

BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

SPRING 2020

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Baltimore Trad Jazz Jam

By Kris Belgica

Baltimore is enjoying another successful jazz jam, this time featuring blaring, brassy melodies, the playful articulation of the clarinet and the “chunk-chunk” of the banjo. These are some of the hallmarks of the New Orleans sound—traditional, or “trad” jazz. Started by local musician Zach Serleth, Baltimore Trad Jazz Jam now happens most Tuesdays, hosted by De Kleine Duivel, a popular bar in Hampden tucked below The Bluebird Café, where they currently allow patrons to bring in outside food. De Kleine Duivel (“the little devil,” in Flemish) is a perfect venue for a night out to revel in musical nostalgia or just enjoy a delicious Belgian ale.

The house band consists of Jon Mathis (trumpet), Seth Kibel (clarinet), Brian Priebe (trombone), Ed Goldstein (tuba), Sami Arefin (lead guitar) and Zach Serleth, who cycles among upright bass, rhythm guitar, and banjo. The jam begins with an hour of music from the house band, then opens up to others. Horns of all types are welcomed with open arms. Play guitar or bass? No problem. You can tag-team with Zach, Sami or Ed. Tap dance? Come on up and you will

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PHOTO CREDIT: LIX FIXSEN

ERIC KENNEDY

Music Is a Healing Force

By Mitch Mirkin



PHOTO CREDIT: CHUKA JENKINS

Drummer and vocalist Eric Kennedy has toured the world, playing with jazz greats such as alto saxophonist Bobby Watson, formerly with the legendary Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. But Kennedy is also a homegrown Baltimore artist who remains true to his roots and has been a pillar of the local jazz scene for decades.

His rock-steady beat and creative flair on the drums, along with his soothing and soulful vocals, can be heard around town regularly. Kennedy plays often at venues such as An die Musik and Keystone Korner, with a variety of ensembles. He also appears on several CDs, many with other local artists, and now has three albums of his own in varying stages of production. These include one solo project in which he plays all the instruments.

“I am local. However, I am very proud of the fact Baltimore has made me a global teacher and musician as well,” says Kennedy, who frequently travels abroad to give master classes, clinics, and lectures.

(continued on page 8)

The Baltimore Jazz Alliance is a
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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

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JAZZ JAM SESSIONS

Where the cats congregate
to groove and grow!

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

SUNDAYS

Germano's – 7-10

Weekly jazz jam hosted by Mike 'n' Ike.
Instrumentalists and vocalists are welcome. 300
South High Street. 410-752-4515

MONDAYS

An die Musik Live! – 7:30-9:30

409 N. Charles Street. Jam sessions **SECOND**
and **FOURTH** Mondays co-hosted by Alex
Meadow and Christian Hizon. \$5 for musicians and
\$8 for others. 410-385-2638

Avenue Kitchen – 7-10

911 W. 36th Street. Hosted by Hot Club of
Baltimore, mostly Django Reinhardt music,
1930s-'40s and standards. Room for dancing.
Full bar with extensive draft beer selection and
food menu. No cover. 443-961-8515

Terra Cafe – 8:30-11:30

101 E. 25th Street. Straight ahead jazz jam hosted
by Clarence Ward III. All are welcome to come out
and express themselves. No cover, one drink
minimum. Come on in and swing with us.
410-777-5277

TUESDAYS

NEW! De Kleine Duivel – 8-11

3602 Hickory Avenue. Every Tuesday, The Trad
Jazz Jam night will feature a house band and
musicians are welcome to come play!
info@dkdbar.com

The Judge's Bench – 8:30-Midnight

8385 Main Street, Ellicott City. Charlie Schueller
leads informal jam sessions on the **FIRST**
TUESDAY of each month. 410-465-3497

If you know of local jam sessions,
or if any of the jazz jam sessions
listed are discontinued,
please LET US KNOW
so we can update the page!

TUESDAYS

Keystone Korner – 9

1350 Lancaster Street. Hosted by the Baltimore
Jazz Collective (Sean Jones, Kris Funn, Quincy
Philips, Todd Marcus, Matt Stephens, Brinae Ali).
Musicians and vocalists are welcome.
410-946-6726

Randallstown Community Center – 6-8

3505 Resource Drive, Randallstown. Open Jazz
Jam Sessions/Book & Poetry Readings. Hosted
by Derrick Amin. Musicians and vocalists are
welcome. 410-887-0698

NEW! Tabor's Ethiopian Restaurant – 8-11

328 Park Avenue. Weekly jam hosted by Joel
Santiago. 410-528-7234

NEW! Trinacria – 7-10

885 N. Howard Street. **THIRD TUESDAYS**
Liz Fixsen & Friends Jazz Jam for All. Host band:
Eric Worthy (bass), Matt George (Keyboard), Ace
Dennis (drums). All instruments and vocalists
welcome. No cover-tips welcome.
443-759-4082

WEDNESDAYS

49 West Café – 7-10

49 West Street, Annapolis. **FIRST & THIRD**
WEDNESDAYS. Hosted by John Starr and
house band. Musicians and singers very
welcome! Delicious and reasonably priced food
and drink available! \$10 cover. Reservations
410-626-9796

NEW! Marie Louise Bistro – 8-11

904 N. Charles Street. April 1st, 15 & 29, May 13
& 27. Hosted by Tom Lagana. No keyboard at
this session. 410-385-9946

THURSDAYS

The Place Lounge – 7:00-10:00

315 W. Franklin Street. Jam session/open mic is
hosted by Spice **SECOND & THIRD**
THURSDAYS. Musicians and vocalists are
welcome. 410-547-2722



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<http://www.joeycalderazzo.com>

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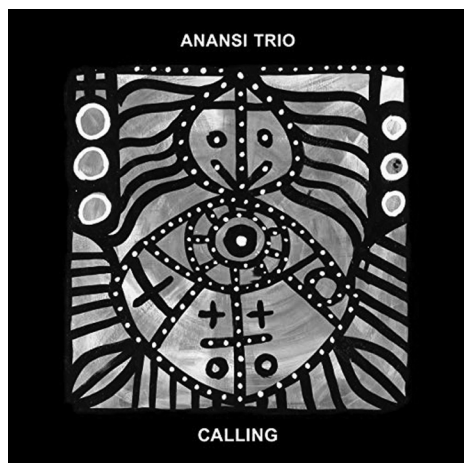
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The Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society is a nonprofit organization and is supported in part by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council. To discover more about Maryland State Arts Council grants and how they impact Maryland's arts sector, visit msac.org.

www.baltimorejazz.com



CALLING

The Anansi Trio

By Dr. Earl Brooks

Fresh off the heels of their 2018 album *On the Path*, the Anansi Trio returns with *Calling*, an album that manages to offer everyone something they will like without sacrificing the chemistry so readily audible among the group's members. Comprising Matt Belzer on woodwinds, Larry Melton on bass, and Mark Merella on hybrid drum kit, the Anansi Trio's new album provides a compelling mix of original compositions by Belzer and a few standards that highlight the group's strengths. Belzer, Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and frequent performer in theaters and concert halls in the DC region, has written the lion's share of the original compositions on the album.

One of the most significant aspects of this new project appears to be the group's increasing willingness to go beyond charts composed specifically for trios. This expansion offers a lot more room for Belzer to double on other instruments and further enrich the rhythmic flair that has become their calling card. Due to the Anansi Trio's commitment to African-diasporic rhythms and percussion within contemporary, jazz compositional structures, it's a bit sur-

prising that they have chosen a something-for-everyone approach rather than opting for distinct, fully-conceptualized albums (such as Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's *Ancestral Recall*), given the rich folklore surrounding the Akan folktale character, Anansi, which is the trio's eponym. My best guess is that they are moving toward such a project in the future because there are brief gestures to such thematic planning strewn across both albums.

I've always considered sax-led trio albums to lie on a spectrum of sonic and stylistic conventions, with the more experimental approaches (à la Albert Ayler or Henry Threadgill) on one side and an emphasis on understatement or technical mastery (such as with Joe Lovano or Lee Konitz) on the other side. The Anansi Trio targets a middle ground between such extremes, mixing a bit of experimentation with a few fresh interpretations of beloved standards. For example, the first track, "I, Chihuahua" is penned by Belzer and features a catchy, angular melody laid over funk rhythms. Inspired by Isaac Asimov and Belzer's dog, it's playful and jovial but with enough structural and harmonic complexity to keep one guessing about the song's direction. The trio then pays homage to Joe Henderson by including two of his charts: "Gazelle," which features special guest Ned Judy on electric piano, and a new arrangement of "Inner Urge" by Merella. The album also includes a moving rendition of John Coltrane's "Liberia."

The album's titular song, "Calling," begins with an introduction that is a haiku imposed on a hymn-like bass and melody line before spinning into the main theme. Merella's use of the batá drums creates an atmosphere of solemnity and gravity. The trio explores darker tonal colors with "Doom" and Arthur Blythe's "Lenox Avenue Breakdown." "Doom," anchored by Belzer's rich tone on bass clarinet, a meditative change of pace in lieu of a more traditional ballad. The trio is at its best during moments of high intensity, which is why "Lenox Avenue Breakdown" stands out on the

album, showcasing the trio's ability to sound like they are having fun while remaining amusingly serpentine.

Merella lets loose on bongos and timbales on "Of My Choosing," and Belzer's improvisation is at its most surprising and fluid here. The final two tunes on the album show off Belzer's multi-instrumentality, which includes piccolo, flute, alto flute, and clarinet. "Sympathetic Vibrations" features an improvisation over two dissimilar electric bass lines by Melton. Belzer focuses his attention on the soprano sax in both selections and is aided by the presence of a full woodwind sextet. The album closes with "Mystery Guest," a seductive and uplifting groove that attempts to target the mind, body, and spirit.



Anansi Trio
Matt Belzer, Mark Merella, Larry Melton

Fans of Dave Holland, Zakir Husain, and Chris Potter's *Good Hope* or Johnathan Blake's *Trion* will enjoy this album's mixture of buzzing energy and tender moments. *Calling* is an inspiring sophomore album that conjures up a bit of its own magic and intrigue.

Dr. Earl Brooks is an instructor in the English Department at UMBC. He teaches classes in communication-related topics such as "Texts and Contexts," "Topics in Communication and Technology," "New Media and Digital Literacies" and a class in sound studies. He is a jazz aficionado and plays the saxophone. His research is focused on music, specifically jazz, blues, gospel, and R&B.



From left: Ed Goldstein, Tom Mitchell, Zach Serleth, Brian Priebe, Jon Mathis

Baltimore Trad Jazz Jam

(continued from front page)

find yourself captivating the crowd. Musicians, from novices to advanced performers, will expect warm welcomes from everybody once the house band opens up to the jammers

When I first came to check it out, I was a little iffy about jamming, simply because I was not familiar with the repertoire. But I was put at ease when I found that the chord changes to several of the tunes were not as intimidating as I had expected. In fact, many of the songs played, such as “Honeysuckle Rose” and “I’m Confessin’ (That I Love You),” were familiar from other jazz scenes. The jam takes place on a raised stage where performers and listeners are easily visible to one another. The accessible repertoire and the high visibility are excellent for helping beginner musicians to hone their jazz chops and get used to performing in front of an audience. Toward the end of the session, all musicians are invited to join in on a mass jam, where the last few tunes are played with a combined force of volume and intensity. The result is a climax that fills the room with energy and immediately grabs everyone’s attention. This was the highlight of the jam on the night I played.

Toward the end of the session, all musicians are invited to join in on a mass jam. . . . The result is a climax that fills the room with energy . . .

Serleth, a founding member of the band Tongue in Cheek and now moving into some new musical partnerships, started this jam after prodding from a friend on Facebook. After serious consideration, he approached the management of De Kleine Duivel, which had previously hosted a gypsy jazz jam. He organized this jam not only because he loves

trad jazz, but also because he felt there were not enough musicians in Baltimore playing in this style. He also has a strong commitment to community-building and hopes this jam will help create a more connected network throughout the Baltimore jazz scene.

“There’s a lot of space to dance, and the band is great to listen to. . . once the downbeat starts, the room is filled with eager dancers.”

A unique characteristic of this jam is that it is geared toward swing dancers, most of whom congregate in front of the stage. Many of the tunes feature medium tempos and short durations, ideal for those who don’t want to dance for twelve minutes straight at 240 beats per minute. Typically, each tune lasts five-six minutes and is rarely too fast or slow for dancers. This weekly event has quickly become a very popular attraction for the city’s Lindy Hoppers. One regular, Isabel Robinson, says, “The jam has a great atmosphere. There’s a lot of space to dance, and the band is great to listen to. The musicians are awesome and very welcoming to new musicians.” Each week, once the downbeat starts, the room is filled with eager dancers.

Dancers, musicians, and patrons can experience a night where two musical realms—modern and traditional—blend into one another. The new decade has kicked off big time with the arrival of the Baltimore Trad Jazz Jam. You do not want to miss out on this jam!

Kristoffer Belgica is a Texas native who moved to Maryland in 2015. He is a swing guitar player currently studying gypsy jazz with Sami Arefin. He plays with the DC-based gypsy jazz band Swing 5 and Baltimore Swing Drop. His regular performance venues include The Rye in Fells Point, Meadworks in Hyattsville, and assisted living and retirement communities. This is his first article for BJA.

Hank Levy Charts to be added to Towson University Library Archives

By Liz Fixsen

All the brouhaha over the 2014 movie *Whiplash* has mostly been forgotten, but not the music that inspired it—the music of Baltimore big band composer, arranger and director Hank Levy. Now many of his original charts are finding a new home in Towson University's archives, located in Albert S. Cook Library.

Levy, a native of Baltimore, composed numerous pieces for the Stan Kenton and Don Ellis orchestras in the 1960s and '70s. He also led the Towson State University Jazz Ensemble at what is now Towson University and directed the Towson jazz studies program for 21 years until retiring in 1989. He passed away in 2001, but the Hank Levy Alumni Band, later named the Hank Levy Legacy Big Band, has continued his legacy under the direction of Bernard Robier.

"I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if it weren't for Hank Levy. . . . He opened doors to me to explore different kinds of music."

Levy's compositions are famous for using unusual time signatures such as 5/4 (five beats per measure, with a beat having the value of a quarter note), 7/4, 9/4, and 12/8 and for his use of unusual harmonies and voicings, as well as his employment of counterpoint (counterpoint is the relationship between voices that are harmonically interdependent [polyphony] yet independent in rhythm and contour—Wikipedia.). He also wrote many notable arrangements of jazz standards.

Trumpeter Bill Warfield, Director of Jazz Studies at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, says of his time studying with Hank Levy: "I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now if it weren't for Hank Levy. He was the perfect music teacher. He opened doors to me to explore different kinds of music." Levy was highly eclectic, using a wide range of musical genres in his compositions and arrangements, says Warfield. One important thing he learned from Levy was how to shape an arrangement from beginning to end, starting with simple motivic devices that build to a climax that makes audiences go wild.

His music is considered difficult to perform, but it is richly rewarding for players and audiences alike. For at least a decade, requests for the scores have been coming in from all over the USA and abroad. His compositions have been performed not only by the Legacy Band but also by countless high school jazz bands, private bands and orchestras. Some of the top-rated schools that have played Levy's composi-



Stewart Levy is in the process of cataloguing and inventorying the Hank Levy charts.

tions include Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, and Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. On a recent visit to Bern, Switzerland to give a concert series, local pianist Chris Grasso came across a sign (at Bierhübeli Bern) announcing a performance by the Swiss Jazz Orchestra—playing Hank Levy.

A handful of Levy's works are still in print through various distributors. His best-known works, those recorded by Stan Kenton and originally published through Creative World, are now distributed by Sierra Music Publications.

**On a recent visit to Bern, Switzerland . . .
Chris Grasso came across a sign announcing
a performance by the Swiss Jazz Orchestra
playing Hank Levy.**

A large number of Hank Levy's charts are owned by his nephew, Stewart Levy. Along with Hank Levy Jazz, LLC, and the Hank Levy Jazz Foundation Inc (501c3), as well as Levy's former student Tony Campbell (who teaches at Towson), Stewart Levy had been looking for a permanent home for the charts. The notoriety of the movie *Whiplash* brought their attention to the matter. They and Ashley Todd-Diaz, the university's archivist, have begun trying to expand their housing of composers' music.

Stewart Levy is in the process of cataloguing and inventorying the charts. All the instrument parts are 8.5" x 11" copies of the originals. They are being adjusted, cleaned up, and converted to PDF format for the archive. He has already sent over the first group of 25 charts (out of some 200). Mr. Levy doesn't know where all the originals of the charts for the instruments have ended up; his uncle gave most of them away to band members.

Levy also possesses about fifty or so original pencil-on-

paper scores. Those original scores will also be transferred to Cook Library and added to the archives' digital collections, making the charts accessible to both on-site and online users, while preserving Hank Levy's copyrights. Stewart Levy has also transcribed some compositions into Finale and other digital music notation formats. Dr. Todd-Diaz says that eventually the library may work with the Jazz Studies department to complete more transcriptions. As this work proceeds, Hank Levy's genius will become ever more accessible to the world of jazz.

Questions about Hank Levy, his music, licensing, acquiring his jazz charts or anything else may be emailed to StewartLevy@HankLevyJazz.com. Also see the Hank Levy website at www.hanklevyjazz.com, the Towson University webpage, Hank Levy's Legacy at www.towson.edu/cofac/about/hlevy.html, and the Albert S. Cook Library Archives webpage at www.towson.edu/archives

Liz Fixsen is a jazz pianist, jazz vocalist, jazz enthusiast and church musician. She has written numerous articles and reviews for the Baltimore Jazz Alliance and serves on the BJA board. Liz teaches English as a Second Language through Howard County Library and taught Professional Writing at University of Maryland for many years. She works with Jazz Beyond Borders promoting jazz and world-music artists.



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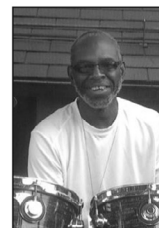
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The mission of Contemporary Arts Inc. is to preserve and advance
the appreciation of the Jazz art form throughout the community
through education and performance.

Eric Kennedy: Music Is a Healing Force

(continued from front page)

From his youth, Kennedy has eagerly sought out musical mentors, in Charm City and beyond.

"I chased them all down," he says, referring to pioneering drummers like Max Roach, Louis Hayes, and the aforementioned Art Blakey and Elvin Jones. "I didn't get to meet all of them, but I would try. I would go to their gigs, take lessons. Some guys weren't teaching, but they would invite me to just come up to New York and hang out."

The late Baltimore-based drummer Johnny Polite used to drive a school bus during the day—and that's where Kennedy would seek him out.

"He was a big mentor for me," recalls Kennedy fondly. "I would sit with him on the bus while he was waiting for the kids."

Kennedy names his primary local influences as drummer Jamal Wilson and vocalist, composer, and multi-instrumentalist Timmy Shepherd. "They've helped mold me into the musician-composer, teacher, and man I am today," he says.

Kennedy has always gravitated toward teachers who would push him, who would make him grow. He recalls one day in his teens when he was playing the timpani at Frederick Douglass High School. The sharp-eared orchestra teacher, Bobby Harris, pointed out that Kennedy's tuning of one of the drums was slightly off—by a quarter-tone.

"A quarter-tone off? I respected that," recalls Kennedy. "I said, 'I've got to start hanging around this guy!'"

Before attending Douglass, Kennedy went to the Baltimore School for the Arts. The exposure to classical music built his chops, but what he found most rewarding was the fellowship with like-minded peers.

Jazz is the ultimate fusion . . .

It's really a mixture of all the different styles

"We were all staying after school, going to record shops, going to the library, borrowing every type of music we could find: Korean, African, straight-ahead, avant-garde. We hung out with the dancers, the visual artists. There was a group of us who just wanted to learn about everything. We'd all just get together and share information."

Take it back further, and Kennedy recalls growing up amid a *mélange* of musical influences. His older brother Dennis played the drums, so there was a kit in the house that Eric could experiment with. Other siblings also played music. Extended family members and neighbors sang in the church or vocal groups. There was gospel, R&B, soul, rock—and of course, jazz. Kennedy absorbed the sounds of traditional jazz but also found himself drawn to fusion groups like Mahavishnu Orchestra and Chick Corea's Return to Forever.

Then there were the more exotic sounds, like South



African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, Egyptian oud player Hamza El Din, and Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar. They kindled Kennedy's passion for what would become known as world music.

The first time he heard Shankar play, recalls Kennedy, "I said, 'What is this music?' I fell in love with it."

For Kennedy, though, jazz is where it all comes together, where all the genres merge.

"Music for me is more than just a gig.

**It's saved my life and it's been healing,
and therapeutic, and fun.**

"Jazz is the ultimate fusion," he reflects. "It's really a mixture of all the different styles, and you have the opportunity to blend it into something new, something unique."

Creativity, self-expression, connection with other people and other cultures—these are ideas Kennedy has tried to impart to young music students as a teacher and mentor in Baltimore public schools and colleges.

"Music for me is more than just a gig. It's saved my life and it's been healing, and therapeutic, and fun. When I teach and play, those are the things I want to give back," says Kennedy. "I want you to feel you're loved. I want to inspire you to read a book, see a movie, or research a musician. Even try a food you haven't tried before. I want to connect you with the rest of the world." Certainly Kennedy's music has long been an inspiration to thousands of listeners and players in Baltimore and far beyond.

Mitch Mirkin is a writer and editor with the research program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He contributed to the recent BJA series of profiles on local big bands. Seven of Mitch's jazz compositions appear on The Common Roots Ensemble's recent CD, *Dance of the DNA*.



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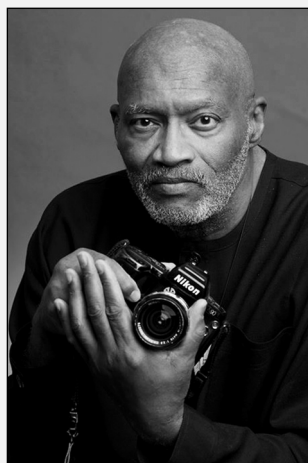
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IN MEMORIAM + VERNARD GRAY

VISIONARY CURATOR, ART COLLECTOR, PHOTOGRAPHER,
ULTIMATE JAZZ FAN, VIDEOGRAPHER/FILMMAKER AND FASHION DESIGNER



**By Liz Fixsen
and Bob Jacobson**

In late January the Baltimore jazz scene lost one of its most dynamic advocates, Vernard Gray, director of the Be Mo Jazz Series, which he co-founded with the late guitarist/vocalist Earl Wilson. Gray was also a BJA board member since 2014.

As shown on his Facebook page, Gray was a “visionary curator, art collector, photographer, ultimate Jazz fan, videographer/filmmaker, and fashion designer.” Although Gray played multiple roles in the arts, when it came to jazz, saxophonist Craig Alston explain that “Vernard thought of himself as a presenter. He liked concerts with a theme, such as the music of Billy Strayhorn or Charlie Parker.” Gray often turned to Alston as a consultant on jazz, but he also mentored him about how to present himself as an artist. “And it wasn’t just jazz,” Alston adds. “He was open to hip-hop and story-telling—all kinds of programs.”

Gray was born in 1941 in Washington, DC, where his father had moved from a farm in rural Virginia and his mother from Illinois during the Great Depression. They were both federal employees. According to his younger sister, writer Louise Gray, both parents encouraged their children to explore the world, ask questions and study, judge people by how they treat you, and have all kinds of friends. Their father was a gregarious sort who “never met a stranger” and was very political, spending each Sunday watching current affairs shows on television. Their mother was quieter but an activist who led a petition drive to get a recreation center in their neighborhood. She gave Vernard his first camera at age twelve. After attending Howard University and Bowie State, then working for the post office, for VISTA and as a courier, he became a professional photographer, videographer and art gallery owner. His Miya Gallery (1976-2001) was one of the first in DC to focus on African American artists. Gray was a long-time member of the Anacostia Coordinating Council, which presented him with its community service award.

Gray’s sister Louise remembers Vernard going at around age nineteen to hear jazz in DC and New York’s Greenwich Village. But she also echoes Alston about Gray’s wide-ranging tastes in music. As she has been going through his CD collection, she has found music in other languages from all over the world.

Most of Gray’s productions took place in DC as part of the non-profit he founded, East River Jazz, which was part of nine DC Jazz Festivals, but he liked to show off Baltimore’s jazz talent in many of his DC shows. Alston recalls a memorable 2016 concert at Fort DuPont in which he and Baltimore trumpeter Theljon Allen played with a rather odd combination of a soul vocalist and three experimental jazz players from DC. “The audience loved it,” says Alston. “Vernard was always trying to bring different styles together. He had faith that whatever the artists wanted to do, it would be great.”

In Baltimore, part of Gray’s mission was finding new venues for jazz. These came to include the Isaac Myers-Frederick Douglass Maritime Museum, Teavolve, and the Motor House. He frequently made a point of including a post-concert “conversation” as part of the program, with panelists talking about the composer or other aspects of the music. In his later years Gray hosted his own birthday celebrations in Baltimore, always with live jazz. In 2019, Gray received a DC Mayor’s Arts Award for Excellence as a Community Arts Advocate, which included acknowledgment of over three hundred jazz performances in the Washington-Baltimore region since 2008.

Gray died in Cuba while on the third trip he organized to the island. Alston says that in Cuba, Gray was trying to build a relationship that would bring Cuban artists here and send US artists to Cuba to perform. He was always into building relationships in the arts community, no matter what the cost: he believed in bridging gaps in the culture, even the gap between B’more and DC. “At first Cuba was just a place he was curious about,” says Louise Gray, but it became “something that lit him up. He loved the seemingly endless variety of artists and something about the spirit of the people. It was like a paradise for him.”

In addition to his sister, Gray is survived by three daughters and three grandchildren. A celebration of his life is slated for March 29th, 2020, from 1 to 4 pm, at The Arc Theater in Washington, DC.

The Gail Marten Songbook

By Liz Fixsen

"Celibacy.

It's alright by me.

Though it's not for everyone.

Sleeping alone

Life on your own

Not for most, but fine for some.

No compromising

Try it for yourself and see,

Try it for yourself and see. . .

I've had my fun

I've played and I've won

Never much for keeping score.

Been in the game

Warmed by the flame

Then I asked myself, what for?

I'm improvising

Life in one-part harmony, diggin' my own company."

Those are some of the lyrics written by vocalist and songwriter Gail Marten to the tune of "Blue Monk," by Thelonious Monk. It is just a sample of the clever words she has written to both well-known standards but her own tunes, as well as to melodies written by her long-time collaborator, pianist Clem Ehoff, as well as other composers, including Larry Willis.

Marten will be publishing these songs in *The Gail Marten Songbook*, soon to be available at www.jazzpalette.com with the songs in PDF format and in Finale so that users can transpose the songs as needed.

Until retiring from performing in 2016, Gail Marten was one of Baltimore's most well-regarded vocalists. She began her singing career in 1980 shortly after moving to Maryland from Philadelphia. She performed at premier venues throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, including Blues Alley, Bohemian Caverns, Baltimore's Pier Six Concert Pavilion, Ethel's Place, and Eubie Live! She held long-term engagements at the Belvedere's 13th Floor Lounge and many premier hotels including Omni, Hyatt Regency, Hilton, Radisson, Sheraton and Renaissance.

Some of the jazz notables she has

worked with include familiar Baltimore names such as Larry Willis, Cyrus Chestnut, Robert Shahid, Carl Grubbs, Eric Kennedy, Fred Hughes, Blake Meister, Larry Brown, Tim Murphy, Todd Simon, Greg Hatza, Darius Scott and Tom Lagana.



PHOTO CREDIT: SHEILA P. JONES

Marten has also released several critically praised albums, including *In Love Again* (2009), with Larry Willis (piano), Herman Burney (bass) and Eric Kennedy (drums); and *Is It Love* (2005), *Pure Joy* (2003) and *Beyond the Rainbow* (2001) with the Clem Ehoff Trio.

**"Like a trace of perfume in
a cold, empty room"**

Marten began composing in the early '80s. "Big Girl Blues" was the second song she composed, in 1982. While sitting in her car one day, feeling sorry for herself, she wondered, "Why doesn't someone come and help me?" She answered her own question: "Nobody's coming to help you. You're a big girl now." And that thought became a song that she wrote down that very night: "I'm a BIG GIRL now / I'm a BIG GIRL now / I pay my own damn bills / And find my own cheap thrills / I'm a BIG GIRL now."

As she once wrote in an article for the BJA newsletter, "Some of my lyrics evolve from a question, some tell a

story and others employ humor. I often utilize conflict, tension and resolution, and now and then my intention is to intrigue with a seductive enigma. . . . I seek the sensual, hoping to involve the listener." Here is an example: "Swim with shiny, silver dolphins / through Tahiti's blue lagoons, / warmed by orchid-scented breezes . . .". Her aim is always that the listener will be "touched, inspired, or amused in some manner."

Some of her lyrics are wry and witty, as in "Reinventing Me": "I will reinvent myself / Become another me / I will circumvent my natural personality / find a formula to free / An alternate reality / And maybe then he'll fall in love with me. / I will rise at six am / To exercise my chi / Stop at eight and meditate / Achieving harmony. / Change the color of my hair, / Reconstruct my derriere, / Surely then he'll fall in love with me. . . ."

Others are romantic and dreamy, as in "Gypsy Dream" (Django): "Like a trace of perfume / in a cold, empty room / How your soft serenade / Breathing light to shadow / Lifts my sorrow / generates a rainbow / in darkness the colors are blending / Pretending is ending. . . ."

Marten hopes to get some nationally/internationally prominent singers, as well as local vocalists, to perform and record her music. Shirley Horn was scheduled to record three of Marten's songs but fell ill and died before she could do this.

Marten also exercises her creativity as a graphic designer under the name Jazz Palette; she has edited and designed the Baltimore Jazz Alliance newsletter since 2009. She has written performance reviews for BJA and says that she has a book of short fiction on the horizon. With this new songbook she is also carrying her musical career into the future as well as providing a valuable resource to jazz vocalists everywhere.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RENÁ SWEETWINE



BJA? Here's Why!

BJA Vice President, RENÁ SWEETWINE

Why did you join the BJA?

I joined the BJA to get a closer look at what's going on in the jazz community in Baltimore. I had retired and was basically looking to be a part of something different.

Tell us about your involvement with jazz (as a fan or listener, or a player past or present).

I am a jazz vocalist and was very much involved at that time with the Randallstown Jazz Workshop. It allowed me to work on my craft with a full band. I learned a lot with the workshop. Now I sing between the genres of jazz, blues, and R&B. I am still feeling my way through.

What do you think of the Baltimore jazz scene?

The Baltimore jazz scene is still growing. I believe music and business work hand in hand. The business allows musicians to have a platform to play or perform. The business gains more patrons to visit their business. One day, hopefully, we can show statistical data about whether open mics, or live bands in general, help to bring more revenue.

Who are some of your favorite jazz musicians?

One of my favorite jazz musicians from Baltimore is alto saxophonist Roscoe Evans, who plays smooth jazz, and saxophonist Jim Dow—he reminds me of the sax players from the times of the Billie Holiday era, with a lot of emotion. I love their sound!

How have you been involved with the BJA so far?

I have helped to organize the 2019 Father's Day Jazz Fest and the 2019 jazz conference in November. I have been involved with partnering with other organizations and businesses to find bands for BJA events. With all the things BJA does, such as creating events, providing a platform for artists, and partnering with other organizations, we sometimes get the opportunity to offer a band a gig. That's a good feeling! As a musician myself, I know how hard it is to get a decent-paying gig. So when the opportunity presents itself, it makes me feel good to be a part of offering the opportunity.

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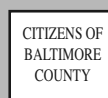
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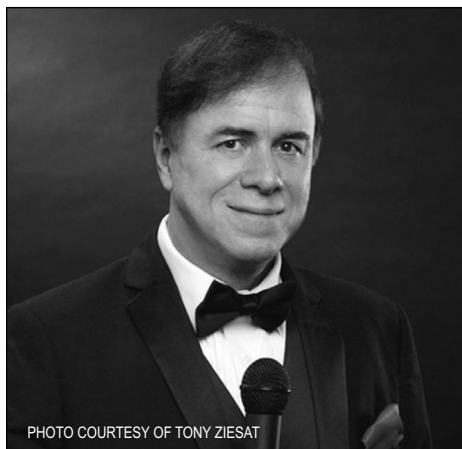


toddmarcusjazz.com

Tony Ziesat's *The Roller Coaster of Love*

By Theodore G. Zavales

Now that spring is finally upon us, one's thoughts turn, naturally (and hopefully), to romance. Tony Ziesat's latest collection, *The Roller Coaster of Love*, is indeed a musical love letter to romance, a charming journey through love in its many guises, as realized by the masters of the Great American Songbook.



In addition to his command of the canon of standards, Ziesat specializes in international love songs . . .

An ex-New Yorker, Tony grew up listening to opera, spent some of his teenage years in the Greenwich Village folk music scene, and ultimately settled on jazz, frequenting the Village Vanguard with guitarist/songwriter Jimmy Kachulis, listening to jazz greats such as Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. He subsequently received vocal training at the Eastman School of Music.

Shortly thereafter, he unexpectedly passed an audition for Broadway but deferred that dream in favor of raising a family. When the kids became adults, Tony re-entered the world of vocal performance, gravitating toward standards and the Great American Songbook. His repertoire also includes material from musical theater and international love songs (Italian, Greek, French and Spanish). He has created and regularly performs six different cabaret programs: "The Roller Coaster of Love," "Rhythm and Blues and All That Jazz," "The Magical Spell of Love," "My Jazzy Valentine," "Agape and All That Jazz" and "The Wild Ride of Amore." In addition to cabaret shows and nightclub gigs, Tony provides entertainment for private social/family occasions, corporate events, and fundraisers for non-profit charitable organizations. He has performed at Germano's Cabaret (where he is a regular and where he will be playing again on May 16th), the Chesapeake Arts Center, Preston Hall, the now-defunct Black Fox Lounge in DC, the Parthenon in Potomac and the Ridgefield Playhouse in Connecticut. He feels truly blessed to have the incomparable Stef Scaggiari as his pianist, from whom he has learned a great deal.

The selections on the CD allow the listener to truly experience love's varying and complex emotions are ideally suited to Ziesat's vocal stylings, which are simultaneously powerful and seemingly effortless. Ranging from the wistfulness of Rodgers and Hart's "Bewitched, Both-

ered and Bewildered" and the unabashed romanticism of Hoagy Carmichael's "The Nearness of You" to the exuberance of Lerner and Loewe's "Almost Like Being in Love" (which indeed made this reviewer "all aglow and alive") and the joy of Cole Porter's "I've Got You Under my Skin," Ziesat's set can be enjoyed alone or with someone special. And, as a vocalist myself, I find the temptation to sing along irresistible. In addition to his command of the canon of standards, Ziesat specializes in international love songs, as demonstrated in "Arrivederci, Roma" performed in both English and Italian.

The piano accompaniments of Scaggiari, featured on most of the tracks, are the perfect complement to Ziesat's vocals, as are the guitar of Jimmy Kachulis on Rodgers and Hart's "Where or When" and Kachulis's piano for Buddy Johnson's "Since I Fell for You."

Brief audio samples of all seventeen of the songs on the album, as well as online purchase information, may be found at Amazon.com. Tony's website address is: www.tonyzvocals.com

Ziesat's album notes encourage you to "Fasten your seatbelt!" Perhaps, but I think you'll find *The Roller Coaster of Love* a delightfully smooth vocal ride.

Theodore G. Zavales is a native New Yorker, is a trained vocalist and a devotee of early music, particularly Byzantine chant and music of the Renaissance. He is currently a member of the Choir and a Psalti (Chanter) at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Baltimore.

*Jazz stands for freedom. It's supposed to be the voice of freedom.
Get out there and improvise, and take chances, and don't be a perfectionist.
Leave that to the classical musicians.*

— Dave Brubeck

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April 18 7&9 p.m. An die Musik, Baltimore
Gregory Thompkins Tribute to John Coltrane w/Frank Young on drums
June 19 8:30 p.m. Poulet, Timonium, MD
Gregory Thompkins Tribute to John Coltrane w/Frank Young on drums

Visit www.carlfilipiak.com for more upcoming shows.

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- **An die Musik** offers 10% discount for BJA members for music purchases at the An die Musik record store.
- **Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society** offers BJA members a \$2 discount off the general admission price. Just indicate your affiliation when ordering tickets.
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BJA Member Notes

WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Ellen Adajian, Jim Adajian, Kris Belgica, James Deshler, Ann Fagan, Angel Gonzalez, Karen Greene, Aaron Levin, Jaquelyn Lyman, Sandra Mason, Judith Mercier, Julie Merrill, David Mershon, Chip Miller, Amy Rynes, Zachary Serleth, Larry Stokes, Sandra Summers, Alexis Tantau, Nelson Thomas, Alvin Wheeler

AN DIE MUSIK

Once again, An die Musik was named one of the 100 Top Jazz Venues in the World by *DownBeat* Magazine.

MARK OSTEEN

Former BJA president Mark Osteen is now vice president of Baltimore Chamber Jazz Society.

PHIL RAVITA

Phil Ravita has received a grant from the Jazz Education Network funded by the Herb Alpert Foundation. The grant will be used to put on a Jazz for Kids program at the Green School in the Belair-Edison section of Baltimore City.

GEORGE SPICKA

George Spicka will present his first string quartet performance of "The True Believer," at a Baltimore Composers Forum concert on April 25th.



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Where Are They Now?

By Bob Jacobson



DAVID DIONGUE

Saxophonist David Diongue won our Next Generation Artist award in 2011, recommended by Barbara and Carl Grubbs, who lead the SAX summer music program. Diongue then attended Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA) and played frequently in the Randallstown jam sessions led by Derrick Amin. After graduating from BSA, he spent four years at Oberlin Conservatory, where he studied with Gary Bartz, Robin Eubanks, and Jamey Haddad, graduating in 2017. That summer Diongue taught at SAX camp. Later he worked in marketing and promotions for Contemporary Arts, Inc., the non-profit which runs SAX camp.

Since returning to Baltimore, Diongue has led trios and quartets and performed at An die Musik, Morgan State University, Pratt Library, DC Public Library, Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, Blues Alley, Sotto Sopra and Zissimo's. He has recently suspended all performing while preparing a recording project to be released in May 2020.



SIMONE SUMMERS

Trumpet student Simone Summers won our Next Generation Artist award in August, 2016. She is now a junior at Baltimore School for the Arts, playing in its jazz band, which performed at our Jazz Fest in June and at the Jazz Education Network conference in New Orleans in January.

Summers also plays in Paul Carr's Jazz Academy Orchestra in Silver Spring, where she also studies trumpet with Chris Battistone. In Baltimore she studies piano and bass with Blake Meister. Last summer the young trumpeter spent three weeks at Eastman School of Music—two at jazz camp and one at trumpet camp—and one week at University of Maryland's music composition camp. She is currently thinking about attending jazz camp at Berklee College of Music or studying filmmaking and film scoring.

We are so proud that our awardees have continued studying and achieved so much on the jazz path. Way to go, David and Simone!

Bob Jacobson has written for *DownBeat*, allaboutjazz.com and jazzreview.com. He also wrote chapters on Ellis Larkins and Hank Levy in the 2010 book *Music at the Crossroads: Lives and Legacies of Baltimore Jazz*.



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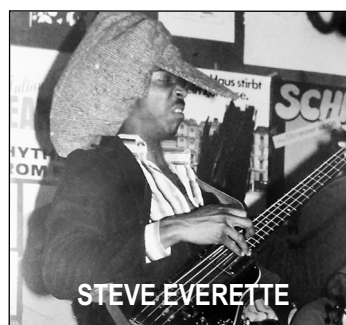
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Before They Played Jazz

By Ian Rashkin



These days you can catch BJA's newest board member Steve Everett around the jazz clubs in Baltimore and Washington, mostly listening and supporting his fellow artists. But back in the late '70s, he was playing some mean funk and fusion in

Germany—Frankfurt, the Rhine River and the Taunus mountains. "When I left the States, I took funk with me," he says of his time doing dual service in the U.S. military and the funk-rock band Score.

On one occasion they were playing a club in Wiesbaden or Geisen, and the owner, a dreadlocked individual known as "German Rasta Guy," took him aside and said "Bassman, I want you to wear my hat while you are playing in my club. The hat is perfect for you." The well-worn hat kept its shape, hiding the lack of dreads underneath and adding to a classic bass face!

Ian Rashkin works as a software developer by day, and plays bass any chance he gets, with Mike 'n' Ike, the Liz Fixsen Trio, and other local artists. He has served on the board of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance since 2014 and is its current president.

SUMMER 2020 ISSUE
Deadline for ad reservations: May 15th

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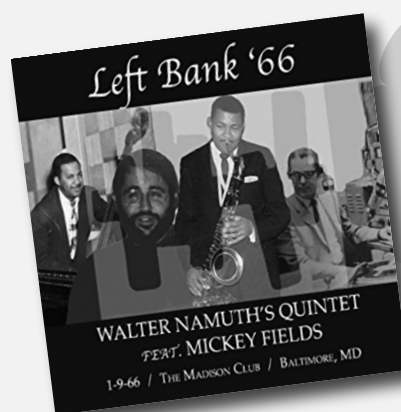
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Six tracks include Sam Jones's "Unit 7," Monk's "Well You Needn't," Miles Davis's "Pfrancin" and "The Theme," Benny Golson's "Stablemates," and Billy Reid's "The Gypsy." Phil Harris is on bass, Claude Hubbard on piano and Purnell Rice on drums. Total playing time = 67 minutes.

To purchase *Left Bank '66*, you may pay \$15 via PayPal at baltimorejazz.com or write a check for \$15 to: BJA, 847 North Howard Street, Baltimore, MD 21201. Please make sure to type or print your street address. We will then send you the CD by U.S. mail.

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Details on page 19

