MA RAINEY’S BLACK BOTTOM

DEFINING the BLUES
IN THIS ISSUE:

ON THE COVER _ Viola Davis as Ma Rainey with, from left, Chadwick Boseman, Colman Domingo, Michael Potts, and Glynn Turman. (All Ma Rainey photos courtesy of Netflix).

ARTICLES/REVIEWS

09 _ Jazz at William Paterson
13 _ News from WBGO:
    New CEO Steve Williams
15 _ Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom
20 _ Talking Jazz: Kurt Elling
26 _ Pizzarelli Painting: Highest Bidder
28 _ Book Review: Life in E Flat
30 _ Phil Woods’ Legacy
37 _ Other Views
43 _ Big Band in the Sky

COLUMNS

03 _ All That’s Jazz
05 _ Editor’s Choice
35 _ From the Crow’s Nest
52 _ Not Without You!

NJJS.ORG
If you’re reading this message, you’ve embraced our new reality, Jersey Jazz as a digital publication. We remain committed to the same editorial excellence that has been the driving force of this magazine, and steadfast to our mission to continue to preserve and promote jazz.

With moving Jersey Jazz online, we’re able to offer a full color, monthly format which will better serve our members, musicians and advertisers.

This online format will allow this award-winning publication to be “Google-able”—with select contents available to a worldwide audience—and allow NJJS to become part of the ever-expanding digital world. What goes on in Jersey won’t just stay in Jersey anymore!

Please note, the February issue of Jersey Jazz is available with unrestricted access to everyone who wishes to enjoy it—members and non-members alike. Please tell your friends and family about this limited offer so they too can enjoy this amazing resource. After February, full content of the magazine will be available to NJJS members only.

Congratulations to WBGO and everyone associated with the documentary The WBGO Story ... Bright Moments from Newark to the World. It’s been chosen as an official selection of the New Jersey Film Festival’s virtual Spring 2021 season. Bravo to Chris Daniel—Producer/Director, Dorthaan Kirk—Co-Producer/Executive Consultant, Bill May—Archival Photographs and Don Braden—Soundtrack, for bringing this incredible story, of a community of people committed to America’s art form of jazz, to film.

Advertisers are the sustaining life force for Jersey Jazz, as membership fees alone are insufficient to finance a publication of this caliber and also allow NJJS to present outstanding musical programming.

We’d like to thank all of our advertisers in this issue: Jazz Fest at Sea, William Paterson University, Ocean County College, Bell & Shivas, Attorneys at Law, Mark Clemente, James Pansulla and our newest partner, Entertainment Cruise Productions/The Jazz Cruise. When patronizing any of these advertisers, please let them know you saw their ad in Jersey Jazz.

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We can’t do what we do without YOU! Members are the heart and soul of this organization and we’d like to thank everyone who renewed their membership this past year. We’re grateful for your continued patronage.

If you joined NJJS this past year, we’re delighted to welcome you into this jazz community. Please see page 52 for our latest list of new and renewed members. If you have any questions about your membership, please contact membership@njjs.org.

In our ongoing effort to continue to provide music programming, we hope you’ve been enjoying our virtual Socials on our Facebook page: New Jersey Jazz Society.

January’s Social featuring guitarists Frank Vignola and Vinny Raniolo—in a tribute to New Jersey
guitar greats—was an incredible hour of music and memories and was our largest “attended” virtual event to date. If you missed this hotter-than-hot concert, you can enjoy the re-broadcast of it on our Facebook page.

Until we can enjoy in person concerts again, virtual live-streaming events are a wonderful way to bring our jazz community together, to engage with the artists, and to stay connected other viewers. Please check our website www.njjs.org/events for future virtual events.

Our “NOW, More than ever!” annual appeal campaign kicked off in December and we need YOU to join with us in this collaborative effort. If you haven’t already contributed to this campaign, please consider a generous tax-deductible donation, to help us more creatively introduce people of all ages to jazz; provide more much-needed scholarship money to worthy college recipients; and present performances that provide musicians with livable wages. Credit card donations can easily be made online at www.njjs.org/Donate or by mail to: NJJS, P.O. Box 223, Garwood, New Jersey, 07027. Please make check payable to NJJS.

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Log on to www.smile.amazon.com and select New Jersey Jazz Society (Summit, NJ) as your beneficiary, then shop as you normally do. Please tell your friends and family members about this amazing opportunity for NJJS. Thank you in advance for helping to support NJJS.

Lastly, if you’re not already on the NJJS eBlast list you should be. Be assured, we do NOT sell or share our lists we anyone! This is a vital communication tool for information and events concerning all things NJJS, as well as for information on our event partners and jazz colleagues. Sign up today on our website homepage.
Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra Will Survive at New Venue

When word spread that the Jazz Standard jazz club was closing, there was concern that the Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra program, directed by bassist David O’Rourke and tenor saxophonist Antoine Roney, would perish as well. Trumpeter James Haddad, now a Juilliard student, performed regularly for a few years in the JSYO, and he told me it was an experience he greatly valued (Jersey Jazz, January 2021).

Fortunately, according to O’Rourke, the program has been rescued. Once the pandemic is over, live rehearsals and performances will resume at the National Jazz History Museum in Harlem. “When the news about the Jazz Standard broke,” he said, “we received several offers from people who didn’t want this program to go away. Ryan Maloney (NJMH Director of Education and Programming) said, ‘Look, we’ll do this whichever way you want to do it.’ So, when the Covid lockdown is over, we have a place to go. Just being able to go back to the kids and tell them we have a very significant offer was fantastic.”

The JSYO provided young jazz musicians the opportunity to perform regularly on Sunday afternoons at the New York club, often with guest artists from the New York jazz scene. The program started in 2002. “It was just a case of three people being in the same head space at the right time,” O’Rourke recalled. O’Rourke knew the program could be a success because, at the time, “We were rehearsing in a freezing martial arts facility in the Bowery. There was a blizzard, and they all still came to the rehearsal. I thought, ‘We have to do something to cement this.’ I called James Polsky (Jazz Standard Co-Founder/Owner) and asked if there was any chance we could start a series at the Jazz Standard. He said, ‘We’re all on the same page here. Mark (Mark Maynard, Co-Founder and Director of Operations) wants to do something for kids.’ We started doing four weeks in 2002; now, we go through the school year.” Musicians must audition to be accepted into the program.

During the pandemic, the program has been continued online. “I get the kids to work on transcriptions,” O’Rourke said. “I believe that’s the real education.”

There are lots of rising stars among the JSYO participants, but O’Rourke singled out one current student he’s particularly proud of—a 17-year-old drummer, Bato Adeylotte, who is a student at the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts near Lincoln Center. Adeylotte heads a group called the Bowery Jazz Messengers, and on Saturday, October 10, 2020, World Homeless Day, the BJM performed outside The Bowery Mission. The audience, said O’Rourke, consisted of “people who were strung out but still needed something positive.”

Born and raised in Dublin, O’Rourke leads and writes for his own 20-piece band, The O’Rourkestra, which ordinarily would be performing at the Zinc Bar in New York. Through the years he has played with guitarists Les Paul and Bucky Pizzarelli and pianists Tommy Flanagan and Cedar Walton, among others.

During the summer, O’Rourke performed some outdoor gigs at the Capital Grill in Paramus, NJ. “At the very first one we did,” he said, “people had tears in their eyes. They came up with masks and said, ‘It’s so great to hear live music.’”
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.

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For the third consecutive season, William Paterson University’s Jazz Room series will be streamed online. The goal, though, remains the same, according to Dr. David Demsey, Coordinator of Jazz Studies: “A varied list of artists in terms of generation, instrumentation, style that will attract different audiences.” All concerts will continue to be presented on Sundays at 4 p.m. Here’s the spring lineup:

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14**

**Special Valentine’s Concert with vocalist Marion Cowings.**

Vocalist Marion Cowings is, according to Demsey, “One of the under-recognized song giants. He’s done so much major stuff on the New York scene and nationally for decades.” The late pianist Mulgrew Miller, who was Director of Jazz Studies at WPU from 2005-2013,
was, Demsey said, “very close to Marion and wanted to bring him here, but we could never work out a date. So, here we are, six years later. Marion Cowings is certainly a master who deserves to be more widely recognized.” The musicians who will accompany Cowings were not known at press time.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 7**

**Johnathan Blake’s Pentad**

Drummer/composer Blake is a William Paterson alum — “He graduated in the mid ’90s,” said Demsey, “but has gone on to be a major artist who has played with everyone from Kenny Barron and Dave Holland to Michael Brecker, and rapper Q-Tip.” Blake’s band will include: Immanuel Wilkins on alto saxophone, Joel Ross on vibes, David Virelles on piano, and Dezron Douglas on bass.

**SUNDAY, MARCH 21**

**John Fedchock New York Sextet**

Fedchock, Demsey pointed out, “was a major voice in the Woody Herman Orchestra in the ’80s, as a soloist; and he wrote a lot of their great arrangements. Since then, he has become a fixture on the New York scene, leading his own big band and small groups for decades.” Fedchock’s sextet will feature Walt Weiskopf on tenor saxophone, Scott Wendholt on trumpet, Allen Farnham on piano, David Finck on bass, and Eric Halvorson on drums.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 25**

**Guest bassist Ron Naspo with the WP Latin Jazz Ensemble, directed by Chico Mendoza**

For many years, Naspo was part of the Bucky Pizzarelli Trio, along with pianist Tony Monte, that performed at the Pierre Hotel’s Café Pierre. “Naspo,” Demsey said, “is kind of a New Jersey and New York mainstay bassist and has been very involved on the Latin scene as well, so he was one of the first choices of our conductor and longtime faculty member Chico Mendoza. Since we cannot safely field a big band, we are doing a six-horn setup on the concert with Ron.” Mendoza described it as: “Tito Puente style, not a full big band.”

**SUNDAY, MAY 2**

**The Steve LaSpina Quartet**

Steve LaSpina is a member of the William Paterson faculty, and, according to Demsey, “has played with everybody.” That list includes Stan Getz, Marian McPartland, and Jim Hall, among many others. “He can play super modern, traditional, Broadway shows, anything,” Demsey added. “He is a musician’s musician.” LaSpina will be joined by saxophonist Joel Frahm, pianist Luis Perdomo, and drummer Eric McPherson.

**SUNDAY, MAY 9**

**Houston Person and Bill Charlap**

Pianist Charlap (who is Director of Jazz Studies at WPU) and tenor sax-
ophist Houston have been playing duos together for a number of years. “I can’t quite remember how we started to play together,” Charlap said. “We have known each other for years and years now and have played together in many different contexts. “Playing with him is a magnificent experience,” Charlap continued, “because the warmth of his humanity and musicianship and the depth of his experience and true virtuosity are palpable all the time. We have a very good simpatico which we have always had because we both love to swing, and we both feel the time in the same place. I love making music with him. I love everything he represents, and what he is about.” Person, Demsey added, “is an under-recognized tenor giant who should be right there with Stanley Turrentine, Hank Crawford, Gene Ammons, and the other great jazz and blues players.”

Regarding the still-evolving online process, Demsey said, “The actual recordings have been going pretty well. We have a good camera crew who are alums of our music department. They have video expertise and are really good musicians. That’s a rare combination. They understand the dynamics of a concert, and what an audience member wants to look at.” Paying for this, as always, comes in large part, from “our ongoing support from the New Jersey State Arts Council.” Without it, “we would not exist.” The extra video costs are temporarily being covered by an NEA CARES grant.

“We prerecord these concerts,” Demsey continued, “because it is a lot easier to put together a video presentation if you have at least a couple hours to edit things a bit. And it gives us a chance to put the tune titles in underneath and list the names of the band members.”

As for the ticketing process, “We are trying to make it more straightforward. Each event will be available on demand for 30 days beyond the concert date, and once you have the ticket, you can see it as much as you want. A reminder to our audience to be on time if you are viewing a Sunday show! If you show up at 4:10 to purchase a ticket for a 4:00 p.m. concert, you are locked out. However, the next afternoon it comes back up again and you can see it on demand.”

As always, a Sittin’ In session is scheduled for an hour before each concert, and anyone may submit questions for the artists. These are always available on the university’s YouTube site. Demsey noted one additional change, “We are advertising internationally in DownBeat magazine. Normally advertising is only in the New York metro area, but now people are watching the concerts from Japan and Europe.” Ticket prices are ‘pay what you want’—$25, $20, $15, $10—and must be purchased at www.wpunj.edu.
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Regardless of the legal issue – from minor traffic violations to serious criminal charges or litigation – our attorneys first view the totality of the problem through the eyes of our clients. Then we put the best resources of our firm in play to meet their unique needs and secure the best possible results.
Steve Williams Proves You Can Go Home Again

Former Director of Programming Returns as President/CEO and Envisions Technology Upgrades and Strengthening of Collaborations and Partnerships

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

The expression, “You Can’t Go Home Again”, gained popularity after Thomas Wolfe’s novel with that title was published in 1940. But Wolfe’s book doesn’t apply to Steve Williams. For Williams is, indeed, coming home again. After serving as Director of Programming at WBGO 88.3FM (Newark Public Radio) from January 2015-April 2018, he departed for Seattle to accept a position as Director of Audio Production at KUOW 94.9FM, the National Public Radio news station there.

In March 2020, Williams re-joined WBGO as a Programming Consultant and then, after a national search by WBGO’s Board and other community partners, Williams was selected as the station’s new President/CEO, succeeding Interim President/CEO Bob Ottenhoff, the station’s founding general manager, who had come out of retirement.

Williams returned as Programming Consultant at a critical time — the outbreak of Covid-19. “One of the first things I had to do,” he recalled,” was to devise a plan of action with our Chief Technology Officer and Radio Engineer, Chris Tobin, to automate our daily broadcasts and digitize our music library.” This was done so the station’s on-air personalities could broadcast and play music from home. (Tobin, tragically, died from a heart attack on December 19, 2020, at the age of 59).

“We had to acquire technolo-
COLLABORATIONS, NETWORKS, AND PARTNERSHIPS HAVE TO BE A BULWARK OF BGO’S ACTIVITY.

As he spoke with Jersey Jazz during his first week as CEO in January, Williams outlined several key goals. “Part of my vision for Newark Public Radio,” he said, “has to do with upgrading our physical and technical plant to be in sync with what’s happening. We need to redesign our physical plant or consider the possibility of moving into and developing a new location in Newark.” The city of Newark, he added, has been rejuvenated as “a hub for arts and culture. And, it’s becoming the center of a revival in high tech, a destination for many high tech companies. I see WBGO,” he added, “as the hub of arts and culture and jazz—sort of a ‘Jazz Central Station.’”

Williams is also committed to broadening collaborations and partnerships and to deepening the station’s engagement with its audience. “Collaborations, networks, and partnerships have to be a bulwark of BGO’s activity,” he said. “That includes continuing our relationship with NJPAC and enhancing our relationship with Rutgers-Newark. And, you can rest assured we’ll be working more closely with the New Jersey Jazz Society. I don’t think any institutional organization can survive without partnerships.”

WBGO’s audience is diverse—not only within the Tri-State Area, but also throughout the world, via the Internet. Jazz fans, Williams pointed out, make up “a completely diverse constituency. They’re young, old, male, female, city, suburbanites, highly-educated, rich, poor, and everyone in between. You have this broad landscape demographically. You have to ask the audience what they want, and research the market extensively. As long as you allow for that complete dialog to guide you and not make any assumptions, you will be able to maximize your potential as an arts and culture and media organization.”

A native of Cincinnati, Williams is a graduate of American University and was Managing Producer of its radio station, WAMU 88.5FM, for 5 1/2 years. He has also worked in commercial radio at Jefferson-Pilot-owned stations in Denver, Clear Channel Communications stations in Philadelphia and San Francisco, and at KGO 810AM in San Francisco.

A documentary, The WBGO Story ... Bright Moments from Newark to the World, directed by Chris Daniels of Daniel Productions, was selected for screening at the NJ Film Festival (January 30); Thomas Edison Black Maria Film Festival (February 5); and Garden State Film Festival, March 24.)
Understanding the Real Meaning of ‘The Blues’

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

White folk don’t understand the blues. They hear it come out, but they don’t know how it got there.”

—VIOLA DAVIS, AS MA RAINEY, IN Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom

What is the definition of the blues? Grammy Award-winning vocalist Catherine Russell believes Viola Davis, portraying Ma Rainey in the Netflix movie adaptation of August Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, really nailed it. “That quote where she says: ‘The blues make you feel you’re not alone. You can release all of your feelings into it.’

There’s a basic tension that white people don’t experience ... the blues is our way of releasing that tension.”

— Catherine Russell
“We live differently—Black and white people,” Russell continued. “In the scene where Ma sends two guys out to get a Coke, it takes a long time for them to find a place [to buy it] where they’re not going to die. This is something that white people are not going to experience. People don’t understand that you could leave your house and not come back, and nothing would be done about it.”

Another anxiety-inducing scene depicted a minor auto accident involving Rainey’s car. “Ma owned a fancy car, and [after the accident] they didn’t believe the car was hers,” Russell pointed out. “She gets out of the car, and there is a whole crowd of white people around. My nerves were on edge. There’s a basic tension that white people don’t experience—‘I have to watch what I say.’ The blues is our way of releasing that tension.”

The only real-life character in Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom is Rainey, and most of the action takes place with her and her fictional band in a Chicago recording studio in the 1920s. In the 1940s, Russell’s mother, guitarist/bassist/singer Carline Ray, was part of the Sweethearts of Rhythm, an all-female, integrated music group. She also played with trumpeter Erskine Hawkins’ band and met her husband, bandleader Luis Russell, when a trio she had formed joined his band.

“My mother told me how horrible it was to tour down south,” Russell recalled. “The Midwest was no great thing either. Being Black and a woman, you had two strikes against you. Women weren’t treated as serious musicians,” she added, “particularly women who played non-traditional instruments such as guitar, bass, and horns. It was okay if you played violin and piano, but you had to look cute and be able to play.”

When Russell was a teenager, she was more familiar with Bessie Smith—known as ‘Empress of the Blues’—than with Ma Rainey. “I also heard Alberta Hunter at The Cookery, and I’ve done some Ethel Wa-
Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom

All those women lived the way they wanted to live.

Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom tribute shows. Ma Rainey was the last I got into. Ma, though, was the ‘Mother of the Blues’ and was a huge influence on Bessie Smith, just as Joe [King] Oliver influenced Louis Armstrong—except that Bessie and Louis became the bigger stars.

“All of those women lived the way they wanted to live and didn’t go by any rules regarding how they should be around men or how men should treat them. They were great entertainers, and they were great storytellers.”

The four male musicians in the movie were trombonist, Cutler, played by Colman Domingo; pianist, Tole-do, played by Glynn Turman; bassist, Slow Drag, played by Michael Potts; and trumpeter, Levee, played by the late Chadwick Boseman—his last movie appearance in what was an Oscar-worthy performance.

Russell saw Ma Rainey on Broadway and appreciated that the movie “stuck to the script, just told the story of the characters, kept to how people lived their lives, no excess drama. All the moments were real and true about how the musicians were getting through life.”

Saxophonist Branford Marsalis wrote the soundtrack, and Russell feels he, “did a really nice job of weaving the music into the story. It all worked together. The music is part of their lives, not a separate
MA RAINEY’S BLACK BOTTOM

thing. It’s a story with music, not a musical. I also liked his incidental music, the music behind the dialog.”

In an interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Marsalis—who also wrote the soundtrack for Spike Lee’s Mo’ Better Blues starring Denzel Washington and Wesley Snipes—said, “The blues is the basis of jazz. Some modern jazz musicians would disagree. That doesn’t matter to me. When I listen to great jazz artists, they have an understanding and relationship with the blues.” Marsalis was on the set as often as possible to ensure the actors portraying musicians looked as if they were really playing. “I’m so used to seeing movies where it doesn’t look like they’re playing ... It was just a matter of getting the actors on board.”

Boseman was committed to looking as authentic as possible, so Marsalis reached out to a colleague from his Tonight Show days, session trumpeter Chuck Findley. “Branford called and asked me if I’d be interested in coaching Chadwick,” Findley said. “I spent two weeks with him. He has half a dozen pieces where he’s playing. If the camera’s on his fingers, the valves have to be right; the fingering has to be right. He couldn’t read music, but he could sing, and he studied like a real pro. He studied every one of the clips. I just wrote down the fingering. He would sing it and push it out—singing through the horn and fingering it. He was just beautiful. I couldn’t have taught a musician who knew notes as well as I taught Chadwick.

“The whole time period,” Findley continued, “I never knew he was sick (Boseman died in August 2020 at the age of 43 from colon cancer). Not once did he ever show any pain or discomfort. We got very close during those two weeks. It was more brother to brother than teacher and pupil. He wanted to know everything, particularly how to hold the horn. I had two old trumpets that they played with in Chicago in the ‘20s. I took one of them for him to hold. He did a wonderful job.”

As an 18-year-old, Findley, now 73, played trumpet in Buddy Rich’s big band. Through the years he has performed and recorded with a wide variety of artists, ranging from Joni Mitchell and B.B. King to Miles Davis and George Benson. He was also a member of the GRP All-Stars Big Band.

There is a conflict in the movie between Levee and the other band members because he wants to modernize the music by adding his own songs and arrangements. “He was the hot shot who came in and wanted to do his own music, get away from the old blues from the South—more up kind of blues playing.”

Levee’s desire to be more modern than his older bandmates is a clash that seems to surface throughout jazz history. Even today, Russell said, “There definitely seem to be some strict lines between types of jazz and what musicians want to play, and the era and style of jazz they choose to play. I’m pretty much in the traditional field. Traditional players that I work with are more well-versed in the modern styles, and can play both. The modern jazz player is less inclined to go back. Sometimes modern jazz players feel older music is corny, but there are exceptions. Some people embrace all of it. Scott Robinson is one who does. When I make a recording, I’m so rhythm-based that I notice the difference—especially in the rhythm section—between guys that are swing-based and people who are most interested in just stretching out.”
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A Jersey Jazz Interview with Kurt Elling

BY SCHAEN FOX

Kurt Elling’s album, Secrets Are the Best Stories (Editions Records Ltd.), featuring Danilo Perez, was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Jazz Vocal category. (The Grammys will be held on March 14 in Los Angeles). We talk to him about that, plus his work as an artist and historian and his planned move back to Chicago from New York.

**JJ** How badly were you affected by the pandemic?

**KE** I was set to do all kinds of dates in Europe and here in the States with Danilo Perez.

**JJ** Tell us about Secrets Are the Best Stories?

**KE** It’s a collaborative effort with Danilo Perez. He wrote many of the compositions, and I wrote many of the lyrics. We’re both hopeful people, but the world even before Covid-19 was disturbing. We saw the headlines, the division in the country. The way the administration was treating citizens, non-citizens, the rest of the world, common sense, science, civility, true patriotism is discouraging at best. It was deeply disturbing and corrosive to the body politic. So, we had that at the forefront of our minds.
I specifically wanted to engage Danilo in a conversation about immigrants, people on the short end of the stick, so several of the compositions reflect that concern in a direct or indirect way. Also, I notice how history echoes. It doesn’t repeat, but it definitely modulates and comes around again with the same or similar challenges. And ghosts of mistakes past, how we pass them down, or receive them without even knowing it, and how they come back to haunt us. And hopefulness as well, but hopefulness that is born of hard experience, and a kind of watchfulness.

Were you surprised that it was nominated for a Grammy?

I am always gratified and humbled to be nominated. Since the recording was released just as the shutdown occurred, I am somewhat surprised that anybody even heard it.

You spent years gigging in Chicago and now in New York. Have you noticed any cultural differences between the musicians in each city?

New York has been a churning cauldron of youth and people hungry to make it; people hungry to learn; people coming from all over the world and measuring themselves against the ghosts of greatness; people wanting to play from the same stage where Dexter Gordon played where Max Roach played; people want to sing from the same stage that Mark Murphy sang from that Joe Williams or Jon Hendricks sang from; people wanting to play the big rooms with any one of the Marsalis brothers; people hoping to get noticed and picked up by maybe a Chick Corea or any number of incredible burning players. So, there’s a certain high-end competitiveness that is a natural part of the scene here. And certainly, a very, very fraternal aspect exists to balance that out. Once you prove that you can play, and your sincerity and your dedication, you’re surely going to find some people who are going to hit with you.

Now, Chicago is filled with really, really great players. It’s a great training ground for younger people before they come to New York, and it’s been a great working town for cats with professional credentials. And at least until everything shut down, it was a really great place to raise a family. I hope it can stay that way. Chicago has a very diverse music and arts scene, with cats of many ages, and plenty of places to play. I’m excited about plugging in again and finding out who the hot young players are and where the scene is now. You can afford to live in Chicago a lot more coherently on a jazz income. I guess you might say, it has its own history of innovation and
holding the line when it comes to a certain swinging brawny sound that I respect and love very much — your Von Freemans, your Fred Andersons, your Johnny Griffins. Cats who blow.

In fact, after almost 13 years here in New York, my family and I moved back to Chicago last July. My daughter is going into the Chicago Academy for the Arts as a freshman this year, and I want to be there for her and support her. And, it’s definitely a difference in the amount of money I’m ready to spend on rent and purchasing power.

**JJ** I noticed all the photographs you have up on your wall. Would you care to tell us about them?

**KE** Well, I’ve got Dexter Gordon back here because I love his talent. He was an incredibly great singer on the saxophone. And I got a picture of my friend Tommy Smith, who is an inspiring saxophone player based in Scotland. He’s a real hero of the people. He started a couple of youth orchestras and a big band. There wouldn’t even really be a jazz scene in Scotland without him. He’s pretty remarkable human success story. I’ve got a picture of my bassist, Rob Amster, who died very early. It’s a picture of us together at the Green Mill in the heat of summer. I’m wiping his brow while he’s continuing to play. I’ve got a picture of Branford and me that I’m real proud of.

**JJ** Is there any foreign location, overseas location that you’re particularly fond of?

**KE** There are many. I love being a touring musician. I love being in France, and I’ve always been welcomed there. I love the UK. The UK has a very strong, swinging scene and also has a very, very strong electronic jazz scene; at least in London. It’s a thrill to be there. It’s a thrill to be in the Netherlands. They’re beautifully educated and it’s such a civilized place. They get all my jokes and think I’m much funnier than I am. It’s fabulous. I love it up in Scandinavia. I’m happy to be in Spain any time. In Italy they just want to cry and be emotional about the music, which is very stirring and inspiring — in Poland too, but in a much darker and different way. I love going over to Japan. The gracious attitude and, again, the civility, the very, very sophisticated culture is very beautiful.

**JJ** In 2005 you purchased a condominium from then Senator Barack Obama. Did you have any personal interaction with him?

**KE** Yeah, I met Barack Obama when I did a small number of benefits when he was running for state senator. He was living in the neighborhood where my wife and I were living. Willie Pickens, the great Chicago piano player also lived in Hyde Park and was already doing benefits. He knew the Obamas already and invited me to come along. He said, “Yeah, man, this guy, Barack, he’s going to be somebody. He’s really smart and he’s got this and that.” So, I did a couple of benefits. And Barack would want to sit down and be like, “So, John Coltrane, he’s got such an intense sound. What’s your take on his story?” I’d say, “Oh, okay. Let’s talk about ‘Trane.” We purchased the Obama apartment right at the...
time when he had been elected to the US Senate. His book sales were taking off, and he needed a Senate level house. My wife was pregnant at the time and we needed laundry in unit. [Laughs] I said, “I’m going to grab that. This guy really is going places. If it was good enough for him and his family, it’s definitely going to be good enough for me and mine.” So, I guess we both upgraded.

Let’s see … And then, you know, a handful of times while he was president – most notably at International Jazz Day, the last year of his presidency. That was a real thrill. I got to stand right next to Al Jarreau for the finale. 

JJ Would you go into detail about being invited to perform at the White House?

KE Well, the first time it happened was in his very first year in office. It was for the first state dinner that he was throwing for then Prime Minister Singh of India. I think that happened because Michelle Obama’s office was looking for Chicago-related and Chicago people who could bring a certain thing and mix it up with American citizens of Indian extraction, or Indian relations. I was happy to do it. I got to sing with the National Symphony Orchestra. I think it was Marvin Hamlisch conducting.

The second time was International Jazz Day. I was invited by the Thelonious Monk Institute, the ones who put on the International Jazz Day celebrations. You can see it online. It was a cavalcade. I did a duet with Dee Dee Bridgewater. There were a bunch of New Orleans players on that. And, I got to sing back-up for Buddy Guy and his band!

JJ Your website has a section called “Take Action.” Why do you have it there?

KE I continue to search for the right way to make a difference and to focus my energies and to give back. It’s an imperfect science. I’m trying to do more than just write lyrics and sing in tune. I’m trying to be part of the solution, so I at least want to point people to some things that I think “Okay those people seem like they’re making a good difference.” If anything I’m doing as a singer or someone you listen to pushes you to also act, then here’s a couple of places I would suggest. Sometimes in concert I’ll say, “Please pick up a CD tonight. All the CD money is going to this cause or that cause.” I just want to pitch in. I don’t want to be the guy that is always, “Hey buy the recording. Support me.” That doesn’t seem like it is enough.

JJ Many musicians avoid making political remarks that might upset some in their audience. Not you. Have you always been willing to brave the storm?

KE I’m not nearly as brave as I wish
I was. I wish I did more than just talk about things, march a little and maybe point the way. I’m a terrible narcissist, I’m afraid. But I do acknowledge the fact that sometimes people come out to my shows to get away from the headlines. Either way, I feel the situation — for a while now — has warranted all people of good will speaking out in all the ways that they can. If you can’t condemn that stuff which is blatantly incorrect and corrosive, at least speak up for the most defenseless among us. At least we have to speak up for what we believe in — for what’s really right and not for what the ugly is getting away with right now.

**KE** The people I’ve got up here on the wall. Put music aside for a moment. What a fascinating consciousness and the nth degree of hip jazz musicians represent. I would have loved to have gone to a concert and sat next to Prez and listened to classical music, or to any number of singers. Duke Ellington, obviously was a genius of being human. I feel you can get to know Duke, if you try. I feel he really was the same extraordinarily gracious sophisticate offstage as he was on stage. Knowing him would have been a thrill in a completely different way. It would have ennobled me. I would have loved to have dinner with Basie and hung out with him that way.

Among living people, I mentioned my friend Tommy Smith before. He’s an extraordinary intellect and very dedicated artist. He’s overcome an incredible series of circumstances to become extremely powerful artist and a gracious and foundational figure in his home country. And ... who wouldn’t want to hang out with Wayne? Wayne is a bodhisattva. Did you know that? It was great hanging out with Branford. That is one of the proudest times of my career, going out with that band, and to be confounded by some of the things he would say.

**KE** Mabern, man he was so generous and child-like in his conversation. He was enthusiastic about music and musicians. He was just as enthusiastic about people he had played with as he was meeting new players. He was interested in everything, always asking questions. He was always ready with a joke, just a sweetheart of a guy and so generous and concerned in a sweet kind of way.

**KE** I suspect that when one is young one has a natural optimism and resilience that either barrels through, laughs at or otherwise overcomes barriers and obstacles. Along the way one gets inured to—or makes friends with—many of the chronic challenges to one’s calling. After a longer while, they become de rigueur. I don’t imagine a realistic scenario at this point in my career where I will have a “hit record” (whatever that would be at this point) that would serve up the kind of financial and lifestyle rewards I had imagined as a younger person.

I am, instead, grateful for the identity I have come to embody, the friendships I have made, the memories I have collected, and the family to which I am able to return when the road is through.
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David Miner Hosts Annual Players Concert at His Napa Valley Winery

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON

Napa Valley vintner David Miner first met Bucky Pizzarelli in 2000 when his future father-in-law, Reed Mackenzie, brought Bucky and Howard Alden to Napa Valley as a wedding gift. “They stayed at my house and played a concert at my winery. My brother and I sat in with them. It’s also the first time I played a Benedetto Guitar. I ended up investing in the company.” Miner thinks he may still have some vinyl recordings of some of his father-in-law’s jazz house parties, which, he believes, most likely ended in the early 1990s.

“Bucky and Howard Alden were regulars,” he said, “along with Milt Hinton, Dick Hyman, Ralph Sutton, and quite a few others. Reed is a wonderful man and a huge jazz fan.” Today, Miner is Chairman of Benedetto Guitars as well as President of his own winery, Miner Family Vineyard in Oakville, CA. In 2005, his winery
PIZZARELLI PAINTING

released a 2002 Miner Benedetto Signature Cabernet Sauvignon and hosts an annual Benedetto Players Concert at the winery. Benedetto, based in Savannah, GA, is a sponsor of the Savannah Jazz Fest, held every September.

When the Pizzarelli family donated a painting by Bucky—who passed away in April 2020 at the age of 94—to the New Jersey Jazz Society to be sold as a fundraiser, it was only natural that Miner would be interested. So interested that he was, in fact, the highest bidder for the painting of the Pizzarelli property on the bank of the Saddle River in Bergen County, NJ.

The 20 x 24-inch oil-on-canvas painting features striking autumn colors against a pallet of blue sky, green and brown trees with the Pizzarelli home in the background. It came with its original frame and was prominently signed: PIZZARELLI. The auction prize also included a photograph of Bucky and his wife, Ruth (who passed away a week after Bucky) watching a Frank Sinatra video at home with the painting displayed in the background.

Pizzarelli would stay at Miner’s home during the Benedetto Players Concerts, and Miner recalled that, “he would be up in his boxer shorts early in the morning ready to play. He’d just say, ‘Make some coffee first’. I still have Ovaltine in the house because Bucky would drink Ovaltine every night before he went to bed.”

For the Players Concerts, Miner Family Vineyards transforms its loading dock into an amphitheater for an evening of wine, hors d’oeuvres, and jazz. Benedetto CEO Howard Paul always joins Miner on guitar; and other players through the years have included Alden, Frank Vignola, and Jimmy Bruno. The concert was canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic, but Miner is hopeful of reviving it in August.

The Savannah Fest is usually a seven-day free event. In 2020, because of Covid-19, it was an online streamed event, held from September 23-27. It included a Movie Night with a streaming of Clint Eastwood’s documentary, Dave Brubeck: In His Own Sweet Way; a Blues Night with vocalist Willie Jackson and guitarist Eric Culberson; and a Spicy Jazz Saturday with saxophonist Jazmin Ghent, accordionist Buckwheat Zydeco, Jr., pianist Emmet Cohen, and trombonist Wycliffe Gordon.
Jazz autobiographies vary greatly in quality of writing and in accuracy. Many of the jazz musicians who have written autobiographies have done a fine job, but some are unfocused, full of imagined rather than real stories and leave the reader unfulfilled. Phil Woods is a fine writer who has given us an unvarnished, often profane, but insightful, picture of his life. This master musician, who died September 29, 2015, in East Stroudsburg, PA, had an intellectual depth that adds to the satisfaction garnered from reading what he had to say.

Woods was born into an Irish-Catholic family in Springfield, MA, on November 2, 1941. While his immediate family was not a musical one, there was always a lot of music played around the house on the radio.

At the age of 12, he inherited a saxophone from his Uncle Norman, and, at his mother’s urging, started to take lessons on the instrument. He took to it with enthusiasm and by the age of 16 had formed a jazz band with classmates, one of whom was drummer Joe Morello. His playing experiences expanded and included some lessons from pianist Lennie Tristano one summer when Woods spent some time in New York City with his pianist friend Hal Serra.

After he completed high school, the lure of the jazz scene in New York City brought the 18-year-old Woods to the Big Apple where he became a student at Juilliard and spent as much time as possible sitting in at jam sessions and grabbing whatever gigs he could find. He met many of the jazz headliners of the day, including the revered Charlie “Bird” Parker who remained an influence on Woods throughout his career.

Woods led an interesting but somewhat haphazard life during the early and mid-1950s, having fathered two daughters, getting high on pot and booze and experiencing a variety of performance situations. In March 1956, he was asked to be part of a State Department tour of the Middle East by a big band led by Dizzy Gillespie. It was an opportunity to be in an all-star band, playing charts from Gillespie’s legendary bebop big band from the 1940s as well as new ones by musicians such as Quincy Jones, Ernie Wilkins, Melba Liston, as well as Gillespie. Later in the year, the Gillespie crew made a second State Department trip, this time to South America.

Soon afterward, Woods met and married Chan Parker, Bird’s widow, a marriage that would last until 1972. Woods moved to New Hope, PA, where Chan lived and remained busy in live performances and as a recording artist. A highlight for him was playing on the 1959 Thelonious Monk Orchestra that performed a memorable concert at Town Hall in New York City. That was soon followed by a stint on the Quincy Jones
BOOK REVIEW

big band that toured Europe in 1959.
Woods had another occasion
to participate in a State Depart-
ment tour in 1962, this time to Rus-
sia with Benny Goodman. For this
chapter, Woods has quoted exten-
sively from the incisive piece that
bassist Bill Crow wrote soon after-
ward for the Gene Lees Jazzletter.

By late 1967, with the jazz scene
slowing down stateside, Woods de-
cided to move his family to Europe,
ending up in Paris as home base.
He soon established his European
Rhythm Machine, a group that was
avant-garde oriented and enjoyed
great success for several years.

By 1972, the European scene was
drying up for Woods, so he returned
to the United States where he ini-
tially tried his hand at fusion, but by
1973 started the Phil Woods Quintet
with pianist Mike Melillo, guitarist
Harry Leahey, bassist Steve Gilmore,
and drummer Bill Goodwin. When
Leahey left in 1978, they remained
together as the Phil Woods Quar-
tet. In 1983, Woods went back to the
Quintet format with the addition of
trumpeter Tom Harrell, followed by
trombonist Hal Crook and, finally,
trumpeter Brian Lynch. Melillo re-
mained in the piano chair until 1980
and was succeeded by Hal Galper,
Jim McNeely and Bill Charlap. Gilm-
ore and Goodwin remained through
all of the iterations of the group.

Woods married Jill Goodwin,
Bill’s sister in 1985, and they lived
in the Poconos until Phil’s passing.
During his years in the Poconos, he
was a major participant in the vi-
brant jazz scene that developed in
the area, the centers of which were
the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water
Gap and the Jazz Studies program
at East Stroudsburg University.

During his career, Woods was
recognized as one of the premier alto
saxophonists in jazz. While his roots
were in bebop, he was also at home in
a variety of musical settings. In addi-
tion to the musical highlights men-
tioned above, his work with fellow
alto player Gene Quill was truly mem-
orable. They were the first call alto
players on the New York scene during
much of the 1950s and were often
called Phil and Quill. He also had a
special musical relationship with
Benny Carter. He stayed busy almost
until his death from emphysema.

Life in E Flat is engrossing from
first words until last. As you read
along, you feel like Woods is sitting
next to you relating his stories. Yes,
there is a brashness and crudeness to
his writing that some might find a bit
much, but his life story is so compel-
ling that his occasional profanities
become just a natural part of who he
was, a musical giant who did it his way.
PHIL WOODS’ LEGACY

Alto Saxophonists Pay Tribute to Their Hero

We asked several alto saxophonists to reminisce about Phil Woods – what he meant to them and the world of jazz.

VINCENT HERRING

I started playing saxophone in 1975 or 1976. Even though it was during the rise of what was to become ‘smooth jazz’, I fell in love with the artistry of Phil Woods!

I grew up in a household where jazz was played every day. My mother loved Freddie Hubbard, Horace Silver, Les McCann, Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane, and far too many others to list. Our home was always a jazz party, but soul and R&B were also heard. Once I started playing saxophone my interest grew, and I wanted and needed to hear more saxophones on recordings.

One day almost by accident I caught “I Love You Just the Way You Are” on the radio, and I heard the most beautiful saxophone sound I could imagine. For days I tuned into the soft rock station hoping to hear the song again. It didn’t take long; it was very popular and in heavy rotation. I found out it was Billy Joel, and, after a short time, I found out the saxophone player was Phil Woods. I looked for his records and found Live at The Showboat (RCA Victor: 1977; reissued in 2014 by Sony Music Japan). This was my introduction to Phil Woods.

I found out Phil played often at my local jazz club, the Keystone Korner in San Francisco. My mom enjoyed going to the Keystone as much as she could. One week it was Phil Woods playing. I can remember to this day the first time I heard him play live. He produced the most beautiful sound while smoking a cigarette, holding it between his middle and index fingers! The next day I practiced with a cigarette and did everything I could to produce a sound like Phil Woods.

During one of my visits to the club, Phil recognized me because of my frequent visits when he was playing there. I was surprised Phil spoke to me and asked me what I was working on. He gave me encouraging words. He was one of my first musical heroes.

I moved to New York some years later and did everything I could to study with Phil Woods. Lessons were at his home near the Delaware Water Gap in Pennsylvania. Some of my current students ask me what I learned from Phil Woods. After all of my lessons, hearing Phil Woods live hundreds of times and playing several concerts with him, I learned that Phil Woods is one of the Great Jazz Masters and his musicianship has rarely been matched. Phil showed me where the bar to greatness is located. I might not ever reach it, but I know where it is, thanks to the greatness of Phil Woods.
ALEX LAURENZI

When I was 14 years old, I attended the William Paterson Summer Jazz camp, where Jim McNeely was my combo instructor. At the end of the workshop, Jim wanted to connect me to his old boss, Phil Woods. I met Phil five months later when I saw his quintet play at Birdland. Jon Gordon was joining him as a special guest, and even though Mr. Woods was playing with his oxygen tank right by his side, he was still the commanding officer on that bandstand. Playing Charlie Parker’s music, it was a beautiful passing of the torch, of sorts. Jon was great, too. Phil didn’t seem much inhibited by his emphysema. I went back stage afterwards and introduced myself.

The first of our three sessions together must’ve been only a few months later in 2013. I would drive out to the Delaware Water Gap on a Saturday, and we would do an hour or so lesson together, maybe two hours.

My first lesson was great. His studio space on the upstairs of his beautiful, modern, light-filled home was the perfect size for both of us. More records and CDs than you can imagine, a giant Mac computer for composing, an upright piano, and a lounge chair. He owned me on some long tones, claiming that if he could play longer than me with his emphysema, then I better start learning how to put some air through the horn. I’m still working on that, I guess, all these years later. He knew I had some bebop vocabulary at that point and trusted that I would be fine on the horn, but he said he wanted me to become the most complete musician I could become. So we spent most of the time playing 3rds and 7ths on the piano, learning simple voicings first over “Autumn Leaves” and then “Con Alma”. He believed that if I could really understand that, that would be the proper foundation for everything else.

Second lesson, a few months later: I didn’t practice enough, and my piano chops were still rough. He was a bit disappointed that I hadn’t really gotten it together enough. It was then that I got a pretty important work-over-talent conversation, where he said I was talented and that was great, but I had to combine it with a serious work ethic, because the music required the most of us. It was life itself. I had to take it from being some hobby or something that I was good at and really develop a relationship with it, respect it and love it like I would anyone or anything greater than myself. I think that Phil embodied the culture and spirit of this music in
many ways, believing in learning and loving it the right way, playing with the realest people, and bringing a high level of excellence and passion every time you pick up the horn, no matter the musical situation. You could see that this music really was life for him, and it deserved nothing less than the dedication of his own.

Third lesson, a few months later: Phil had asked me to write a duet for us. I took a stab at it, and I wasn’t thrilled with what I came up with. He encouraged me to keep working with it. I got my piano stuff in a better place, so Phil was happy that his serious talk worked on me. I think it was during that lesson where he showed me a bunch of Benny Carter tunes. They had done a double alto quintet record in the ‘80s or ‘90s, so this music was from that record date. I hadn’t really spent any time with Benny Carter’s music, so it was a good snapshot of what he was about.

While the first two lessons really felt like lessons from the master, the third lesson felt more like two friends just hanging out, playing music together. He seemed to just be enjoying himself, and I was obviously having a great time just flipping through the tunes. It felt like a proper conclusion to our time together: I was left with a bunch of big ideas to work on, things that would sustain me for a long time. But we ended our time together with a reminder of what we are here to do: connect with others through the good vibrations of this music. It was the last time I would see him before he passed in 2015. The funny thing was that while I loved his playing, I wasn’t a real big “Phil” head when I knew him. People thought I sounded like him but it was because I was trying to go after the bounce,
expressiveness, and bluesiness of Cannonball with the vocabulary of Bird and Stitt. It was in early college (2016-2017) where I really started to dig into Phil more – Live at the Showboat, his stuff with the Quincy Jones Big Band, some later stuff with the Bill Charlap trio, etc. I am glad to have known him before I knew him like that through the horn. I came to him as much less of a diehard fan, but have become one over the years as I have spent more time with his music. I will always feel some sort of spiritual and musical connection to Phil Woods and all he stood for.

**CHARLES MCPHERSON**

We did a pretty big tour all over Europe together. Phil was seven or eight years older than me. He got to see Bird more than once. I saw Bird when I was 14 or 15. Phil Woods and Jackie McLean pretty much represent the post-Charlie Parker era. They’re the children of Charlie Parker. They represent the sax players and musicians very much influenced by Charlie Parker, but they took the lessons and developed their own style. I’m one of them; John Coltrane is one of them. Phil Woods was like the guy who definitely understood the language and had really good technique and developed his own way of doing things.”

**ALEXA TARANTINO**

I always knew I wanted to be a professional saxophonist, but it wasn’t until I heard Phil’s sound that I really knew what I wanted to sound like and how I wanted to make others feel. Phil could play you the sweetest lullaby or wake you right up with slap tonguing and growls. He had total command over the instrument without ever sounding forceful, regurgitative, or self-centered. I was so fortunate to spend some time with Phil and share the stage with him as a high-schooler and early-college student. Those memories will last forever. I miss hearing him play live, but so grateful for the recordings that I have so that I can continue to embrace his approach for years to come.

**JULIUS TOLENTINO**

Phil Woods played a huge part of me being a jazz musician and a fan of the music. Before I got hip to Jackie McLean and became one of his students, Phil was one of the first saxophone players I tried to emulate when I was in high school. My dad took me to see him several times...
at Fat Tuesday’s and at festivals.

One of my first jazz teachers was a protege of Phil Woods, Nelson Hill, who’s a wonderful saxophonist and still resides in the Water Gap area. (Nelson Hill is part of the Eric Mintel Quartet that performed at the NJJS December Virtual Social). What made me gravitate to Mr. Woods’ playing was his sound. So big, round, warm, and expressive. He had a bounce and swing that you could feel in one note. I was able to attend a masterclass of his at the Manhattan School of Music, and I still practice and teach some of the warmups he showed us.

But the major thing I took away from him at that time was that music was more than learning solos and being able to play. It was about being an artist in every sense of the word. Experiencing life and culture and letting that come out through your music. I wasn’t really ready to understand what he was getting at in high school, but it stayed with me and guided my artistry moving forward. I always be a fan, and I love all of the different eras of Phil’s playing.

**DAVID BINNEY**

I went to Phil for a lesson when I first moved to New York City in 1981 when I was 19. I walked in, and he offered me a huge joint. I said, ‘no’, I wanted to concentrate on the lesson. We played a bit, and he wrote down four or five things on one sheet of music paper and said, ‘Learn these and you’ll never have to see me again.’ I learned them and never saw him again. They were the best things I could have learned in a lesson. I still use them every time I play. It was kind of amazing actually. That day changed my life in a way. I’ve told the story hundreds of times at clinics, masterclasses, etc., and people always love it.

**MARK FRIEDMAN**

When I graduated college from Jersey City State College (now New Jersey City University) in 1979, I needed direction in what to practice. I contacted my long-time idol, Phil Woods, and he took me on as his student. Talk about being honored!!!

He was super cool with me and taught me tons! In December of 1980—December 20 to be exact—I dropped off my sax to the repairman and picked up a loaner from my friend Matt and headed to the Village Vanguard to catch Phil Woods. I was sitting right in front of him. He noticed I had a sax (my friend’s loaner) and said something to the effect—“You have a sax and you’re not coming up here to play with me?” I squirmed because you have to be used to a horn to play it comfortably. So, I jumped up and played a couple of tunes with him.

I invited me back the next night to play again with him. I made sure the repairman had my horn fixed so I could be comfortable. What a thrill to sit in with Phil at the Vanguard a second night, this time along with Eric Kloss. Phil was kind, encouraging and such a cool guy!

**STEVE WILSON**

Along with having one of the most definitive and best alto sounds EVER, Phil was the quintessential total musician, indeed a craftsman. He was a fantastic composer and arranger for ensembles of any configuration and instrumentation. Had Phil chosen he could have had a very successful career alone in that realm. I hope that all of his skills and artistry beyond the horn will be appreciated. Phil was one the grand masters and one of our music royalty.
Olin O’Brien gave me this story: “There was an opening in the New York Philharmonic bass section in 1956, and my teacher, Fred Zimmerman, encouraged me to practice even more, and to apply for it. He also encouraged his former students, like Bob Gladstone, Julius Levine, and Alvin Brehm, to take the audition.

“I was working as an usher in Carnegie Hall while I was studying at Juilliard, and I had noticed that there were no women musicians in the NY Phil except for the second harp, occasionally.

“But Fred told me, ‘If you play well enough, they will have to take you.’ His confidence in me gave me the courage to apply, so I wrote a letter answering the advertisement in the International Musician, and got an answer back to ‘Mr. O’Brien,’ telling me my audition was 9:45 a.m. on a Saturday morning in October, at the second floor orchestra club room of Carnegie Hall.

“I did play. Fred told me that I played very well, and that the committee thought I was very good. Bob Gladstone won the job, and since he was a Zimmerman student too, we were very happy.

“Bob was in the New York Philharmonic for 10 years and then went to Detroit where he served as principal bass for 34 years. Bob recommended me for the New York City Ballet Orchestra where he and Julius Levine had played for years, and by December of that year I was accepted into the NYC Ballet, where I played for 10 years, until I auditioned again for the NY Philharmonic and Bernstein hired me.

“There is a wonderful camaraderie amongst most bassists, I have found. We try to help each other out, partly because we KNOW how difficult it is to play well!”

Bill Crow is a freelance musician and writer. His books include Jazz Anecdotes, Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around, and From Birdland to Broadway. This column is reprinted with permission from Allegro, the monthly magazine of AFM Local 802.
“We entered a cigarette-smoke-filled arena with a small stage at one end, where there were three-foot-high cardboard music stands set up with music for approximately 75 mambos. There was also an upright piano. Seated at it was a plump blonde woman, who looked at me, puzzled, as I took out my bow and asked her politely for an A. She stared at my bow, and asked, ‘What the HELL is THAT?!’ I said it was a bow, and could I please have an A so I could tune. Her response was, ‘Honey, we don’t want the NOTES: We just want the RHYTHM!’

“’We played for four hours. I got large blisters on my first two pizzicato fingers, and earned $16, which I sent to my mother in Los Angeles. I was proud to have played my first professional job.’

Gene Perla posted this story on Facebook. He got it from saxophonist John Clay, who said:

“I was playing a week-long engagement at Fat Tuesdays in NYC with Zoot Sims, Jimmy Rowles, and Michael Moore. On a break, we were all hanging out talking, when a man approached Zoot. He said that Frank Sinatra was shooting a movie down on the lower East Side, and Frank would like for Zoot to drop over and say hi. Zoot paused for a moment and then said, ‘Naaaa ... tell him to come over here.’ We all about lost it. ‘The next night there was a table directly to my left of the stage that was set up for about eight people with a bottle of champagne in the middle. In came Frank with his entourage, and they sat down and enjoyed the set. Zoot took the microphone and said, ‘I’d like to acknowledge a great musician, Mr. Frank Sinatra.’ I was told later that night that Zoot having introduced him as a great musician instead of as a great singer was greatly appreciated by Frank.”

One June day Herb Gardner overheard two kids discussing their graduation ceremony. “… and when the graduating class walks in, the band plays this real slow march called ‘Papa Smurf’s Dance’.” Herb said Sir Edward Elgar had no idea he’d be so immortalized.
The New Orleans-based Saber-tooth Swing is a swinging sextet that has released an all too brief six-tune album titled Songs of Future Past (Slammin Media). The album includes three standards, “Frankie & Johnny,” “Blue Skies” and “How Deep Is the Ocean;” W.C. Handy’s “Atlanta Blues;” “Chocolate Jesus” by the iconoclastic Tom Waits; and a tune by the jam band Phish, “Lawn Boy.” With appropriate sound- ing vocals from trumpeter Dan Ruch and fine playing from Alex Canales on reeds, Chris Butcher on trombone, Romain Beauxis on guitar, Spike Perkins on bass and Robert Montgomery on drums, this hot group serves up spirited swing dance sounds that are fun to hear. sabertoothswing.org

The Len Pierro Jazz Orchestra is a hard swinging big band from Philadelphia as can be heard on The Third Quarter (Walking Path Records – 2020). Pierro has gathered a top flight crew of Philadelphia area musicians to play his charts on eight original tunes plus “If I Should Lose You,” “Jitterbug Waltz” and Kenny Barron’s “Voyage.” Their playing is tight and exciting. There are outstanding solo interludes by tenor saxophonists Larry McKenna and Chris Farr, alto saxophonist Matt Vashlishan, trumpeter Tony DeSantis, and flugelhornist George Rabbai. Pierro is a fine arranger who has given his aggregation a lot of wonderful music to play. It is pleasing to hear and it sounds like the band had just as much fun making it all come to life. lenpierrro.com

Those who have been hardcore jazz fans for as long as I have been are probably familiar with the name of Phil Nimmons, the Canadian clarinetist, bandleader, composer, arranger and educator. Nimmons, who is still with us at the age of 96, led a small big band, Nimmons ’N Nine, and a full-sized big band, Nimmons ’N Nine Plus Six that garnered critical acclaim and a steady following. To the Nth (Self-produced) is an eight-song tribute to Nimmons by The Nimmons Tribute, an octet led by pianist Sean Nimmons, Phil’s grandson. The program has seven Phil Nimmons originals plus “Rista’s Visit,” written by Sean for his grandfather, Rista being Phil’s middle name. The band nicely captures the spirit of the Phil Nimmons music while beautifully executing the charts by Sean, the result being Nimmons with a contemporary shading. Phil Nimmons was a giant on the Canadian jazz scene, fully deserving of renewed attention. This is a nice way to start! nimmonstribute.bandcamp.com

As a solo guitarist, Andy Brown is as tasty as it gets, both musically and in his song selection. On Alone Time (String Damper Records – 2138), Brown addresses standards, “Look for the Silver Lining,” “The Gypsy,” “Little White Lies,” “Lollipops and Roses,” “The Best Thing for You” and “I’ll Never Stop Loving You;” some nods towards Brazilian sounds, “Berimbau,” “Samba Un Pouco Azul,” “Quiló Que eu Sei” and “Samba Da Minha Terra;” pop material, “Love Theme from ‘The Bladerunner,’” “If” and “Lollipops and Roses;” and a few jazz tunes, “Soft Winds,” “Laverne Walk” and “Belleville.” No matter the genre, Brown exhibits great musicianship and

OTHER VIEWS
BY JOE LANG
an unerring sense of improvisation. You do not have to be a guitar enthusiast to fall for this album, just a fan of good music. **String Damper Records – 2138**

The influence of Django Reinhardt on jazz guitar music has been unique and substantial. When mentioning those on the scene today who have been influenced by Reinhardt’s style, **Stephane Wrembel** stands out as one of the best. He has not only absorbed the music of Reinhardt, but has added his own musical perspectives to create music that never sounds dated, rather refreshingly new. To get a taste of Wrembel’s approach to what is often referred to as gypsy jazz, give a listen to **The Django Experiment VI** (Self-produced).

Wrembel and his band, guitarist Thor Jensen, bassist Ari Folman-Cohen, drummer Nick Anderson, saxophonist/clarinetist Nick Driscoll and special guest, violinist Daisy Castro, address four Reinhardt songs, “Naguine” (two versions), “Impromptu,” “Nuages” and “Swing de Paris,” plus “Dream of You,” “St. James Infirmary,” “La Valse des Niglos,” “Laguna Laita” and “What Is This Thing Called Love.” These tracks were recorded in a studio, but with no headphones or multi-tracking. The players were encouraged to just let the music flow as in a concert, and the results are a joyful feast of improvisatory music sure to lift your spirits. As is often the case in these times, this is a digital only release. [stephanewrembel.com](http://stephanewrembel.com)

Morristown’s own **Alex Wintz** has emerged as a strong presence on the New York City jazz scene. He was making appearances at Shanghai Jazz in Madison while still a student at Berklee College of Music. Upon graduation from Berklee, he moved to New York and seamlessly became an active player. Among those with whom he has performed are Peter and Will Anderson, Jeremy Pelt, and Etienne Charles, while also establishing a career as a leader and educator. **Live to Tape** (Outside I Music – 2035) finds Wintz leading his trio with Jimmy MacBride on bass and Dave Baron on drums on four Wintz originals, Herbie Hancock’s “Textures,” Annie Clark’s “What Me Worry” and the standard, “I’m All Smiles.” Wintz has absorbed a wide range of influences and is comfortable in many styles, but his emphasis here has mostly a contemporary tilt. It is exciting to see the growth in this young man whom I have known since he was an aspiring jazz guitarist while still at Morristown High School. Hats off to Alex! [alexwintzmusic.com](http://alexwintzmusic.com)

**Dave Young** has been a force on the Canadian jazz scene for about 60 years. Originally from Winnipeg, he has been a presence in Toronto for decades as an in-demand jazz bassist and also has extensive classical credits. His latest release as a leader is **Ides of March** (Modica Music) on which he fronts a group with himself on bass, Kevin Turcotte on trumpet, Reg Schwager on guitar, and Terry Clarke on drums. They provide a nice straight-ahead program of nine songs—four by Herbie Hancock, “Dolphin Dance,” “Speak Like a Child,” “One Finger Snap” and “Riot,” two originals by Young, “Ides of March” and “Forty Five Degrees,” plus Lee Morgan’s “Speedball,” Niels Lan Doky’s “The Target,” and a trio
version of Gershwin’s ‘My Man’s Gone Now,’ with Clarke sitting out. The music is unerringly interesting, often incorporating a hard bop feel. Turcotte’s trumpet lies easily on the ears, Schwager shines throughout, while Young and Clarke, as always, lay down a strong rhythmic foundation and sparkle when the spotlight falls on either of them. Wonderful music for trying times!

modicamusic.com

Live! Vol.1 (Echoes of Swing Productions – 4512) is a spirited program taken from July 2019 concerts in Germany by pianist Chris Hopkins and the Jazz Kangaroos, the Kangaroos being violinist/vocalist Walter Washingmachine, bassist Mark Elton and guitarist David Blenkhorn, all from Australia, although Blenkhorn currently resides in Paris. There are six strictly instrumental tracks, “Can’t We Be Friends,” “Blue Lou,” “Swing 46,” “Blues in the Closet,” “What Am I Here For” and “Fine and Dandy,” while “Moonlight in Vermont,” “Russian Lullaby,” “A Hundred Years from Today” and “When Lights are Low” feature Washingmachine on the vocals. Hopkins, American-born but a long-time resident of Germany, is also an accomplished alto saxophonist, but sticks to the piano for this concert. Washingmachine is a swinging violinist in the Grappelli tradition, and he vocalizes with the kind of jazz sensibility that so many musicians who play this music possess. Elton provides strong rhythmic support and shines particularly on the Oscar Pettiford jazz classic, “Blues in the Closet.” Blenkhorn is an eclectic player, a straight-ahead swinger who lets you know that he has absorbed plenty of Django Reinhardt. Put them together and these guys are having a ball. echoesofswing.com

NOUAUX HAS CORRALLED AN ALL-STAR INTERNATIONAL CAST OF JAZZ PIANISTS.

French jazz drummer Guillaume Nouaux has played with a host of great jazzers over several decades as well as serving as the leader of some very hip sessions. For Guillaume Nouaux & The Stride Piano Kings (Self-produced), Nouaux has corralled an all-star international cast of jazz pianists who are adept at playing in the stride tradition. They are, from Germany, Bernd Lhotzky and Chris Hopkins; France, Louis Matzetier and Alain Barrabes; The Netherlands, Harry Kanters; Italy, Luca Filastro; and the United States via Italy, Rossano Sportiello. Each player joins Nouaux for two duos, while Nouaux solos on the Coleman Hawkins tune, “Mop Mop” that he dedicates to the memory of Big Sid Catlett. There are many tunes that you would expect in a collection like this such as “Harlem Strut” (Lhotzky), “Drop Me Off in Harlem” (Matzetier), “Runnin’ Wild” (Sportiello), “Jitterbug Waltz” (Kanters) and “Handful of Keys” (Filastro). Then there are standards that are played with varying approaches, including “I Wish I Were Twins” (Filastro), “Willow Weep for Me” (Hopkins), “Overnight” (Matzetier), “Tea for Two” (Kanters), “When I Grow Too Old to Dream” (Hopkins), “The Lady Is a Tramp” (Barrabes) and
“Over the Rainbow” (Lhotzky). Sportiello adds an original, “Why Did You Tell Me ‘I Love You’” while Barrabes opted to combine two tunes popular in bebop circles, “Cherokee” and “Salt Peanuts,” and take them to the Land of Stride. Nouaux, a wonderfully creative percussionist, has chosen wisely and well in selecting partners. Each player has his own style, but they all come from the same tradition resulting in an album with a unity that keeps the transition from song to song feel seamless. guillaumenouaux.com

Being house bound by the pandemic has not suppressed the creative juices of pianist Fred Hersch. He took to Facebook to post a new performance video every afternoon for about two months. In August, he undertook a recording project that has resulted in Songs From Home (Palmetto – 2197), 11 tunes filling almost an hour and played with his usual elegance and creative genius. The album became available in early November, just a few weeks after he celebrated his 65th birthday. While most of the album is contemplative, Hersch completes this musical journey with an uplifting stride take on “When I’m Sixty Four,” the age that he was when he recorded the track. This is a nice complement to the slow take on “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely” that opens the program. In between we get a few tunes often heard in a jazz context, “After You’ve Gone,” “Get Out of Town” and “Solitude;” a couple of pop tunes, “Wichita Lineman” and “All I Want;” avant-garde trumpeter Kenny Wheeler’s “Consolation - A Folk Song,” and a couple of Hersch originals, “Sarabande” and “West Virginia Rose,” a tribute to his mother and grandmother that he pairs with the traditional melody, “The Water Is Wide.” Hersch has provided some perfect music for those moments when you need to sit down, relax and contemplate the joys in your life. fredhersch.com

While studying at Berklee College of Music, baritone saxophonist Claire Daly became aware of the music of Rahsaan Roland Kirk. She was taken by the spirit he transmitted in his playing. Rah! Rah! (Ride Symbol – 34) is her way of saying thank you to the inspiration that Kirk’s music provided to her. The Claire Daly Band includes Daly on bari, flute and vocals, Eli Yam-in on piano, Dave Hofstra on bass, and Peter Grant on drums. For her program, she selected eight tunes recorded by Kirk and created two contrafacts, on Kirk tunes “Blue Lady” based on “Lady’s Blues” and “Momentus Brighticus” from “Bright Moments.” She plays flute on “Serenade to a Cuckoo,” “Funk Underneath” and “Momentus Brighticus,” and adds vocals to “Alfie” and Sly’s “Everyday People,” a song that she pairs with Kirk’s “Volunteered Slavery.” Daly and her band do not channel Kirk, rather play the music in their own way with the spirit of Kirk lingering in the background. It is effective and results in an interesting musical journey. ridesymbol.com

While she has been based in New York City since the 1980s, Jersey City-born vocalist Marty Elkins still thinks of herself in spirit as a Jersey girl. On her latest recording, ’Tis Autumn (Jazzheads – 1247), she is found in a duo
OTHER VIEWS

format with bassist Mike Richmond. This demanding voice/bass duo format would intimidate many musicians, but these two experienced and highly talented individuals sound like they are having the musical experience of a lifetime. The program is replete with standards that sound like new tunes in the hands of this pair of jazzers. The selections are “Old Devil Moon,” “In a Mellow Tone,” “‘Tis Autumn,” “When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin’ Along,” “Stairway to the Stars,” “Lullaby of the Leaves,” “My Mother’s Eyes,” “Honeysuckle Rose,” “I Ain’t Got Nothin’ But the Blues” and “All or Nothing At All.” Elkins knows how to get the most out of a lyric, often varying the melody to pull out the subtle shadings that she finds in the lyrics. Richmond complements the daring of Elkins with the kind of musicianship and intuition that is reserved for truly special players. “‘Tis Autumn ‘tis wonderful! jazzheads.com

If you need a pick me up, why not grab hold of a copy of Glitter & Grits (NTL Records) by vocalist Deborah Silver. For this 13-song album, she is joined by the Western Swing crew Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel plus a variety of guest musicians and backup singers. What they have produced is a collection of fun music with elements of jazz, country, and classic pop, meshing to create steadily infectious sounds. The emphasis is on songs from the Great American Songbook, including the likes of “I Got Rhythm,” “That Old Black Magic,” “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,” “After You’ve Gone,” “Almost Like Being in Love,” “Get Happy,” “Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive,” “Embraceable You,” “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore” and “Fly Me to the Moon.” Add in a couple of old warhorses, “Ballin’ the Jack” and “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home” plus “Deep in the Heart
of Texas,” and you have a rompin’, stompin’ good time program. Silver, who survived a bout with a rare bone disease when she first became a mother, and a recent 40-day battle with Covid-19, emits the kind of verve and grit that comes naturally to a born fighter. DeborahSilverMusic.com

Honeysuckle Rose is the debut album from Toronto-based vocalist Aubrey Wilson. She is supported by Chris Bruder on piano and Wurlitzer, Tom Altobelli on bass, and Sean Bruce Parker on drums, with Luis Deniz on alto sax and Scott Tapley on guitar for two tracks apiece. There are 10 selections on her program. Wilson attended the Applied Music program at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario, where she met her bandmates. They have been together for eight years, and the familiarity from playing together for an extended period of time gives their performance a special cohesion that comes through on each track. Wilson’s vocal qualities are similar to singers such as Cyrille Aimee and Stacey Kent, light in texture with a strong jazz influence. She gives “Honeysuckle Rose” a very slow and sexy reading. The challenging lyrics that Mark Murphy set to Oliver Nelson’s “Stolen Moments” are well handled by Wilson. “Norwegian Wood” entered the jazz world through the fabulous Bill Holman chart for the Buddy Rich Big Band. The arrangement for Wilson’s emphatic version is by Bruder, who did all of the charts for the album. Wilson and her band are off to a fine start with this recording, with a rosy future on the horizon. aubreywilsonmusic.com

Gary Williams has enjoyed a busy career as one of the best traditional pop vocalists in England. He performs extensively in Great Britain and is a popular favorite on cruise ships. Williams is often called upon to perform Sinatra-themed programs, but his versatility enables him to float among jazz-influenced pop, cabaret, and middle-of-the-road pop. His most recent album, On Days Like These (Gary Williams – 6828) fits most comfortably in the last of these categories. It is an amalgam of pop songs such as “The First Time I Saw Your Face”, “Time in a Bottle”, and “If”. There are a few that lean more toward the standards designation such as “Joanna”, which he combines with “The Good Life”, “Didn’t We”, “The Days of Wine and Roses”, and “It’s Impossible”. His pleasant baritone always makes for pleasant listening, and this collection will provide aural comfort food in these days of uneasiness and confusion. garywilliams.co.uk

Never Can Say Goodbye (Self-produced) is a recent album by vocalist Clifton Davis with The Beegie Adair Trio. Davis sings a dozen tunes including the title song that he wrote which became a big hit for Michael Jackson. In addition to Adair’s trio, there are synthesized strings added on most tracks. The program comprises standards such as “I’ve Never Been in Love Before,” “Two for the Road,” a duet with Monica Ramey, “The Folks Who Live on the Hill,” “Too Marvelous for Words” and “Teach Me Tonight;” some Brazilian tunes, “So Many Stars,” “Começar de Novo” and “Somewhere in the Hills;” three Davis originals, the title song, “Swept Away” and “Leaving It Up You,” plus “Minha Alma” by Adair and Lori Mechem. Davis is possessed of a mellow baritone that he uses in a mostly understated manner. The arrangements are more pop than jazz, but Adair’s trio definitely adds a jazz element. After a long career in musical theater and as an actor in film and on television, Davis has turned his attention to vocalizing on a recording, with enjoyable results. cliftondavis.com
Remembering Ed Xiques

BY TED PEASE

Ed Xiques is my oldest and dearest musical friend. Our friendship began in the ninth grade at Pelham High School in Pelham, NY, when we discovered our mutual interest in jazz. We listened to records together at every opportunity. Then we started playing together—Ed on alto and me on drums. Ed was very patient with me—“brushes, man, brushes!” When we were juniors in high school, we formed a jazz sextet with some friends and played a few gigs at high school dances. We also played together in the high school dance band. At the time, Ed was exclusively an alto player. He already had a mature sound and was soloing nicely, especially on the blues. (Xiques, who played all the reed instruments, died December 4, 2020, in Las Cruces, NM).

Several years later after college, Ed was directly responsible for me migrating to Boston and beginning my subsequent career at Berklee. He gave me a place to stay and some instant gig contacts. We played together in Dick Wright’s nine-piece jazz/dance band that included Gary Burton on piano(!), Mike Gibbs on trombone, and Jimmy Derba on tenor. Ed played baritone sax. He had a huge sound.

Ed left Boston in 1962 to seek his fortune in New York along with Rosie, the love of his life. Then came Thad and Mel, countless other gigs, tours with Liza Minnelli, and the rest, as they say, is history. Along the way, Ed endeared himself to so many people. His easygoing personal style, his sense of humor, and his dedication to musical excellence earned him the love and friendship of hundreds and hundreds of fellow musicians and students.

An early memory about Ed and me: The first time I heard Charlie Parker was at Birdland in 1955. Not live—it was a recording playing over the house system as Ed and I walked down the stairs to a 3 p.m. Sunday matinee performance by the Stan Kenton band (I wanted to see and hear Mel Lewis. So many cross currents to my story. Twenty years later, Ed would be playing in Thad and Mel’s band!) Anyway, I’m hearing this searingly beautiful alto sound—it was “Just Friends,” from the *Bird with Strings* album, which, at age 16, I had never heard before. “Who is THAT?” I asked Ed, the alto player. “That’s Charlie Parker,” he answered. We took our seats in the “bullpen”, which was set aside for kids under 18.

Remembering Diane Moser

BY SCOTT NEUMANN

With Diane Moser’s passing on December 17, 2020, the New York/New Jersey music world lost a true “supernova” of creativity and communal organization as well as a strong purveyor of musical and spiritual nourishment for countless musicians, students, and followers of her music.

Diane’s finest attributes went well beyond her musical capabilities as a pianist, composer, bandleader and educator. Her Midwest/Iowan roots developed her down-to-earth sensibilities and sincere compassion as a human being. Diane was a great mother and a caring friend, and teacher to so many. She was selfless as a person and a great listener and was always interested in how you and your family were doing, and what you were up to both musically and personally. Even as Diane was very sick the final weeks of her life, she rallied her Composers Big Band’s (“CBB”) band mates together to share memories of beloved longtime saxophonist/band member Ed Xiques, who had passed away only days before Diane’s untimely death. (See Ted Pease’s tribute to Ed Xiques).

Having played drums for more than 20 years in both Diane’s Composers Big Band and small groups, I can say that all of her musical talents and personal attributes came into play with each and every performance. Though her nickname was “D-Mo”, musical comrades often likened her to a scout troop Den Moth-

Ted Pease, winner of two grants in jazz composition from the National Endowment for the Arts, has been a faculty member at Berklee College of Music since 1964. He is currently Distinguished Professor of Jazz Composition.
During the monthly CBB tenure, which lasted for more than 23 years, Diane would always be personally greeting arriving musicians and audience members. Her musicianship and maternal instincts guided the band and countless guest artists to so many nights of unforgettable musical heights. Diane was all about the sheer joy of coming together in the experience of creating meaningful music. Having played in many great big bands through the years, CBB had a very different feel for me from the others, one with a much more communal and family feel.

Equally, Diane had a gift for making events happen and bringing people together. With her artistry and dedication to education, she created an impact for students and audiences alike in and around Montclair, NJ. She was a tireless curator of events and performance pieces, giving opportunities to so many musicians and students, young and old. That same intent landed her many prestigious grants over the years. To name a few, Chamber Music America, Meet The Composer, and the Mid-Atlantic Arts Council. Her compositional credits are extensive, writing for theatre, film and many different musical premieres for many acclaimed ensembles.

Some of my most cherished memories of Diane come from CBB’s monthly run at Trumpets Jazz Club in Montclair. To fit the band on stage, Diane and the piano were positioned so that she faced directly back towards bassist Andy Eulau and me, as we were located at the very back of the band. I can vividly and fondly remember the sights and sounds of all of the expressions and comments of joy, re-assurance, humor and often disbelief that we shared...
during each and every performance.

Most musicians have a “zone” or physical posture that they assume when they enter into their deepest moments of creating. I will always remember Diane’s “zone”. With her eyes closed and head thrown back her, her facial expression conveyed both a deep concentration, and a beautiful balance between intensity and joy as she played her heart out.

It is that balance of Diane’s intense love and joy for music, her family, friends, students and audience that sets her aside as the true “super nova” that she was. Rest in peace dear Diane and thank you for all you shared with us!

In addition to his 20-plus-years association with Diane Moser, Scott Neumann has played with such jazz legends as Woody Herman and Brother Jack McDuff. He currently leads the Neu3 Trio and the Osage County Quartet.

Junior Mance
An NYC Favorite, He Learned from the Legends, and Then Became One

The list of musicians that pianist Junior Mance played with sounds like a who’s who of jazz – Gene Ammons, Cannonball Adderley, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Dinah Washington. I moved to New York in 1968 and discovered him when he was a regular at Greenwich Village’s Top of the Gate. By then, he was leading his own trio, as well as playing with others, and his unique brand of blues-tinged jazz mixed with bebop and a healthy dose of selections from the American Songbook made him a favorite all over the city.

Mance died January 17, 2020, in New York at the age of 92. One of the best descriptions of his style was written by The New York Times’ John S. Wilson on January 1, 1980. Reviewing a performance at the Knickerbocker Saloon in the Village, Wilson wrote, “Junior Mance is usually spoken of as a pianist whose playing is steeped in the blues ... His blues feeling influences everything he plays. But the structure of his sets and of his individual pieces have such color and dramatic flair that they go a long way toward filling the musical vacuum left by the death of Erroll Garner three years ago ... Mr. Mance can build vast pastel panoramas on a tune such as the bossa nova, ‘Wave’, or work his way deliberately through ‘Georgia on My Mind’, shaking the melody from time to time to make sure it is still there.”

Born in Chicago, October 10, 1928, Mance left Roosevelt College to join tenor saxophonist Gene Am-
mons’ band. He also played with Lester Young before being drafted into the Army in 1951. He was stationed at Fort Knox, KY, and would have been shipped to Korea during the Korean War if not for a chance meeting with another soldier, Julian “Cannonball” Adderley.

In a July 2008 interview with AllAboutJazz’s Ken Dryden, Mance described what happened. “I had guard duty one night,” he said, “on duty two hours, then rest for one. I walked around this service club where soldiers hung out after duty hours. I heard music and thought it was records. There was a big band on stage and a big roly-poly guy, Cannonball, leading it. I was the only one in uniform and a field helmet. I ran up to the stage and asked to sit in. The pianist was a clarinetist who only knew a few basic ‘church’ chords … Cannonball looked at me with a frown and asked me what did I want to play. I said, ‘How about something out of your book?’” He picked a sort-of Count Basie-ish blues, the band came in shouting, and he told me to take the first solo. I played the chorus, and Cannonball told me to take another one and then kept encouraging me. I peeked at the brass section, and their heads were bobbing to the beat. I played until my arms almost dropped off …”

Adderley spoke to his first sergeant and got Mance transferred out of infantry training and into clerk-typist school. Mance stayed at Fort Knox, became Adderley’s roommate, and continued to be the pianist in Adderley’s band.

After his discharge from the Army in 1953, Mance became the house pianist at the Bee Hive Jazz Club in Chicago. The house trio, he told Dryden, “included me, the late [bassist] Israel Crosby, and a local drummer, Buddy Smith. The gig lasted two years; they brought in singles and gave each one four weeks.” Among the visiting musicians were Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis. “Lester,” Mance said, “was generous with the solos.”

In 1954, Mance toured with Dinah Washington, joining Adderley in 1956 and Dizzy Gillespie in 1958, forming his own trio in 1961. In the 1990s, Mance was part of a group of pianists called the “100 Gold Fingers” who toured Japan once a year. Among the other pianists in that group were Hank Jones, John Lewis, and Harold Mabern.

Recruited by drummer Chico Hamilton and saxophonist Arnie Lawrence in 1988, Mance began teaching in the School of Jazz and Contemporary Music at The New School in New York, remaining there for 23 years. A statement released by The New School shortly after Mance’s death, said: “Junior was a central figure at the school, helping to make it into the great program that it is today. Those who knew Junior during this period often times went to hear him perform just down the block at the old Café Loup where Junior and his band had set up shop on Sunday nights. Junior was known for his brilliant playing, teaching, and for his friendship, camaraderies, and storytelling … We will always remember Junior Mance and the important role that he played in our community.”

One of his former students, drummer Jean-Phillippe O’Neill, in a Facebook post, said: “R.I.P., Junior. I’m glad I was one of your students. You opened my ears and always told me how much you loved drummers!”
mer, Alvin Queen, recalled (also on Facebook) that “We used to share great moments on the bandstand with [bassist] Martin Rivera and traveling the world together. You have definitely done your job on this earth.”

Saxophonist Andrew Hadro told DownBeat that Mance, “didn’t much care how old you were, where you came from ... If you wanted to play some blues, you were cool. His favorite piano was truly the one in front of him. The only thing he liked almost as much as playing was hanging out, laughing, and telling stories from his decades playing jazz everywhere with everyone.”

Mance is survived by his wife, Gloria Clayborne Mance, who announced his death on Facebook and said: “I know the world has lost a jazz legend. He was undoubtedly a very loving, happy, and unforgettable person. I have lost my soulmate.”

**Eugene Wright**

*Last Surviving Member of Dave Brubeck’s Classic Quartet*

On May 11, 2013, “A Celebration of the Life and Music of Dave Brubeck” was held at New York’s Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, two hours of music and conversation to honor Brubeck, who died the previous December (Jersey Jazz, July/August 2013).

One member of Brubeck’s classic quartet of the ’50s and ’60s was still alive—bassist Eugene Wright, who played “King for a Day”, a duet with Brubeck’s son, Darius. “King for a Day” was written by Dave Brubeck and his wife, Iola, for Louis Armstrong.

Wright, who died on December 30, 2020, in Los Angeles, at the age of 97, was the only African-American member of Brubeck’s quartet, which also included alto saxophonist Paul Desmond and drummer Joe Morello. In the late ’50s, come college deans, primarily in the South, requested that Wright not be part of the quartet when it visited their campuses, and Brubeck flat-
ly refused. He also canceled a tour to South Africa rather than agree to bring an all-white band there.

Nate Chinen, writing on the WBGO website the day after Wright’s death, recalled that Wright performed in *The Real Ambassadors*, a jazz musical created by Dave and Iola, with vocals by Armstrong and Carmen McRae, among others. It premiered at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1962. It was motivated, Chinen wrote, “by the hypocrisy of a U.S. State Department that touted jazz as a beacon of democratic equality even as Jim Crow segregation persisted back at home.”

Chinen cited the southern college campus tour as an example. In 1958, “when Brubeck arrived at a college gig in North Carolina,” according to Chinen, “university administrators balked at the unexpected presence of a Black musician in his band. Brubeck refused to play the concert without him.” Twenty-three of 25 scheduled college concerts were canceled

In a Facebook post, Brubeck’s son, Chris, a bassist/trombonist, recalled spending “many hours under my father’s piano next to Gene’s bass, absorbing his groove. He was a HUGE influence in my development of the concept of how to function as a bass player in a jazz group.” Wright, Brubeck continued, “was never looking for individual glory, his highest accolade was to be mentioned as a part of the rhythm section that really swung ... He was the ultimate team player and an under-appreciated aspect of why the classic quartet was such an amazing and highly regarded jazz group.”

Born on May 29, 1923 in Chicago, Wright recorded about 30 albums with the Brubeck Quartet including, of course, *Time Out*, the iconic 1959 Columbia album that included “Take Five” and “Blue Rondo a la Turk”. His musical hero, according to Chinen, was the Count Basie bassist, Walter Page. “So,” wrote Chinen, “it was no small point of pride when Wright landed a gig with Basie in the late 1940s.” In the early ’50s, Wright played with tenor saxophonist Arnett Cobb, clarinetist Buddy DeFranco, and vibraphonists Red Norvo and Cal Tjader. Brubeck hired him away from Tjader. In the 1970s, Wright recorded on movie soundtracks and worked in television studios. He also headed the Jazz Department at the University of Cincinnati and directed the advisory board of the Jazz Division of the International Society of Bassists.

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In Chris Brubeck’s FB post, he said his sister, Cathy, wrote to him after hearing the news of Wright’s passing. “Gene,” she said, “had such an open and generous, humorous way of viewing the world and his place in it ... As souls live on in some other afterworld state, I’m sure the party he envisioned has already begun.” Chris added: “I have to say I agree—I think that great heavenly jam session has started.”

No information was available regarding survivors.

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**Frank Kimbrough**

*Revered Pianist with Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra*

Pianist Frank Kimbrough was most well-known for his association with the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra, which he joined in 1993, remaining as the band’s keyboardist until his death at the age of 64 on December 30, 2020, in Long Island City, NY. When *Jersey Jazz*’s Schaen Fox interviewed him nearly four years ago (April 2017),
Kimbrough recalled how it all began. “A friend said, ‘I just recommend you to this lady that’s started a big band.’ She called, but I really wasn’t interested in playing in a big band. She was very nice, and I said, ‘I want to see the charts and hear the music.’” Schneider dropped off some charts and a cassette tape of one of her albums. “I put the cassette on, and the first thing I heard was Evanescence. It freaked me out because it is gorgeous. I got up the next morning, called her, and she asked if I wanted to do two months of Monday nights at Visiones, a club in Greenwich Village. It paid 20 bucks a night. I said, ‘Okay.’ Those two months ended up being five years. That bonded the band. In March (2018), it will be 24 years for me ... Maria is the salt of the earth ... I never get tired of it because the music is always new ...” (When the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra recorded Evanescence on the Enja label in 1992, the Los Angeles Times’ Bill Kohlhaase called it “one of the most promising big band debuts in a long time.”).

Upon hearing of Kimbrough’s death, Schneider told WBGO’s Nate Chinen, “I feel like so much of what the band has become is largely standing on the foundation of Frank ... He thrived on risk ... He had incredible ears, incredible taste, because he was so selfless and had this big musical heart. He was always taking it someplace different and someplace astoundingly beautiful, every night.”

Born on November 2, 1956, in rural Roxboro, NC, Kimbrough studied classical piano. Then, when he was a teenager, he saw the Bill Evans Trio on a Public Broadcasting TV special. “I remember it like it was yesterday,” he told JazzTimes in 2004. “There it was, the discipline of the classical stuff that I’d been working on and...”
the freedom of improvising.” Evans and Thelonious Monk were his two main early influences, followed by others such as Paul Bley, Andrew Hill, Shirley Horn, and Keith Jarrett.

Kimbrough told Fox that he and Horn “became friends very quickly. I’d go to her gigs, and she’d invite me to her recording sessions. One day she had me meet her at the Steinway place on 57th Street. We went through every room in the place, and we picked out a nine-foot Hamburg Steinway for her to take home.”

Among Kimbrough’s better known albums were *Lullabluebye* (Palmetto Records: 2005) with bassist Ben Allison and drummer Matt Wilson and *Play* (Palmetto Records: 2006) with bassist Masa Kamaguchi and the late drummer, Paul Motian. Reviewing *Lullabluebye* for *JazzTimes*, Steve Futtermann wrote that Kimbrough, Allison, and Wilson “read each other like the old friends and musical partners they are, and their familiarity and intuitive approach to improvised form accounts in large part for the album’s success.” Kimbrough’s final recording as a leader was *Monk’s Dreams* (Sunnyside: 2018), six discs containing interpretations by Kimbrough’s quartet of 70 Monk compositions.

Kimbrough was an integral member of Allison’s Jazz Composers Collective, founded in the ’90s. As part of that group, he created the Herbie Nichols Project, exploring and raising awareness of music by the late pianist/composer Nichols, a talented artist in the ’50s, who never achieved widespread recognition. Nichols, who died in 1963, is perhaps best known for writing the Billie Holiday standard, “Lady Sings the Blues”.

On January 3, 1985, Nichols’ birthday, Kimbrough was listening to a celebration of his music on Columbia University radio station WKCR. “The first notes,” he told Fox, “sent me scurrying for a cassette so I could tape the show. There was just something amazing about it. I recorded everything I could for the next three hours and started transcribing his tunes the next day. Maybe five or six years later, when I got together with the guys who became the Jazz Composers Collective, I’d bring these tunes to the sessions. That is how the Herbie Nichols Project got started.”

Kimbrough was also a music educator. He joined the Jazz Studies faculty of Juilliard in 2008. Pianist Ted Rosenthal, a fellow Juilliard faculty member, posted on Facebook that Kimbrough was “a dedicated and inspiring teacher. I often experienced first-hand his wisdom, love, respect, and devotion to the students—who loved and respected him right back. He will be sorely missed by the Juilliard community.”

On March 12, 2019, Kimbrough was the visiting artist at Bowling Green State University’s Jazz Week, the last concert before the pandemic shut down all performances at the university. Kimbrough’s message to the BGSU students: It’s important “to play with the cat standing next to you and make him sound good.”

His wife, vocalist/composer Maryanne de Prophetis, said the cause of death was likely a heart attack. She told Chinen: “I think he felt like he could give even more of himself, musically and humanly, as a teacher than he could with his playing. That’s a pretty radical thing to say. But he got so much gratification from imparting in that way—and yet he was so humbled by his students.”

In addition to de Prophetis, survivors are: his mother, Katrina Lee; and four brothers, Conrad, Mark, Edwin, and David.

For more articles on members of the jazz community we have recently lost, look in the News section of njjs.org.
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