

# JerseyJazz

Journal of the New Jersey Jazz Society

Dedicated to the performance,

promotion and preservation of jazz.

VOLUME 46 • ISSUE 7  
JULY/AUGUST 2018



Montclair State University students Salvatore Alaimo, on alto saxophone, left and Carlos Juncal on trumpet formed the front line horns for the scholarship performance at the May 20 NJJS Jazz Social at Shanghai Jazz in Madison. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

## Jazz Goes to School



Serious jazz education in the United States traces its roots to North Texas State College (now the University of North Texas) in the early 1940s. The school's legendary jazz studies program got its start there when an NTSC graduate student was asked by the dean of the college's music school to write his master's thesis on a proposed curriculum for a dance band major. That curriculum got a big boost when Stan Kenton, who saw the program as a pipeline to supply crackerjack players for his band's challenging book, took an interest. (Kenton later donated his entire library of scores and papers to the school.) Jazz music's fortunes, dance band or otherwise, have waxed and waned over the years, but jazz education programs

have become well established at many universities around the country. Including here in New Jersey where New Jersey Jazz Society co-founder Jack Stine endowed a jazz studies scholarship in the name of clarinetist Pee Wee Russell at Rutgers University in the early 1970s. The Society has continued in that tradition for nearly 50 years and now awards annual scholarship grants at each of five New Jersey universities with degree programs in jazz studies. James Pansulla, NJJS director of education programs, presented several of the the current crop of scholarship students at Shanghai Jazz in Madison on May 20 and his report on the students and Mitchell Seidel's photos of the performance begin on page 28.

## NJJS Showcases 2018 Jazz Scholarship Students at May Social

Story by James Pansulla | Photos by Mitchell Seidel

The New Jersey Jazz Society's college scholarship 2018 awardees represented their respective schools well with a two-set performance at the May 20 Jazz Social at Shanghai Jazz in Madison.

For many years the scholarship winners would perform the opening set at the annual Pee Wee Russell Memorial Stomp, but several years ago it was decided to give the students the spotlight with their own event.

And so now each year the third Sunday in May is Scholarship Day and the Society brings together the nominated students at Shanghai Jazz to acknowledge their achievements, issue their awards and enjoy some of their playing.

"The scholarship program is a pillar of our mission at the Jazz Society," said NJJS President Cydney Halpin.

The New Jersey Jazz Society funds annual scholarship grants at each of five New Jersey colleges with degree programs in Jazz Studies.

The Pee Wee Russell Memorial Scholarship Fund, which funds awards to Rutgers students, determined solely by the Rutgers University Foundation, is an endowment established by the NJJS and the Rutgers University Foundation in 1972 with revenue generated from the original Pee Wee Russell Memorial Stomp.

That inaugural event, which led directly to the formation of the

New Jersey Jazz Society, has been presented consecutively for the past 49 years. The recipients of the scholarship grants at the other colleges are selected by the faculties of the respective colleges.

The Scholarship Day also makes recognition of the inter-generational connections between master teachers and these top students. We now see students

from far reaches coming to New Jersey to study with the Bertonecinis and Maberns and other legendary faculty and then returning to their native area to spread the jazz gospel.

New Jersey's state's colleges play a major role in securing the future of the art form. One of the schools, William Paterson University, now boasts a 25% acceptance rate. In raw numbers that means there are only 25 openings for the usual 100 freshman class applicants to its renowned jazz program.



James Pansulla, director of education programs for NJJS left, addresses the audience at Shanghai Jazz between performances by saxophonist Salvatore Alaimo and trumpeter Carlos Juncal on May 20.



Hired Gun: Pianist Nick Masters of Jersey City, a recent graduate of William Paterson University, joined the scholarship winners for the show.

Five of the state's colleges take part in the Jazz Society's scholarship activity: Montclair State University, New Jersey City State University, Rowan University, Rutgers University and William Paterson University.

Several months before the award date, the director of the jazz program at each school is asked to nominate a student for each award, which is in part funded by the generosity of NJJS members.

Many contributions were made during the end-of-year appeal last November, for which we owe a huge debt of thanks to former Board member Lynn Redmile. Members of the Society responded with gifts earmarked for these grants, which allowed this year's total to reach \$7,400.

William Paterson University professors David Demsey and Bill Charlap nominated guitarist Jianing Yang to receive this year's Jack Stine Scholarship. Jianing hails from Guangzhou, China, near Beijing where, according to CNN's China Desk, "There is a now-vibrant and fast-developing jazz scene targeting China's ever-growing middle class." The Beijing Blue Note, in fact, has been buzzing since opening in 2016.

Jianing is completing his studies at William Paterson on a student visa. He was part of the generation-spanning tutelage of Gene Bertoncini, who recently performed for the NJJS at the March Jazz Social at a sprightly 86.

Montclair State University Jazz Studies Director Jeffrey Kunkel summoned his faculty, which nominated two players who shared the New Jersey Jazz Society Board of Directors Scholarship.

Trumpeter Carlos Juncal is a graduate of Arts High School in Newark and studied with master horn player Josh Evans. Carlos was also a former member of the Jazz House Kids Dynasty Big Band and the Brick City Jazz Orchestra in connection with NJPAC.

As many sax players before him have, Salvatore Alaimo credited instructor Mike Lee as being a major influence and jazz role model. Sal is a graduate of Tottenville High School in Staten Island and also credits his former teacher Chris Garone. Sal brought his alto sax to participate in the dozen tunes the ensemble performed on the day, including some bouncier tunes well-suited for sax such as “Cheesecake” by Dexter Gordon and “Strollin’” by Horace Silver.

The Rowan University jazz faculty and its director Denis DeBlasio, who years ago helped Maynard Ferguson manage his band, also split the award between drummer Joseph McGuth and bassist Matthew Kaefer.

Each player acknowledged their most influential faculty member: Joe’s mentor was



Guitarist Jianing Yang, from China, applauds Jackie Gage’s performance while he waits to perform. Also waiting in the wings are saxophonist Salvatore Alaimo and trumpeter Carlos Juncal.



Trumpeter Carlos Juncal of Montclair State University plays at the NJJS scholarship program with drummer Chris Paredes of New Jersey City University.



Bassist Matthew Kaefer and pianist Nick Masters keep pace behind saxophonist Salvatore Alaimo at the NJJS scholarship winners performance in Madison.

drummer Dan Monaghan and Matt’s was bassist Douglas Mapp. Both teachers are also highly regarded players in the Philly area. The award is named after longtime NJJS board member and jazz activist Bill Walters.

Joe is from Erdenheim, Pa and Matt from Ramsey, NJ. As an added bonus, the Kaefer family made the on-the-spot decision to become new Jazz Society members. They were in attendance among the many family members and friends of the musicians.

At New Jersey City State University, Jazz Studies Director Gabriel Alegria, who recently took over that post from fellow horn player Walt Weiskopf, nominated drummer Chris Paredes of Paterson for the Don Robertson Scholarship.

Many of our members remember Don’s drumming skills and several players nominated from that school over the years have identified drummer Tim Horner as their most influential teacher, as Chris did this year.

Saxophonist Pablo Hernandez from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers, New Brunswick was the recipient of this year’s scholarship named in honor of Pee Wee Russell but Pablo was not available to perform on May 20. Funding for the Pee Wee Russell Scholarship got a major boost in January of 1988 when the Jazz Society (fueled by co-founder Jack Stine’s chutzpah) sponsored — and sold out — a Carnegie Hall concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of Benny Goodman’s 1938 groundbreaking date at that esteemed

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## NJJS SCHOLARSHIP DAY

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**Photos by Mitchell Seidel**

venue. The Rutgers grant is derived in part from the interest and dividends which this 30-year-old fund throws off.

The performance on May 20 was well-received. The young musicians from such varied locations had never met before but spoke a common musical language. Social media was used to pull together the players and their most-favored tunes in the days leading up to the live date.

Two additional musicians from the Jazz Society's Rolodex file of emerging artists rounded out the ensemble. Pianist Nick Masters is a 2016 graduate of William Paterson's program, where still more intergenerational piano study took place between Harold Mabern and him. Nick is now a member of Winard Harper's band, Jeli Posse. Vocalist Jackie Gage is originally from the San Jose, California area, where she received the *San Jose Mercury News's* Rising Star Award in 2013 for young jazz musicians. She now lives in Jersey City, performing locally and appearing frequently with Fender Rhodes specialist Marc Cary's band. **JJ**

*Only with generous financial contributions from people like you, can we increase our awards to keep pace with rising costs. What better way to support jazz than to help educate the next generation of musicians? Invest in the future today with a tax deductible contribution earmarked for its scholarship fund. Donations are restricted to the use of funding Jazz Studies scholarships. Contributors of \$1,000 or more will be deemed a Lifetime Member of the New Jersey Jazz Society. You may also have a scholarship named in honor of you, a loved one, your organization or your company. For more information visit [njjs.org/scholarships.php](http://njjs.org/scholarships.php).*



Guest vocalist Jackie Gage of San Jose, California is backed by bassist Matthew Kaeyer and pianist Nick Masters at the May 20 Jazz Social at Shanghai Jazz .



As two students were drummers, they split the duties at Shanghai. Joseph McGuth of Rowan won a Bill Walters Scholarship and handled the sticks for the first set.



Bassist Matthew Kaeyer was nominated by the Rowan University jazz faculty for a Bill Walters scholarship.



Second set drums were handled by Chris Paredes of New Jersey City University, who won the Don Robertson Scholarship.