Jack D. Stine
1921 – 2018

Jack Stine lived his life with boundless energy and the unfailing optimism that a little gumption could get a person a long way. Taking a fledgling jazz society from the barroom of a rural New Jersey roadhouse to center stage at Carnegie Hall and spearheading construction of affordable senior housing in his local community (including a 172-unit building named in his honor) are just two examples of the many achievements Jack piled up in a lifetime of service to others. Sanford Josephson tells the inspiring story of the co-founder of the New Jersey Jazz Society, who died on June 15, beginning on page 28.
Jack Stine | Co-Founder of the New Jersey Jazz Society

Your Breakfast Sweetheart and other stories from a life of contagious optimism

By Sanford Josephson

“Jack Stine,” wrote The Star-Ledger’s Jane Moore on August 10, 1995, “does not know how to play a musical instrument, nor does he know how to arrange music. But, he does know how to arrange concerts.” That was an understatement. The first concert Stine arranged was the initial Pee Wee Russell Memorial Stomp in 1970, two years before he founded the New Jersey Jazz Society.

It “was just an idea that came to me,” he told Moore, “after the funeral of one of my favorite performers — clarinetist Pee Wee Russell.” The 49th Pee Wee Russell Stomp was held on March 18 of this year.

“I learned that Pee Wee wished he could have helped some kid get a start in music education,” Stine said, “so I decided to organize a memorial concert to raise funds for a scholarship.”

That first concert raised more than $3,000 for a scholarship in Russell’s name at Rutgers University. Now, the event also raises money for scholarships at Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Rowan University and William Paterson University.

As impressive as the Stomp was, the jewel of Stine’s concert organizing career was a 50th anniversary concert in 1988 at Carnegie Hall, celebrating Benny Goodman’s historic 1938 concert there. Longtime NJJS member Al Kuehn recalled to Jersey Jazz how it all played out. “Jack got the idea that, ‘wouldn’t it be great to try to recreate the concert at Carnegie Hall on the exact day as the 1938 concert?’ He knew it was a long shot. At Carnegie Hall, he spoke to the secretary of the manager and explained what he had in mind. She told him that a national organization had been in and expressed an interest for the same date, January 16, but she would see if the manager would speak with Jack. The manager asked the secretary if the other people had left a deposit. She said they had not. He then asked Jack how much money he could leave as a deposit. Jack said he had about $35 but could only leave $20 because he needed some money to get home. The manager said okay, and the rest is history.”

With the help of clarinetist Bob Wilber, who led the star-filled recreated Goodman band, the concert was a sellout.

Another concert success occurred in 1976 when Stine collaborated with Newport Jazz Festival founder and producer George Wein to present concerts at Waterloo Village in Stanhope, NJ, as part of the Newport Jazz Festival in New York. On June 20, 1976, The New York Times jazz writer John S. Wilson reported that, “The Newport Jazz Festival will cross the Hudson River for the first time this weekend when it will present three programs at Waterloo Village, the re-created Colonial settlement in this Sussex County community. And, if the expectations of George Wein, producer of the festival, and of the New Jersey Jazz Society, which introduced Mr. Wein to the setting provided by Waterloo, are realized, the state will have a regular place in the festival.”

Among those who appeared in the first Waterloo programs were: Carolyn Byrd, one of the stars of the Broadway musical, Bubbling Brown Sugar; the Count Basie Orchestra; pianists Eubie Blake, Dick Wellstood and Earl “Fatha” Hines; and guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli.

“This invasion of New Jersey by the Newport Festival,” Wilson pointed out, “was inspired by another New Jersey Jazz Society activity, the annual Pee Wee Russell Memorial Stomp, which is held every February at the Martinsville Inn in Martinsville. Each year at the Stomp, the Society presents plaques of commendation to two persons — a musician and a non-musician — whose activities in jazz are deemed outstanding. Last February, the non-musician’s plaque went to Mr. Wein. And, when the Newport Festival producer arrived at the Martinsville Inn that afternoon, he found the place so packed with fans listening to New Jersey jazz bands that he had trouble getting in.”

Wein told Wilson that he was, “astounded. Here were 900 people in a roadhouse on a rainy Sunday afternoon in mid-winter. It has to have some significance.” A few weeks later, Wein asked Stine if the society would stage something in connection with the Newport event, such as a showcase for some of the New Jersey musicians who performed at the Stomp. Stine told Wein he wasn’t sure if he could get the musicians to go to New York, but he suggested it might be a good idea to try something in New Jersey.

Kuehn, who produces the annual Chicken Fat Ball in Maplewood, remembers meeting Stine at a diner on Route 206 the morning before...
the first concert. “We had no idea how things would go,” he said, “and we were filled with excitement and anxiety. Well, we didn’t have to worry. It was a success beyond our wildest imagination. More than 5,000 people showed up. We were blown away."

If not for Stine’s leadership, the New Jersey Jazz Society probably wouldn’t have been created. Despite the fact that he wasn’t a musician, veteran cornetist Ed Polcer refers to Stine as “The Bandleader.” “We were a happy bunch of souls with one thought in mind,” Polcer recollects. The group would get together to enjoy each other’s company and listen to music. “There were doctors, teachers, lawyers…an ice cream truck route man, mechanical engineer and a liquor store owner . . .” It was the liquor store owner, Stine, who molded the group into an organization to promote live jazz.

“Eventually,” says Polcer, “the inevitable happened: the popularity grew, larger venues were selected, world-class musicians volunteered their services, concerts were recorded, financial accounting and promotion were needed. From all of this, a leader emerged. I like to think of him as a consummate bandleader. Jack Stine was my favorite bandleader, and I have known a few.”

The New Jersey Jazz Society was organized in October 1972. According to a December 1, 1974, article by The New York Times’ Ray Warner, the NJJS members would turn up to hear pianist Jimmy Andrews at O’Connor’s Beef and Ale House in Watchung, “or Chuck Slate at the Widow Brown’s in Madison, or perhaps Bucky Pizzarelli on Monday (guitar night) at Gulliver’s in West Paterson. These are among the half dozen or so Jersey places regularly presenting small jazz groups these days.” The next scheduled big party, Warner wrote, “will be the ‘First Annual New Year’s Eve Gala’, featuring Ed Polcer’s Society Stompers. It will be held at O’Connor’s.”

After graduating from Plainfield High School, Stine enlisted in the Army, learned code-breaking, and served in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations during World War II. He also was a morning disc jockey known as “Your Breakfast Sweetheart”.

He flirted with acting, securing a cameo in the 1962 movie, The Miracle Worker, starring Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke. His scene was shot at the Gladstone train station. He also performed for several decades in the local theater at the Martinville Community Center. The longtime owner of Colonial Liquors in Pluckemin was elected to the Bridgewater-Raritan Board of Education from 1966-1973, serving as president from 1968-73 and was board member and president of Proprietary House in Perth Amboy, the last official royal governor’s mansion in New Jersey. In addition to his involvement with the NJJS, Stine promoted live jazz events at Somerset County College (now Raritan Valley Community College) and, in 1991, founded the Princeton JazzFeast. (Sadly, in 2018, the JazzFeast is being changed to the Princeton Music Fest, featuring only one jazz band).

The Bernardsville News (July 12, 2018) described Stine as “a man of seemingly boundless charisma. Jack easily connected with people from every circumstance and instantly put them at ease through humor, a relaxed attitude, and genuine engagement. His exuberance, confidence, and optimism were contagious…”

Jack Stine was born on June 21, 1921 in Plainfield, NJ. He died on June 15, 2018 at his home of 51 years in Pluckemin, NJ. He was predeceased by his wife, Audrey; a son, Paul; a grandson, Paul Crannell; and a brother, Herbert. He is survived by his children, Julie, David, Emily, and Chris; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Contributions in his memory may be made to the New Jersey Jazz Society Scholarship Fund through Paypal or by check to: NJJS, Attn. Mike Katz, Treasurer, 382 Springfield Ave., Suite 217, Summit, NJ 07901.
Newport Deals A Winning Hand

By Sandy Ingham

It's a roll of the dice, weather-wise, attending an outdoor-based jazz festival. But musically, there's no gamble at historic Newport, Rhode Island, where nearly every act is a winner.

The 2018 Newport Jazz Festival by Natixis Investment Managers August 3-5 played out under weather similar to New Jersey's that weekend: hot and humid Friday and Sunday, downpours and some high wind on Saturday. Thankfully, no lightning or thunder, so no performances were cancelled.

Jazz royalty reigned on all four stages — the big one outdoors at spectacularly situated Fort Adams State Park, the others under cover.

■ Artist in residence Charles Lloyd played in three different groups, part of his 80th birthday celebration. On Sunday, the tenor saxophonist giant teamed with roots singer Lucinda Williams on the Fort stage, which looks out over Narragansett Bay and an armada of yachts, sailboats, water taxis and seagulls.

Introduced by festival founder George Wein, 92, as a genius and “still a kid compared to me,” Lloyd was joined by Jason Moran on piano, Reuben Rodgers on bass, Eric Harland on drums and Marvin Sewell on steel guitar.

Listening to such jazz virtuosi apply themselves to a languorous blues is musical glory. It set the mood for Williams, whose world-weary manner and mournful lyrics tugged at the heart. Her new song, “We’ve Come Too Far to Turn Around,” was an immensely appealing country-gospel waltz full of oblique references that could be interpreted as comments on our current political morass. Or not.

■ Guitar wiz Pat Metheny led off a double bill Friday night at the International Tennis Hall of Fame stadium in downtown Newport. Joined by Gwilym Simcock on piano, Linda May Han Oh on bass and Antonio Sanchez on drums, the multi-award-winning Metheny delved into Latin tunes and a country-flavored romp full of sweet, sunny chords. He switched to acoustic guitar on two ballads, and “Skylark” proved a cool, soothing balm on a hot night.

Act Two brought on Jose James, among the very best male jazz singers today. He was mesmerizing in his set paying tribute to Bill Withers. His most impressive number was “Grandma’s Hands,” on which he eventually began breaking up the lyrics into stuttered single words, then into syllables that morphed into mere blips of sound, like musical Morse code, a form of scat he sustained for several minutes. It was a feat of oral legerdemain.

James’s expressive gestures added drama to his performance, which included Withers’ classics “Just the Two of Us,” “Use Me” and the soulful “Lean On Me.” On the latter, pianist Takeshi Ohbayashi ventured into church with a prolonged gospel-enriched solo. Amen, indeed.

■ Sunday morning’s wakeup call was courtesy of Herlin Riley, imitating whale songs by blowing into a giant seashell, apropos given the nautical setting. Riley, the ever-upbeat drummer from New Orleans, assembled New York-Havana Connection for the festival, featuring Cuban native Alexei Marti on congas. Marti now lives in the Crescent City.

Jazz vocalist Jose James, who appeared as the second act of a double bill with guitarist Pat Metheny, was mesmerizing in his set paying tribute to Bill Withers. Photo by Jack Casey.
As if it weren’t hot enough already, the quintet — with Marcus Strickland on tenor, Russell Hall on bass and Eric Lewis on piano — was on fire playing “Night in Tunisia” and Riley originals “Gringo in Havana” and “Shake off the Dust,” an ambling-paced dance tune from his latest CD, New Directions.

Riley happily scatted on the Mardi Gras anthem “Tutti Ma.”

Coincidentally or not, two of the greatest young jazz singers, Jazzmeia Horn and Cécile McLorin Salvant, overlapped on different stages on Sunday afternoon.

Horn is a dazzlingly imaginative improviser, grafting her own lyrics and wildly adventurous melodic twists onto jazz standards like “Night and Day,” Jimmy Rowles’s “The Peacocks” and most impressively on “Willow Weep for Me.” Salvant, a two-time Grammy winner, was more tradition-minded as vocalist with an all­woman septet, Artemis, that included several NJJS favorites: Ingrid Jensen, Melissa Aldana, Allison Miller and Anat Cohen.

Another singer, Charenee Wade, was a compelling presence who connected with her Harbor Stage audience from the start with her strong voice and equally strong message: In these troubled times, we should resist the hate around us and share our love.

Wade’s interactions with ebullient pianist Oscar Perez were fun to watch, and guest Camille Thurman on sax, Val Green on drums and bassist Paul Beaudry were valuable contributors too.

Not many jazz artists appear to have as much fun playing as saxophonist James Carter, who closed out the Quad Stage tent Sunday with his organ trio.

Carter prefaced on a somber note as he dedicated the set to ailing baritonist Hamiet Bluiett. But the music was upbeat: selections from Django Unchained, a forthcoming Blue Note album that Carter described as “Gypsy music, ‘hood style.”

Resemblance to Hot Club of Paris fare was hard to discern as Carter, alternating between brawny tenor, alto and soprano, enjoyed a workout on stage, strutting about, swinging horns to and fro, whipping up the crowd with drummer Brian Blade, Ron Miles on cornet and Scott Colley on bass. With no piano, the sound was spare on tightly constructed arrangements, with the horns frequently in perfect unison, then playing off one another. Blade, as usual, was a joy to watch.

Renowned pianist Harold Mabern and fiery tenorman Eric Alexander led a quartet at the Harbor Stage, Alexander’s postbop ideas flashed from head to horn at lightning speed, while blues master Mabern’s offerings were often obscured by overzealous drums and bass.

Enthusiastic applause prompted Alexander to exhort the crowd to stand up for straight­ahead jazz and defy the “tabloid critics” who say jazz is dead.

The 180­seat Storyville stage presented solo and small­group jazz and served as a cool refuge for those escaping heat, rain, or the thousands at other venues. Bill Charlap, Cynthia Sayer, Isaiah Thompson, Sara Caswell with Dave Stryker, Helen Sung and Matthew Whitaker played there.

Newport does well at attracting young listeners, with discount student tickets and some crossover acts: Andra Day, Go Go Penguin, Living Colour and George Clinton with Parliament Funkadelic.

The festival’s musical director, Christian McBride, a Philly guy now living in Montclair, was an emcee, taking delight in wearing a custom­made #89 Eagles jersey and trying to enlist the crowd in an E­A­G­L­E­S chant. “Always wanted to do that in New England,” he chortled.

The Patriot faithful were tolerant.