BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

SPRING 2022 INSIDE THIS EDITION

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PHOTO COURTESY OF EBBAN DORSEY

EBBAN DORSEY

Telling A Story With Her Sax

By Liz Fixsen

IT'S BEEN YEARS since I first heard alto saxophonist Ebban Dorsey and her tenor saxophonist brother Ephraim play. They were young teens–age 12 and 13, respectively—and they were headlining at Caton Castle on August 13th, 2016. Since then, I have watched them grow and flourish in the Baltimore jazz scene and beyond. They have been popular regulars at the Monday night session led by Clarence Ward III at Baltimore's Terra Café (and now at R House); they have been repeat performers under the name Sweet Return at Keystone Korner. In July 2021, the siblings played with the National Youth Orchestra in New York. In October, they played at the Beacon Theater in New York with a band led by saxophonist Kamasi Washington. In December, Ebban played with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in their performance of Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker Suite*, alongside bassist Eddie Hrybyk, in a replica of Eddie's summertime porch concerts. Twice the pair has played the National Anthem at Orioles' games. And that just scratches the surface of their performing careers.

Both Ebban and her brother are stunningly accomplished musicians, having studied in Carl Grubbs's Contemporary Arts SAX camp, Peabody Prep, and at Baltimore School for the Arts (Ephraim has now graduated). But I have chosen to write about Ebban, maybe because she is the younger of the two siblings—in fact, she is the youngest of seven Dorsey children, all of whom play instruments—or maybe because of her gender, although women in jazz are increasingly common these days. But it is also because of two intriguing fea-

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PHOTO COURTESY OF BYUNG KANG

DRUMMER BYUNG KANG Helps Keep Baltimore Jazz Scene Pulsating

By Mitch Mirkin

THERE ARE DRUMMERS who can be relied on to lay down a steady groove and keep near-perfect time. Then there are those who go beyond the call of duty and creatively add layers of rhythmic and percussive texture and color to the music.

Byung Kang is in the latter category. A resident of Columbia, MD, he is a familiar face on both the Baltimore and DC jazz scenes. I've had the privilege of working with Kang to record a couple of albums featuring my original compositions. Besides being dependable, affable, and fun to work with—always good qualities in a collaborator —Kang is a sensitive and intelligent musician. He understands a composer's intent, sets just the right rhythmic vibe, listens astutely to his bandmates, and intuitively anticipates and responds to the ebb and flow of their playing. From the first to the last note, he brings forth a wellspring of creativity from his cymbals, snares, toms, and bass drum.

Peabody Connections

Kang came to Germantown, Maryland, from South Korea with his family at age 11. Early on, he was exposed to Korean church music, and is still active on that scene today. Jazz entered the picture when he was in elementary school. His father, a car mechanic, brought home a Buddy Rich Memorial Concert CD a customer had given him. "That was my intro-

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

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

BJA Priorities

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

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Drummer Byung Kang Helps Keep Baltimore Jazz Scene Pulsating

(continued from first page)

duction to jazz," recalls Kang. "I was hooked." It was the explosive drumming, in particular, that pulled him in.

Living in an apartment, he couldn't play drums, so he took up the trumpet instead and played it through high school. But he also found opportunities at school to start experimenting on the drums. He had found his passion.

> "I'm thankful for a community that loves music. They've helped me shape who I am as a person and as a drummer."

Kang went on to graduate from Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory with a bachelor's degree in 2014 and a graduate performance diploma in 2016. With those educational roots, the thirty-year-old percussionist is well connected with many of the prominent names in Baltimore jazz. He has studied and played with free-thinking saxophonist Gary Thomas, former chair of jazz studies at Peabody, who, according to the website All About Jazz, "displays a passion for uncharted territories."

This passion for musical discovery can be seen in a clip that Kang posted on his YouTube channel showing him playing with Thomas, along with guitarists Jonathan Epley and Kevin Clark and bassist Blake Meister, at An die Musik in 2019. The tune, "The Divide," like many of Thomas's compositions, is avant-garde, with a challenging, odd meter. One commenter wrote, "The drummer handles this composition with a relaxed authority that that makes me believe that he's been here before."

That's an apt description of Kang's playing, although I'm not sure what exactly is meant by "he's been here before." Knowing Kang, I can think of two interpretations: 1) The drummer did his homework and practiced the tune so thoroughly that he was able to master its complex rhythms; or 2) His relatively young age belies his technical abilities and artistic sensibilities, leading one to ponder whether he's "been here before" —perhaps drumming in a previous life? (Just kidding—but it's an interesting thought!)

At Ease With Complicated Charts

Kang has also played with bass clarinetist, composer, and arranger Todd Marcus and saxophonist-composer Russell Kirk, both Baltimore jazz stalwarts. Kang recognizes Gary Thomas's harmonic and rhythmic influences on both musicians, and he has proved adept at providing the rhythmic underpinning for even their most rhythmically complicated and challenging charts. Kang notes the complexity of the original jazz music being played around Baltimore, tracing it to Thomas's outsized influence.

Lately, Kang has also played with Soultet, a Baltimore group that performs soul, funk, and R & B, along with jazz. He says he likes the chance to stretch out into other genres. But jazz is his musical home, and he is quick to credit Baltimore's jazz community for enthusiastically supporting his career to date.

"I'm thankful for a community that loves music. They've helped me shape who I am as a person and as a drummer."

Mitch Mirkin is acting director of communications for the Office of Research and Development of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He is a longtime jazz lover and in recent years has devoted his musical talents to jazz composing. His original compositions are featured on two CDs—*Dance of the DNA* (2019) and T*he Madison Avenue Shul* (2020)—with a third in the works.

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JAZZ AND THE U.S. CONGRESS

From "Secret Sonic Weapon" to "National Treasure"

By Anna Celenza

The U.S. government's involvement with jazz began during a period of ideological crisis: the Cold War. As political leaders in Washington struggled to present the nation as a model of peace and equality to foreign entities, civil rights struggles at home offered a strikingly contradictory image. Frustrated by the stereotype of Americans as uncouth and materialistic and determined to debunk Soviet accusations concerning America's race problem, President Eisenhower went in search of a home-grown, cultural product that could be exported around the world as proof of American innovation and diversity. Jazz is what he found. Eisenhower's easy embrace of jazz seems hypocritical given his noncommittal reaction to the early events of the Civil Rights Era. Nonetheless, his acute sense of expediency quickly superseded his well-documented condescension toward African Americans.

Recognizing the symbolic importance of an American genre firmly tied to Black culture, Eisenhower added jazz to his arsenal of weapons against communism, and for the first time in American history, Congress began to think about jazz. The result was a State Department program called the Jazz Ambassadors, which, beginning in 1956, sent the nation's finest musicians around the globe, from Pakistan and Iraq to Egypt, the Congo, Greece, South America, and the Soviet Union. As a *New York Times* reporter noted in 1955, under the Eisenhower Administration, jazz became America's "Secret Sonic Weapon."

American bandleader and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie was chosen as the first Ambassador. After touring the Middle East, in July 1956 he travelled to South America, where he performed for audiences large and small, engaging in everything from spontaneous exchanges with local fans to official, formal events with high-ranking officials. From the start, however, the Jazz Ambassadors had critics in Congress. Angered by the (often racist) complaints of several politicians, Gillespie coauthored an article for *Esquire* titled "Jazz is Too Good for Americans," wherein he highlighted the sharp contrast between attitudes of certain U.S. congressmen and the enthusiastic crowds he encountered abroad. Toward the end of the article, Gillespie recommended that instead of cutting back the Jazz Ambassadors program, senators should advocate for stronger jazz to be "taught to school children at all levels of their education." Although such an education program would not be considered for several decades, Congress did take note of jazz's effectiveness for cultural diplomacy and eventually approved funds for additional tours featuring Benny Goodman and his band in 1956 (East Asia), the Dave Brubeck Quartet in 1958 (Eastern Europe, the Middle East and South Asia), Louis Armstrong and his All Stars in 1960/61 (Africa), and Duke Ellington (Middle East) in 1963.

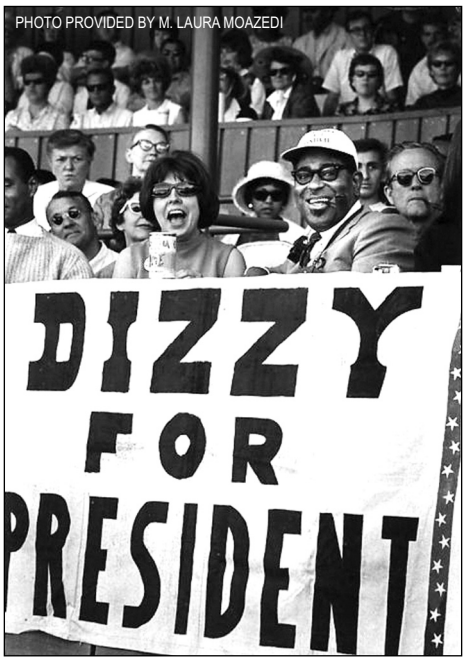


PHOTO PROVIDED BY M. LAURA MOAZEDI

Armstrong had been asked to participate in an earlier tour of the Soviet Union in 1957 but declined due to his disappointment with the Eisenhower administration's refusal to enforce court-ordered desegregation of schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. "The way they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell," said Armstrong. "It's getting so bad, a colored man hasn't got any country." Gillespie sympathized with Armstrong's point of view. After his Middle East tour he admitted that even though he was proud of his effectiveness "against Red prop-

PHOTO COURTESY OF PINTEREST

From left: (Jazz Ambassadors) Charlie Barnet, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong and Lionel Hampton

aganda," he was insulted by the State Department's attempts to "brief him" beforehand about American race relations: "I've got 300 years of briefing. I know what they've done to us, and I'm not going to make any excuses."

Dave and Iola Brubeck also took note of the disconnection between the message promoted by the Jazz Ambassadors tour and the reality of everyday life at home. To draw attention to this problem, the Brubecks joined forces with Armstrong in 1961 and produced a musical titled *The Real Ambassadors*, which highlighted the hypocrisy of the government program. The musical celebrated Armstrong's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, and also emphasized his key role as a musical diplomat. *The Real Ambassadors* was recorded in 1961 and performed live at the 1962 Monterey Jazz Festival to great critical acclaim.

Shortly after Armstrong was appointed America's Real Ambassador, Gillespie put his own name forward for an even more powerful political post: the Presidency of the United States. The chorus to his 1964 campaign song, a rewrite of his tune "Salt Peanuts," said it all:

Your politics ought to be
a groovier thing.
Vote Dizzy! Vote Dizzy!
So get a good president
who's willing to swing.
Vote Dizzy! Vote Dizzy!

Gillespie touted his experience as a Jazz Ambassador as proof of his foreign policy competence. He also said that if elected, he would rename the White House "the Blues House," and appoint a stellar cabinet: Duke Ellington as Secretary of State, Max Roach as Defense Secretary, Peggy Lee to head Labor and Miles Davis as Director of the CIA. All joking aside, the impetus for his campaign was to influence the issues at stake in 1964 and raise money for civil rights organizations such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His candidacy became a regular topic in the media, and even after he pulled out of his race, talk show hosts and journalists continued to comment on the symbolic connections between jazz and American democracy.

Over the last two decades, the State Department has recommitted to the idea of music ambassadors. One Baltimore native who has benefitted is Richard Johnson . . . "Jazz is much more than music . . . It is the very essence of democracy. Freedom, joy, improvisation, creativity! When you share jazz with those outside of America, people begin to see past any issues or conflicts and discover that this music has meaning."

Beginning in the 1970s, Congress outsourced the Jazz Ambassadors to a private entity, Festival Productions, in an effort to cut costs. This shift in financial support worried some policy makers. Was the government's commitment to jazz growing less focused? To preserve the importance of jazz as a symbol of American identity, Rep. Robert C. Wilson of California introduced a joint resolution on February 28th, 1973 to declare "the national music of the United States to be jazz." But the measure failed to pass, and Congress's willingness to recognize jazz began to wane. In 1978, the Jazz Ambassadors program was downsized dramatically and transferred from the State Department to the newly formed United States International Communications Agency. For more than a decade, interest in jazz seemed to disappear from the halls of Congress.

Then Rep. John Conyers, Jr. of Michigan came along. On September 25th, 1986, he proposed H.Con.Res.396, "a concurrent resolution designating jazz as an American national treasure." The goal of the bill was to ensure that jazz would be "preserved, understood and promulgated." As the title of this resolution indicates, it was concurrent with a Senate resolution, S.Con.Res.170, introduced by Sen. Alan Cranston of California on October 15th, 1986. Although neither resolution gathered enough support for passage in 1986, Conyers and Cranston refused to give up. In 1987 they introduced revised versions in the House and Senate (H.Con.Res.57 and S.Con.Res.23), both of which passed unanimously under the general title The Jazz Preservation Act. Jazz was finally codified as a national treasure, "an indigenous American music and art form, bringing to this country and the world a uniquely American musical synthesis and culture through the African-American experience."

Over the last two decades, the State Department has recommitted to the idea of music ambassadors. One Baltimore native who has benefitted is Richard Johnson, who teaches jazz piano at Peabody Conservatory. "Jazz is much more than music," he says in a State Department promotional video. "It is the very essence of democracy. Freedom, joy, improvisation, creativity! When you share jazz with those outside of America, people begin to see past any issues or conflicts and discover that this music has meaning. It's a testament to those elements that help most true democratic governments succeed."

On May 12th, jazz fans will get to hear the political power of this music when students from Peabody's jazz program bring the above history to life in the historic Bakst Theater and Far East Room at the Evergreen Museum and Library (4545 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21210). For tickets and/or information, contact the venue: evergreenmuseum@jhu.edu, (410) 516-0341.

Anna Celenza is a professor at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of several books, including *Jazz Italian Style, from Its Origins in New Orleans to Fascist Italy and Sinatra* (2017) and *The Cambridge Companion to George Gershwin* (2019). She's also published eight children's books, including *Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite*. In 2016 Celenza co-founded Music Policy Forum, a non-profit that advises local governments about how to create sustainable music ecosystems.

EBBAN DORSEY

Telling A Story With Her Sax

(continued from first page)

tures of her playing that particularly captured my attention.

I first noticed one of these features on a Monday evening at a summer jam session at Terra Café. She started taking a solo, one chorus after another. At first, after around the fifth or sixth chorus, I was rolling my eyes, thinking, hey, girl, don't hog the whole show! But I quickly began to hear something else: she had gotten on a train and was not getting off until she got where she was going.

What is in her mind when she stands on a stage to play?
Ebban says that the entire Baltimore jazz community
has taken both of them under their wing
and has been a welcoming space for many years . . .
"Every time I play, I pray that it will bring healing
to at least one person in the audience."

I heard her digging deeper and deeper into the tune to mine all its potential. She would find a motif, and keep repeating it, adding small variations, and keep repeating it, until suddenly it would take on fire and intensity. And then the excitement began building, until finally—after maybe fifteen choruses—she took the horn out of her mouth and stepped aside for the next soloist, and the crowd of listeners just went completely wild. And I've seen the same thing happen at other shows in which she has participated in Baltimore.

The repeated motifs, she explained in our interview, were a kind of conversation with the rhythm section. And she went on to say that she is indeed telling a story when she solos, and that Ward would encourage her to keep going, because he could hear that something exciting was about to happen as she took one chorus after another.

The other thing that caught my attention about Ebban was that she would stand there like a statue, never bobbing, dipping, or swaying as do many other saxophonists when they play. I personally think that bodily movement adds drama and expressiveness to a performance, so it was a little puzzling to me that Ebban did none of that. She just stood there, immobile, and blew her horn. All the drama and expressiveness came entirely from the sound she was making with her instrument. Oddly enough, as she explained to me in our interview, she feels like she IS moving while she plays! Clearly, she is not wasting any physical or psychic energy on anything but telling her story, with that shiny instrument between her hands.

At one point she mentioned the challenges of her musical journey. What could these challenges be, for a young person who has seemed to travel a smooth upward path toward brilliance? One of them, she said, was sometimes being the only female player in a lot of sessions—she sensed negative vibes due to her age and gender —although never in our Baltimore jazz community, which has never been anything but warmly supportive. Sometimes she felt a little overwhelmed to be one of the youngest players in the scene, facing pressure from high expectations. Finally, it was a struggle to "find herself" in the music—to make it her own. Maybe what I was hearing in those long solos was that struggle to find her own personal voice, her own personal story. And finally, she says, it was often a challenge to be content with where she was at any given moment, accepting that she was still growing.

What about her relationship with her big brother, who is himself a spectacular musician? "He has always been my biggest supporter," she answered. Their only competition is in video games. As for supporters, Ebban said that the entire Baltimore jazz community has taken both of them under their wing and has been a welcoming space for many years. She particularly credits Todd Marcus and Ward as fostering her growth for years in their respective jam sessions. Marcus says, "I've known Ebban for almost ten years and have loved watching the progress she has made through her hard work. I'm proud of what she is doing on her horn, as a bandleader, and as a positive and thoughtful person."

What is in her mind when she stands on a stage to play? Her answer reflected her background growing up in a church family. "Every time I play, I pray that it will bring healing to at least one person in the audience." Young Ebban Dorsey can be assured of doing that. And the world of jazz lovers will be supremely blessed with healing and delight as she continues her musical career.

Liz Fixsen is a jazz enthusiast and a regular presence in the Baltimore jazz scene. She is a member of the board of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance, and she edits and frequently writes for the BJA newsletter. She also sings and plays jazz piano whenever she gets the chance.

A few of many places where you can read more about both Dorseys:
https://www.youngmusicianscollective.org/ebban
https://baltimorewatchdog.com/2021/11/28/brother-and-sister-musical-team-find-their-voice-through-jazz/
https://www.baltimorejazz.com/2016/10/dorsey-kids-headline-caton-castle-aug-13-2016/

Introducing New BJA Board Member Nathaniel "Tre" Barr

By Lix Fixsen

Nathaniel "Tre" Barr is one of the BJA's newest board members. He introduces himself here:

I joined the BJA because I am a music lover and am always looking to give back to the Baltimore community. Being a BJA member supports both passions.

My involvement in jazz started when I was an R&B/soul producer. Bassist Dennis Turner and keyboardist Sam Prather, two band members of the band YaMama'Nym (which I co-founded with Turner in 2002) exposed me to the jazz influences of the songs I produced.

This also piqued my interest in learning and listening to jazz recordings and hearing the roots of the influence. Since then, I have been involved in the Baltimore and DC jazz scenes as a producer and executive producer of jazz recordings and as a promoter of jazz shows.

I have had the privilege of working

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATHANIEL "TRE" BARR

with many jazz artist/musicians from the Baltimore jazz scene. There is a plethora of talent in the area. My wish is that our community would nurture that talent. Some of my favorite jazz musicians are Thelonious Monk, Natalie Wilson, Robert Glasper, Sam Prather. My favorite Baltimore jazz musicians include Clarence Ward III, Craig Alston, Kris Funn, and Lafayette Gilchrist.

So far, as a new member of the BJA board, I have started the planning of Jazz Appreciation Month events and the Father's Day Jazz Fest, and I have advised on a documentary project on behalf of the board. I hope to continue to aid in the promotion of Baltimore artists and help to nurture their creativity.

Both of my jobs support my work with the Baltimore Jazz Alliance and my love of jazz. As I mentioned earlier, my job as a producer and small label owner of soul and R&B music has been influenced by jazz. And as a senior manager at BGE, I help to further one of the goals of our company, which is to support the community we serve, and that includes supporting the arts.

TWENTY

The Eric Byrd Trio's Platinum Celebration

By Gregory L. Lewis

The Eric Byrd Trio is celebrating the platinum anniversary of its musical marriage with a delightful new digital album release—twenty songs covering an hour and twenty-two minutes—that is aptly entitled *Twenty*, and is available in download form on Spotify, iTunes and Amazon.

Over the past twenty years, the personnel on this recording—pianist Eric Byrd, acoustic bassist Bhagwan Khalsa and drummer Alphonso Young, Jr.—have also spawned multiple CD siblings, including *Triunity*, *21st Century Swing* and *Saints are Still Marching*.

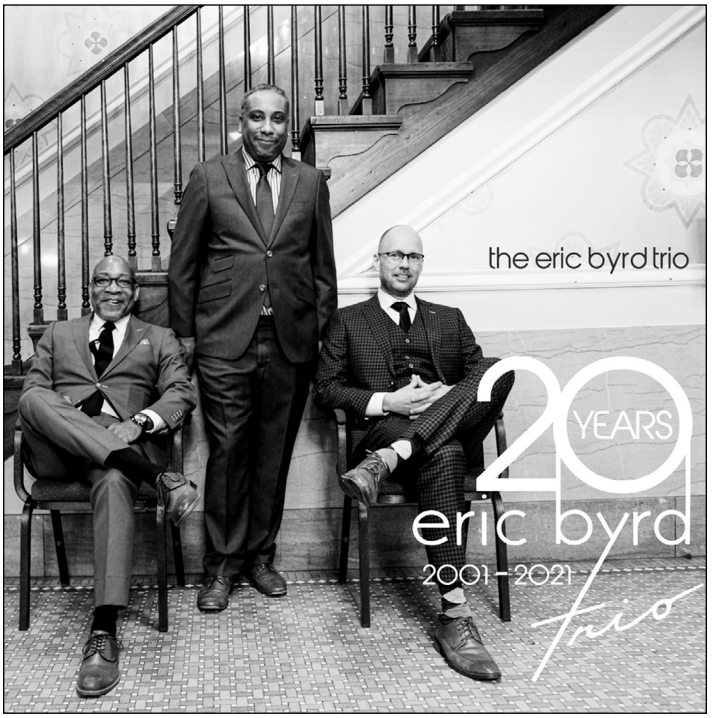
With a bluesy approach enlivened by bouncy melodies and rhythmic swing, Byrd's piano style recalls that of William "Red" Garland (1923-1984), the keyboard dynamo in trumpeter Miles Davis's groundbreaking mid-1950s quintet. Moreover, the soulful influence on Byrd from the African-American gospel music tradition is palpable.

As a past director of music at St. John's Baptist Church in Columbia, MD, Byrd is fully conversant with the nuances of church music, which he shows from the frolicking march-time cadence of lead-off tune "Sunday Mo'nin Chu'ch" to the dirge-like quality of "Thank You Lord," a solemn coda with trilling organ chords by the versatile Allyn Johnson that rounds out the playlist.

Throughout the repertoire, the bass and drum cohesion is remarkable, accenting and filling in behind Byrd's expansive piano statements of various melodic themes.

Twenty is a grab bag of musical treats. There are some familiar titles, like "I Could Write a Book" and "I'm Glad There Is You." Many songs feature Byrd's engaging vocals, such as on "I Can't Breathe" (with John Lee on electric guitar), a lament about contemporary race relations inspired by the case of George Floyd. Also, Byrd croons on "Love Like Rain," a ballad with a dash of acoustic guitar spice, courtesy of picker Will Byrd, Eric's sixteen-year-old son. Another surprise, "Jazz Things to Jazz Kings," is a catchy hip-hop salute to the trio, delivered with a go-go beat by D-rhyme out of Boston.

The juxtaposition of jazzy racial angst and hip-hop reminded me that such in-tempo finger pointing has not always been exclusively in one direction. The Last Poets was a 1970s group of Black spoken-word artists whose dashiki-clad performances against a background of pulsating conga drums were a precursor to hip-hop.



In many ways, *Twenty* repays attention. Particularly striking is the Byrd/Khalsa duet on "Single Petal of a Rose," wherein Byrd tinkles distinctive piano notes against the moaning of a forlorn arco bass. Sound intimates shadows, whimsically.

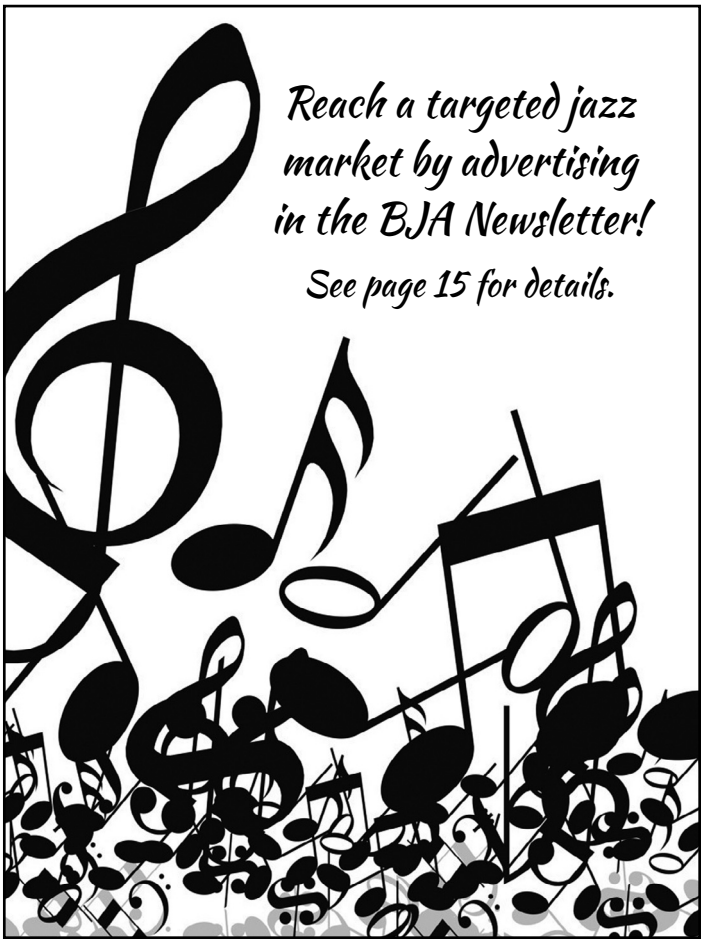
Throughout the repertoire, the bass and drum cohesion is remarkable, accenting and filling in behind Byrd's expansive piano statements of various melodic themes, as typified by the uptempo piano runs with repeated riffs over splashing cymbals, staggered drumbeats and a rock solid bass line on "Lullaby for Jason Miles."

It's impossible to play drums in a jazz idiom without displaying the influence of Art Blakey (1919-1990). The track titled "Another Time, Another Place" shows the drums in poly-rhythmic Blakey mode, with a tapping high-hat cymbal offsetting a rim-knocking pulse that corresponds to every lilt of the piano's melodic phrasing. Snare and bass drum accents form a rhythmic cushion for bluesy piano flights of harmonic fancy, while a brief drum interlude stops short of a classic Blakey press roll. A variation on this pattern is repeated on "Elsa" and "The Backward Step," the latter tune featuring an electric keyboard. And there's a lot more!

I once attended a great performance by a piano trio but found myself agreeing with a silly observation by a fellow attendee: "I wish they had a horn." That's like blaming a dog for not being a cat. Yet, the missing horn prejudice is real. Undaunted, the Eric Byrd Trio has managed to overcome such

obstacles for two decades. They're survivors. *Twenty* is proof of that. As drummer Alphonso Young, Jr. puts it: "True artistry comes from understanding that music and life are one in the same."

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



TERRY KOGER QUINTET

Out of Time

By Ian Rashkin

Terry Koger's new album *Out of Time* grabbed my attention from the first bar, with Darrell Taylor's powerful rolling drums introducing the great hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (by J. Rosamund and James Weldon Johnson). When the rest of the band enters in a strong rhythmic unison, it's clear that this group intends to do just that. Short and sweet, at 1:36, this rendition sets a tone of engagement and optimism, with just a hint of nostalgia. The classic spiritual "Wade in the Water" brings down the mood, but not the energy; the rolling moves from drums to piano and solo saxophone replace the full band, bringing the same feelings of hope and grace to a more personal, intimate level.

Having thus set the mood, taking the listener out of the mundane, the group brings the feel straight back to earth with a solid rendition of Wes Montgomery's "Road Song." An intriguing rhythm twist happens as the band seems to shift between swing and funk, feeling almost unsettled, but never out of control. Other than that quirk, the band plays this pretty straight, with firm solos by Koger (alto saxophone), Freddie Dunn (trumpet), Bill Washburn (piano), and John Leonard (bass).

On Charles Mingus's standard "Nostalgia in Times Square," the group starts out with a simple but tasteful piano intro followed by the melody played on bass over light piano comping. Then the horns kick in with some beautifully crunchy harmony between them and the piano—almost more Monk than Mingus, but either way showing the group's appreciation of the harmonic experimentations introduced by these and other composers of that era. Washburn's solo especially stands out, showing off a style he often plays in which seems to channel Don Pullen: handfuls of notes thrown effortlessly at the piano creating a sound that is rich and full, but loose and on the verge of sloppiness without ever seeming unintentional. Leonard's bass solo also stands out on this tune, especially in its phrasing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRY KOGER

Terry Koger Quintet at Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival
From left: Bill Washburn, John Leonard, Terry Koger, Darrell Taylor and Freddie Dunn

"Café Mocha," a Terry Koger original, is a lovely waltz with a good mix of bounciness and grind; it's light and free, but a little bit gritty, as it should be. Again, Washburn's comping caught my ear, and his solo typifies the experimental, folkloric style that Pullen and others of his time initiated.

Duke Ellington's beautiful ballad "In a Sentimental Mood" is played straight and in character, with no real surprises, but with a particularly strong, rich tone in Dunn's trumpet solo.

"On the Trail," from Ferde Grofé's "Grand Canyon Suite," is a surprising choice, with its Western, nostalgic feel, but the group adapts it beautifully, with Washburn playing a decorative, loping accompaniment to the straight melody, reminiscent of something Duke Ellington would play in his smaller combo settings. Both Koger and Dunn are at their strongest, giving this outlier a definitive feeling of belonging.

Speaking of Ellington, the group moves on to the Juan Tizol classic "Caravan," a great contrast that substitutes the camel-laden processions of the Sahara for the loping horses and donkeys of the American West. Again, both horns play very strong solos, with excellent comping by Washburn.

After listening to Washburn hint at both Pullen and Ellington in his playing on the previous songs, I was surprised by

his original, "Charm City Shoutout," which features a classic mid-century jazz sound, but with a touch of an edge. Mainly it was the tight rhythmic turnaround section that caught me pleasantly off guard. It fits perfectly with the song, but I wasn't expecting such tight linear lines from someone whose playing seems more thick and rounded. Wherever it came from, it worked great, and the song is one of the strongest on the album.

Capping off the album, Koger's "Out of Time" is another win, being based on a classic vamp feel with a clean A section followed by a more complex, but still solid, B section. Again I heard Pullen, but also Horace Silver, Hampton Hawes, even a little Ornette Coleman. It has a nice groove with a good melody, and offers the only chance for Taylor to play a drum solo, which he keeps short but strong and sweet.

Overall, this record reminds me of Koger himself: warm and humble, knowledgeable and respectful of his various roots, but with an original voice. Nothing about the record is flashy: there are fast notes, but not too many, there is wailing, but not too much. The whole album feels in control and replete with the idioms and sentiments of the past, but with subtle expressions of personality that make it a pleasure to hear, another unique voice in a long tradition of classic jazz..

Ian Rashkin served as the president of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance from 2016 through 2021, and currently serves as its treasurer. Recently relocated from Baltimore to Los Angeles, he works as a software engineer by day, playing bass and writing music as time allows.

Jazz Jams Springing Up All Over Town!

By Liz Fixsen

With COVID lockdowns behind us, the jazz scene is gradually recuperating. Some old jam sessions have been revived or moved, and new ones are springing up.

The weekly Monday night gypsy jazz jam (6 to 9 pm) has been running since 2012 at various locations in Baltimore. It is now located at De Kleine Duivel in Hampden, a Belgian-style beer hall with a warm and cozy atmosphere. Led by the redoubtable guitarist Michael Joseph Harris, it features the guitar-driven swing-jazz of the Django Reinhardt era. The house band includes Kris Belgica (guitar), Connor Holdridge (guitar), Bhagwan Kalsa (bass) with Cyndy Rice Elliott and other bassists often sitting in, along with the occasional accordion, clarinet, saxophone or mandolin player. Max Jacobs, a remarkable young violinist, often sits in, as well a singer or two, and folks are frequently inspired to dance.

"The Session," a high-powered straight-ahead jazz session led by Clarence Ward III and Rufus Roundtree, is another long-running session. Its current location is at R House in Remington, Monday nights 7 to 10 pm. "The Session's" house band includes Aaron Hill (piano), Blake Meister (bass) and Devron "Ace" Dennis (drums), with frequent high-caliber players subbing or sitting in. "The Session" brings out a long line of players, including a number of Peabody students, all with pretty dazzling chops. The food court there provides a range of edible offerings up to 9 pm; the bar is open later.

The session that once happened at Trinacria Café is now resuming every fourth Sunday at the same De Kleine Duivel, 5:30 to 8:30—a relaxed, straight-ahead session welcoming players and vocalists at all levels, hosted by Liz Fixsen, with house band Matthew George (piano), Mike Graham or Eric Worthy (bass) and Chuck Karner (drums). The inaugural session on February 27th brought out a line-up of fine players, including Mike Weber, Terry Koger, Skip Grasso, Bill Freed, Tomas Drgon, Greg Small and others. Happy hour is from 5 to 7 pm, with $3 off all draft beers and cocktails and half off selected plates.

Bassist Jesse Powers has revived his popular third Thursday session at "The Place" on West Franklin, leaning toward funk and R&B. The "Spice" band leads the session with Moe Daniels, keyboards; Rodney Dunton, drums; and Jesse Powers Jr., bass. A $10 cover charge gets you one drink and access to a buffet of hors d'oeuvres as long as they last. The crowd in small bar, eerily lit by blue light, creates a very convivial atmosphere with loud shouts of appreciation, often joining in to sing along with the singers.

Drummer Brendan Brady has a new every-Sunday session at Bar 1801 in Upper Fells Point, 7 to 10 pm, drawing many of the younger players in the Baltimore jazz scene, who line up waiting to play. Key band members, besides Brendan, are Hannah Meyer on keyboard and Jeff Reed on bass. The bar offers a range of beers, hamburgers with signature sauces, and salads. Bar patrons can also flip through a selection of vinyl records for sale. Drummer and vocalist Sheritta "Love" Harris has started an eclectic new second-Sunday session, "Vibe Check," at Motor House on North Avenue, 7 to 10 pm.

Find the BALTIMORE JAZZ JAMS at
www.baltimorejazz.com/jazz-jams

Worthy Brothers Transformation Ensemble Dazzles

By Lauren Silinsky

The Worthy Brothers (Eric and Zachary), with three other exceptional musicians, make up The Transformation Ensemble. On February 18th they performed a truly delightful concert at An die Musik.

Bandleader Eric Worthy called the ensemble Transformation because of the recent transformations in his own life and in the lives of his band members. His show at An die Musik in September of 2021 was a beautiful tribute to the recent passing of his mother. This concert recognized another transformation—the birth of his first child. "My connection to spirituality is through my music," explained Worthy; "playing is a form of meditation for me and a primary mode of emotional expression."

Andrea Brachfeld, a flutist with an international reputation (playing with such artists as Chick Corea and Paco Lucia), joined the ensemble after moving to Baltimore from New York and meeting Worthy at a local jam session. The pair appreciated each other's work and decided to collaborate for what would be Brachfeld's inaugural show in Baltimore as a resident. Complementing Brachfeld on flute and Worthy on bass were three other top-flight musicians: Zachary Worthy on piano, Steve Caballero on guitar and Frank Russo on drums.

> "My connection to spirituality is through my music . . . playing is a form of meditation for me and a primary mode of emotional expression."

The concert presented a pleasing combination of standards and originals, from Caballero's blazing solo on "Changin' Up" and Eric Worthy's strong bass line on "Holy Land" to Brachfeld's impressive chops and blindingly fast melodic leaps, paired with the fluidity of Zach Worthy's fingers on the ivories in "The Little Girl's Song." The dramatic, dynamic drum solo building to the climax in "Seven Steps to Heaven" was another highlight in a set packed with exciting moments of superior musicianship.

Attendees were in awe of the intricate and interesting original compositions. The effective use of dynamics to draw the audience in was akin to the depth and range of the emotional spectrum. One such example was Zachary Worthy's heart-felt piano sonata dedicated to Black History Month. The incredible texture and sound, the multiple directions in which this piece seemed to unfold simultaneously, the complexity and swiftly varying dynamics, all felt like a living musical narrative—the perfect tribute to such an important commemoration.

Each musician captured the audience's attention with moving and creative solos, beautifully complementing the others. This skill of being able to shift with grace, humility, and ease is likely what has allowed them to adapt and remain flexible and resilient during their own life transformations.

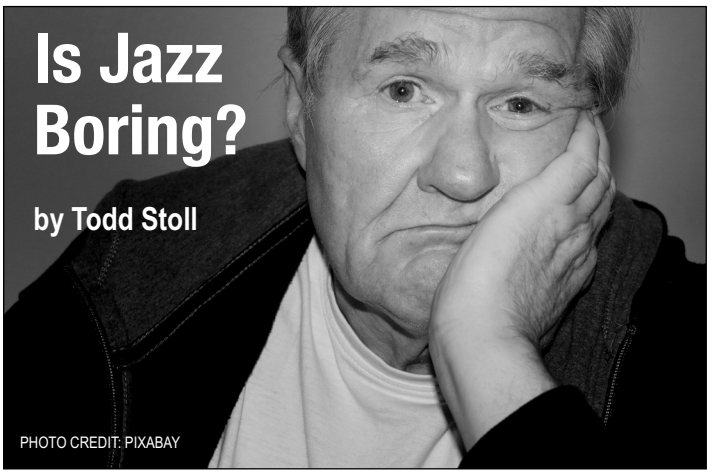
PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERIC WORTHY

Brachfeld echoed this overarching theme, explaining how she and her music have undergone immense transformations in the past few years. "My spiritual and my musical life have joined forces," Brachfeld stated. "The purpose of my music is to heal and uplift. The more I connect with myself through meditation and doing the inner work, the more I can reach audiences."

There was a beautiful theme of gratitude and reciprocity woven between the musicians and the audience. Brachfeld reflected on how the supportive energy of the attendees created a comfortable and safe space for the creativity to flow through her and back out to the crowd. "It's about being relaxed in that space of accepting, receiving, and giving. The purpose of playing music is to play for and connect with the audience. I hope the fans understand how important they are."

Drummer Russo shared these comments: "I have always enjoyed playing live . . . but it feels even more meaningful now. Art is humanity, and I am just grateful to be here and healthy enough to be able to still do this." Hopefully, this impressive ensemble will be playing together at future concerts in Baltimore and beyond.

Lauren Silinsky has a degree in radio and television broadcasting. She has directed, shot and produced promotional music videos for local artists in Chicago, co-hosted three radio shows in Chicago, and booked many jazz artists for shows all over the city. She also wrote several tourism articles for *Where*, a magazine placed in major Chicago hotels. Since moving to Baltimore, Silinsky has become a familiar presence in the local jazz scene.



IS JAZZ BORING? Is jazz boring? I don't mean that it IS . . . but I find myself many times puzzled by my own reaction to some of the incredible music I hear regularly. Of course, I may be accused of being a "you kids get off my lawn . . ." jazz critic. I find myself in clubs and concerts being bored and distracted by musicians I admire and respect—old, young, male, female, all races and styles. Part of this is the homogeneity I hear in our music. If I feel this and I love this music, what chance does a larger portion of the listening audience have?

I call this the "jam session" style of jazz performance—head, solo, solo, solo, solo, trade fours with drummer, head. Unfortunately, somewhere between the end of the big band era and Miles Davis's second great quintet, this became common practice for small-group jazz. The idea that everybody solos on every tune is viewed by jazz musicians as practically a constitutional right. (And I'm not going to talk about the length of said solos.)

So what is our overall objective for jazz broadly? Do we want to be a niche genre for well-educated and experienced listeners, or do we want a larger audience that can enjoy our music on a more casual level? Ahhh, the age-old question: how does one maintain artistic integrity while offering less-experienced listeners a way in, an on ramp for the less sophisticated?

A close friend of mine, an award-winning and experienced jazz artist, once shared with me feedback he received backstage after a gig from a listener with very little musical experience. It is direct and to the point:

- You all play in nearly the same order on every tune. It gets boring.
- All five of you play together for a very short time, then just one solos for a long, long time, then all five play together again for a very short time.
- The slow piece was nice, but then it got fast again for a long time, then slow again.
- No matter what the tune or character of the tune, it all kind of sounded the same.
- You're personable back here, but on stage you don't say much and come across cold and arrogant.

This is pretty telling, and from an outsider's view, probably right on target. Perhaps there is a way we can change just a few things and still be artistically satisfied. What if we considered the following when programming our small-group jazz performances?

- Limit the number of soloists per tune.
- Change the solo order on each tune.
- Change keys for solos.
- Write more ensemble music.
- Add interludes or ensemble choruses between soloists.
- Write riffs and backgrounds behind soloists.
- Write short choruses.
- Play ballads as ballads, and think about the length.
- Change up textures.
- Change up grooves.
- Play in balance and create a greater dynamic range.
- Talk to the audience. Give them some context for the music—a story, something to be connected to.

My good friend and immediate past president of Jazz Education Network (JEN), Caleb Chapman, would most likely add to this (if any of you have seen his bands . . .) HAVE FUN! Now, not everyone is as comfortable expressing themselves on stage as Mr. Chapman's ensembles, but a smile goes a loooong way. I believe that incremental changes, while taking the listener into consideration, can generate broader appeal while maintaining artistic integrity. And, in our high schools, colleges, and universities, perhaps we can start teaching this way, making varied and interesting performances for educational audiences a starting point. Then, maybe the next generation will have an even better chance of developing new and more engaged audiences.

This is an excerpt of an article from the Jazz Education Network website, November 6th, 2018. https://jazzednet.org/is-jazz-boring/, and is reprinted with permission of Todd Stoll.

Todd Stoll has spent nearly thirty years as an educator, performer, and leading advocate for jazz. He currently serves as vice president of education for Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City, where he oversees programs that reach more than 200,000 people each year. His leadership at JALC has revived the institution's commitment to the underserved while embracing twenty-first century technology as a means for greater access to the music. Since his tenure began in 2011, the education department at JALC produced nearly 20,000 individual events both in its home at Fredrick P. Rose Hall, throughout the U.S. and abroad.

FREE Online Global Community Musician Directory

Seattle pianist Randy Halberstadt is developing an online global community musician directory, a FREE service. Some big improvements are scheduled for the next few months (such as creating a separate domain, adding self-editability and a search function, etc.), but the cost to the musicians will always be $0.00.

Contact: Randy@randyhalberstadt.com
Website: https://randyhalberstadt.com/directories

BJA Member Notes

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS
Concord Community Development Corp., Earle Derry, Saundra Heard, Jesus Mendoz, Stephen Ray

MARK OSTEEN
Former BJA President Mark Osteen's new book, *Fake It*, is available at: https://www.upress.virginia.edu/exhibits/mla-2022 in cloth, paper or E-book. Reviews: https://www.upress.virginia.edu/title/5246

PHIL RAVITA
Phil Ravita was a judge for Washington Area Music Association's Wammie awards; and he is now being represented by the talent agency Jazz Beyond Borders.

Phil has begun teaching guitar at Harford Community College. He is teaching bass at Mount St. Mary's University where he hosts his jazz radio show, *Jazz on the Record*. The show airs Monday nights on 89.9-FM WMTB from 7-8 pm and is also available online at https://tunein.com/radio/WMTB-FM-899-s21257.

SEAN JONES
In *DownBeat* magazine's 86th annual readers poll, Sean Jones placed 17th on trumpet. Jones was also named among Black Marylanders to Watch by the *Baltimore Su*n during Black History Month.

WARREN WOLF
In *DownBeat* magazine's 86th annual readers poll, Warren Wolf placed 2nd on vibraphone. *DownBea*t also praised Wolf's playing on Christian McBride & Inside Straight's album *Live at the Village Vanguard.*

HERBERT SCOTT
Herbert Scott, founder and executive director of the Capitol Jazz Foundation, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from President Joseph Biden in February.

TODD MARCUS
Syos has introduced the Todd Marcus signature mouthpiece for bass clarinet and clarinet.

CARL GRUBBS
Saxophonist Carl Grubbs has installed a fifteen-track recording studio in his basement at his home in the Gwynn Oak/Lochearn neighborhood of Baltimore. His son is funding this long-time dream. The studio is equipped with a Yamaha PSR125 88-key keyboard, a Steiff acoustic piano and an electric drum set. An adjacent room provides an isolation chamber.

Grubbs inaugurated the studio by recording with some bandmates from The Visitors, a band they formed 50 years ago. They recorded some of Grubbs's old compositions, including some that have never been recorded before, updating them with new interpretations and instrumentation. The result, called *Carl's Chronicles*, will likely be posted on YouTube.

Grubbs also hopes to use the studio to record podcasts, gathering musicians to talk about music. He also hopes to offer recording services to others in the community at affordable prices, possibly even offering free time for musicians to work on material by recording it and listening to it. It's something he can offer to students of SAX camp, the summer youth program run by Contemporary Arts, Inc. Because Grubbs is just learning to use the technology, he may ask for help from friends with more expertise, in exchange for free recording time.

We applaud Carl Grubbs as he embarks on this new phase of his long and illustrious career as a jazz musician.

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BUT THAT'S NOT ALL! A number of local venues and businesses offer discounts to BJA members. Our next issue will be distributed at the beginning of JULY 2022. Visit www.baltimorejazz.com for details. If you have a discount you'd like to offer, Please email us at jazzpalette@gmail.com and let us know what you have to offer.

BJA is supported in part by a grant from the Creative Baltimore Fund, a grant program funded by the Mayor's Office and the City of Baltimore. Thank you!

Mayor Brandon Scott
& the City of Baltimore

CREATIVE BALTIMORE FUND

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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