milestones". Other tunes will also be included in the concert.

"I am really pleased with the way the band is playing," Sparky added. "It's tough when a group only meets once a week, but I have dedicated musicians who put in the time to practice while still maintaining careers and families."



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON Moores School of Music

JAZZ FESTIVAL

28TH ANNUAL MSM JAZZ FEST

FEBRUARY 27 & 28, 2026

Join us for the 28th annual Jazz Fest featuring world-class trumpeter Mr. Wayne Bergeron, exciting concerts, hands-on clinics, student awards, and more. Don't miss this chance to learn, perform, and get inspired!

Register for a 30-minute performance followed by a 30-minute clinic by scanning the QR code below.

Enjoy a phenomenal concert each evening at 7:30pm in Moores Opera House. Friday night's guest is TBA. Saturday night's featured guest will be Wayne Bergeron.



For questions and inquiries, email
caa@uh.edu

REGISTER



forms.office.com

 Moores School of Music
Kathrine G. McGovern
College of the Arts

Have you renewed your TJEА membership?

TJEА membership benefits include:

Annual Jazz Director Symposium

TJEА Newsletter -- 4 times per year

School Grant Program offering up to \$500 per program

Jazz information resources

Ongoing support of jazz education in Texas

A shared voice in the continued advocacy of jazz education

Please email Heather Mensch at webmaster@tjea.org for your membership renewal link. Include your full name in the request. If you still have your membership link from last year, you may use that link to complete your transaction in PayPal.

TJEA SYMPOSIUM – 2026

Wednesday, February 11 at the TMEA convention

9 am – Dr. Keith Winking (Tx State Univ) – Choosing Quality Jazz Charts

- *Dr. Winking will discuss various factors and elements when choosing the best repertoire for your jazz ensemble.*

10 am – Tito Carrillo (Tx State Univ & ATSSB Jazz Clinician) – Getting Engaged with Improv

- *Professor Carrillo will present pedagogical techniques that will get your students excited about improvisation.*

11 am – Altin Sencalar (Univ. of Colorado) – Transcriptions and How to Go Beyond Listening

- *Professor Sencalar will present a session on the importance of transcribing jazz solos and how to incorporate them into your daily jazz vocabulary.*

1 pm – Chip Crotts (Georgia Tech & All-State Jazz 1 Clinician) – Strategies, Techniques and Performance tips for Teaching Your Jazz Ensemble

- *Dr. Crotts will present a session on how to get the most out of your ensemble by using various methods, strategies, and techniques that can be applied to your jazz ensemble and beyond!*

2 pm – John Daversa (Univ. of Miami & All State Jazz 2 Clinician) – Jazz Composition & Arranging: Balancing Heart and Mind

- *Dr. Daversa will present a session focused on practical approaches to jazz composition and arranging.*

3 pm – Daniel DuFour (Univ. of Texas at Austin) – The Drum Set: View from the Throne

- *Professor DuFour will present a drum set clinic that focuses on the role of the drummer in a big band and combo setting.*

The Latin Jazz canon: a beginning guide to Latin Jazz styles for Jazz Ensemble

By Altin Sencalar

The upper left-hand part of the page of many charts has the style or groove description written. For years, the word “Latin” has been written plainly with little to no context. This is troublesome for the beginning jazz director, beginning jazz player, and anyone less familiar with Latin music. Some people resort to a straight-eighth interpretation—which is on the right track— but how do we make this authentic to the style?

This topic is a passion of mine, so let me introduce some foundational aspects of learning and integrating the Latin, Afro-Latin, and Caribbean diasporas into your band and ears.

Knowing the cultural origins of the pieces we program deepens our understanding of how to perform and teach them. Here is a brief overview of the origins of swing and Latin music.

West African drum circle and **West African Kaiso music** are the first grooves we reference in the origins of swing and Afro-Latin music. This music is the beginning of aurally learned grooves. These grooves were taken by slave-ship transport to the Caribbean and then to the Americas. When they reached the Indigenous people of the Caribbean and Americas, the integration of cultures and musical identities began.

To begin a deeper stylistic analysis, we can start by musically dissecting the origin of Latin jazz: Cuba. The collaboration of **Chano Pozo** and **Dizzy Gillespie** is considered the starting point of the intersection between Latin music and jazz. From there, we transition to people such as **Machito** (Frank Grillo) and **Mario Bauzá**. The Cuban music tradition contains a plethora of styles and tempos that differ from straight-ahead jazz. Often misunderstood, however, is how these grooves intersect with commonly played jazz styles.

The table at the end of this article (Fig. 1) outlines the parallels between straight-ahead jazz grooves and accessible Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin grooves, along with listening examples (Fig. 3). These grooves are listed alongside their swing counterparts and have specific origins from Latin American countries. Additionally, you will find a variety of clave rhythms (Fig. 2) and some definitions of words used in this article.

Jazz Ballad

We often associate a jazz ballad with romance, something shared by the **bolero**. The bolero groove, which has Spanish origins, began as a dance and eventually became a staple in the Latin community for its musical texture. This style also evolved to its modern-day use in the Cuban music tradition.

The **tango**—a slightly faster groove within the same tempo range—emerged from Argentina, but also has ties to Uruguay and influences from Africa and Europe. The tango shares the bolero’s romantic feeling, but with a stronger sense of dance.

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Slow Swing & Soulful Swing

The next direct connection we can make is between slow swing and **cha-cha**. The song “Sugar” by tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine is a good reference that emulates the style of slow swing or soulful swing. This sort of swing style falls in its own category: it’s too fast for a ballad, but not bright enough for a medium swing song. Slow swing maintains the ballad’s seductive, emotive feeling, but with more forward motion. Its tempo and style are closely in line with the *cha-cha*—a dance with Cuban origins known for its flirtatious, playful, dance-like energy.

Another counterpart of this type of slow or soulful swing is the Puerto Rican and New York-influenced style of **Latin boogaloo**. Latin boogaloo has soulful nuances in its interpretation and is associated with funk music and its Latin origins. This fusion of styles also circles back to Cuba, as its rhythmic roots contain **son-montuno** (Fig. 2) and a close relationship to funk music.

Lastly, the Brazilian jazz influence of **bossa nova** sits in this tempo range, however the bossa can be played at various speeds. When comparing bossa to its swing counterpart, you can reference the tune “Bye Bye Blackbird”. One of the most popular recordings of this is Miles Davis’s recording featuring Red Garland’s iconic piano intro. The Brazilian parallel version of this tune would be Claudio Roditi’s recording from his record *Impressions*, which showcases how the slower swing tempo translates to the bossa nova style.

Medium & Medium Up Swing

Many Latin styles have performance similarities to medium and medium-up swing. Here are a few key examples:

Guajira, a Cuban groove, is similar to a cha-cha. However, it is faster and more active, which fits the energy associated with the tempo. Like medium and medium-up swing, guajira can be played across a range of tempos and applied to many types of songs. Additionally, the energy of these two styles can vary within the melodic and solo constructs of songs within this tempo range. Guajira also utilizes the front of the beat to ensure the style is energetic and drives toward some sort of dynamic arrival—an aspect consistent with its swing counterpart.

Changüí, associated with the cumbia, is also a “front-of-the-beat”, driving groove. While closely related to cumbia, the changüí originates from Cuba. It also has heavy African influence, making it a direct predecessor to modern day salsa music and a true Afro-Cuban subgenre.

In addition to guajira and changüí as Cuban counterparts within the medium and medium-up swing style, **songo** also fits this tempo and type of energetic forward-pushing beat. Songo is a combination of son montuno, rumba, and funk music. These stylistic influences are also within the family of medium and medium-up swing.

By combining African and Cuban music, we come to a style known as **Afro-Cuban**. However, that term can be vague. When I see “Afro-Cuban”, my initial reaction is to think of a 6/8 time feel. One name for this Afro-Cuban 6/8 style comes from the African religious group **Abakuá**. The group’s name, Abakuá, is also used to describe the groove. This is the groove associated with the song “Afro-Blue”—a combination of African and jazz music made famous by **Mongo Santamaria**.

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Lastly, the **bossa nova** style fits in the medium and medium-up swing tempo range. This is exemplified by the version of the tune “You’re My Everything” as played by **Freddie Hubbard** on his album *Hub-tones*, and my own recording (from the album *Discover the Present*). The medium tempo transfers well with the melodic phrasing and harmonic progression of the tune.

Fast & Up-Tempo Swing

Fast swing or up-tempo swing can relate closely to fast salsa and mambo. There are two common types of salsa grooves within Latin jazz: “2-3 or 3-2 Son Salsa” and “2-3 or 3-2 Rhumba Salsa” (Fig. 2). These grooves can often feel erratic, unpredictable, vivacious, or out of control—qualities that identify closely with bebop or fast swing. When listening to these styles, we often connect with their virtuosity and energy. While the grooves can feel erratic, they are actually repetitive. This repetition preserves the music’s danceability and the consistency of the groove. Like the ride cymbal and hi-hat in bebop, the groove’s pattern is what dictates the music.

Another Latin counterpart to up-tempo swing is **mambo**. This style is heavily influenced by the African diaspora. Mambo groove has multiple layers including polyrhythms, clave, and the Cuban influence of son montuno. However, these elements still fall within the tempo and nuances of the swing style being compared.

The Brazilian counterpart to mambo is typically **samba**, a genre deeply rooted in the Brazilian community. After visiting a samba bar in São Paulo, I recognized the clear connection between samba’s tempo and harmonic movement between those found in jazz. The two recordings I reference are **John Coltrane’s** “Moment’s Notice” and **Claudio Roditi’s** interpretation of the same tune. You can hear how the groove of the samba relates directly to the up-tempo swing, especially in the rhythmic hits throughout the melody of both versions.

Conclusion

In these comparisons of swing and Latin music, we see clear nuances that are identifiable to each swing and Latin counterpart. It is important that, when programming a Latin piece, you are familiar with its origins, nuances, and swing equivalent. This helps you, the director, relate to your students who might not be familiar with this style of music, as well as deepening our collective understanding of jazz and Latin jazz.

Figure 1: Table of Parallel Styles

Jazz (straight ahead)	Latin Jazz Parallel (Cuba)	Optional Latin Jazz Parallels (Other Latin Countries + Africa/ Cuba)
Ballad	Bolero	Tango (Argentinian)
Slow Swing or Soulful Swing	Cha-Cha	Boo-Ga-Loo, Bossa Nova (Brazilian)
Medium/ Medium Up Swing	Guajira	Changüí (this has ties to Cumbia), Songo, Bossa Nova (Brazilian), Afro-Cuban 6/8 (Abakuá)
Fast Swing or Up-Tempo	Fast Salsa (2-3 or 3-2 Son or Rhumba)	Mambo, Samba (Brazilian)

Continued ...

Vocabulary Used:

“Son”- indicates Down Beat focused grooves. (i.e. Son Montuno, 2-3 Son Clave)

“Rhumba”- indicates Up Beat focused grooves (i.e. 2-3 Rhumba, 3-2 Rhumba Clave Salsa)

“Clave”- A repeating, syncopated rhythmic pattern that forms the structural core of many Cuban and Latin dances.

Figure 2: Clave Rhythmic Patterns:**Figure 3: Songs in Swing & Latin Styles for reference**

Ballads: “Tenderly” - Chet Baker

Bolero: “Bésame Mucho” - Consuelo Velazquez

Tango: “Libertango” - Astor Piazzolla y su Quinteto

Slow Swing & Soulful Swing: “Sugar” - Stanley Turrentine

Cha-Cha: “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White” - Perez Prado (this is a touch faster than normal)

Boogaloo- “Boogaloo Blues” - Johnny Colon

Bossa Nova- “Corcovado” - Astrud Gilberto

Continued ...

Medium & Medium Up Swing: “Minor Mishap”- Tommy Flannigan

Guajira- “Minor Mishap”- Altin Sencalar

Changüí- “Changui Guantanamo” - from the compilation *Changüí: The Sound of Guantánamo*

Cumbia- “Escandalo “- La Sonora Dinamita

Songo- “Here to Stay”- Something Blue (This goes between Medium Swing and Songo)

Abroqua 6/8- “Afro Blue”-Mongo Santamaria

Fast Swing or Up-tempo Swing: “Moment’s Notice”- John Coltrane

Fast Salsa- “Black Nile”- Airmen of Note

Mambo- “Mambo Inn”- Mario Bauza

Samba- “Moment’s Notice”- Claudio Roditi

[Editor: The following is a Q&A between the editor and the author, Altin Sencalar, expanding on the theme and intent of Altin’s article.]

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Editor: Altin, thank you for this wonderful article and agreeing to provide a few additional thoughts on the Latin jazz canon. When you hear young bands perform, do you hear any frequent mistakes in their performance of Latin jazz? Any solutions?

A.S.: Yes, I mostly see problems about correctly performing the style inferred with the word “Latin”. Also, an uncertainty about how to appropriately orchestrate the style on the drum kit.

A quick fix is to type into YouTube the style you believe would fit best with the song choice, and listen to about 3-5 videos. You want to be able to sing that style to your drummer as well as show them. For some valid tunes, you can use the recommended listening list from Fig. 3 above.

Lastly, by singing the groove to your drummer it allows them to use their ears and knowledge of timbres to make decisions which inform their musicality. From there, you can add, subtract, and reorchestrate the groove around the drum kit to make more musical sense.

Ed: It seems the rhythm section is a critical part to the performance of this music. Do you have any suggestions to improve their playing?

A.S.: As far as how to bring immediate information to your students in the rhythm section, the fastest way is through listening together. Listening to salsa bands, Latin jazz artists, and comparing the two are great ways for them to compare recordings with different textures.

A rhythm section learning swing music listens to different bands (Basie, Miles Davis Quintets, etc.) to understand the groove, interpretation of songs, and even harmony. The same approach applies to Latin music. The rhythm section should listen to and research players from the above recording list, which will lead them to many valid and authentic sources of stylistic information.

Continued ...

Ed: Teachers often site the bebop era, and **Charlie Parker** in particular, as foundations of study for jazz improvisation. Is there a similar era, or a particular artist that would be helpful for concentrated study of Latin jazz improvisation?

A.S.: As far as a particular single artist in Latin jazz, I think there are many standout musicians. However, many of them have been informed by bebop musicians because Latin jazz developed from bebop innovator **Dizzy Gillespie** and Cuban musician **Chano Pozo**. Eventually, Latin jazz was associated with the syntax of jazz vocabulary.

Eddie Palmeri, one of the great pioneers of modern-day Latin jazz, credits his brother, **Charlie Palmeri**, as well as bebop pianist **Thelonius Monk**. When listening to Eddie solo, his rhythmic use of Monk-like accents is obvious, as well as the lines he is using over common Latin jazz progressions.

Eddie Palmeri has utilized a plethora of brilliant Latin jazz soloists in his ensembles through the years. So, starting with his albums will be a great way to hear and learn how different instrumentalists play in this style.

Ed: Similar to the previous question, let's say a band director—rather than simply choosing a random chart labeled “Latin jazz”—wants to really explore and expand their band's understanding of the genre. Considering the various styles mentioned in your article, is there one in particular they should focus on mastering first?

A.S.: One of the most accessible —as well as hearable— styles for drummers to grasp is **bossa nova**. It was popularized in the American jazz scene by saxophonist **Stan Getz** in the late 1950s. During this era, Getz collaborated on a tune titled *Desafinado*, which emerged alongside the hard-bop era and introduced American audiences to the bossa nova style.

Bossa nova's accessibility allows drummers to focus on simplicity of groove and dynamic contrast across the drum kit, which in turn can strengthen the drummer's ability to swing with control.

Another style to explore is **guajira**. It's another accessible groove not only because of its technical feasibility but also because of the moderate tempos it uses—medium to medium-up tempos. Practicing guajira can also enhance coordination between the bass drum and various hi-hat timbres.

Ed: Finally, do you have a general piece of advice for bands and directors performing this music?

A.S.: Ensuring authenticity is the most important aspect of playing Latin, Afro Latin, African, and Caribbean Diaspora music. Please make sure you give yourself time to listen deeply and absorb the nuances of these different styles of music. It takes about 10 days to form a habit and 21 days for new muscles to repair—if you stay committed, you'll begin to learn, appreciate, and understand these new musical styles. Lastly, by developing your ability to articulate and actively listen to different styles, you'll be more effective when demonstrating and teaching them to your students.

Trombonist **Altin Sencalar** blends jazz with the folkloric roots of his Mexican and Turkish heritage. A Posi-Tone Records Artist and Yamaha Performing Artist, he's performed with Christian McBride, Michael Bublé, and the Temptations. His recent albums — *In Good Standing*, *Discover the Present*, and *Unleashed* — highlight a bold voice shaped by cultural depth and technical mastery.

Altin was named a 2025 Jazz Trombone Rising Star by Downbeat Magazine as well as features in Downbeat, New York City Jazz Record, All About Jazz, New Jersey Jazz Magazine, as well as others.



Altin will be presenting at the **2026 TJE Jazz Symposium** on the topic, *Transcriptions - How to Go Beyond Listening and Building Your Jazz Vocabulary*.

Recordings available on all streaming platforms: Altin Sencalar

<http://www.altinsencalar.com>

Facebook: Altin Brennan Sencalar

Instagram: @altin101



SHSU CD Release, *Remembering Ray* — A joyous affirmation of life, cherishing the memories of one who has passed.

Dr. Aric Schneller, Sam Houston State University's Director of Jazz Studies, said the following about their newest recording:

"This recording was born from both loss and love. The untimely passing of my friend and colleague, **Ray Gonzalez**, in the summer of 2024, at just 43 years old, shook the Houston music community to its core. Ray was one of the city's most versatile reed players — a consummate professional whose artistry and kindness left an indelible mark on all who knew him. His students adored him; four of them —

Diego Carballo, **Rachel Jimenez**, **Franklin Lafferty**, and **David Rodriguez** — are featured on this album, continuing his legacy through their sound and artistry.

"As I enter my 18th year leading jazz studies at Sam Houston State University, I find myself reflecting more often these days. Retirement may still be around the bend, but time, as it always does, seems to be picking up speed. And with that realization comes a deep sense of gratitude — gratitude to God for this extraordinary life in music and education, and for the privilege of sharing it with such gifted and hard-working students, dedicated colleagues, generous donors, and dear friends like Ray, who have shaped my journey along the way.

Sit back and crank it up because **Aric Schneller's Sam Houston State University Jazz Ensemble** is ready to entertain and WOW you with their latest CD, recorded in Spring 2025. They are amazingly young to play with such maturity — their eagerness and energy will have you sitting on the edge of your chair!

(Liner notes excerpt by Mary Jo Papich)

"After Ray's passing, I reached out to his wife, **Giny Mendez**, and together we found a way to celebrate his life through music. The result, along with a memorial scholarship, was a 2024 fall SHSU Jazz Concert — highlighted by my arrangement of one of Ray's favorite Dexter Gordon tunes, "Cheese Cake." The piece showcased our entire saxophone section and became the emotional cornerstone that inspired this recording — a lasting tribute to a beloved alumnus and colleague who gave so much to our school of music. Through Giny's continued generous support of our students, financial and otherwise, she carries the torch of her beloved Ray.

Aric's fine [arrangement of] **Dexter Gordon's "Cheesecake"** honors former alum and bari sax/doubler, **Ray Gonzalez**, who recently passed away... thus, the CD title: ***Remembering Ray***. May they raise the money needed to fully vest the **Ray Gonzalez Memorial Jazz Scholarship**. Please consider donating.

(Liner notes excerpt by Mary Jo Papich)

"This project also carries another story of resilience. Our lead trumpeter and vocalist, **Nathan Ramirez**, was diagnosed with a serious health issue just before the recording session. By the grace of God, he recovered without the need for surgery, and his spirit of optimism shines through on his heartfelt vocals in

Continued ...

a Sinatra-esque rendition of “Have You Met Miss Jones.” My sincere thanks go to **Brian Fincher**, a trusted colleague and former SHSU student, who stepped in on lead trumpet for the session and delivered a stellar performance.

“As we establish and grow **The Ray Gonzalez Memorial Jazz Scholarship** our thanks go out to the generosity of so many. Nearly \$9,000 has already been raised, and our hope is that proceeds from this CD will help us reach the remaining \$16,000 needed to fully endow this fund. Ray’s scholarship will help ensure future SHSU jazz students can continue to thrive in the spirit of his musicianship and mentorship.

“We’ll officially celebrate this album’s release on December 12, 2025, at the legendary Houston venue, The Big Barn at Dosey Doe, marking the next chapter of our scholarship fundraising efforts.

“My heartfelt thanks to the inimitable **Gunhild Carling** for her generosity in joining us on this album. Her boundless artistry, warmth, and virtuosity have inspired our students — and everyone who hears her perform — reminding us all of the joy and wonder that music brings when shared from the heart.

Featuring the globetrotting, international multi-instrumentalist sensation **Gunhild Carling** is a brilliant move! She is truly one of the most popular and sought-after trad jazz musicians in the world today. Not only does she add star power and incredible musicianship to the recording, she inspires the students to up their level of performance on a number she composed: “**Jazz Is My Lifestyle**.” (Liner notes excerpt by Mary Jo Papich)



Multi-instrumentalist, vocalist Gunhild Carling

“I am also deeply grateful to SHSU “Friend of Music” alumnus **Tom Skains** for his ever-generous financial and artistic contributions as Producer; to our new “Friend of Music” **Jerry Jones** for his generous support as Associate Producer; to alumnus **Darrell Parrish** for his invaluable contributions as Score Manager and Music Coach; and to recent alumnus **Tyler Barnes** for his masterful new arrangement of *A Taste of Honey*. Each of these individuals brought immense creativity, dedication, and spirit to this project — the kind of collaboration that keeps the heart of jazz beating strong at Sam Houston State University

“Special thanks to Mary Jo Papich—Jazz Education Network co-founder, Music Education Dept., Bradley University—for her beautiful liner notes. From all of us in the Spring 2025 SHSU Jazz Ensemble, thank you for your support—and for

helping us keep Ray’s music, joy, and generosity alive through this recording.”

Another high point on the CD is “**More Today Than Yesterday**” with talented director Schneller on trombone, vocal scat, and lyrics — and the double C at the end! (Liner notes excerpt by Mary Jo Papich)

If you would like to donate to Ray Gonzalez Memorial Jazz Scholarship, or if you wish to purchase a copy of the CD, contact Dr. Schneller at schneller@shsu.edu.

Continued ...



SOME SKUNK FUNK (7:01)*(Randy Brecker, arr. by Vince Mendoza)*

Franklin Lafferty, tenor saxophone

Carter Huget-Hrupp, trumpet

Bowery Music Publishing (BMI)

JAZZ IS MY LIFESTYLE (3:28)*(Gunhild Carling)*

Gunhild Carling, voice, trumpet, flute, trombone

Self-Published, carlingjazz.com

THANK YOU (6:16)*(Jerry Dodgion)*

Paul Bang, piano

Diego Carballo, alto saxophone

Carter Huget-Hrupp, flugel horn

Christian Hunt, trombone

David Rodriguez, baritone saxophone

Andrew Brugner, tuba

Second Floor Music o/b/o Second Floor Music (BMI)

MIDNIGHT VOYAGE (6:45)*(Joey Calderazzo, arr. by Alan Baylock)*

Brent Humberson, acoustic bass

Franklin Lafferty, tenor saxophone

Joey Calderazzo d/b/a Caldo Music Ltd (ASCAP)

BOLIVIA (6:34)*(Cedar Walton, arr. by Eric Richards)*

Diego Carballo, alto saxophone

Franklin Lafferty, tenor saxophone

Carter Huget-Hrupp, trumpet

Jon Mokarzel, drum set

Vernita Music, (BMI)

A TASTE OF HONEY (6:37)*(Bobby Scott and Ric Marlow, arr. by Tyler Barnes)*

Carter Huget-Hrupp, trumpet

Franklin Lafferty, tenor saxophone

Songfest Music Corp.

HAVE YOU MET MISS JONES (3:31)*(As recorded by Frank Sinatra)**(Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart, arr. by Billy May, trans. by John Farley)*

Nathan Ramirez, voice and trumpet

Chappell and Co. and Williamson Music Co.—A Div. of

Rodgers and Hammerstein

CHEESE CAKE (11:07)*(Arranged to honor the late Ray Gonzalez)**(Dexter Gordon, arr. by Aric Schneller)*

David Rodriguez, baritone saxophone

Simon Morales, tenor saxophone

Diego Carballo, alto saxophone

Rachel Jimenez, alto saxophone

Franklin Lafferty, tenor saxophone

Jon Mokarzel, drum set

Second Floor Music o/b/o Second Floor Music (BMI)

OVER THE RAINBOW (3:35)*(Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, arr. by William Russo)*

Sarah Pickle, trombone

EMI Feist Catalog Inc. (ASCAP)

MORE TODAY THAN YESTERDAY (6:17)*(Pat Upton of Spiral Staircase, arr. Vince Norman)*

Aric Schneller, trombone, vocal scat and lyrics

Paul Bang, piano

Primary Wave 3 Songs c/o Songs of Universal, Inc. (ASCAP)

TORQUE (5:33)*(Written for the Westfield High School Jazz Ensemble)**(Alan Baylock)*

Brian Trujillo, trombone

Carter Huget-Hrupp, trumpet

Pro Jazz Charts (ASCAP)

REMEMBERING RAY

SHSU Jazz
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Huntsville, TX
77341
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In Memoriam: Ray Gonzalez

(September 8, 1980 — August 17, 2024)

Authored by Luke Kirkwood.

Dear friend and colleague of the late Ray Gonzalez.

Owner of Kirkwood Music Services.

SHSU Alumni, Class of 2010

(From the CD liner notes) Just over a year ago, the Houston music community lost one of its most beloved and respected artists. **Ray Gonzalez** was among the city's finest reed doublers—a consummate professional whose presence and artistry has been deeply missed, especially in the musical theatre pits, where his sound became a cherished constant.

From the intimate three-piece ensembles of community productions to the full orchestras of Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS), from the stage with the Houston Jazz Orchestra to substitute appearances with the Houston Symphony—it often seemed that wherever great music was happening in Houston, Ray was there.

Ray's musical journey began at South Houston High School in Pasadena ISD, where, as a freshman, he was first invited to play for a theatre production of *The Boyfriend*. After graduating in 1999, he attended San Jacinto Central Community College, studying saxophone with **Larry Slezak** and clarinet with **Chester Rowell**, who became his lifelong mentor and guiding influence. A pivotal moment came in 2002 when Rowell invited Ray to perform in the pit for *The Pirates of Penzance*—the experience that revealed to Ray he could make a living doing what he truly loved.

That same year, Ray transferred to Sam Houston State University, where he studied under **Dr. Scott Plugge**. At SHSU, he quickly distinguished himself as an outstanding jazz musician and exceptional reed doubler. Faculty and peers recognized his versatility and musicianship, often calling on him to perform across ensembles. Dr. Plugge's instruction refined Ray's technique and introduced the disciplined practice habits that would define his professional success. In 2005, while still a student, Ray earned his first position as a musician aboard the Carnival Cruise Line—a milestone that marked the beginning of a vibrant performing career.



During his SHSU years (2002–2005), Ray's enthusiasm for musical theatre flourished. He performed in numerous campus productions and forged lifelong friendships with fellow musicians **Joe Beam** (drums), **Edgar Jaime** (trumpet), **Stephen Martin** (bass), and **Luke Kirkwood** (piano/keys). Together they dreamed of someday performing professional theatre productions in Houston—a dream Ray realized in October 2014, when he played his first show with Theatre Under the Stars. In time, that same SHSU circle of friends would share the stage together as accomplished professionals.

Outside his busy performance schedule, Ray was a passionate educator, teaching private lessons across Conroe, Klein, Spring, and Tomball ISDs. Each semester, he mentored 20–30 students, many of whom earned placement in TMEA All-State ensembles. His teaching reflected his own lifelong pursuit of excellence and his genuine care for every student's growth.

Continued ...

Ray was loved by colleagues and students alike—not just for his musicianship, but for his humor, warmth and camaraderie. His quick wit could diffuse any tense moment, and his ever-present reminders of how lucky musicians are to “make a living doing what we love” inspired all who worked with him. His now-legendary selfies, often capturing unsuspecting colleagues mid-rehearsal, became a beloved trademark within Houston’s musical circles.

At the heart of Ray’s life was his wife, **Giny**—a gifted vocalist and musician who was his partner in every sense. Her unwavering love and encouragement gave Ray the strength and balance to pursue his art and teaching with passion. Beyond music, Ray was a devoted fan of the Houston Astros and an enthusiast of great food—two joys he savored with the same gusto he brought to his playing.

Houston’s community of working musicians was richer for Ray Gonzalez’s presence, and though his loss leaves a void that can never be filled, his music, humor, and spirit will continue to resonate for years to come.

Editor’s Note: Last year, like everyone who knew Ray Gonzalez, I was shocked to learn of his passing. It was one of those moments when you have to read the news twice—and still, it doesn’t seem real.

Ray was a student in my high school band in the late ‘90s. He was a student full of passion for performing—a vibrant mix of energy, friendliness, good humor, and, of course, marvelous musicianship and dedication—the kind of student directors hope will walk through their band room door.

Life has a way of reconnecting you with friends at unexpected times. Decades ago, I saw Ray at a music show aboard a cruise ship somewhere in the Caribbean. I was there with family and he was playing in the ship’s band. After the show, I leaned over the orchestra pit and shouted, “Hey Ray!” He looked up, cracked a big smile, and shouted back, “Mister Goode!” Later, we spent hours talking and reminiscing on one of the upper decks well into the early morning hours.

I am thrilled that Sam Houston State University dedicated their CD to Ray—and even more so for the scholarship established in his honor, which will help other inspired students continue their own passionate journey with music. If you’re able, please consider donating. Contact Dr. Schneller: schneller@shsu.edu



Me and Ray. A serendipitous crossing of paths with former student Ray Gonzalez during a family cruise twenty years ago—in 2005.

TJEA NEWSLETTER ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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