

BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

December 2015

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THE BJA NEWSLETTER

WWW.BALTIMOREJAZZ.COM

Baltimore: "Music City" of the Future?

By Ken Avis

On October 25th the Music Cities Conference in Washington, DC brought together 200 musicians, presenters, and city administrators from around the world to share experiences concerning the value of active music communities and ways to make them thrive. Something is happening out there. In recent years, at the city and at national levels, data are being collected, action plans are being implemented, and "live music offices" are being staffed. The evidence is conclusive. Under the right conditions a vibrant music scene positively affects community and economic development. Link it to tourism and it can really bring in the dollars and jobs.

Austin, Nashville, New Orleans, and Berlin are clearly "music cities" where festivals, clubs and the supporting industries provide jobs and attract tourist dollars. Austin has been America's fastest-growing city for the last nine years. Its "cool music city" factor has been key to its success in attracting creative talent for the expanding high tech and creative industries. At the other end of the spectrum, Johannesburg, Bogota, and at the national level, Venezuela are actively pursuing music education and performance programs to address problems of crime and poverty and to develop healthier communities.

What about Baltimore? Could Baltimore harness its jazz legacy and active arts scene to ramp up the quality of life and attract talent and jobs to revitalize the city? What might be the benefits and challenges to Baltimore's joining the growing list of music cities?

Assets and Missed Opportunities

A glance at the official tourism and city websites shows little interest in live music beyond the big-ticket culture institutions. There are plenty of data on the number of restaurants, public art installations, and cultural organizations, but no live-music data comparable to those being collected and analyzed in the music cities of the world. Compare Baltimore's site to *Austin Tourism*, where live-music what's-on guides,



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searchable by date, location, and genre, are front and center.

Visit Baltimore details, with justifiable pride, the \$5.2 billion spent by Baltimore's 24 million tourists; that industry contributes 83,000 jobs and \$650 million in taxes. The site declares, "our job is to show the world that Baltimore is a great destination with vibrant neighborhoods, rich culture and inspiring people." Yet you would need to dig deep to find mention of the area's rich jazz history or of Baltimore's having been awarded *Rolling Stone's* Best Music Scene award.

It isn't that no one cares about the arts in Baltimore. Three designated Arts Districts enjoying tax breaks for events and arts programs, and their impact on revitalizing urban space, are clearly recognized. Baltimore consistently stands among the nation's leaders in attracting arts grants, arts revenues, and arts organizations, according to the National Center for

(continued on page 2)

The Baltimore Jazz Alliance is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization.

The Baltimore Jazz Alliance (BJA) is a grass-roots organization of jazz aficionados, musicians and venues dedicated to enhancing and promoting jazz in Baltimore and the surrounding areas. New members sharing this passion are always welcome as the BJA continues its efforts to build a stronger and better networked jazz scene. Together we can help this music thrive in the region and reward listeners and musicians alike.

BJA Priorities

- To develop new audiences for jazz
- To strengthen communication within the jazz community
- To improve media relations on behalf of the jazz community
- To bring greater visibility to the entire array of jazz offerings in the Baltimore region
- To provide greater access to performance opportunities for Baltimore-area jazz musicians

Visit www.baltimorejazz.com for information about our accomplishments and future goals.

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Baltimore, Maryland 21201

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BALTIMORE: "Music City" of the Future?

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Arts Research. The city's assets also include a range of summer music series, plus the Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore School for the Arts, all of which attract and develop musical talent.

Local music presenters are well aware of the positive aspects but point to the lack of coordination and focus to build on the city's assets. The centennial of Baltimore's own Billie Holiday, for instance, went by with limited fanfare. A one-set performance at Artscape was the highlight of the celebration. Despite BJA members' efforts, the very popular annual vocal competitions named for Billie Holiday and Cab Calloway, and the more recent Chick Webb instrumental jazz competition, have disappeared from Artscape. Other jazz performances at Artscape are minimal. As one presenter suggested, "Artscape might as well be renamed Foodscape." This is a missed opportunity to foster audience appreciation for America's national arts treasure.

"We need a concerted and unified effort to make a difference," says Baltimore music presenter Marianne Matheny-Katz. "Tourism and transport are centered on the Inner Harbor, where there is limited night-time entertainment beyond restaurants, bars and shopping. Restaurants could include live music but are generally resistant, especially with entertainment licenses being difficult to obtain—something the City could address. While a number of live music series exist in parks and institutions, improvements are needed in coordination and promotion, along with more support from the City and local publications."

Jazz presenter Bernard Lyons also highlights the challenge of getting everyone to pull together. "The talent and the audiences are there but with few exceptions the local media ignores what's on, except at the main commercial venues. The challenge is also getting the presenters on the same page. Collab-

"Baltimore has some of the features needed to become a thriving musical community: a pipeline of skilled performers, a range of venues and an engaged musical audience. . ."

— JOSE BOWEN
President of Goucher College
and a life-long performing jazz musician

While neighboring Washington, Philadelphia, and now Cape May proudly promote their jazz festivals, Baltimore has no festival of its own. The opportunity to earmark and develop waterfront space for potential live music venues and festival space has been another missed opportunity. Imagine the potential this might have offered! Montreal invested \$150 million in a public-private project to create a downtown festival space with thirty venues. The Quartier des Spectacles now hosts forty festivals annually, and has become home to 450 arts organizations, 7000 arts related jobs and \$530 million in new tax revenues since its inception five years ago.

oration would help us to schedule and promote more effectively, and to partner with potential new live music venues."

Commenting on the lack of promotion coordination and media interest, Station North's Executive Director Ben Stone acknowledges, "Yes, Baltimore's pretty good at keeping our secrets to ourselves. I don't know why." At the same time, Stone paints a picture of a healthy arts neighborhood with a high density of artists attracted by the relatively low cost of living, and plenty of smaller venues drawing good audiences, including for improvised jazz. So Baltimore has its incubators. What it

doesn't have are sufficient mid-sized and larger venues that local musicians might aspire to and be inspired by. As a result it is often bypassed by mid-Atlantic touring acts who go to DC or Philly.

What Can Be Done

"Expanding the arts is good policy. That's clear," says Jose Bowen, President of Goucher College and a life-long jazz musician. "Baltimore has some of the features needed to become a thriving musical community: a pipeline of skilled performers, a range of venues and an engaged musical audience. Arguably, with its rich jazz legacy it could be positioned as the 'East Coast City of Jazz' and could distinguish itself from other cities by being branded as such."

There are potential benefits for musicians, presenters, communities and the wider economy if the coordination and will to promote Baltimore's music scene—not just jazz—can be harnessed. Perhaps existing organizations can lead the charge and encourage The City to pay more attention to live music and to jazz in particular. Maybe the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance could provide the umbrella for music with its ambition "to connect artists and groups, lead in addressing strategic issues and . . . become an indispensable advocate for the contributions, needs and interests of the cultural community."

To realize our "music city" potential, the immediate challenge is to engage Baltimore's business, public and arts communities in imagining the possibilities, collecting data,

setting goals, and collaborating to make the most of the city's music assets. There are so many examples of how to move forward, as the Music Cities Conference indicated. Baltimore could be a "music city" in every sense.

Ken Avis is a music journalist, filmmaker and musician with the award-winning world-jazz group Veronneau. He would like to thank the music community members who generously contributed their time and views.




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BALTIMORE CHAMBER JAZZ SOCIETY at BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Don Braden Quintet featuring Vanessa Rubin

By Michael Raitzyk

For the past 20 years, versatile and innovative musician Michael Raitzyk has been one of Baltimore's premier jazz guitarists. He teaches jazz guitar at Howard Community College.

On Sunday, November 8th, the Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society kicked off its 25th season with the Don Braden Quintet featuring Vanessa Rubin. The audience of this very well-attended concert was treated to two sets of outstanding music. Kudos to the folks running sound at the Baltimore Museum of Art auditorium—it was by far the best audio experience I've ever had there.

With Brandon McCune on piano, Kenny Davis on bass and Cecil Brooks III on drums, Braden played selections from his two most recent recordings—*Full Circle*, with Vanessa

Rubin, and *Luminosity*. The band started with two instrumentals, Chick Corea's medium-swinging composition "Bud Powell," and Braden's "The Time We Shared." Right away I was in awe of everyone's technical abilities. Braden launched into a blazing solo on "Bud Powell," his Sonny Rollinsesque tone flowing with cascades of double-timed notes and smart melodic ideas, always just a hair's breadth away from the blues. "The Time We Shared," with its 12/8 shuffle feeling, gave McCune and Davis a chance to stretch out, and both players took solos displaying unlimited technical ability and imagination. At one point McCune played double-time unison melodies with both hands at an amazing rate of speed.

Her band all warmed up, Vanessa Rubin hit the stage with her original, medium-swing shuffle entitled "Are You Ready for Me?" ("putting on my dress / trying on my shoes / trying to figure out how you're going to make your move"). Her phrasing reminded me of the way tenor sax player Dexter Gordon would lay way back on the beat to create a relaxed and swinging feel. By the end of the tune the whole place was rocking.

Then Rubin sang "Yesterdays," a tune by Jerome Kern and also the title of a live show Rubin has been performing, which dramatizes Billie Holiday's last performance. In addition to exploring Holiday's music, Rubin has gone deep into pianist Tadd Dameron's compositions. She created the Tadd Dameron Vocal Legacy Project, with trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater as music director. Rubin sang Dameron's ballad, "You're a Joy," with Braden taking a haunting alto flute solo. The first set ended with a swinging version of "Lover Man." Rubin really stretched out the phrasing of the lyrics, and the tune featured burning solos by McCune and Braden.

Vanessa Rubin (shown here with Kenny Davis and Don Braden) got the audience into a call and response that amped up the energy of the room.



Brandon McCune



to stretch out on this tune, giving us a vibe reminiscent of Clyde Stubblefield, James Brown's drummer. Very soulful! Rubin returned to the stage and sang "Pure Imagination," peppered with Braden's flute background fills. Braden is a master of musical interplay, supporting Rubin's vocals without getting in her way.

Next up was the swinging twelve-bar blues of the night, "Hold It Right There," penned by Rubin. Rubin got the audience into a call and response that amped up the energy of the room. The concert ended with a very slow version of "Quiet Nights and Quiet Stars" This piece gave Rubin a chance to stretch out with vocal improvisation mixed through the melody. Braden's flute provided fine counterpoint. The song ended in a whisper and we were on our feet.

This concert sponsored by the Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society was wonderful. With master musicians like Antonio Sanchez and Joe Lovano coming to Baltimore later in the BCJS's season, you'd be wise to get your tickets soon!

The second set opened with the quartet playing Herbie Hancock's "Driftin'," and Braden traded fours with Brooks. The last time I saw Brooks play with Braden, the drummer overwhelmed the music with his volume. At this concert, he played a mostly understated, supportive role—but was still amazingly musical with awesome technique.

The second and final instrumental for the evening was Braden's composition, "Jive Turkey," inspired by 1970's black sitcoms like *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times*. This was the funk tune of the set. It should be noted that Braden has always had a foot in commercial music and has composed jingles and TV theme songs. Brooks got

Cecil Brooks III



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The Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society is a non-profit organization and is supported by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive.



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bj a member notes

Welcome

We welcome our new BJA members: Brian Perez, Rachel McDonald, Joseph Allen Jr., Joel Kaufman, Gary Swartz

Anniversary

Bob Jacobson and Ron McCadden celebrated the 20th anniversary of their band Sounds Good with a party/house concert/jam.

bj a member discounts

An die Musik offers 10% discount for BJA members for music purchases at the An die Musik record store.

Chamber Jazz Society of Baltimore offers BJA Members a \$2 discount off the general admission price. Just indicate your affiliation when ordering tickets.

Eubie Live! at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center at 847 N. Howard Street offers a discount to BJA members on rentals of its performance and events spaces.

Jazzway 6004 offers BJA Members a \$5 discount on performances at their venue.

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Dave Douglas Quintet at An Die Musik

By Eric Heavner

Musical stasis is not in Dave Douglas's vocabulary. The prolific trumpeter and composer, who began his career in the 1980s with Horace Silver, has recorded dozens of albums and performed in a variety of styles. In addition to his many jazz projects with artists such as Bill Frisell, Chris Potter and Joe Lovano, Douglas has performed and recorded with Masada (jazz/klezmer), the Tiny Bell trio (Balkan improvisation) and his own band, Keystone (jazz/electronic). He has worked with a dance troupe, with DJs, experimented with Eastern European and Jewish folk music, recorded music for movies (Bill Morrison's *Frankenstein* and several Fatty Arbuckle films) and directs the annual Festival of New Trumpet Music.

Douglas brought his latest jazz project, the Dave Douglas Quintet, to Baltimore on November 18th to perform at An die Musik. For the uninitiated, An die Musik is a great place to hear jazz. It has big easy chairs, is perfectly sized for listening to chamber jazz or classical music and has a small bar. What makes it even better is that owner Henry Wong treats the music performance space as a labor of love. His pleasure in hosting an artist such as Douglas was obvious.

Douglas's quintet featured up-and-comers Jon Irabagon (tenor sax), Matt Mitchell (piano), Linda Oh (bass) and Rudy Royston (drums), all of whom perform on the group's latest CD, *Brazen Heart*, released on Douglas's Greenleaf Music label. Douglas chose his band mates well. The group's playing was cohesive and emotionally diverse. Its performance was, by turns, exciting, somber and searching.

Many of the compositions performed by the quintet, presumably all penned by Douglas (not all of the tunes were announced), departed from the theme-solos-theme structure common in jazz. For example, Douglas sometimes began a tune by soloing over the rhythm section. Where it would go from there was anyone's guess. It could morph into the melody or it might lead to a simultaneous improvisation by trumpet and sax. In one tune, the band restated the theme between each solo. In another, solos and theme merged and separated like smoke from adjacent chimneys.

In another departure from the straight ahead school of jazz, the quintet rarely relied on a swing rhythm anchored by a

walking bass. They found other, less direct ways to swing. Royston's drumming, with its out-of-time accents and complex patterns, had much to do with this. He preferred to embellish the pulse instead of delineating it. Credit for the solid rhythmic feel should be shared with bassist Linda Oh, who unerringly laid down a groove worth improvising over. The group's success in this regard was tacitly confirmed by my wife, who accompanied me to the concert, and whose ears I respect. She tapped her foot the entire evening.

The band's oblique approach to swing was evident in "Hawaiian Punch," the first selection of the night. Douglas and Irabagon played a dissonant, Monkish melody over a loping

rhythm, interrupted by tightly executed stop-time passages. Irabagon contributed a nicely constructed sax solo that began with fragmented three-note patterns and ended in a series of lightning-fast runs. In an unannounced composition, the rhythm section set up a beat that managed to be funky without the drummer's smacking the snare on two and four. Although chaotic at first, it all locked into place when Douglas entered, playing bluesy patterns.

Douglas's playing was best displayed on "Garden State," a boppish, driving composition that reminds one of the jostling traffic of northern New Jersey, where Douglas grew up. Douglas has been compared to the late Lester Bowie, the Art Ensemble of Chicago co-founder, who had

a proclivity for bent notes, altered pitch and shifting timbre. I don't hear it. Unlike the fluid-toned Bowie, Douglas has a precise, centered sound, which he sometimes sweetens with a subtle vibrato. But like Bowie, Douglas wears his virtuosity lightly. His prowess on trumpet, in this performance at least, was harnessed for the creation of interesting melodies, not for its own sake. Douglas's solo on "Garden State" had a searing intensity. It was matched by Royston, who worked his small drumkit into a thunderous solo, a climatic end to the first set.

Since graduating from the Jazz Workshop at the Peabody Conservatory, Eric Heavner has performed with such jazz greats as Webster Young and Julius Hemphill. He currently plays trumpet and flugel horn with the band Jazz Caravan.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVE DOUGLAS

Douglas's playing was best displayed on "Garden State," a boppish, driving composition that reminds one of the jostling traffic of northern New Jersey where Douglas grew up.

An Interview with Nico Sarbanes

By Gail Marten

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Nico Sarbanes, a jazz trumpeter, vocalist and composer from Baltimore. Among an ever-growing list of performance credits are two appearances at the Montreal International Jazz Festival, including one as the opening act for jazz vocalist and recent Grammy-award winner Dianne Reeves.

GM: Nico, you recently organized and presented a Fall Monthly Jazz Series at An die Musik that began in September and ends in December. Who are some of the artists who have participated with you in these concerts?

NS: After being away from Baltimore for so long, and realizing how much the city is a part of me, I knew I wanted to do a series that would specifically showcase heroes of the Baltimore jazz scene. We started the series off in September with alto saxophonist Tim Green, continued with drummer extraordinaire Winard Harper in October, and master vibraphonist Warren Wolf in November. All the artists have put on outstanding performances, and to have the privilege of sharing the stage with them has been a dream realized for me.

GM: Were you pleased with audience response and attendance? Is there anything you would have done differently?

NS: Well, as any Baltimore musician will tell you, filling a venue in this town is a challenge. The audiences here in Baltimore are some of the most educated on the music, but can also be some of the least forthcoming in their support. Now, had these shows only featured myself as a headliner, I could understand limited turnouts. After all, I have been out of the scene for an extended period, and I fully expected and welcomed the challenge of earning the respect and approval of Baltimore's jazz fans, who as I said are some of the most knowledgeable in the country. However, to have featured the artists that we had—Tim Green, Winard Harper and Warren Wolf, three undeniable talents who have proudly trumpeted their Baltimore roots—and not be approaching a full house at a venue like An die Musik has certainly been a bit disappointing. I sincerely hope that we will see more people out in support of our December show, for which we will be featuring another amazing musician.

GM: Who will be performing with you in December?

NS: I am honored to announce that our final concert in the series, on Saturday, December 12th, will feature another of the world's leading alto saxophonists, Baltimore's own ANTONIO HART. I have been a fan of his playing (who isn't?) since high school, when I was starting to seriously get into jazz and was eager to familiarize myself with Charm City's hometown heroes. I finally had the pleasure of meeting him earlier this year. I was interning in the Kennedy Center's Jazz



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICO SARBANES

Programming department, and Antonio was bringing his organ trio to the Center's jazz club. We had talked on the phone a bit prior to the show, and he knew I was a trumpet player and a fellow Baltimorean. During the second set of his show, he invited me on stage to play "Minority" (a Gigi Gryce standard) with the band—a huge thrill for me. Playing with one of my idols, I did my best to hold my own while combating the nerves. With that said, I am very much looking forward to another crack at "Minority" with Antonio on the An die Musik stage!

GM: You recently received a Bachelor's degree in Jazz Trumpet Performance at the Schulich School of Music at McGill University in Montreal. What is the next step in your formal music education?

NS: I am currently enrolled at Towson University, pursuing a Music Education masters with certification to teach in the public schools. Having already had some wonderful experiences working with Baltimore City students, I knew that I wanted to become a certified educator and give myself the opportunity to contribute to the community in that way. I think it would be an incredibly fulfilling complement to a career in performance.

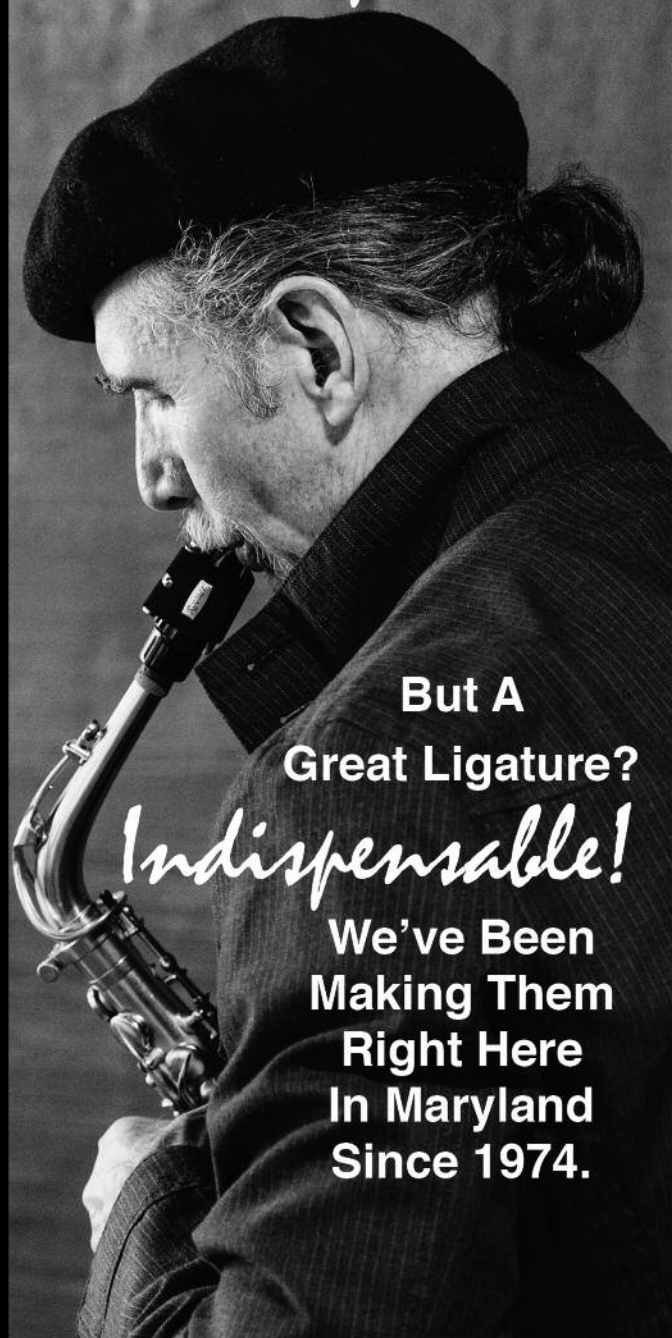
GM: In order to establish your own identity, do you try to downplay that you are the son of Congressman John Sarbanes and grandson of retired Senator Paul Sarbanes?

NS: I am proud of the family legacy of public service started by my grandfather and continued by my dad, but I never go out of my way to bring attention to it, as I want people to judge my music on its own merits, without the influence of political or familial bias. However, as I truly believe that there is no pursuit more important than that of public service, I do hope, whether through music, education, or (who knows?) public office, to help the Baltimore community in any way I can.

GM: Will you be presenting a Winter Monthly Jazz Series at An die Musik?

NS: This winter, I will be attempting to expand my performance area to Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and New York, so that will be the bulk of my focus. I will of course continue to maintain a presence in Baltimore, but I will not be continuing the An die Musik series into winter 2016. I would like to explore the possibility of leading another series next fall, though, either at An die Musik or Caton Castle.

Beret? Optional.



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*** NOTE: As these events may be subject to change, it's always a good idea to CALL AHEAD for CONFIRMATION!**

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Phaze 10 – Monday Open Mic hosted by Spice.
885 N. Howard Street. 7-11 pm. 410-462-2010

Liam Flynn's Ale House – Monday night jam sessions hosted by Hot Club of Baltimore, mostly Django Reinhardt music, 1930s-'40s and standards. 22 W. North Avenue. 8-midnight. Call Michael Harris for more information at 443-884-2123.

TUESDAYS

Randallstown CC – Open Jazz Jam Sessions/Book and Poetry Readings every Tuesday at 6-8 pm. Hosted by Derrick Amin. 3505 Resource Drive, Randallstown. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. Sponsored by BJA. 410-887-0698

WEDNESDAYS

Café Noir – Every Wednesday jam session with Open Mic hosted by Scott Strother with Spice. 3627 Offutt Road, Randallstown. \$15 cover with open bar 7-8 pm. \$10 cover 8-10 pm. Proceeds benefit non-profit organization. 410-952-4009

NEW! Conah's Bar & Grille – FIRST and THIRD Wednesdays. Jazz jam session hosted by Charles Eron Trio. 84 E. Main Street, Westminster. 7-9:30 pm. 443-821-3267 charleseronjazz@gmail.com

49 West Café – FIRST and THIRD Wednesdays. "Starr's Jazz Jam" at 49 West Street, Annapolis. Hosted by John Starr and house band. Musicians and singers very welcome! Delicious and reasonably priced food and drink available! \$10 cover. 7-10 pm. Reservations 410-626-9796

Homeslyce – Todd Marcus leads jazz jam sessions every Wednesday. Musicians and singers welcome. 336 N. Charles Street. 8-11 pm. 443-501-4000

Phaze 10 – Jam sessions at Phaze 10 hosted by April Sampe and The Next Level Band. 885 N. Howard Street. 8-midnight. 410-462-2010

THURSDAYS

Phaze 10 – First Thursday Straight Ahead Jazz Workshop Jazz Workshop hosted by John R. Lamkin II, 855 N. Howard Street. 7-11 pm. 410-462-2012

The Place Lounge – Jam session/open mic hosted by Spice. 315 W. Franklin Street. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. 7-10 pm. 410-547-2722

If you know of local jam sessions, please share the information with our readers by emailing the details to the editor at: jazzpalette@gmail.com

If any of the jazz jam sessions listed are discontinued please inform the editor at: jazzpalette@gmail.com



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BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please return this form along with your check to:

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847 North Howard Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
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December 2015

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