

# JerseyJazz

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Reedman Adrian Cunningham, left, and Louis Armstrong Eternity Band leader David Ostwald rehearse for the concert 'Satchmo and Sidney Revisited' on March 28. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

## PLAYING FAVORITES

### Highlights in Jazz Salutes Armstrong and Bechet

David Ostwald's Louis Armstrong Eternity Band, with special guests Oliver and Jean Baptiste Franc, performed a tribute to two of jazz's founding fathers at the March edition of Highlights in Jazz, New York's longest running jazz series. Story and photos from Mitchell Seidel on page 26.

Gypsy Jazz Returns to Maplewood/Page 10

## Jazz's N'Orleans Roots Celebrated at Highlights in Jazz

Story and photo by Mitchell Seidel



Satchmo and Sidney are “revisited” by the lineup at Jack Kleinsinger’s Highlights in Jazz. From left: Adrian Cunningham, Olivier Franc, his son Jean-Baptiste Franc (partially hidden), David Ostwald, Arnt Arntzen, Alphonso Horne, Dave Gibson and Dion Tucker.

If you wanted to know what sparked Jack Kleinsinger’s interest in jazz, you need look no further than the subjects of his concert at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center in lower Manhattan on March 28: Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet. Those two legends of New Orleans jazz were among his favorites — and have such staying power with the music-loving public that their names are practically synonymous with classic jazz.

At the concert, the usually loquacious former prosecutor regaled his audience with a story about his days as a teenaged jazz fan, when his father introduced him to the Central Plaza, where young Kleinsinger and his friends could nurse soft drinks and listen to the likes of trumpeter Henry (Red) Allen and pianist Wille (The Lion) Smith — for a whopping \$1.80 each.

One day, though, Jack and company arrived to find the cover was up to an allowance-busting \$5. They passed. When he got home and explained they didn’t want to pay the high price for this artist they didn’t know, some guy named “Bishet,” Kleinsinger recalled, “my father almost locked me in a closet for a week.”

The Highlights in Jazz concert, “Satchmo

& Sidney Revisited,” produced in association with the Sidney Bechet Society, featured David Ostwald’s Louis Armstrong Eternity Band, a

longstanding aggregation of varying personnel that, as its name implies, performs a repertoire and style drawn from Satchmo and French Bechet disciple Olivier Franc and his stride piano-playing son, Jean-Baptiste Franc.

The fine part of the concert was the fact that it wasn’t a rote recital of Armstrong’s or Bechet’s personal stylings, playing that’s so instantly identifiable that in lesser hands it risks lapsing into cliché.

This is mostly the case with Armstrong, whose popularity transcended jazz into popular music. Just ask yourself how many gravelly voiced Satchmo imitators you’ve heard singing “Hello Dolly” while grasping a handkerchief at amateurish jazz events.

Bechet, an expatriate in his latter years, never had that luxury or risk. A star in his adopted Paris, in the United States he didn’t have the wide-ranging popularity of Armstrong.

Plus, his distinctive style and forceful tone on a most difficult wind instrument keeps all but the most skillful players from copying him.



Trumpeter Alphonso Horne prepares to fill the large shoes of Louis Armstrong at a Highlights in Jazz concert that remembered both Satchmo and soprano sax icon Sidney Bechet.

Tuba-blowing Oswald's aggregation featured Alphonso Horne on trumpet, Adrian Cunningham on reeds, Dave Gibson on drums, Dion Tucker on trombone and "surprise guest" Arnt Arntzen on banjo and guitar.

With no monitors, few microphones, and no music stands, the band played a selection of tunes that both did — and did not — have associations with Armstrong and Bechet, with the strength of the presentation coming from both Oswald's arrangements and the individual arrangements. Cunningham, a facile player no matter what the horn, was a skillful soprano soloist, swinging through the numbers but never stepping over the line to attempt to mimic Bechet.

Similarly, trumpeter Horne's singing and playing on "St. James Infirmary Blues," with skillful plunger playing and some call-and-response by trombonist Tucker were in the spirit of the original but never overtly copied.

It would be unfair to call Olivier Franc a Bechet imitator, but his style pays a strong homage to the soprano master. His tone is close to, but not identical to Bechet's room-filling sound. His son Jean-Baptiste is a skilled side player who both performed solo and accompanied his father.

The only low part of the show was the absence of Sidney Bechet's son, Daniel, who was advertised to appear but could not attend due to medical problems. However, the other musicians in attendance carried the heavy load. ▣

(above) Trumpeter Alphonso Horne goes over tune selections with Louis Armstrong Eternity Band leader Davis Oswald and "surprise guest," guitarist, Arnt Arntzen.

(right) Sidney Bechet saxophone disciple Olivier Franc and his son, stride pianist Jean-Baptiste Franc rehearse their duo performance for Jack Kleinsinger's Highlights in Jazz.

