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**VOLUME IX** 

**ISSUE III** 

THE BJA NEWSLETTER

WWW.BALTIMOREJAZZ.COM

# **Two-Piano Project: Blackman and Evans**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAN BLACKMAN

Alan Blackman is always pushing boundaries, both with his own compositions and with his interpretations of jazz standards, pop tunes, and even classical compositions.

ne of the most memorable jazz concerts I ever heard was in Los Angeles in 1978: a two-piano concert with Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock. It was an intriguing concept and a thrilling experience to hear these two giants of jazz keyboard expand the possibilities of this powerful instrument with their twenty fingers on 176 keys.

So I was intrigued and excited when I heard that our own Alan Blackman was performing piano duo concerts, both with local artists and with those from afar. The first of these concerts that I heard was with the Icelandic jazz pianist and composer Sunna Gunnlaugs; later I heard him perform with Harry Appelman, pianist with the Afro-Bop Alliance and Rumba Club. He has also partnered with Vardan Ovsepian, an Armenian living in Los Angeles; Steve Kessler, Clay Giberson, and, most recently (Feb. 5th), with Orrin Evans. Several of these concerts were recently compiled into an album, *Alone Together: The Two-Piano Project* (available from CD Baby).

Blackman says that Ovsepian was the inspiration for him to use this format. While Blackman was teaching at Towson University some ten years ago, Ovsepian was in residence giving clinics and performances. One afternoon the two found some spare moments to get into a practice room with two pianos, and started to jam. As Blackman recalls in the album liner notes, "At first it was my originals and then his, and then eventually we just played—no structure, no form, just music. There were moments of magic, fun, risk, and reward."

There were certainly many moments of magic, fun, risk, and reward at the three concerts I attended at the Monteabaro Recital Hall at Howard Community College, where Blackman teaches. A two-piano duo is not a common format, but as Blackman says, "it's a surprisingly fun format with lots of freedom, but without the pressure and loneliness of solo piano." However, he adds, "it's easy to get in each other's way and hard to keep things interesting from a timbre perspective." But these highly sensitive

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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.

#### **BIA 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.

#### **Baltimore Jazz Alliance**

847 North Howard Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Please direct your questions and comments to: webmaster@baltimorejazz.com

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# **Two-Piano Project: Blackman and Evans**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORRIN EVANS

Acoustic pianist Orrin Evans was among the "Young Lions" of straight-ahead jazz who emerged in the 1990s. If melodic jazz is your thing and you don't know this guy, you're missing out.

(continued from front page)

artists know how to listen to each other; each stays in a different range to provide a greater richness of pitch and rhythm than can be heard with a single performer on the piano. While one set of hands is busy creating intricate improvisations in the upper ranges, the other set of hands provides a dense rhythmic and harmonic foundation in the lower ranges. Seamlessly, they switch roles.

Alan Blackman is always pushing boundaries, both with his own compositions and with his interpretations of jazz standards, pop tunes, and even classical compositions. This last concert consisted mostly of well-worn standards, but both Blackman and Evans thoroughly mined those familiar veins to extract all their hidden gems of rhythm and harmony and to present fresh, exciting music.

For example, "Autumn Leaves" began with a series of rolling arpeggios before the tune became discernible, played over a droning bass line. On "Nostalgia in Times

Square," the duo offered cross-rhythms, swinging against a vaguely Latin groove. Blackman laid down Brubeckian chordal passages that Evans echoed; then Blackman switched to a quirky right-hand melody line with hints of Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King." The tune ended on an assertive chord series. "Just Friends" began in an elegiac mood, with Blackman creating a drone by reaching over the top of the piano and plucking a string, the note repeating like the insistent voice of memory. "Summertime" got a funky, bluesy treatment, first in D-minor, with a Bill Evans-style switch to F-minor on the bridge. Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-A-Ning" went from honky-tonky, to Gershwin-esque, and then back to Monkish with taut, discordant chords in both hands over an ostinato on the root, ending with a relaxed little music-box sequence on the melody. Likewise, on "Solar" there was Monkish angularity that swung at a manic tempo with a torrent of notes through which the melody appeared and disappeared like a sunlit school of flying fish. Then the two calmed it down just a bit to exchange some gnomish chords with spritely, eerie trills, coming to rest on a single smooth chord.

HCC is only a half-hour drive from downtown Baltimore, so distance should not be a factor in getting more Baltimore folks out to these concerts—and there is plenty of free parking on weekends. You may contact Blackman at iplayjazzpiano@hotmail.com, or check the website of the Horowitz Performing Arts Center at HCC at http://www.howardcc.edu/Visitors/musicconcerts/facultyconcerts.html

- Liz Fixsen

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# Michael Formanek at Peabody Institute

n enthralled and attentive audience filled Peabody's East Hall Friday night, February 17th, to hear The Peabody Jazz Orchestra perform six original compositions by the ensemble's director, noted bassist Michael Formanek. Formanek, who brings an impressive performance resume which includes work with Freddie Hubbard, Bob Mintzer, Chet Baker, Cedar Walton, Peter Erskine, Stan Getz, Tony Williams, Dave Liebman, Joe Henderson and even Elvis Costello, has been the ensemble's director since 2003.

It was Formanek's compositions that brought delight to the evening's audience as much as his students' performance. But the director humbly yielded to his ensemble's personnel and allowed them to shine as they deftly navigated the composer's challenging arrangements. Constructed as most big bands typically are, this jazz orchestra offered the welcome addition of a French horn to supplement the trombone section.

The concert's opener, "Holy Waters," named for a favorite fishing spot on Oregon's Rogue River, featured graduate student Mark Meadows on piano and bassist Jonathan Guo. This interesting tune employed lots of chords framed in a medium swing. The piano solo was full of intriguing melodic lines, yet was not over-played one bit.

Though he cut his teeth in New York, "Charm City Ditty" reflected Mr. Formanek's homage to his adopted city. The tune, which has a light rock feel, began with the trombones and a persistent pedal bass throughout the head. Featuring Alex Crean on first tenor saxophone, Eric Forgey on guitar, Alec Hanslowe on first trombone, and Joshua Burgess on second tenor saxophone, the arrangement moved along effortlessly. Hanslowe's trombone solo fit the spirit of the tune perfectly. Burgess's tenor solo proved he prefers the timbre of his instrument's lower and middle range.

# . . . the director humbly yielded to his ensemble's personnel and allowed them to shine . . .

"Beneath the Fancy Staircase" channeled one of Baltimore's favorite sons and one of Stan Kenton's favorite composer/arrangers, Hank Levy, with its 7/4 time signature. The piece began with a straight eighths feel and featured a brief piano interlude by Ethan Braun. A slow and methodic crescendo by the entire ensemble over Max Bledstein's guitar solo allowed the band to hint at its dynamic range. Then the audience was rewarded with a recapitulation of the original feel as the tune wound down to a quiet end.

Recounting Formanek's affiliation with the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, he explained that the title of the



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL FORMANEK

Michael Formanek, who brings an impressive resume . . . has been the ensemble's director since 2003.

next piece was derived from the composer's studio to which he was assigned: C2. The tune, "see too," used a creative interplay between saxophonist Crean and bassist Guo as its head. This minor 3/4 piece employed an energetic dissonance. Crean and Burgess soloed together, and the energy they created helped the band build to an exciting crescendo.

The most challenging piece was saved for the next slot in the concert after the band had covered enough ground to be duly warmed up. "Pong," named for the early video game, used overlapping layers of sound for its head, and featured the delightful alto saxophonist Jarrett Gilgore. His solo employed creative rhythms and flights of rapid notes as he explored the full range of the alto saxophone. Ben Merliss's strong bass solo was every bit the match for the ensemble background that accompanied it. Then Rachel Winder delivered a welcome flute solo as the rhythm section accompanied, flawlessly executing Formanek's intricately punctuated rhythms.

"Dance Like a Mutant," a 10/4 piece with an even eighths feel, closed the concert. The tune featured Emily Wagner on guitar and gave Gilgore another platform to display his technique and range. Meadows satisfied again with his piano comping, and drummer Matthew Tredwell deftly navigated all time signatures to keep the band in place effortlessly.

Although the Peabody Jazz Orchestra is driven by a strong rhythm section and fully exploits an equally strong saxophone section, the entire ensemble presents itself as a well-rehearsed vehicle for Michael Formanek's refreshing and challenging literature.

- Larry Brown

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# **Caton Castle Jazz Jam Sessions Gaining Momentum**

Because of the overwhelming response, Caton Castle's exciting jam sessions have continued. The sessions are gaining momentum and attracting both aspiring and experienced musicians. It's been a joy to have so many of Baltimore's best participating.

The first session took place on January 21st and featured the seasoned quartet of

Tim Green on saxophone, Noble Jolley on piano, Kris Funn on bass and Warren Wolf on drums. Confident masters of their instruments, they played inside and outside the melodies. However, as Tim Green explained, this session wasn't about the best—it was a platform for the up-and-coming. He added that although there are many jams for smooth jazz,this one was for straight-ahead jazz. The jammers were timid at the beginning, but Green pushed them, opening with "Straight, No Chaser." He gave each group about three tunes to play before he switched up, and the young musicians all got to experience a real jazz club and audience. Green shared his knowledge and experience in a most generous and loving way, and the jammers got to play with one of the best rhythm sections in town.

On January 28th the Caton Castle jam session was led by

Todd Marcus on clarinets, with Alan Blackman on piano, Kris Funn on bass and Mike Kuhl on drums. The first set was played by the core musicians and included an original by Marcus as a tribute to the turmoil that occurred last year in Egypt. Marcus, who is of Egyptian heritage, played the bass clarinet, imbuing his composition with rhythms and sounds of the Middle East. I was reminded of "Maiden Voyage," with the mellow tones of the bass clarinet and Funn's growling bass. The piece began in a dark place, but ended with the inspiration and jubilance of today's Tahrir Square, with Blackman and Kuhl adding an uplifting flair to the finale. Marcus also introduced his Egyptian-influenced arrangements of "East of the Sun" and "Love Makes Me Dance." Then the jammers took over, tackling "Straight, No Chaser," "Red Clay," "Recordame," "Nardis," "Beautiful Love," and finally "All of You." We counted twenty-five participating musicians

Jazz musicians and listeners of all levels are welcome at our Thursday night jam. We hope to see you there. Bring your friends and family.

More about subsequent jams may be found by following us at our Facebook Group: Real Jazz Live @ Caton Castle

- Leslie Imes



PHOTO BY LESLIE IMES

Aspiring and established musicians alike have been gathering to jam at Caton Castle on Thursday nights since January 21st.

Identities and more photos may be seen at the Facebook Group: Real Jazz Live @ Caton Castle

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# The Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society presents...

# The WALT WEISKOPF QUARTET featuring BRUCE BARTH SUNDAY, MARCH 11th 5 PM

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More info at: www.baltimorechamberjazz.org Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society

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BJA Members now receive a \$2 discount off the general admission price!

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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.



## IJVIJ JIGUJ TNJA

Eubie Live! is a new state-of-the-art performance venue in Baltimore offering a small, yet intimate setting for music, dance and theater. Eubie Live! provides patrons with a unique ambience reminiscent of the jazz clubs of the 1920's and 1930's on the fourth floor of the Eubie Blake Jazz Institute. Totaling more than 2,000 square feet in area, Eubie Live! comfortably seats more than 100 patrons and is physically challenged accessible. The space includes the latest technologies in sound to give patrons the best performing arts experience possible.

Please call 410-225-3130 for booking opportunities.

★ Special discounts available for BJA members!



We're always looking for new members. If you enjoy reading our newsletter, please show your appreciation by joining the BJA. If you're a musician, joining will get you on our email list for gigs. If you just love jazz, your membership will help our efforts immeasurably.

The membership form may be found on page 11 of this newsletter or join online at the BJA website.

www.baltimorejazz.com

The BJA is dedicated to promoting Jazz in Baltimore! www.baltimorejazz.com

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# JAZZBiZ by Tom Reyes

A series of interviews of movers and shakers in the area involved with the business of promoting jazz



#### **CHERYL T. GOODMAN**

Baltimore native Cheryl Goodman has worked in arts promotion and administration since the early 1980s. She has produced and/or presented performances by Chuck Mangione, Cyrus Chestnut, Terence Blanchard, Stanley Turrentine, Roy Ayers, and Sweet Honey in the Rock, among others. She initiated jazz series at the BMA (Sculpture Garden), Cylburn Arboretum and at the Eubie Blake Center, produced the Annapolis Jazz Fest for two years, was asso-

ciate director of the *Jazz Times* convention, and consulted on the *Billboard/BET* on Jazz conference. In addition to being the founder and Director of Dance Baltimore, she is Director of Administration and Fundraising for OrchKids, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's youth music education program. In the BJA's first year, she offered valuable services as a consultant. Many readers may know her best from WEAA-FM, where she announces cultural events under the moniker "your girl Cheryl."

- 1. You are obviously a big jazz fan. Who are your favorite artists? Actually, I'm not that big of a jazz fan. I love all kinds of music and like to listen to everything from show tunes to gospel to classical to hip hop to classic rock. I enjoy certain styles of jazz more than others—contemporary, Latin, "the standards," but classic R&B is probably my music of choice.
- 2. How did you get started in the entertainment industry? I started dance at age three and was initially a piano major in college. I was limited in music theory so I switched to writing as a major after the first year. When I graduated, my first job was as an entertainment writer for the *Afro-American*. Eventually, I got tired of just writing about the great entertainment I was surrounded by and wanted to be more a part of it—but not necessarily as a performer. Producing concerts, festivals, etc., gives me a chance to be involved in all aspects—programming, marketing, fundraising, etc.
- 3. What would you recommend to a young person interested in following a similar career path? Know your field, enjoy what you do and always aim for the highest artistic quality.

- 4. As a producer and presenter, you wear a lot of different hats. Do you have a favorite job, and if so why? Any job where I'm the boss (smile). I like being in control of the product I'm working on. Otherwise, there is no quality control—no control of the artistic product you are offering to an audience. I always have a plan of what I'm trying to offer, what result I want received by an audience. I have to be the one making the decisions to insure that gets across.
- 5. What are you looking for in an artist or band when you book them for an event? Entertainment value is number one. The artist has to offer a good show—interesting, creative, fun—something the audience is going to enjoy. Artistic technique, musical perfection is not always the goal. Marketability is also important.
- 6. Does it help for them to have a professional press kit, or would you prefer to see them in person? A press kit is necessary to promote the show in the media—photos online and in the newspaper, airplay from CDs, etc. Many artists don't look at a booking from the promoter/producer's perspective. Without these promotional items, it's harder for me to promote the show and sell tickets. As for the booking process, I always have to see an artist before I book them to make sure that they present a show others would enjoy. A previously recorded CD doesn't insure that.
- 7. Prior to this interview, I didn't know that you are a classically-trained pianist. Do you still find time to practice, and how often? I can't say that I practice regularly but I do try to just sit down and play a few times a week. Being around so many talented musicians, I'm very motivated to be a better musician myself—even if it's just for myself.
- 8. Who is your favorite classical composer, and why? Tchaikovsky. I just enjoy the mood he creates—very simple. I was introduced to *Nutcracker* early on and it's still a favorite.
- 9. Do you have a role model, and if so what inspires you about this person? My mom was my role model. She was beautiful, understanding, patient, physically fit and ALL that but when I got to know her as an adult, I found out that she was also an independent woman when it wasn't in vogue, a lover of the arts throughout her life. She studied nursing in New York City in her younger years and while there also studied dance with Pearl Primus, was in acting workshops with Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, learned saxophone from jazz players in Harlem clubs and was a childhood friend of Sarah Vaughan. Who knew? In her 60s, she was taking bellydance!
- 10. You lead a very busy life. What is your primary motivation for what you do? Paying my rent (another smile). I don't mean to be as busy as I am. I get excited by new and talented artists, exciting ways to present the arts, new audiences that I can introduce to something great. I get started doing something and then realize I've added another project to an already busy schedule. I frequently hear myself saying to complete strangers, "Somebody stop me!" (final smile).

Tom Reyes is a pianist, B3 organist and bandleader. His website is www.tomreyesjazz.com

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### JAZZ JAM SESSIONS

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Monday night jam sessions at the Red House Tavern, 2239 Essex Street. House piano, drums, and PA system. Hosted by Tom Reyes and friends, featuring the band's Hammond B3 organ. Showtime at 8 pm. 410-522-0015

#### Tuesday Nights – Randallstown

Open Jazz Jam Sessions/ Book and Poetry Readings every Tuesday at 6:30-8 pm at the Randallstown Community Center, 3505 Resource Drive. Hosted by Derrick Amin. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. Sponsored by BJA. 410-887-0698

#### Thursday Nights - Caton Castle

Thursday night jam sessions at Caton Castle, 20 S. Caton Avenue, Catonsville. House piano, drums and PA system. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. Showtime at 8 pm. 410-566-7086

#### SHARE

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

### From our readers . . .

BJA members are invited to email letters regarding member interest, constructive criticism, and/or good suggestions. One or two letters will be printed in each issue. 300 word maximum. Letters should be emailed to the editor at: jazzpalette@gmail.com

If you learn of opportunities for music education scholarships or grants, please email the information to the editor at: jazzpalette@gmail.com

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## **Baltimore Jazz Alliance Big Band**

BALTIMORE JAZZ MUSICIANS are welcome to be a part of the BJA Big Band. For further information or complete details for sending mp3 and pdfs, please contact Anthony Villa at avilla@loyola.edu.

## bja member notes

#### **New Members**

Music Lovers: Dieha Reid and Bobette Watts-Hitchcock Musicians: Karla Chisholm and Wes Crawford

#### **Hybrid Jazz**

Trish Hennessey is looking for great talent in our region to interview on her radio show *Hybrid Jazz from Trish Hennessey*. The only requirement is to have a CD and a positive outlook. Contact: altcwgal@aol.com or 410-686-4424.

#### **Volunteers Needed at Eubie Blake Center**

Do you have computer and/or people skills? There are opportunities for reliable volunteers of all ages and skills to help at the Eubie Blake Center located at 847 N. Howard Street. Contact Troy Burton at 410-225-3130 or eubieblake@rcn.com.

#### **Congratulations**

Congratulations to member Adam Hopkins, one of ten recipients of Maryland State Arts Council awards for non-classical music composition. Other recipients from the jazz community were Blake Meister, Harry Appelman, Darryl Brenzel, Michael Formanek and Russell Kirk.

# bja member discounts

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

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

**Donna's Restaurant** in Columbia offers BJA members 15% off their bill for up to two people during live jazz (Saturdays, 7-9 pm).

**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.



PHOTO IMAGE BY LEO HOWARD LUBOW

### Baltimore Jazzscapes II

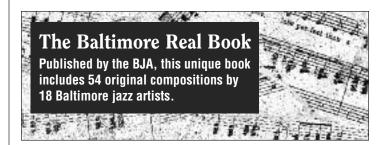
The BJA'S 16 track compilation CD *Baltimore Jazzscapes II*, showcases Baltimore jazz artists performing in formats ranging from piano trios to large ensembles, playing everything from standards to original contemporary jazz.

The new tracks (all but two of them original compositions) on *Jazzscapes* 

If testify to the breadth and depth of the contemporary Baltimore jazz scene. Jazzscapes II also presents a bonus track by the late Baltimore saxophonist Mickey Fields, an inspired rendering of "Lover Man."

CD available at **www.cdbaby.com** and numerous retail outlets in Baltimore including:

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BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART, Art Museum Drive
AN DIE MUSIK, 409 N. Charles Street
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JAZZ HOUSE WEST, 6035 Liberty Road
RECORD & TAPE TRADERS, 7551 Ritchie Highway, Glen Burnie
and 736 Dulaney Valley Road, Towson
SOUND GARDEN, 1616 Thames Street, Fells Point
and by the various band leaders on the disk



# Members may purchase copies directly from the BJA for \$8 (20% discount) or at the following retail outlets:

Appalachian Bluegrass, 643 Frederick Road, Catonsville
Baltimore Brass & More, 99 Mellor Avenue, Catonsville
Bill's Music, 743 Frederick Road, Catonsville
Coffey Music, 31 E. Main Street, Westminster
Dale Music, 8240 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring
Dundalk Music Center, 15 Center Place, Dundalk
Music Go Round ("C" Book only), 10112 York Road, Cockeysville
Peabody Bookstore, 5 E. Centre Street, Baltimore
Reisterstown Music Center, 519 Main Street, Reisterstown
Rosso Music Center, 5600 Ritchie Highway, Brooklyn Park
Stu's Music, Rt. 140, Westminster
Ted's Musician Shop, 11 E. Centre Street, Baltimore
The Guitar Center ("C" Book only), 1524 E. Joppa Road, Towson
and 6320 Ritchie Highway, Glen Burnie
Washington Music Center, 11151 Veirs Mill Road, Wheaton

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## display advertising

## **RATES** for ad placement

REACH A TARGETED JAZZ MARKET BY ADVERTISING IN THE BJA NEWSLETTER.

Email your print-ready ad\* to: jazzpalette@gmail.com

\*Ad Specs: Original B&W line/vector artwork in jpg format at 600 dpi are preferred. Pixel-based images should be 300 dpi or higher resolution.

#### **AD PLACEMENT RATES AND SIZES:**

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#### Deadline for ads and payments:

15th of the month prior to the appearance of your ad. LIMITED SPACE. Reserve your ad space EARLY. BJA reserves the right to reject inappropriate copy.

# Payment (checks only) payable to BJA) should be mailed to:

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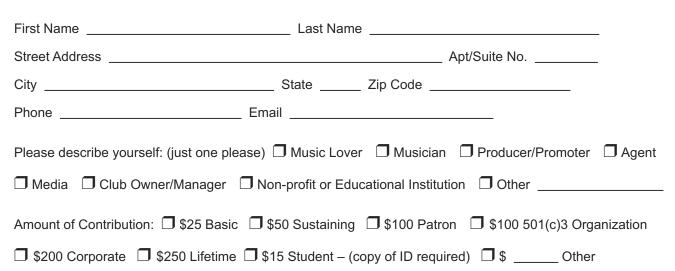
> Gail Marten, Editor/Designer Baltimore Jazz Alliance Newsletter jazzpalette@gmail.com

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Your membership card will be mailed to you or the person named below.

#### The perfect gift for the jazz lover who has (almost) everything!



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# Have you been looking for jazz in all the wrong places?

The jazz calendar at www.baltimorejazz.com is the right place to find live jazz in Baltimore!



**MARCH 2012** 

Dedicated to promoting JAZZ IN BALTIMORE!