Jazz at Paper Mill Playhouse

Celebrating the Harlem Renaissance
IN THIS ISSUE:

ARTICLES/REVIEWS

09  Jersey Jazz LIVE!:
    Lance Bryant Trio

12  Jazz History: Sonny Stitt

17  Jazz at Paper Mill
    House: After Midnight

23  Jazz at the Vogel:
    Joshua Redman

29  Rising Star: Tyler Bullock

32  PBS Documentary:
    Dr. Eddie Henderson

36  Other Views

40  Big Band in the Sky

COLUMNS

03  All That’s Jazz

06  Editor's Choice

43  Not Without You!

CORRECTION: In the Rising Star article in the January Jersey Jazz, the correct name of Kellin Hanas’ drummer is Quinton Cain.

ON THE COVER  Photos of Duke Ellington (left) and Cab Calloway, courtesy of Paper Mill Playhouse.
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 very 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 43 for our latest list of new and renewed members. If you have any questions about your membership, please contact me at membership@njjs.org.

NJJS’ 2024 Juried Scholarship Competition—which will award a $1,000 and a $500 prize in each of two categories: Jazz Performance and Original Composition—is accepting entries.

The competition is open to all students currently enrolled in a New Jersey college undergraduate music program, as well as to Jersey residents currently enrolled in an out of state college undergraduate program. Proof of residency is required for Jersey applicants in out of state schools.

Along with the cash award, winners will receive guidance, mentorship, and the opportunity to perform with an industry professional, plus coverage in Jersey Jazz.

This competition will once again be judged by our prestigious panel of professional musicians, educators, and industry leaders comprised of:

Don Braden—world class tenor saxophonist, flutist, composer, and educator
Ted Chubb—Vice President, Jazz Education +Associate Producer, Jazz House Kids, trumpeter, composer, and educator
Jason Olaine—Vice President of Programming, Jazz at Lincoln Center
Mariel Bildsten—Trombonist, bandleader, sidewoman, and educator

Submission deadline is Friday, March 29, 2024, 11:59 p.m. Visit njjs.org/Education/Scholarship Program for complete details.

The Board and I would like to thank Nan Hughes Poole and NJJS Board Member Cynthia Feketie for their generous support of this initiative.

If you’d like to support the growth of our prize offerings, donations can be made via our website njjs.org/Donate. Please note “Scholarship Fund” where indicated. Donations can also be mailed: NJJS, 382 Springfiled Ave., Ste. 217, Summit, NJ 07901. Don’t hesitate to contact me at pres@njjs.org if you have any questions.

Plan to join us Sunday, February 4th at 3:00 p.m. for Jersey Jazz LIVE!

This month’s Rising Stars segment will feature the Jacob Tolentino Trio, opening for the Lance Bryant Trio. For more information on this LIVE! event, please see page 09.

If you’d like to support a LIVE! program—in part or in full—providing performance opportunities for the next generation of jazz musicians as well as seasoned musicians, please contact me at pres@njjs.org or at 973-229-0543.

Jersey Jazz LIVE! is held at Madison Community Arts Center, 10 Kings Road, Madison, NJ. Free street parking. Refreshments available for purchase. $10 Members, $15 Non-Members (applicable day of event to membership), and $5 Students w/ID.

While NJJS is very grateful for program funding, in part, from Morris Arts and The Summit Foundation, the majority of our operat-
ing expenses and initiatives are financed by membership dues and donations.

The Board and I would like to thank all the donors who’ve supported our 2023 “YOU Make It All Possible” annual appeal campaign to date. So many of you are patrons who’ve generously supported our work year after year, and your commitment to NJJS has both sustained us through difficult times and fostered growth. We truly can’t do what we do without YOU!

If you haven’t yet contributed to this campaign, please consider helping NJJS continue its performance and educational initiatives by donating today either by mail, or anytime online at njjs.org. There’s a red “Make a Donation” button conveniently located on our home page for easy giving.

Would you like to maximize the impact of your gift? Many of you work for employers that have a matching gift program that will double the impact of your gift for free. Often, you just have to complete a simple form. Check with your Human Resources Department for further information.

You can also make a tax-efficient gift from your IRA today! Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), also known as IRA Charitable Rollovers, are the savviest way for individuals age 70½ or older to use their IRAs to maximize their charitable giving. Your IRA donation is a generous way to fulfill your required minimum distribution for the year. Gifts generated directly from your IRA will save you on taxes while helping NJJS fulfill its mission to promote and preserve jazz.

Please join me in thanking long-standing member Tom Salvas for his many years of service and videography expertise with NJJS. Tom will remain a devoted member, but has need to “resign” from his LIVE! filming tasks. We’re very saddened to have him leave this post, but know he has wonderful grandchildren and other projects that need his time and attention. Tom, you and your work will be sorely missed.

Do you—or someone you know—have time and videography skills that you’d like to share with NJJS? If yes, please contact me at pres@njjs.org.

Just a reminder: If you’re not already on the NJJS eBlast list you should be. Be assured, we do NOT sell or share our lists with 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 at njjs.org.

“If music be the food of love, play on.”
—William Shakespeare

Celebrate Mardi Gras at the Bickford Theater at the Morris Museum Sunday, February 11, 3:00 p.m. This lively and joyous concert will feature Thaddeus Exposé/bass & vocals, along with the Gumbo Players. Please visit morris-museum.org for details and tickets.

Celebrate Valentine’s Day at a Special Event! The Kate Baker Quartet presents “It’s All About Love” in the “Speakeasy” atmosphere of the Parlor at Hailey’s. Presented by Hailey’s Harp & Pub with music organized by Friends of Metuchen Arts/Metuchen J azz. February 14, 7-9 p.m. Two sets of music, $25/ticket and $20 food/drink minimum, full dining menu. 15 Station Place, Metuchen, NJ. Doors open at 6 p.m.. For tickets: https://bit.ly/42eXE53
FEATURING
Lance Bryant Trio
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4  3:00 PM
Madison Community Arts Center
10 KINGS ROAD, MADISON, NJ
FREE STREET PARKING ON KINGS ROAD
$10 MEMBERS | $15 NON-MEMBERS
$5 STUDENTS (WITH VALID I.D.)
Rutgers Jazz Lab Big Band to Perform Duke Ellington’s *Black, Brown, and Beige*

When Duke Ellington and his orchestra premiered his extended work about African-American history, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, on January 23, 1943, at Carnegie Hall, it received mixed reviews, as critics (all white men) were confused by the combination of elements from both classical music and jazz.

Dr. Anthony Branker, a member of the Jazz Studies faculty at Rutgers’ Mason Gross School of the Arts, points out that Ellington, as early as 1931, rebutted critics who compared him to classical impressionists such as Delius and Ravel. Ellington wrote, “My men and my race are the inspiration of my work. I try to catch the character and mood, and feeling of my people. The music of my race is something more than the American idiom. It is the result of our transplantation to American soil and was our reaction, in plantation days, to the life we lived. What we could not say openly, we expressed in the music …”

On Wednesday, February 28, the Rutgers University Jazz Lab Big Band, directed by Branker, will perform *Black, Brown, and Beige* at the New Brunswick Performing Arts Center. “I believe the most rewarding part of this experience for the students,” Branker said, “is having the opportunity to immerse themselves in the unique performance practices associated with the Ellington Orchestra and experiencing firsthand the depth and beauty of Edward Kennedy ‘Duke’ Ellington the conceptualist, who, as a writer, was responsible for creating a compositional and arranging paradigm that would have a profound effect on the jazz language.

“Billy Strayhorn,” Branker continued, “often spoke about Duke’s practice of capitalizing on the unique musical personalities in his ensembles. So, it has been exciting to hear the students, who are now stepping into these roles and taking on those personalities, while still adding their sense of musical self. Of special note regarding our own student musicians would be the wonderful work of our entire trumpet section led by Charlie Baxter, baritone saxophonist Tristan Voitcu, trombonist Kyle Courter, and pianist Jacob Hurlock, to name a few.”

*Black, Brown, and Beige*, Branker said, “is a beautifully written and powerful work that has not been fully appreciated or understood, largely because there have been few opportunities to hear performances of the entire work and few commercially available recordings. Those that come to mind include The Duke Ellington Carnegie Hall Concerts, January 1943, the premiere performance of the work, as well as Black, Brown, and Beige by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra led by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, which was released in 2020.”

The Rutgers Jazz Lab Big Band, Branker explained, “seeks to educate and expose both students and the community to the artistic and historical significance of jazz by presenting repertoire that is representative of the wide spectrum of styles and conceptual approaches found throughout the music’s evolution.” At this season’s final concert on April 17, the JLBB will feature Branker’s own big band music with two special guests: Mason Gross faculty members, tenor saxophonist Abraham Burton and trumpeter Alex Norris.

The Jazz Lab Band performance of *Black, Brown, and Beige* will be held from 7:30-9 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28. For more information or to order tickets, log onto nbpac.org or call 732.745-8000.
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.

Visit www.njjs.org or email info@njjs.org for more information on our programs and services.
Tenor saxophonist, arranger, and educator Lance Bryant moved to New York City in the mid-1980s after studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston. In 1990, Bryant began a decade-long relationship with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, eventually becoming the band’s Musical Director and Principal Arranger.

During his career, Bryant has performed with vocalists Phyllis Hyman and Jon Hendricks and pianist James Williams, among many others. He has been an onstage musician for such Broadway shows as Swing!, After Midnight, and Shuffle Along, and one Monday night a month, he leads his own big band at Newark’s Clements Place.

On Sunday afternoon, February 4, Bryant, now a resident of Cedar Grove, NJ, will bring a trio to the New Jersey Jazz Society’s Jersey Jazz Live! concert at the Madison (NJ) Community Arts Center. He will be joined by bassist Tom DiCarlo and pianist James Austin, Jr.

In celebration of Black History Month, the trio, according to Bryant, will be playing “some classic pieces that defined some of the jazz styles throughout the decades of the music. We’ll also perform pieces showing how some of the iconic artists musically dealt with social justice.” Selections could include Lil Hardin Armstrong’s “Struttin With Some

Lance Bryant Trio to Celebrate Black History Month with Jazz Classics and ‘Social Justice’ Songs
Barbeque”, John Coltrane’s “Alabama”, and Abel Meeropol’s “Strange Fruit”, recorded by Billie Holiday in 1939.

In addition to his performing and arranging activities, Bryant serves on the faculty of three New Jersey jazz education programs—Jazz House Kids, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center’s Jazz for Teens, and the New Jersey Youth Symphony’s jazz curricula. He will be participating in two additional Black History concerts at the Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway, NJ, later this month. On February 22, he will be playing with the Bob DeVos Quartet and on February 25, he will be a special guest at the NJ Youth Symphony’s Black History Month Celebration.

DiCarlo has performed and/or recorded with many world-renowned musicians including trumpeter Claudio Roditi, tenor saxophonist/flutist Don Braden, and tenor saxophonist Houston Person, to name a few. He was selected by the U.S. State Department and Jazz at Lincoln Center to conduct educational workshops, masterclasses, and performances in Southeast Asia and had the honor of touring with the Mark Sherman/Tim Horner quartet throughout South Korea, China, Russia, and the Philippines. DiCarlo is an Adjunct Professor of Theory Lab, Director of Jazz Combo and Double Bass at Lafayette College in Easton, PA.

Austin, J. R., originally from Chicago and now a resident of Cliffside Park, NJ, studied under jazz legend Barry Harris. He currently directs NJPAC’s Jazz Jam series at Clements Place. When AllAboutJazz’s Geannine Reid reviewed his JCA Records album, Songs in the Key of Wonder, she described him as “an accomplished pianist and bandleader who honed his craft under the tutelage of a number of legendary musicians.”

The Lance Bryant Trio will be preceded by a Rising Stars opening act led by trumpeter Jacob Tolentino, who was the Rising Star in the November 2023 issue of Jersey Jazz. Tolentino, a resident of Roselle Park, NJ, was a member of the 2023 All-State Jazz Ensemble that performed at the TD James Moody Jazz Festival. In the spring of 2022, he was part of the Newark Academy band that competed as a finalist in Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Essentially Ellington competition. And, in February 2023, Tolentino was named an Outstanding Soloist at the Charles Mingus High School Competition & Festival, held at The New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York. Last summer, he was selected as one of 10 trumpet players in a nationwide audition process to be invited to Jazz at Lincoln Center’s prestigious Summer Jazz Academy.

The Madison Community Arts Center is located at 10 Kings Road in Madison, NJ. The Jersey Jazz LIVE! concerts will begin at 3 p.m. Admission will be $10 for NJJS members and $15 for non-members. Student admission is $5 with valid ID. There will be light refreshments for purchase. To order tickets in advance, log onto https://madisonarts.ticketleap.com/jersey-jazz-live-02-04-24.

Funding for Jersey Jazz Live! has been made possible, in part, by funds from Morris Arts through the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of The National Endowment for the Arts. This program is also proudly supported by a grant from The Summit Foundation.
KEAN STAGE

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Jubilee- 30 Years of Mnozil Brass
SATURDAY, MARCH 2 @ 7:30 P.M.

MAR 2

ENLOW RECITAL HALL
Aaron Diehl Trio
SATURDAY, MARCH 9 @ 7:30 P.M.

WILKINS THEATRE
Drum Tao 30th Anniversary: THE TAO 夢幻響
FRIDAY, MARCH 22 @ 7:30 P.M.

MAR 22

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One of the most talented and influential saxophonists of modern jazz, Sonny Stitt, nonetheless, existed in the shadow of Charlie Parker for most of his career. The first sentences of liner notes from two important posthumous compilations of his recordings allude to the problems that he confronted: “I’m no Bird, Man ... Nobody’s Bird. Bird died.” (Zan Stewart, The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions, Mosaic Records, 2001).

When is Sonny Stitt going to get his props?” (Harvey Pekar, Stitt’s Bits: The Bebop Recordings, 1949-1952, Concord Music, 2006).

In 1965, Stitt presented a lengthy rebuttal to the accusation that he was a Bird imitator in an interview with the English journalist Les Tomkins entitled “Sonny Strikes Back” (Cre scendo, January 1965, p. 29-30).

Stitt was a few years younger than Parker, but both emerged, on record at least, in the mid-1940s, with similar stylistic approaches on alto saxophone. Comparisons of the two...
innovators, therefore, were inevitable, as was the question of who influenced whom, the answer usually favoring Bird. In retrospect, analysis of Stitt's conception and time feeling reveal notable differences from those of Parker, who was more willing to experiment. Stitt was a master of solo construction and note-spacing that created intense swing, but has been criticized for playing in a somewhat formulaic manner. Either by fate or design, the two titans never recorded together.

Another divergence was Stitt’s extensive utilization of the tenor saxophone and, sometimes, baritone saxophone as part of his armamentarium. While Parker did play tenor, there exist only two studio recording sessions where he is heard on that horn, both under the leadership of trumpeter Miles Davis.

None other than John Coltrane had the following to say about Stitt: “Stitt’s tenor style was much different from his alto sax approach. He sounded something between Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray, an outgrowth of both of them. All the time, I thought I had been looking for something, and then I heard Sonny [Stitt] and said ‘Damn! There it is! That’s it!’” (from Lewis Porter, Michael Ullman and Ed Hazell, Jazz from its Origins to the Present, Prentice-Hall: 1992).

Stitt was born Edward Hammond Boatner, J r. on February 2, 1924, in Boston, but raised in Saginaw, MI, by his mother Claudine, a piano and organ teacher, and stepfather Robert Stitt, a nightclub owner. His father, Edward Boatner, was a professor of music, and his brother Clif ord, a concert pianist. A sister, Adelaide, was a singer, so music surrounded him in his early years. He studied piano starting at the age of seven, but later switched to clarinet and then alto saxophone.

Never finishing high school, Stitt began his professional career while still a teenager, touring with a band that also included trumpeter Thad Jones and saxophonist Big Nick Nicholas. After a stint with the Sabby Lewis Orchestra in Boston, he joined Claude Trenier and the Bama State Collegians, which brought him to New York City in 1943. It was there that he attended sessions at many of the clubs, including Minton’s Playhouse, where bebop was being formulated.

In the summer of 1943, Stitt joined the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, a blues-oriented ensemble that provided early experience and exposure to many stalwarts of modern jazz. His very first recordings were made with Bradshaw for the Regis label in 1944, and it was during a tour with the band that Stitt first met and participated in a jam session with Charlie Parker in Kansas City. Moving on to the Billy Eckstine band in 1945, Stitt now found himself in a dynamic incubator, amongst some of the original bebop originators and musicians with whom he would establish significant relationships. These included trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, and Miles Davis; and saxophonists Budd Johnson, Dexter Gordon, Gene Ammons, Leo Parker, and Cecil Payne.

On alto saxophone, Stitt was involved in a number of recording sessions that were instrumental in defining
The new genre called bebop. These include the Dizzy Gillespie sextet session for Musicraft on May 15, 1946, Kenny Clarke and His 52nd Street Boys (nonet) on September 5, 1946, for the French Swing label, and the Fats Navarro/Gil Fuller Modernists (octet) the very next day for Savoy Records. Quintet sessions (The Bebop Boys) led by Stitt himself, again for Savoy, on August 23, 1946 featured trumpeter Kenny Dorham and pianist Bud Powell. All of these recordings solidified Stitt’s status as one of the most important bebop exponents of the 1940s.

Another classic recording of the bebop era was a quintet session led by trombonist J.J. Johnson for Prestige Records on October 17, 1949, which gave us the first examples of Stitt’s tenor saxophone approach. From then on, partly in an effort to escape the inevitable comparisons with Bird, the tenor would become an important part of Stitt’s substantial legacy. In 1950, he teamed up with Gene Ammons to produce several recordings and performances that revisited the “tenor battle,” a crowd-pleasing, competitive event. Stitt enjoyed the challenge of facing off with other saxophonists, and, thanks to his incredible technique and creativity, usually came out on top. Besides Ammons, there are live and recorded pairings with Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis, Paul Gonsalves, Ronnie Scott, Booker Ervin, Zoot Sims, and Red Holloway.

It is also important to mention three of the albums Stitt made under the leadership of Dizzy Gillespie for Verve Records. For Musicians Only (1956) features Stitt on alto sax and Stan Getz on tenor tearing through four uptempo titles with incredible facility. From 1957, Dizzy Gillespie Duets and Sonny Side Up both feature Sonny Rollins on tenor with Stitt on alto and tenor. The extended solos on these albums proved very influential in defining the future of jazz saxophone, as bebop transitioned to hard bop in the late 1950s.

Stitt often participated in Jazz at the Philharmonic tours and, in 1960, joined Miles Davis’ quintet, briefly replacing John Coltrane. It has been reported that Stitt’s heavy drinking contributed to the trumpeter’s decision to move on to Hank Mobley, George Coleman, and, ultimately, Wayne Shorter.

A brief period with Atlantic Records produced two fine albums: Sonny Stitt and the Top Brass (1962) and Stitt Plays Bird (1963), the latter a tribute to Parker with the leader on alto sax throughout. In 1966 and 1967,
Stitt experimented with the Vari-tone, a microphone substitute with special effects capabilities that was also employed by Eddie Harris, Lou Donaldson, and Michael Brecker.

Stitt never really led a touring ensemble, but throughout his career, he was always performing, often with local musicians. He acquired the nickname “Lone Wolf” because of his solitary travels throughout the world. This continued through the 1970s, a time when he contributed to some excellent recordings such as The Giants of Jazz (Atlantic, 1971) and The Bop Session (Sonet Records, 1975), both reunions with Gillespie, the former also featuring Thelonious Monk. And of great interest from this period is a very recent release of a live appearance in 1973, at The Famous Ballroom in Baltimore (Boppin’ in Baltimore—Live at the Left Bank, Jazz Detective, 2023).

His last recording took place in June 1982 for the Muse label (The Last Sessions, Vol. 1 & 2, 1983—Volume 1 was nominated for two Grammys in 1984). A heavy drinker with a history of abuse of other substances, he was diagnosed with cancer and died on July 22, 1982, in Washington, DC, at the age of 58.

As we observe the 100th anniversary of his birth, the magnitude of Sonny Stitt’s legacy cannot be overlooked. Throughout a career lasting almost 40 years, Stitt recorded more than 100 albums as a leader or co-leader for both foreign and domestic labels. His playing, especially on tenor saxophone, was enormously influential, due, in large part, to its accessibility and his technical skill. He may have labored in Bird’s shadow, but in the end, proved himself to be one of the most important saxophonists in jazz history.

Noal Cohen is an author, musician, jazz researcher, and discographer based in Montclair, NJ.

Some Thoughts about Sonny Stitt
BY SAXOPHONIST BOB MOVER

I would say that Stitt affected me in the sense that you couldn’t be a saxophone player and not be impressed by the cleanliness of it, the precision, all the wonderful qualities that he had, the soul, the feeling, and all of that. But I was much more influenced by Charlie Parker. “[Stitt] was not cloning Charlie Parker. He was, along with Bird, one of the first to kind of turn into the modern style: a slower vibrato, a little different articulation than Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter and some of the jump alto players like Pete Brown and Tab Smith, those guys. I think that I heard more Lester Young in Stitt’s tenor playing than in his alto playing.

“He did influence me to play the instrument really clean, understanding what you’re doing, leaving no room for doubt. Nothing vague about Stitt. Harmonically, when he plays a change [chord progression], you know exactly what change he’s playing and this kind of thing. But he was very diatonic. He used a lot of notes of the scale thing where Bird tended to use a few more neighbor notes and passing tones and chromatics in his lines.

“Each chord change that he played was a little composition. What he liked to do was play a phrase that was melodic and answer it with something that could comment about it. So he’s answering it with some kind of double time phrase. And he does that technique a lot. He has certain devices that he does a lot and that are certain kind of compositional devices of paraphrase. And that may have something to do with his coming from a classical background and playing classical piano.”

Comments were made in a Zoom interview by Noal Cohen in September 2023.
The New Jersey Jazz Society is pleased to announce the 2024 Juried Scholarship Competition. This competition will award two $1000 prizes and two $500 prizes in two categories: Jazz Performance & Original Composition. The competition is open to all New Jersey college students currently enrolled in a college undergraduate music program, as well as to New Jersey residents currently enrolled in an out of state college undergraduate program. Proof of residency required. Along with the cash award, winners will receive guidance, mentorship and the opportunity to perform with an industry professional, and coverage in Jersey Jazz.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE:** Friday, March 29, 2024, 11:59 PM Eastern Time

Visit njjs.org/Education/ScholarshipProgram for details.

This competition is generously supported by NAN HUGHES POOLE and CYNTHIA FEKETIE.
The Duke Ellington Orchestra opened at the Cotton Club in December 1927 and stayed for almost four years. That long-term residency during the Harlem Renaissance made Ellington New York’s most celebrated Black bandleader. In 2013, the musical revue, After Midnight, premiered on Broadway, celebrating Ellington’s years at the Cotton Club and featuring 17 musicians selected by Jazz at Lincoln Center Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis. On January 31, the first production of After Midnight in the New York/New Jersey area, since its Broadway run, opened at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, NJ. The musicians, all Black, were selected by pianist Sean Mayes, who is the production’s Music Director.

“We were really excited at the notion of being able to do this at Paper Mill,” he said, “with an all-Black cast and an all-Black band to pay homage to the past but also to acknowledge...
and stay in the present. How do we exist as Black artists replicating what came before us?” The show is running through February 25, and, although it wasn’t intentional, Mayes acknowledged the serendipity of performing it during Black History Month.

When The New York Times’ Charles Isherwood reviewed the 2013 production, he wrote, “I mean no disrespect to the superabundance of talented performers in this jubilant show when I say that they are all playing second fiddle, if you will, to the main attraction. This would be the musicians called the Jazz at Lincoln Center All-Stars, stacked in a bandstand at the back of the stage.” So, recruiting the musicians for the Millburn production, Mayes said, was critically important. They had to be “musicians who have the sort of vast experience—not only of styles of jazz but also obviously a different range of musical talents that lend itself to being able to play and groove and make this kind of music sound as authentic as possible, being able to play off the page. It’s a real wide range of people—some who play a lot of theater but are from the jazz world.”

The band consists of three horns, plus the rhythm section: M. Ayers on piano, Jordyn Davis on bass, Steven Jackson on drums, Tru Born (aka Anthony Michael Peterson) on guitar, Raymond Johnston on alto saxophone, Siya Charles on trombone, and Jackie Coleman on trumpet.

Originally from Toronto, M. Ayers has served as Conductor of two Tony Award-winning Broadway productions, MJ: The Musical and Hadestown; he conducted the American Pops Orchestra in Black Broadway: A Proud History, a Limitless Future, a national television show on the Public Broadcasting System; and he was Music Director, Orchestrator, and Arranger for an Evening with Duke Ellington and friends at the Cotton Club.
Andre DeShields with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in 2021. (De Shields was in the original Broadway cast of Ain’t Misbehavin’ in 1978).

Davis, from Detroit, was the first Michigan State University student to receive a Bachelor’s Degree in Music Composition and Jazz Studies concurrently. She has performed with several leading jazz artists including trombonist Michael Dease (an MSU faculty member), trombonist Wyckliffe Gordon, and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen. She is also the leader of her own band, Jordyn Davis & Composetheway.

Mayes referred to drummer Jackson as “a Berklee cat” because he studied at the Berklee College of Music. “He does a lot of theater here in the city,” Mayes added, “but doesn’t necessarily get the opportunity to do jazz gigs all the time.”

Tru Born is a multi-faceted guitarist comfortable in many different genres in addition to jazz. For example, he has toured with Joan Baez as well as vocalists Cassandra Wilson and Lizz Wright. He has performed with pianist Michele Rosewoman and saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, among others. Trumpeter Jackie Coleman is also a versatile artist, having performed with hip hop artists Wu-tang Clan and the indie rock band, Bright Eyes, as well as with jazz vocalist Ledisi. However, her closest connection to After Midnight was performing with Fantasia, one of the rotating leads during its Broadway run.

Johnston also studied at Berklee, and his bio describes him as “a consummate sideman, bandleader, woodwind specialist, instrumental music teacher, and composer.” He spent 27 years as a U.S. Army bandsman, has played with guitarist “King” Solomon Hicks, trombonist Steve Turre, drummer Ali Ryerson, and has toured with the Count Basie Orchestra. He

Bassist Jordyn Davis was the first Michigan State student to receive a Bachelor's Degree in Music Composition and Jazz Studies concurrently.
was in the band for Broadway’s Shuffe Along and spent 13 years with the Cotton Club All Stars Band.

Trombonist Siya Charles left Cape Town, South Africa, and came to New York in January 2022 when she was invited by Juilliard to audition as part of the admission process. In February, she was accepted and began her studies in September. “To be honest,” she said, “I always thought that Juilliard was out of my league. As a kid, I used to hear about the school in Hollywood movies. One of the jazz greats, Miles Davis, studied there during his youth, so there has always been an air of prestige around the school. I didn’t think I had what it took to make it there. But I decided to take the chance. I am thrilled it has all worked out, even though I wasn’t expecting it to.”

The Broadway production of After Midnight had 25 songs, and all 25 will be performed in a streamlined version of the show at the Paper Mill. “As a creative team,” Mayes said, “Dominique (Co-Director and Choreographer Dominique Kelley) and Jen (Co-Director and Paper Mill Associate Artistic Director Jen Bender) and I have had a lot of conversations with Jack Viertel (a major Broadway producer who conceived the original production). He was really pretty instrumental in helping to get the production streamlined. It’s a reduction. There are seven players in the band compared to 17, and the cast is reduced to 10 (from 25 singers, dancers, and actors). It’s a much smaller compact version, but with the same music. It’s 90 minutes with no intermission, so you’re really going to get to go along for the ride. The text is all Langston Hughes’ text and his poetry. That’s sort of the dramatic device that’s borrowed in order to weave the music and a story together.

“When you think about musicals like this,” he continued, “the music drives it, the music pays homage to
the time, but we’re also going to have some really great dancing. It’s sort of billed as the music of Ellington. I think a more apt way of describing it would be the music of Ellington and his contemporaries. There’s a lot of music by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields—interplay between Black performance and white composition. There’s also music by Cab Calloway.”

There are a dozen Ellington compositions in After Midnight including “Black and Tan Fantasy”, “Creole Love Call”, and “It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing”. Cab Calloway is represented by “Zaz Zuh Zaz”. McHugh/Fields tunes include “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love”, “Diga Diga Doo”, and “On the Sunny Side of the Street”. There is also music from the white songwriting team of Ted Koehler and Harold Arlen such as “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” and “I’ve Got the World on a String”.

“In the theater,” Mayes said, “we’re always revisiting, retelling these stories about Harlem and about the Harlem Renaissance. It’s fascinating to look at that timeline. People look at the ’20s and ’30s as the maturation of Black theater and Black art. The great thing with the production at Paper Mill is we’re so lucky to have access to New York’s best.”

As charismatic as the memory of the Harlem Renaissance was, people often forget that two of the most popular clubs—The Cotton Club and Connie’s Inn—presented Black entertainment for white audiences only. A third club—the Savoy Ballroom—was enjoyed equally by Black and white dancers. Lindy Hop legend Frankie Manning once recalled a night when someone came over to him at the Savoy Ballroom and said, ‘Hey man, Clark Gable just walked in the house.’ Somebody else said, ‘Oh, yeah, can he dance?’
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In September 2023, when tenor saxophonist Joshua Redman released his first album on the Blue Note label, Where We Are, Frank Alkyer of DownBeat described it as “a confessional about America, one full of hopes and dreams, but also reality and confusion, and love, and loss.”

Redman will be appearing at the Count Basie Center for the Arts’ Vogel Theater in Red Bank on February 9 and will be playing selections from Where We Are. The concept behind the album, he said, was that each tune is connected to places in America, adding a thematic layer and providing a cohesive and narrative-driven musical experience. Where We Are also introduces a new dimension to Redman’s discography as it features a vocalist for the first time—Gabrielle Cavassa, who will be joining him in concert.

“I can’t sing,” he explained, “but I try to sing through the horn. Until now, I’ve been the prime melodic voice generally, and I finally had the courage to relinquish that role. The project started during the pandemic. It began at a time when I was basically doing nothing musically. I was thinking about doing something with a vocalist for a long time. I got a text from my manager, who was in New Orleans at an event. The text said, ‘I’m sitting here, and this vocalist is performing, and she’s absolutely riveting. You’ve got to check her out.’

“So, I started to check out Gabrielle’s music; there’s something uniquely compelling and captivating about her. Her sound, her style, and her expression; and I was kind of drawn into it. Then we started talking about making an album.” Redman suggested picking songs connected to American locations. The result: “All the songs are connected conceptually, intellectually, and emotionally.” (Cavassa was a co-winner of the 2020 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Award.)
Vocal Competition and a Jersey Jazz Rising Star in July/August 2021).

One of the more fascinating pieces on the album was Redman’s blending of the Frank Perkins/Mitchell Parish standard, “Stars Fell on Alabama” with John Coltrane’s “Alabama”. “‘Stars Fell on Alabama’,” he said, “was a song that we settled on early, jazz musicians often play these American Songbook tunes, these chestnuts. Many are nostalgic, romanticized, and optimistic, even if they’re sad songs. It’s a romantic idealism that is part of the American experience. It was important for me that we didn’t just represent that aspect of the American experience. I wanted to portray this juxtaposition of American idealism and romanticism versus the reality of American life and some of its great hardships.”

Redman wrote the song combination in response to the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL, in 1963. “It galvanized the civil rights movement in a lot of ways,” he pointed out. “I had that idea of this juxtaposition. ‘Stars Fell on Alabama’ is supposedly about a meteor shower that happened in the 1830s in Alabama. It’s very romanticized. It’s kind of a representation of a certain aspect of the beauty of the American South. I wanted to juxtapose that in connection with Coltrane’s ‘Alabama,’ a very different experience of the American South.

Asked about his take on Bruce Springsteen’s “Streets of Philadelphia”, Redman conceded that, “Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would ever cover a Bruce Springsteen song. I have always had the utmost love and respect for Bruce Springsteen. He’s almost a statesman, a cultural force, and an icon. I didn’t grow up in New Jersey, and I wouldn’t say he’s been one of my biggest influences outside of jazz. But when Gabrielle and I were talking about songs, I said, almost jokingly, that we could do ‘Streets of Philadelphia’.

“Gabrielle was somewhere in her car listening to music. She called or texted and said, ‘I’m in my car, and I heard just Streets of Philadelphia, and I’m crying. We should do the song.’ So, there was an emotional connection for her. She felt something with the song. So, I was like, okay. Then I went to work trying to find a way in which we might be able to bring it into our world and find a sort of meeting place between the world of improvised acoustic jazz and the world of Bruce Springsteen. I think it’s a prime example of a song I could
Joshua Redman's musical journey is uniquely fascinating. Born in Berkeley, CA, he is the son of legendary saxophonist Dewey Redman and dancer Renee Shedroff. Raised by his mother, Redman was exposed to a diverse range of music and arts from an early age. Initially starting on the clarinet, he transitioned to the tenor saxophone, which ultimately became his primary instrument.

Despite his passion for music, Redman didn’t initially envision a career in the field after high school. Instead, he pursued higher education at Harvard University, where he earned a degree in Social Studies, achieving the impressive feat of graduating summa cum laude in 1991. Following this academic success, he enrolled in Yale Law School, indicating a potential future in law. However, destiny had other plans.

“I graduated from Harvard in June of 1991 and moved to New York right after,” Redman recalled. “It was a last-minute decision. I was accepted to law school and decided to take a year’s deferment. I wasn’t sure where I was going to go. There was a house in Brooklyn with a bunch of musicians I had met when I was in the Boston area. And they were like, ‘Come down, sleep in the living room. We need help with the rent.’ So, I moved into that house and was just around music for the first time. Cats were practicing all the time, and there were jam sessions there all the time. Brooklyn was a real nexus for the young jazz community. So many musicians from my generation were living in the area, and I was going out to clubs and listening to music all the time, starting to work around town.”

One of Redman’s most cherished memories from that period involves creating music alongside his father, Dewey Redman. This experience allowed them to bond and forge a connection that was absent during Josh’s youth.

“My father started hiring me,” he said. “I played with him at the Vanguard that summer. My father had moved to New York, sometime in 1968, and I was born in 1969, so he was already living in New York then.”

“Having to play after my father every night was an experience.”
I was raised solely by my mom and really didn’t know my father. I knew his music well, but I didn’t know him well. I saw him maybe 10 times growing up when he would come to town and play. The irony is my mom was like, “Yes, play music,” and my father was like, “You’re crazy,” but it makes sense, right, because he was living the musician’s life.

“I’m biased,” he acknowledged, “but he’s one of the great tenor saxophonists in jazz. He had the utmost respect and admiration of his peers. He was a musician the community held in such high regard and esteem, yet he always struggled to make ends meet. I remember the first time I saw him at his apartment in Brooklyn. He said, ‘Hey, hang on. I’ll be back.’ He was gone for an hour and a half, and he came back, and he had a saxophone with him, and I was like, ‘Where’d you go?’ He said, ‘I had to get my saxophone out of the pawn shop.’ He would go on the road and make a little bread, then get off the road, and he would have to put his horn in the pawn shop to literally buy bread. He would only play the music that he wanted to play. He would never do something that he didn’t believe in 100 per cent musically; and he probably paid an economic price for that. He was highly educated. He was a teacher, but he chose to leave Texas, move to San Francisco, and drive a cab so he could play music.”

When Joshua Redman started playing with his father, he was young, and, in his words, “I could get around the horn. I had a certain flow, and I could form ideas quickly. I could kind of tell an interesting story as an improviser. Having to play after my father every night was an experience. He played with great depth and weight. The power of his sound and the love, the beauty, the angst, the anguish, the poignancy, the strength, the vulnerability, everything in his sound and the quality of expression amazed me. Whatever I played after him, I felt my playing was like cheap sprinkles you put on ice cream. That time was a great source of inspiration and revelation.”

Redman’s first tour without his father was in September 1991 with pianist Geof Keezer. “Things were just starting to happen,” he said. “I was beginning to make my rent and could buy a couple of slices of pizza at night, and that’s all I needed. I was like, wow! I’m doing this, playing with the greatest musicians in the world, and I can support myself. I started getting calls from older musicians like Charlie Haden and Jack DeJohnette and doing tours with them. Then, on a whim, I entered and won the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition in 1991.”
That swiftly propelled his career. He signed with Warner Brothers Records and released his debut self-titled album in 1993, which received significant acclaim. The album’s success was evident as it reached Number 3 on the Traditional Jazz Charts. The momentum continued with subsequent albums on the WB label. Wish (1993), MoodSwing (1994), and Freedom in the Groove (1996), among others, reached top positions on the charts and achieved substantial sales.

“I was, and I’m still surprised by it (early success). I still thought I was going to go to law school. So it didn’t even feel like a gamble; there was a certain kind of nonchalance to it all. Maybe some of that is youthful ignorance. Making music has always been fun for me. It was never this thing that I was serious about. Don’t get me wrong. I’m very serious about it now, but music was always my escape. I didn’t plan to do this. I didn’t really work hard to make it a career early on. I loved the music and listened deeply to it, but it’s always been like, let’s have some fun. Yeah, let’s make a record!”

When asked to summarize his musical journey, Redman said, “I just feel super lucky, fortunate. I am grateful to be able to do this for so long and to do it with some of the best to have ever done it. I’m still having fun.” When jokingly asked if law school was in his future, he laughed and said, “Oh God no, there’s no way I can imagine doing anything else with my life.”

The Joshua Redman/Gabrielle Cavassa concert begins at 7 p.m. on Friday, February 9. For more information or to order tickets, log onto thebasie.org or call (732) 842-9000.

Check out Jay’s podcast “30 Albums For 30 Years (1964-1994)” to hear the full interview with Joshua Redman.

For the complete performance schedule, visit grunincenter.org.

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Tyler Bullock began taking classical piano lessons in his hometown of Nashville when he was four years old. Eight years later, he discovered jazz through an organization called the Nashville Jazz Workshop. "It’s kind of similar to Jazz House Kids," he said. "They have classes and summer camps. It was a summer camp I went to, and that just opened up the world to me."

Lori Mechem, Founder and Director of Education at NJW, remembered that Bullock "was so curious and eager to learn. No matter what song I would give him, he would come back with it memorized and playing it very well! He became our ‘house pianist’—meaning that he went through all of the ensemble classes. Tyler was awarded with the Billy Strayhorn scholarship for our Jazz Camp his senior year in high school, and he was in our Scholarship Lesson program, which provided him private lessons during his entire high school years. Honestly, in all of my 40 years of teaching, Tyler was one of the..."
most devoted, dedicated, hard-working piano students I ever had.”

In his senior year of high school, Bullock was one of 24 high school students, out of hundreds of applicants, accepted into Carnegie Hall’s 2021 NYO Jazz Orchestra. “Covid was still going on,” he recalled, “and we were on the SUNY Purchase campus. Normally, NYO tours somewhere. We didn’t get to tour, but we made an album. It was just such a beautiful experience with all the people I met. And, Sean Jones (trumpeter and Artistic Director) is an incredible mentor and teacher.”

On Sunday, February 4, Jones will be leading an NYO All-Star Quartet at a Carnegie Hall ‘Well Being’ concert featuring Bullock on piano, Ryoma Takenaga on bass, and Domo Branch on drums. Takenaga, a previous Jersey Jazz Rising Star, from New Providence, NJ, was also in the 2021 NYO Orchestra. Branch was a member of the inaugural orchestra in 2018. J ones described Bullock as “a fantastic young musician. Tyler is a natural born leader. I’m very thankful for being a part of his earlier career at NYO.” The February 4th concert, he added, “is going to be largely around healing—overall well being through connectiveness spiritually. There will be moments where the crowd will be asked to participate.”

An important mentor to Bullock in his freshman year at Juilliard was alto saxophonist Bruce Williams who has installed him in the piano seat of the Roy Hargrove Big Band, which played at the South Orange Performing Arts Center on January 18 (Jersey Jazz January 2024 cover story). During the summer of 2022, Williams invited Bullock to join him on some New Jersey gigs, “and then other players started hiring him.” Among them were drummers Willie Jones III, Alvester Garnett, and Joe Farnsworth. “He was so receptive to suggestions from my sidemen—Willie Jones and (guitarist) Saul Rubin.” Williams also took Bullock with him
to play at a memorial concert for the late pianist Stanley Cowell, held in Maryland by Cowell’s widow, Sylvia.

Currently, the 20-year-old Bullock is in his third year at Juilliard. “When I was in my junior year of high school,” he recalled, “we came up to New York to look at some schools. I took a lesson with the late Frank Kimbrough. He was really great and kind. I really wanted to go to school in New York, and I felt Juilliard had the most of what I was looking for.”

Bullock plans to stay in New York after he graduates from Juilliard in 2025 and has already played four times at Mezzrow in Greenwich Village. When he first started playing piano the artists who inspired him were Oscar Peterson and Bill Evans. “As I got deeper into it,” he added, “I still loved them, but Herbie Hancock became a massive influence, along with Bud Powell, Art Tatum, and Phineas Newborn.”

The applications deadline for the 2024 Carnegie Hall NYO Orchestra was January 12, and Sean Jones, Artistic Director, said the pre-screening process will take place this month. Then, “We’ll all get together at the beginning of March. Over the course of two days, we’ll select the band, and the announcement will be made sometime in March.”

“We do our best,” he continued, “to think about musicianship first, but we also look at it through the lens of diversity—all types, not just gender diversity but ethnic diversity and economic diversity. We want to make sure the musicians are at the highest level, but we also want to make sure the band represents as much of America as we possibly can. It’s important for us—the older generation and leaders in the music—to continue to create spaces where young people can express themselves, grow, and be mentors just like the Art Blakeys, Horace Silvers, and Betty Carters of the day.”
In 2006, Mark Rabideau’s second grade son, Luke, was preparing a school report for Black History Month. “I’m going to do something on Harriet Tubman,” he told his father. But, the night before, Rabideau had interviewed trumpeter Dr. Eddie Henderson at the New York jazz club, Smoke, for a Lancaster, PA, radio station, and he had another suggestion. “I said, ‘Maybe somebody else is going to cover the Harriet Tubman angle. Let me tell you about a gentleman I just met.’ And then I shared a little bit about Eddie’s story. So, Luke said, ‘Do you think I could get an interview with Dr. Henderson?’ Eddie agreed to do the interview, and we scripted all the questions. Then, Luke sprung one last question. ‘Hey, Dr. Henderson,’ he said, ‘I’ll be reading my report on Tuesday morning at Irving Elementary School (in Highland Park, NJ). Would you like to come play your trumpet?’ Eddie
agreed to do exactly that, and he became a close personal family friend."

Eighteen years later, Rabideau is telling Eddie’s story as producer of Dr. Eddie Henderson: Uncommon Genius, a 30-minute documentary that will be screened at Smoke on February 7 and will air on Public Broadcasting System TV stations throughout February.

That story is extraordinary. The 83-year-old Henderson was born in New York City to parents who were entertainers. His mother was a dancer at the original Cotton Club, and his father was a member of Billy Williams and the Charioteers, a singing group. When Henderson was only nine years old, he met Louis Armstrong. “He taught me how to make a sound on his mouthpiece,” he recalled in the documentary.

Shortly after that, Henderson’s father died, and five years later, his mother married a physician, resulting in a move to San Francisco, where Henderson studied classical trumpet at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. His interest in jazz was ignited after he went to San Francisco’s Blackhawk jazz club and saw the Miles Davis Sextet with tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, alto saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones. He also took up ice skating and became the first professional Black figure skater.

Then, influenced by his stepfather, after earning his BS in zoology at the University of California in Berkeley, he went to medical school at Howard University in Washington, DC, and became a psychiatrist. When he was in medical school, Henderson would study every night until around 9:15 and then go out to the DC clubs, sitting in when he could. Drummer Billy Hart, interviewed in the documentary, pointed out that when Henderson was in medical school, “he was practicing with Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard.”

Henderson returned to San Francisco to practice medicine, all the while continuing to sit in on jazz sessions. When trumpeter Woody Shaw left Herbie Hancock’s sextet, Hart, a member of the sextet, recommended Henderson as a replacement for a week. The week became a permanent gig, and when that happened, Hen-

“MUSIC IS LIKE THERAPY—IT PUTS ME AT EASE.”
Excerpt from the October 2023 issue of *Psychiatric News*

There are lots of musicians named “Doc”—Doc Severinson, Doc Pomus, Doc Cheatham, Doctor John the Night Tripper—but not too many are genuine M.D. doctors. Today, at 83, Eddie Henderson, M.D., is a master of the jazz trumpet, but he arrived at that peak with a detour through several side gigs, including psychiatry...

Eventually, Henderson was able to put down his stethoscope and make a full-time living with his horn. The path has taken him through 26 albums as a bandleader, dozens more working with musicians, and uncountable gigs in clubs and concert halls. He still fronts his own group and often joins an all-star band, The Cookers, on the road. He also passes along his experience to a younger generation of trumpeters as a member of the jazz faculty at Oberlin College’s Conservatory of Music.

Yet those long ago echoes of his life as a physician and a psychiatrist in training still resonate, just like the notes emanating from his trumpet over the years.

“I couldn’t be a good doctor unless I was healed, and music is the thing that heals me,” he said. “Music is like therapy—it puts me at ease with who I am. Then I can relate to other people and spread the joy.” —AARON LEVIN

Eddie Henderson playing with The Cookers. From left, George Cables, Billy Harper, David Weiss, Dr. Henderson, Donald Harrison, and Billy Hart.

Henderson said, “to heck with medicine.”

His reputation spread, and he started being hired by “all my heroes.” Those included saxophonists Joe Henderson (no relation), Dexter Gordon, and Jackie McLean; and drummers Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, and Roy Haynes.

The night of theSmoke screening, Henderson will perform with pianist George Cables and then participate in a brief talk session with Rabideau. The following four nights (February 8-11), the Eddie Henderson Quintet with Cables, alto saxophonist Donald Harrison, bassist Gerald Cannon, and drummer Lenny White will perform. Hart, Cables, Harrison, and drummer Mike Clark are interviewed in *Uncommon Genius*.
To produce the documentary, Rabideau partnered with a colleague, Michelle Bauer Carpenter, at the University of Colorado Denver's College of Arts and Media. Rabideau is Associate Dean for Faculty and Student Affairs and a Professor of Music; Carpenter is Chair of the Visual Arts Department and a Professor of Digital Design. “Michelle served as the Director of the documentary, and we built a team around that,” Rabideau said. “We were able to tap into some university funding to seed the project, and we’ve created an art exhibit about Eddie’s life, which will have its opening at 4 p.m. on February 1 at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts’ Experience Theater.” That night, Henderson will be performing at the Dazzle Denver jazz club.

The art exhibit, Rabideau said, will include photographs from Henderson’s life and “parts of the film we couldn’t squeeze into a 30-minute documentary.” Uncommon Genius will air twice in February on WNYE-TV, channel 25, in New York City—at 12:30 a.m. on February 8 and at 10 p.m. on February 17. WNYE-TV can be found on channel 22 on Optimum, 525 on Verizon Fios, 1025 on Comcast, and 25 on Spectrum, DirectTV, and RCN.

—SJ

PHOTO BY JIMMY KATZ
The Mercer Hassy Orchestra is a band of amateur musicians based in Sapporo, Japan, led by Mercer Hassy, an arranger who has a particular fondness for the music of Ellingtonia. This comes to full fruition on MHO’s third album, *Duke’s Place* (Mercer Hassy Records), a 12-tune program of songs from the Ellington oeuvre. The band is spot on in its delivery of Hassy’s arrangements, which give fresh interpretations of the material. The selections include “Daybreak Express,” “Satin Doll,” “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore,” “U.M.M.G.,” “I’m a Sentimental Mood,” “Hot and Bothered,” “Bakif,” “Passion Flower,” “Ape and Peacocks,” “Prelude to a Kiss,” “Duke’s Place,” and “Happy Go Lucky Local.” Hassy’s charts capture the swing and spirit of Ellington but take most of them for a joyful new ride. A visit to Duke’s Place is a delightful experience.

Total Currents: East Meets West (Chronograph Records - 109) by the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra features four selections, two each composed and arranged by Jill Townsend and Christine Jensen. They have created a suite comprising sound portraits of where they have lived with an emphasis on the waters surrounding them. Townsend’s early years were spent on the East Coast which she captures on “Inside the Wave.” The tide then shifts to Jensen’s later life in the East reflected in her “Crossing Lachine,” her musical impression of paddleboarding on the St. Lawrence River. Townsend then explores the sounds inspired by the water along the West Coast where she currently resides. The final movement, “Rock Skipping Under the Half Moon,” recalls Jensen’s earlier memories of rock skipping on the inlet in Sechelt, British Columbia. Their imaginative approach to this project is beautifully performed by the band. This is music for times of contemplation. Release date 2/2/2024.

Trombonist Marshall Gilkes spent four years as a member of the German WDR Big Band. *Life Songs* (Alternate Side Records – 017) is his third reunion with the band for a recording project. On this occasion, he serves as arranger and conductor as well as being featured on trombone. The program includes seven Gilkes originals plus “This Nearly Was Mine” and a traditional song, “All the Pretty Horses,” with a vocal by Sabeth Pérez. The songs were written to reflect various aspects of contemporary life as conceived by his musical imagination. While this is big band music, it is not mostly of the swinging variety, rather more for enjoyment as music for thinking rather than toe-tapping. Of note to NJJS members, the pianist on the session is Billy Test, a former NJJS scholarship recipient who distinguishes himself nicely in his solo interludes.

While most noted as a trumpeter in small groups, Jim Rotondi has had much experience playing in big bands. He has been anxious to record some of his compositions with a big band and strings. Rotondi, who currently resides in Graz, Austria, found a perfect partner to undertake his dream
project, Vienna-based trumpeter/composer/arranger Jakob Helling. Helling arranged 12 of Rotondi’s compositions, plus one of his own. Rotondi’s trumpet is featured with the Notes and Tones Jazz Orchestra plus, on six tracks, a string section augmented by a flute, oboe, bassoon, and horn. The highly listenable result is Finesse (Cellar Music – 040623). The music is eclectic, ranging from slow ballads to selections with a more spirited feeling. Rotondi is his usual fluent self, and he has some cohorts from his New York City days along for the musical ride with the solo presence of Dick Oatts on soprano sax and Steve Davis on trombone on one track each. Danny Grissett fills the piano chair in the big band. Rotondi’s dream setting for his compositions has been nicely realized on Finesse. Release date 2/9/2024. CellarMusicGroup.com

Standardized! (Consolidated Artist Publications – 1073) finds trombonist Eric Goletz fronting a band consisting of Henry Heinrich on guitar, Jim Ridl on piano, Brian Glassman on bass, Steve Johns on drums, and Joe Mowatt on percussion. Don Braden on soprano sax and Lajuan Carter on vocals contribute on some of the selections. There is also a six-piece string section on several tracks. Goletz, who also plays piano on three tracks, has been on the New York City scene for more than 30 years and shows here why he has been a first-call trombonist during his time in the Big Apple. He is a fluid player with an unerring talent for improvisation. The program is a mix of jazz tunes, Charlie Parker’s “Now’s the Time,” Horace Silver’s “Nutville,” ‘Jungle Juice’ and “Mayreh,” Tom Harrell’s “Train Shuff’er” and Stanley Turrentine’s “Sugar;” standards, “Just in Time,” “Caravan,” “Nature Boy,” “The Summer Knows,” “Summertime” and “The Windmills of Your Mind;” plus Stevie Wonder’s “Lately,” the last two having Person lovingly caressing the tunes with support from H and, while the other three are Freddie Hubbard’s “Little Sunflower” “One for My Baby” and Stevie Wonder’s “Lately,” the last two having Person lovingly caressing the tunes with support from H and, Janeway, Harvie S and Johns. Braden on tenor sax for six cuts, f; uke and soprano sax for one each is a consummate reed player. Allen graces seven of the 10 tracks with tasty and creative improvisations. Harvie S is one of those bass players who always finds the right notes, while Johns keeps things in a steady groove throughout. Blue Topaz, filled with well-conceived arrangements by H, is a welcoming listening experience from first note to last. WhalingCitySound.com

Take a superb guitarist like Peter Hand, put him in the company of primo jazzers like saxophonist Don Braden, trumpeter/flugelhornist Eddie Allen, pianists James Weidman or David Janeway, bassist Harvie S, and drummer Steve Johns; bring in the tenor sax magic of Houston Person for a couple of tracks, and you will get the kind of hip sounds that can be found on Blue Topaz (Whaling City Sound – 140). Seven of the nine selections are original tunes by H and, while the other three are Freddie Hubbard’s “Little Sunflower” “One for My Baby” and Stevie Wonder’s “Lately,” the last two having Person lovingly caressing

WhalingCitySound.com
The piano of Michael Costantino has been a presence on the New Jersey jazz scene for many decades. He has been an instructor at the Newark School of the Arts for almost 30 years. His years of experience are reflected in the imaginative way in which he addresses the 10-song program on *The Song Inside the Tune* (self-produced). With support from Harvie S on bass and Thierry Arpino on drums, Costantino finds new ways to approach each song. The selections include “Yesterdays,” “Speak Softly Love” (two versions), “Satin Doll,” “What’ll I Do,” “Bill Withers’ Just the Two of Us,” Linda Perry’s “Beautiful,” Paul Jabara’s “Last Dance,” and an improvisation on Beethoven’s “Pathetique.” Costantino has a way of approaching the songs that are reflective of the album’s title. 

When you find 48 minutes of music spread across six tracks, you get the kind of far-reaching approaches to tunes that you will find on *Three* (self-produced), by organist Pat Bianchi and his bandmates, saxophonist Troy Roberts and drummer Colin Stranahan. The tunes are “Love for Sale,” “When Sunny Gets Blue,” “Stardust,” “Cheek to Cheek,” Wayne Shorter’s “Dance Cadaverous” and Eddie Harris’s “Cryin’ Blues.” Bianchi is all over the keys as he finds fertile grounds for improvisation in the selections. Roberts is lyrical in his playing but knows how to take sudden unexpected turns. Stranahan adds much to the excitement with his exciting approach to mixing support with strong personal statements. Here are three musicians who are totally empathetic. The live track, a rambunctious 12-plus minutes take on “Cheek to Cheek” is a perfect way to conclude this fun outing. Release date 2/8/2024. [PatBianchi.com](http://PatBianchi.com)

Bassist John Goldsby and pianist Billy Test are both members of the WDR Big Band, based in Cologne, Germany. They have developed a strong, empathetic musical friendship that has resulted in several duo recordings with *Swim for Your Life* (Bass Line Records) being the latest. This is a relatively short album, only 28 minutes, but it is a fine example of the art of duo playing. There are five selections, “Ill Wind,” two by Robin Melody Goldsby, “Otoño” and “April Tango,” and two by John Goldsby, “Fast Calls” and *Swim for Your Life.* A fine indication of Test’s talent is reflected in this story. When the legendary pianist Marty Napoleon attended the Pee Wee Russell Memorial Stomp to receive that year’s musician’s award, Test was the pianist in the youth group that opened the show. After the set, Napoleon asked me to bring Test to his table so Napoleon could congratulate him on his playing. Naturally, Test was thrilled to be recognized by a jazz giant. Goldsby is a partner who matches Test’s artistry. *Swim for Your Life* is short but sweet. [JohnGoldsby.com](http://JohnGoldsby.com)

Standards Deluxe (self-produced) finds saxophonist Rob Dixon and pianist Steve Allee as co-leaders for this unusual album, with half of it comprising standards with vocals by Amanda King and the other half instrumental tracks of mostly Dixon originals. The opening selections are “Caravan,” “Love for Sale,” “The Very Thought of You,” “Sway,” “Love Is Here to Stay” and “On Green Dolphin Street,” with King accompanied by Dixon on sax, Allee on piano, Nick Turner on bass.

[OTHER VIEWS](http://OTHER VIEWS)
and Greg Artry on drums. King has a wonderfully listenable voice and gives the lyrics effective readings. The instrumental portion has five Dixie tunes plus “Caravan,” with Kenny Phelps taking over the drum chair and Derrick Gardner added on trumpet. They recall a classic hard bop unit that would have been at home on the Blue Note label when it had the best hard bop sounds. Add the two halves together and the result is one fine album.

The new album by vocalist Jim Alta more is appropriately titled Swingin’ After Dark (Splank Music - EO11). Al tamore has a nifty 13-song program with a couple of pop tunes, plus lots of fine standards like “Day In, Day Out,” “It’s Alright with Me,” “The Late, Late Show,” “Moonlight in Vermont” and “You Stepped Out of a Dream”. He is supported by a sextet of pianist/arranger John Colianni, saxophonist/cist. This collection of 24 songs that span his career from 1973 through 2020 include 11 instrumental tracks. While there is a strong jazz undertone to most of this music, there are some soul and funk elements on the occasional track. One fascinating aspect of this endeavor is the quirkiness of many of his lyrics. The first vocal, “Who’s Gonna Buy Your Drinks Tonight” sets the tone of what to expect, and what to expect is a lot of surprises and wry humor. MacGill’s vocalizing is an effective complement to the material. The musical settings vary from track to track from a quartet to a big band with two string quartet selections in the mix. This is one of those albums that you will keep revisiting to discover new delights that might have previously slipped past you. (Note: For a more detailed and interesting insight about this album, check out the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=li-2ordF5Tk) CaseyMacgill.com

There are very few performers who are still active and vibrant at the age of 94, but pianist/vocalist Betty Bryant shows on Lotta Livin’ (self-produced) that she is among the select few. There are nine selections on the album with four of them, “Put a Lid on It,” “Blues to Get Started,” “Chicken Wings” and “Katydid,” being new songs written by Bryant. The other tunes are “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” “Baby, Baby All the Time,” “Stormy Monday,” “The Very Thought of You” and “A Lot of Livin’ to Do.” Although her voice reflects her age, she still knows how to put a lyric across, and her pianism is amazing. She has saxophonist/ flutist Robert Kyle, bassist Richard Simon, and drummer Ken ny Elliot in support. Listening to the venerable Betty Bryant is not only enjoyable but inspirational. It is often said that “age is only a number,” and Bryant makes the case here impressively! BettyBryant.Bandcamp.com

The new album by vocalist Jim Altamore is appropriately titled Swingin’ After Dark (Splank Music - EO11). Altamore has a nifty 13-song program with a couple of pop tunes, plus lots of fine standards like “Day In, Day Out,” “It’s Alright with Me,” “The Late, Late Show,” “Moonlight in Vermont” and “You Stepped Out of a Dream”. He is supported by a sextet of pianist/arranger John Colianni, saxophonist/cist. This collection of 24 songs that span his career from 1973 through 2020 include 11 instrumental tracks. While there is a strong jazz undertone to most of this music, there are some soul and funk elements on the occasional track. One fascinating aspect of this endeavor is the quirkiness of many of his lyrics. The first vocal, “Who’s Gonna Buy Your Drinks Tonight” sets the tone of what to expect, and what to expect is a lot of surprises and wry humor. MacGill’s vocalizing is an effective complement to the material. The musical settings vary from track to track from a quartet to a big band with two string quartet selections in the mix. This is one of those albums that you will keep revisiting to discover new delights that might have previously slipped past you. (Note: For a more detailed and interesting insight about this album, check out the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=li-2ordF5Tk) CaseyMacgill.com
Vocalist Marlena Shaw
Gliding Easily from Jazz to Blues to Funk

Marlena Shaw, who died January 19, 2024, at the age of 84, was a vocalist who could glide easily from jazz to blues to funk. That versatility is perhaps best exemplified in her 1969 Cadet album, *The Spice of Life*, which contained a monster hit, the funky “California Soul”, but also covered other musical bases.

Reviewing the album for *AllMusic*, Stephen Cook wrote that her "penchant for stylistic variety is certainly evident... Shaw shines throughout, showing her power on politically charged Aretha-styled cuts like ‘Woman of the Ghetto’... while also delivering supple interpretations of such traditional jazz fare as ‘Go Away Little Boy’ (shades of Nancy Wilson). And, with a gutsy take on ‘Stormy Monday’, it’s clear Shaw doesn’t shrink from the blues either.”


Born on September 22, 1939, in New Rochelle, NY, Shaw began singing and playing the piano at age 10, performing with an uncle at the Apol...
French Horn Player/Bassist/Educator Willie Ruff
From Rural Alabama to Professor Emeritus at the Yale School of Music

In recent years, Shaw sometimes performed and recorded with the DIVA Jazz Orchestra. Reviewing DIVA’s 2014 M cG album, A Swingin’ Life, for AllAboutJazz, Edward Bianco wrote, “Shaw lays down a warm and gentle performance delivering a fantastic interpretation of Alec Wilder’s ‘Blackberry Winter’.” After learning of Shaw’s death, DIVA’s leader, drummer Sherrie Maricle, posted a tribute on Facebook. “I’m so sad to learn that vocal legend Marlena Shaw has left the world,” she said. “She was such a creative, gifted, talented, soulful, swinging, kind, and hilarious human being. Some of my happiest musical moments were on stage with her. And, of stage, her warm smile and brilliant sense of humor always filled the room with joy and laughter.”

Shaw is survived by two daughters, April and Marla; a son, Robert; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In an interview with Yale upon his retirement, Ruf recalled that, “We lived in a house—my mother and eight children—that had no electricity, so there was no radio or music. But there was always dancing, to silence. The dances made their own rhythm.”

Io T theater’s amateur night. In 1966, she began singing with the Count Basie Orchestra, a gig that lasted four years. Prior to joining Basie, Shaw enjoyed modest success with a Cadet single version of Cannonball Adderley’s “Mercy Mercy Mercy”. In 1989, her duet with former Basie singer Joe Williams on Louis Jordan and Billy Austin’s “Is You Is or Is You Ain’t My Baby?” received a Grammy nomination. It was from Williams’ 1989 Verve album, In Good Company.

But Shaw’s biggest hit was “California Soul”. Written by Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson, it was recorded by several artists without much success. But, according to The Washington Post’s Harrison Smith, writing three days after Shaw’s death, “Ms. Shaw’s version became a favorite... It was sampled by hip-hop artists and used in commercials for Dockers pants, Dodge Ram pickup trucks, and Kentucky Fried Chicken.”

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In an interview with Yale upon his retirement, Ruf recalled that, “We lived in a house—my mother and eight children—that had no electricity, so there was no radio or music. But there was always dancing, to silence. The dances made their own rhythm.”
Ruff learned to play the French horn and bass while in the Army, and when he was discharged, he applied to the Yale School of Music to study with the well-known classical composer, Paul Hindemith. “I brought my French horn and played an audition,” he told the newspaper, The Soul of America, “and, by some miracle, they let me in.”

After earning his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Yale, he joined the Lionel Hampton Band, on the recommendation of an Army buddy, pianist Dwike Mitchell. In 1955, Ruff and Mitchell left Hampton and formed a duo that lasted until Mitchell’s death in 2013. Ruff joined the Yale faculty in 1971 and remained there until his retirement.

Commenting on Ruff’s impact at Yale, in an obituary published by the Yale School of Music, Jose Garcia-Leon, the Henry and Lucy Moses Dean of the Yale School of Music, said, “The depth of his intellect and humility was inspirational to many at the school. As musicians, I hope we all seek to embody his love of life and hunger for learning.”

Shortly after joining the Yale faculty, Ruff created a program called “the conservatory without walls” through which African-American musical traditions could be shared through performances, pedagogy, and interactions between artists and audiences at Yale and in the greater New Haven community. Several jazz giants—including Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Mary Lou Williams—were present at the event launch. Ruff also established the Duke Ellington Fellowship, a program at Yale that introduced thousands of schoolchildren in New Haven to performances by well-known jazz artists.

The Willie Ruf -Dwike Mitchell Duo joined the Yale Russian Chorus in a tour of the Soviet Union in 1959, during the Cold War. In 1981, they toured China when that nation was just beginning to open itself to the West.

Saxophonist Wayne Escoffery, who grew up in New Haven, posted a tribute to Ruff on Facebook. “I’ve admired Willie Ruf’s exceptional accomplishments as a scholar, educator, and jazz musician since my youth,” he said. “He touched the world with his performances and lectures and brought his jazz universe into Yale and the broader New Haven community in a unique and boldly organic way. I cherish his legacy, am profoundly grateful for the trail he blazed; and I will continue to reflect on his vast accomplishments as a source of inspiration and guidance for myself, both as a musician and an educator.”

Ruff is survived by a brother, Nathaniel.
Your membership is vital to NJJS’s mission to promote and preserve America’s great art form—JAZZ!

THANK YOU and welcome to all who have recently joined or renewed their memberships. We can’t do what we do without you!

**NEW MEMBERS**

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<td>Donna Korkes</td>
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**RENEWAL MEMBERS**

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