

BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

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VOLUME SEVENTEEN + ISSUE ONE + THE BJA NEWSLETTER + WWW.BALTIMOREJAZZ.COM



PHOTO CREDIT: EFRAIN RIBEIRO

From left: Todd Marcus, Sean Jones, Eric Kennedy,
Eric Wheeler, Tim Brey

BJA in the Year of Covid-19

Summer Music Moves Goes Outside, Baltimore Jazz Conference Goes Virtual, The Calendar Stays Online, and The Beat Goes On

By Ian Rashkin, BJA President

It goes without saying that 2020 has been a very tough year, for artists struggling to make a living, for venues struggling to stay in business, and for individuals struggling to stay healthy and to stay connected in a time of social distancing and stay-at-home orders. We've each faced differing levels of loss and difficulty, depending on our circumstances, but for one and all, the Baltimore jazz community is a very different place than it was a year ago. We've seen festivals and club dates evaporate, venues shut and re-open, and on top of that an extremely contentious election season and a wave of social-justice awareness. Throughout all that, Baltimore jazz musicians continue to create and improvise, and the BJA is doing whatever we can to continue to support that creativity.

After the cancellation of our Father's Day Baltimore Jazz

(continued on page 2)

JAGGED SPACES

An Antidote To Zoom Calls

By Gregory L. Lewis

In this odd season of pandemic-induced social distancing and assorted virtual encounters—Zoom world—there's a palpable longing for the familiarity of group encounters at a restaurant, a stadium, a church or, perhaps, a favorite jazz venue. Fortunately for those with an ear for jazz, recorded music provides a stopgap, recreating the sound if not the camaraderie of a jazz concert.

A case in point is *Jagged Spaces*, the debut CD offering from a saucy new quintet, The Grasso-Ravita Jazz Ensemble, featuring Skip Grasso on guitar, Phil Ravita on acoustic and electric bass, Greg Small on piano, Benny Russell on soprano

(continued on page 3)

CD REVIEW

THE GRASSO-RAVITA JAZZ ENSEMBLE
SKIP GRASSO PHIL RAVITA GREG SMALL BENNY RUSSELL NUC VEGA
JAGGED SPACES

**The Baltimore Jazz Alliance is a
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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.

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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NEWSLETTER

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BJA in The Year of Covid-19

(continued from first page)

Fest, of Artscape and other local festivals, and after our collaboration with Dance Baltimore—Summer Music Moves—was postponed and on the verge of being canceled, we were thrilled to be able to reimagine the latter as an open-air, multi-venue event in mid-September. Thanks to Dance Baltimore's Cheryl Goodman's leadership, the event was a great success, with separate, sequential events at Eager Park, Parks and People, and the front steps of Center Stage, with each location featuring live music and live dance performances.

More recently, we presented our second annual Baltimore Jazz Conference (thanks to support from Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts as part of Free Fall Baltimore), this time totally virtual, but still featuring an opportunity for networking, learning, and catching up on the local scene. Hosted on the Zoom platform, the conference offered panel discussions on Jazz and Activism, History and Highlights of the Left Bank Society, Presenting in a Pandemic, How to Listen to Jazz, and Engaging the Audience. We had presentations such as "Funding Options for the Jazz Community," "Pulling the Curtain Back on Music Licensing and Performing Rights," "Music Business and Law," and FAQs about online playing, plus a listening session with the Baltimore Kissa Society and an open forum with NEA Jazz Master Todd Barkan. In between, we entertained listeners with virtual concerts by Jamal Moore and Jeron White, and by the Justin Taylor Quartet.

While we certainly missed the in-person networking opportunities of our 2019 conference, it was still great to be able to see people, both old friends and new acquaintances, come together to discuss these topics, share ideas and reminisce. For those who missed it, we can't recreate the social aspect—you had to be there!—but the sessions were all recorded and are available online at baltimorejazz.com for your education and enjoyment.

On Halloween we headed down to West Baltimore to support our first Member Grant project (see Introducing BJA Member Grants in the Summer 2020 issue, or online). Long time BJA member Todd Marcus brought a fantastic group featuring Eric Kennedy, Eric Wheeler, Tim Brey, Sean Jones, and of course Todd himself to the street for a free neighborhood performance that drew local residents of all ages as well as fans from the area. It was a great way to bring world-class music to the people where they are and to show them what a rich tradition Baltimore has to offer. One highlight was saxophonist Russ Kirk's three young sons, who were all mesmerized by Eric Kennedy's drumming. (Who wouldn't be?) Another was the start of the show when the neighbor's car battery failed and the band members had to delay their set so they could get her a jump start!

Finally, through all this we have supported our venues and artists by continuing to publish our online calendar and sending out the weekly email and social media listings. Weekly notices halted at first, when the initial lockdown had virtually all performances on hold, but as venues and individual performers found ways to present virtually, outdoors, and eventually, indoors in limited capacities, we've made sure to keep the calendar as up to date as we can, to let everyone know that no matter the odds, culture and art will find a way to be seen and heard. We know that there are varying degrees of risk that people are willing to take, and we can only hope that everyone stays safe and manages to hang on to their health, their art, and their sense of community so that someday we can all come together and again fully enjoy the amazing scene that is Baltimore jazz.

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.

JAGGED SPACES: An Antidote To Zoom Calls

(continued from first page)

and tenor saxophones, and Nucleo Vega on drums. This group rewards curiosity.

The band consists of veteran artists presently hailing from the Baltimore/Washington metro area, each with the sort of academic connections typical of today's working musician. Taken as a whole, the CD's nine original member compositions leave the distinctive stamp of straight-ahead jazz (bebop's heir) with all of its harmonic complexity—a profusion of fast-paced notes that dance all over the musical scale—against a powerful rhythm section, with above-average soloists. The abrupt and angular approach of Russell's volatile tenor sax style is particularly suggestive of the title, *Jagged Spaces*.

Nonetheless, the playlist is balanced with respect to tempo and mood. There's not a bad tune in the bunch. Consider on the one hand, "All About Cynthia," with a bluesy rhythm section backing Russell's lush soprano sax riffing romantically at a leisurely, even halting pace as Small's brooding piano sprinkles single notes in response to the fluttering of Grasso's guitar. "All About Cynthia" revived deeply embedded personal memories of more than one amorous tête-à-tête, the sort of pre-Zoom conversations that served as a pretext for intimacy. Remember those?

The CD's title tune is a middle-tempo romp
on a pulsating melodic refrain . . .
There's not a bad tune in the bunch.

On the other hand, "Latin For Leandro" features the guitar leading on an introductory chorus of a meandering melody with the plucky spontaneity of, say, Grant Green, to a Latin beat propelled by Vega's tapping drum work. The tenor sax's response is breezy, a middle register stream of jostling notes that set up a soaring excursion by the piano, its extended runs establishing jagged spaces against offsetting accents. In an interlude, Ravita's rock-solid bass solo plays rhythmic tag with the strumming guitar, before the sax restates the Latin-flavored theme with gusto.

The CD's title tune is a middle-tempo romp on a pulsating melodic refrain that trades solos among Russell's soprano sax, Grasso's guitar and Small's piano as counterpoint to the jerky rhythm of Vega's lurching drumbeat, as it parries Ravita's thumping bass line. Its vibe is agitated, yet catchy.

"Songhai" features the guitar riffing with a tinge of Eastern rhythm and the tenor sax rapidly rolling repeated notes, à la John Coltrane. "Blue Sunshine" is the obligatory swaggering blues, with Russell working his tenor sax to shouting perfection. "Circles" revolves at a relaxed pace as the soprano sax zigs where the piano zags on a slinking melodic pattern that, in turn, the subtle guitar rhythmically fondles.



From left: Greg Small, Nuc Vega, Skip Grasso,
Benny Russell, Phil Ravita

"The Homecoming" employs an unusual tempo, a sort of intermittently accelerated jazz/waltz, whereas "Chasing Shadows" is a soothing ballad, with a lilting theme that gradually unfolds via subdued tenor sax and guitar solos. "Her Life Incomplete" features Ravita's agile acoustic bass more prominently than elsewhere.

Surprisingly, *Jagged Spaces* is devoid of jazz standards, those hummable, familiar tunes stylized by generations of jazz artists that form a traditional canon of excellence, a short-hand basis for individual comparison with the recognized giants of jazz. This absence is surprising because the CD's artistry so clearly manifests the spirit of mainstream jazz.

Then again, there's a downside to imitation. Perhaps jazz standards were omitted in this collaborative project for reasons related to a story told by pioneering acoustic bassist Milt Hinton (1910-2000) in *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya* (1955), a jazz oral history edited by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff: "One night [a copying imitator] went down to hear his idol at Birdland. And this copier was real high. Well, the man he had copied all this time wasn't up to par that night. So the copier went right up to him on the stand and said, 'Man, you ain't you, I'm you!'"

It's about authenticity, reality. The Grasso-Ravita Jazz Ensemble: who are they? Find out for yourself. *Jagged Spaces* CDs and downloads are available at CD Baby, Amazon and Bandcamp. On January 1, 2021, a CD release event will be live-streamed from An die Musik. Want to know more? Contact skip.phil@grasso-ravitajazzensemble.com.

Gregory L. Lewis is a longtime Baltimore attorney whose jazz reflections frequently appear under the Caton Castle's "show review" tab at catoncastle.com and at reflectionscatoncastle.blogspot.com.

Retirement Can Be Tough; But Jazz Can Help

By Michael B. Friedman

For some, retirement brings immediate happiness, but for many, there's a tough period of adjustment. Without work, you can lose social contacts, a way to fill your time, your sense of who you are, your self-esteem, and your source of meaning. Those who struggle with retirement find many ways to recover well-being. Grandparenting, volunteering, and playing golf work for some people. Creative arts are the salvation for many people; playing jazz, in my experience, is especially fulfilling.

Why? According to Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, the major components of well-being are positive emotions, social connections, engagement and immersion in satisfying activities, personal achievement, and a sense of meaning. Playing jazz addresses all of these.

Positive Emotions: For starters, playing jazz can be fun. Not always, of course. Sometimes it is a struggle to play what you hear inside. Sometimes the best you can do is to play by rote. But when body and musical soul are in sync, it is an incredible pleasure. Playing jazz also often involves reaching into yourself and discovering new emotions. One can release raw emotional energy in the driving rhythms of soul or Latin jazz. One can express emotional tensions through the close, sometimes dissonant harmonies of modern jazz.

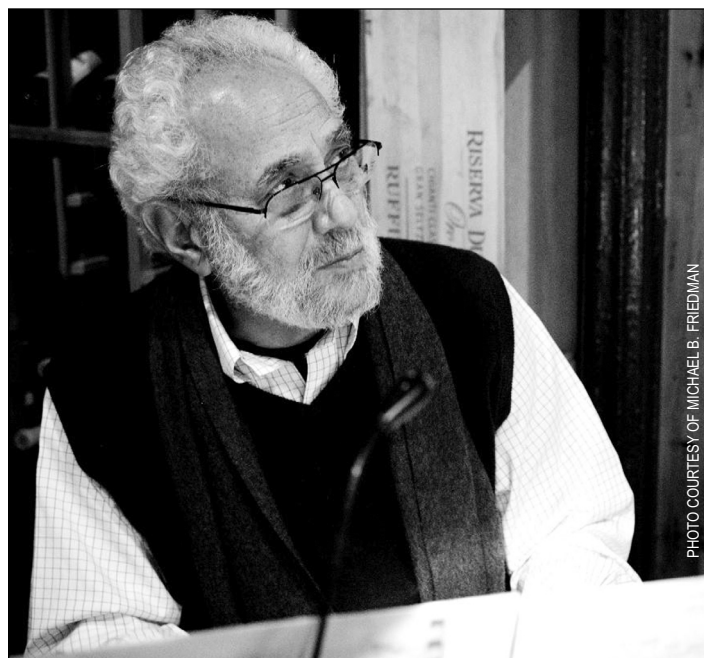
And when your emotions are disturbing, jazz can also help. As the title of an old Horace Silver album suggests, *Blowing the Blues Away* is one of the functions of jazz. And not just the blues. Playing jazz can also quell fears and focus the mind.

Social Connection: Social isolation is one of the greatest challenges of retirement. Playing jazz can help by connecting you with people who share your interests. But more profoundly, jazz connects people with a cultural community. To play jazz together, especially to improvise together, means sharing a language, a history, and a culture with rich traditions. All of this can gather in a powerful, shared, unconscious connection.

Yes, you can play together by the numbers—just follow a chord pattern and stick to a rhythm. But at its best, ensemble playing is an intense union of feeling and spirit.

This unity of spirit can include an audience. There are remarkable moments of all being locked together in a collective excitement, a collective joy, a collective—well, choose your own word.

Engagement and Immersion in Activity: Being active is a key to successful retirement, and the most important activities are those you get so immersed in that you lose track of time. Playing jazz in public or even for personal pleasure takes practice. Of course, that's not always fun, but sometimes it is more than fun. Sometimes there are breakthroughs



in skill or creative discoveries that become great moments of personal satisfaction.

Personal Achievement: Many people who retire are satisfied with just feeling good about their lives, but others want to continue to grow and develop. Playing jazz is something you can work and improve at, perhaps growing from imitation to innovation and development of your own style. This does not mean that you need to become a top-notch professional player. It is far more about achieving your personal best than about becoming as good as the best players in the world.

Meaning: Finding a sense of meaning after retirement is a tremendous challenge for many people. At its best, work provides a sense of purpose, a feeling of contribution and of making a difference. But there is more to meaning than purpose and contribution, and jazz—like other arts—can help you to find meaning through artistic expression.

In philosophical terms, creative art is the pursuit of beauty—not the beauty of a pretty sunset but the sort of beauty that goes beyond the sensuous surface of the work of, beyond the image, beyond the sound, beyond the words. At its best, art can be a form of transcendence, and playing jazz can provide such an experience of transcendence. At its best, playing jazz takes you beyond the routine repetition of rhythms and chord changes. Time is suspended; you are transported beyond the everyday to a dimension of experience rich with connections, discovery, spirit, and meaning.

Well-Being in Old Age: The challenge of retirement is to achieve psychological well-being despite the losses that are part and parcel of leaving work behind. Jazz is just one way to do this; but for those who play, it is a wonderful way.

Michael Friedman is a retired social worker and social advocate who is also a semi-professional jazz pianist and photographer. www.michaelbfriedman.com



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BJA Member Sue Carlin, Loyal Fan and Friend of Local Artists

Would you travel hours by train or bus for a musician friend's gig? Sue Carlin would, in a heartbeat.

By Mitch Mirkin

Prior to the pandemic, the Inner Harbor resident was a familiar face at local jazz venues and often traveled to other cities—like Philadelphia or New York—to show her love for Baltimore-based performers. In addition to being a loyal fan, she has become a personal friend to many of them. “Pre-COVID, I was out listening to live music at least once or twice a week,” says Carlin, who joined BJA in 2006. “I’ve met so many fantastic music artists here in the Baltimore area and not only grown fond of their musicality, but grown fond of them and their families, and I want to make sure they can put food on the table.”

Nowadays, Carlin supports jazz mainly by patronizing live-streaming events, such as those from An die Musik and Keystone Korner Baltimore. “Live is always better, for sure,” she says. “But I’m actually seeing a lot more gigs now.”

Her one peeve about the virtual shows is that they typically don’t include closed captioning. She says this feature, offered on Zoom and other platforms, would be relatively inexpensive for venue owners to add and would help listeners—especially those with some hearing loss—catch song lyrics or remarks from the emcee or band leader between tunes or sets.

Carlin grew up with parents and a sister affected by partial or complete deafness, and she herself has experienced hearing loss in recent years—partly age-related, she believes, and partly the result of “going to a lot of loud concerts.” Back when she was growing up near Rochester in New York’s Finger Lakes region, her mom taught sign language. One of the students was a young woman named Wendy whom Carlin would later introduce to one of her musician friends, guitarist and vocalist Miche Fambro. The two married—and to this day Carlin lightheartedly “takes credit” for their family.

The 40-year Carlin-Fambro friendship is perhaps the paradigm for the warm relationships Carlin has since developed with many musical artists. She brims with anecdotes that sound like case studies in networking. She tells, for example, of how trips to the Rochester Jazz Festival—in part to support Baltimore artists such as Warren Wolf—led to new expansions in her ever-widening circle of music friends.

One of these expeditions led her to meet members of the SF Jazz Collective—including acclaimed trumpeter Sean Jones, who now chairs Jazz Studies at the Peabody Institute. “Warren introduced us, and Sean and I have become good friends,” relates Carlin. The connection extends beyond the bandstand to family. “I’ve babysat for their daughter. Sean

put together my coffee table.”

Prior to our interview, Carlin followed her natural impulse to make connections: she shared a YouTube video for guitarist-vocalist Fambro, whom she referred to as her “wonderful friend.” I was indeed impressed with Fambro’s virtuosic flair and exuberant, innovative, genre-bending style. Carlin is always looking to introduce others to her musician acquaintances, thereby helping those artists make ends meet, while expanding others’ musical worldview.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUE CARLIN

Carlin talks with unabashed excitement of the great music she has enjoyed and the friends she has made—musicians and fellow fans alike—at local venues. Pre-pandemic, she frequented Jazzway 6004, the 60-seat venue at the home of local songstress Marianne Matheny-Katz and her husband, Howard Katz, named by *DownBeat* as one of the nation’s top house-concert venues. Carlin says she’s “met so many wonderful people

there.” She says she enjoys the equally intimate setting of An die Musik, and names Caton Castle, Bertha’s, Keystone Korner Baltimore and the Peabody among her other favorite venues. She misses Club 347, the North Calvert Street jazz hotspot that closed in 2016.

Professionally, Carlin is an executive assistant at Wexford Science and Technology, a firm that works with partners to help create “vibrant knowledge communities” built on principles like discovery and inclusion. That seems like an apt metaphor for Carlin’s jazz adventures. Through her love of the music and the people who make it, and her networking know-how, she has helped forge fruitful partnerships.

“I like to connect the dots and introduce people to each other. I will introduce musical artists to each other and they’ll start working together, and that’s great.”

She also likes watching new musical alliances spring up organically via jam sessions. She used to be a regular at sessions led by Todd Marcus, Clarence Ward III, and others. “I would see artists I really liked who had never played together, and they would perform together and it would be like, Eureka! A new sound! That really got me excited. Then all of a sudden you see them working on each other’s albums. How cool is that?”

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*.

Vocal Trio Maids of Dishonor

Baltimore's Newest Harmony Trio Brings Back the Sweet and Sassy Jazz of Yesteryear.

By Kristoffer Belgica

From the 1930s through the '50s we saw the rise of several beloved vocal groups, such as the Andrews Sisters and the Ink Spots, whose vintage sound inspires musicians to this day. This includes three artists already well known in Baltimore: vocalist Alexis Tantau of the Hot Club of Baltimore, vocalist Bridget Cimino of the Tongue in Cheek Jazz Band, and violinist Nataly Merezhuk, a Strathmore Artist in Residence. They comprise the new up-and-coming vocal trio Maids of Dishonor. Each has her own presence in the city's gypsy jazz and trad jazz scenes and each has performed on many stages, including the Charm City Django Jazz Festival and Keystone Korner. Though each of them pursues her own musical projects, they regularly come together to enjoy this shared passion and keep this part of jazz culture alive.

It was Tantau who initiated the idea about starting a close-harmony group, as she had performed some of the Andrews Sisters' repertoire in high school. Incidentally, Cimino, who had also been introduced to this style of music early on, had entertained the idea with Merezhuk around the same time. Through the happenstance of conversation, the idea was brought to fruition, and they began transcribing the repertoire of the Boswell Sisters and Dinning Sisters and writing their own arrangements.

The group has already had several Baltimore-area performances in the one year they have been together. Their first official gig was in September 2019, when they guest starred



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIS TANTAU

Maids of Dishonor

From left: Bridget Cimino, Nataly Merezhuk, Alexis Tantau

alongside Hot Club of Baltimore in a performance at Union Square Park. The group has also performed at An die Musik and were a part of Creative Alliance's Sidewalk Serenades this past summer. Their performance résumé did not stop there as, due to growing interest, they were sought out to perform a private sidewalk concert.

Being a part of a close-harmony group can be incredibly challenging. Without the support of melodic or percussive instruments, vocalists must rely on each other for cues and become more vigilant to each nuance of the music. Yet performing this style of music seems effortless for Maids of Dishonor. Each vocalist orients herself to singing specific parts of the song, with Cimino typically singing the melody, Merezhuk the high harmony and Tantau the low. Listeners will find each vocalist's sound to be unique. Cimino demonstrates a fierce self-confidence in her singing. Merezhuk's voice is easily distinguishable by her clear intonation, and Tantau has a smoky quality in her voice that is well suited for singing the bottom harmony. The result is a balanced pyramid sound reminiscent of Swing Era vocal groups.

Like countless musicians, the trio has faced challenges during the 2020 pandemic. The group says they "have persisted pretty well" and exude optimism about performing once again. Early on, they got together to create music virtually by recording themselves singing each part in "Lullaby of the Leaves" (1932), then splicing them together. Alexis Tantau states, "we decided that it was just not as fun to sing apart as it is to sing together, so we began meeting at each other's' backyards and kept our distances so that we could actually practice together." The group wears masks when they practice and perform. As they have expressed, it certainly is a challenge for vocalists to sing in the company of others, because wearing masks inhibits the ability to take in full, deep breaths.

Their recording of "Lullaby of the Leaves" can be heard on YouTube. They also have recordings on their Facebook page of several songs, including "Comes Love," "Shuffling off to Buffalo," and "The Way You Look Tonight," with Merezhuk handling "percussion" on snapping fingers and Tantau adding a whistling "instrumental." The three bring to their repertoire an engaging quality that is both sweet and sassy, and in watching them sing, it is clear that they are having a ball doing it.

At the time of this writing, Maids of Dishonor is working with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra bassist Jonathan Jensen, who is writing music for the group to perform, and there are plans to feature him on piano on future recordings. I hope that we will see them perform in-person on many stages once we enter the post-pandemic boom..

Kristoffer Belgica is a Texas native who primarily plays rhythm guitar for local gypsy jazz ensembles Hot Club of Baltimore and the DC-based group Swing 5. He recently separated from the U.S. Air Force after seven years of service and now devotes his time learning from and contributing to the Baltimore jazz community.

Mitch Mirkin's Second Album Links Cultures

Two Baltimore jazz aficionados review
Mirkin's second album

By Kwamé Kenyatta-Bey

As you stroll down Madison Avenue in Baltimore, you will see old buildings that take you back to another time. One such structure, formerly a Jewish place of worship and today a church, compelled local jazz composer Mitch Mirkin to stop and reflect on the spirit of this holy place, past and present. Hence the title tune of his new album, "The Madison Avenue Shul."

From the outside, this cinder-block building—plain, gray and squat—looks quite mundane. But what we deem mundane may reveal deep secrets and transcendent magic inside. That is the duality Mirkin has tried to express musically.

Mirkin says about his inspiration for the album's opening tune, "The Acceptance": "Many of us, in our lives, experience a lot of repetitive routine, day after day, month after month, year after year. But every once in a while, there is some brief excitement, a bit of hope, or promise. . . . These highlights renew the spirit."

Mirkin shows us a new world with this collection of seven tunes, performed by The Common Roots Jazz Ensemble. It is a glimpse into the mind of its creator, strongly influenced by his environment. Mirkin began composing in his teens and then resumed composing after a 25-year hiatus, under the tutelage of his music teacher, guitarist Yawn Jones, at the Music Workshop. Mirkin put together a group called The Common Roots Jazz Ensemble that reflects his diverse creative vision.

The album opens with "The Acceptance," keyboardist Justin Taylor setting a dramatic, introspective mood that foreshadows the material that follows. As we struggle with the mundanities of everyday life, the title tune shows us the flower we almost walked right by. Ron Pender, on tenor sax, gives us that OMG moment. The fluctuation between the smooth footsteps of our stroll are supported with the steady footfalls of Byung Kang on drums and Blake Meister on bass, superbly accented with flights of fantasy and dreams by Yawn Jones's guitar. The other songs on the album will lead the listener to various moments and memories in the composer's life. His love of the Latin beat is strong in "Samba Reminiscence." He closes the album with a gentle tribute to his father in "Ruby the Seltzerman." The other tunes will provide a launching pad for your own imagination and memories to take flight.

Kwame Kenyatta-Bey has worked in journalism as a reporter and editor. He holds a degree in theater arts from Morgan State and has years of experience in theatrical production work. He is currently president and CEO of JAG Productions, which curates and produces new, contemporary and classical theatre.



By Liz Fixsen

This album, inspired by the old synagogue that was once home to Mishkan Israel congregation and is now occupied by a Seventh-Day Adventist congregation, reflects on "the inevitability of change, evolution, transformation," as Mirkin puts it. The seven tunes traverse cultures with various grooves and styles that often switch within a tune.

The title tune "Madison Avenue Shul" aptly invokes the history of the edifice. It opens with a mesmerizing klezmer feel, introduced by a steady, rhythmic bass line on 1, 5 and 1 and then morphs into a sweet swing groove, with the piano tinkling and dancing on high notes, and then the sax joining in over the steady repeated riff. Finally, the saxophone brings us back to the minor key and Jewish folk feel of the beginning.

"Canarsie Blues" takes us from Baltimore to Brooklyn in a lively swing groove that leads to a saucy, funky solo by Taylor using a Rhodes organ setting. Again, more switching grooves from a Latin feel, back to swing.

"One for Wayne" opens with the guitar and flows along with that same easy Latin groove in a major key until the bridge, when the harmony takes on more complexity and darker flecks. Then Taylor introduces more quirks and strange turns of phrase on electric keyboard before the guitar brings back the smooth and flowing feel.

Mirkin's favorite tune, "Don't Keep Me in Suspense," charms with its flowing melody and subtle harmonies, with brief but expressive solos on all instruments, particularly the saxophone.

Overall, Mirkin's compositions, brought to life by the impressive talents of the band, provide a satisfying listening experience.

The album was recorded at the Music Workshop in Baltimore in November 2019. It can be heard on Spotify or purchased digitally on Amazon. You can watch and hear the band perform the title tune on YouTube. The CD will be released some time in 2021.

Liz Fixsen is a jazz enthusiast, pianist, and vocalist, as well as writer and editor for the Baltimore Jazz Alliance newsletter. She also has a background in teaching writing and teaching English language learners.

Where Are They Now?



PHOTO CREDIT: ANDERSON R. WARD

Ephraim Dorsey

By Bob Jacobson

As we said in our previous issue, "Since we presented BJA's Next Generation Artist Award to saxophonists Ebban and Ephraim Dorsey in 2015, the siblings have amassed a stunning array of achievements." They have accomplished most of these together, but below we focus mainly on Ephraim's activities separate from his sister.

Though he started on alto sax, Ephraim Dorsey, now a senior at Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA), switched to

tenor sax in 2016, later adding baritone and soprano saxes and flute. While still a freshman at BSA, Ephraim was asked by senior Julien Chang to play a solo on Chang's recording of his tune "Dogologue." In September of 2019 Ephraim was featured on WJZ-TV's coverage of BSA's 40th anniversary, playing in front of the school. Six weeks later Ephraim was among four "Jazz Youngbloods" playing in a band led by DC-area veteran Chuck Redd at The Mainstay on the Eastern Shore. The other students attended Peabody, Juilliard and Oberlin conservatories. Earlier this year Ephraim played for an interracial church service on Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday, along with his music theory teacher from BSA, keyboardist Mark Hardy.

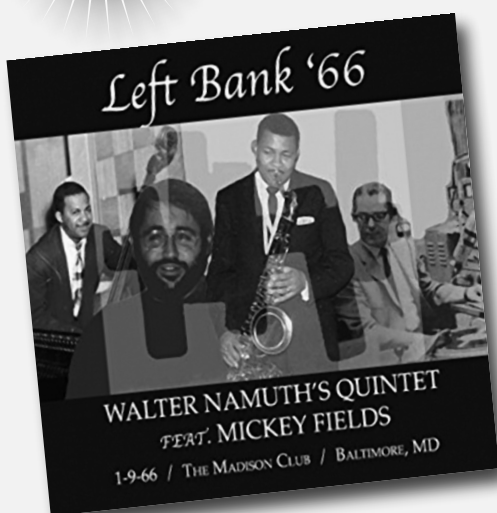
Another of Ephraim's remarkable activities of recent years took place in late 2018, when he appeared as a younger version of saxophone great Kamasi Washington in the 24-minute film *As Told To G/D Thyself* (available on Apple Music). Asked how this came about, Ephraim said, "A lot of people were in my corner, saying I'd be perfect to play the role." Those people included a BSA alumnus trumpeter Dontae Winslow, who is close to Washington. While Ephraim's part was non-speaking, he played one of the five major characters.

The pandemic robbed Ephraim of a major opportunity this past summer. He had been selected by J.B. Dyas, Herbie Hancock Institute's education director, to be part of its All-Star Sextet of young players in Milwaukee. COVID has also reduced Ephraim's jamming and public performances, but the young optimist says that things are going very well despite lockdowns. He and Ebban have livestreamed a concert from their basement and played live and livestreamed with Carl Grubbs's sextet at Keystone Korner. He is taking lessons with Gary Thomas and recording original compositions that will be released soon. Despite the difficulty of choosing a college when tours are only virtual, he is considering several possibilities, including UCLA, Peabody, Berklee and Manhattan School of Music.

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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Gone but not forgotten ...

Ruby Glover

Jazz vocalist Ruby Glover began singing at age six, and after turning professional in the 1940s she attracted the attention of many jazz giants. Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Billie Holiday were said to be among her admirers. Although she was courted by Columbia Records, she never became a recording artist, preferring to sing in front of audiences.

In addition to her singing, Glover was known for her role in presenting the annual Billie Holiday vocal competition in Baltimore. She also taught a jazz appreciation course at Sojourner-Douglass College and gave tours of Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue, where jazz flourished in the mid-20th century. She was a mentor and inspiration to many vocalists in the Baltimore area and beyond. For more about Ruby Glover, you may wish to read Liz Fixsen's chapter on the queens of Baltimore jazz in *Music at the Crossroads*, edited by Mark Osteen and Frank J. Graziano.

