

BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

SUMMER 2022 INSIDE THIS EDITION

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HANNAH MAYER

From California to Peabody



PHOTO COURTESY
OF HANNAH MAYER

By Greg Small

It's springtime in Baltimore, and our beloved hometown stirs to life after a long winter slumber. This spring feels more special than most, and as we continue to move forward into a semblance of normalcy, we realize just how much we have missed live music and the synergy it creates. Concerts are back, rehearsals are in full swing, and jam sessions are being born.

One of the newest sessions in town is hosted by drummer Brendan Brady on Sunday nights at Bar 1801 in Upper Fells Point. Brady consistently assembles a first-rate rhythm section to join him at this friendly corner establishment, and it only takes about three seconds of taking in the scene to realize why word has spread so quickly. A staple of the group's rhythm sections has been pianist Hannah Mayer, playing on the house Fender Rhodes, ably supporting the music around her in a myriad of ways. I caught up with her after a session in early April, the energy of the night still reverberating in the dozens of musicians who stuck around to the end for every last note.

Mayer, a sophomore at the Peabody Institute, is no stranger to jazz and the broader spectrum of popular music. A native of the San Francisco Bay area, she credits her early growth to holistic instruction from the young age of five or six. "My teacher encouraged me to learn about chords, had me singing the songs as I was playing them and still covered the fundamentals of music reading and piano technique," she recalls with a smile. "It was a good fit and really worked for

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JOHN R. LAMKIN III SEXTET

Jazz Returns to The Castle

By Gregory L. Lewis

On April 2nd, 2022, Caton Castle presented the John R. Lamkin, III Sextet, featuring a group of regional all-stars: Sean Jones on trumpet, Tim Green on alto sax, Robert Gilliam on tenor sax, Allyn Johnson on piano, Michael Bowie on acoustic bass and John R. Lamkin, III on drums. This group relaunched Caton Castle's regularly scheduled jazz shows after a two-year hiatus due to pandemic restrictions. The pent-up desire to play and to hear the music was palpable, with the full capacity audience enthusiastically applauding Lamkin's opening exclamation: "It's been two years!" Then the volcano erupted.

"All Blues," the modal masterpiece from Miles Davis's classic *Kind of Blue*, led off the first set with a distinctive bass introduction that morphed into a three-horn statement of the melodic theme. The muted trumpet then riffed in varying tones, shading the melody against the powerful rhythmic

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PHOTO COURTESY
OF LESLIE IMES

From left: Robert Gilliam, Tim Green, Sean Jones, Allyn Johnson, Michael Bowie, John R. Lamkin III, John R. Lamkin, II

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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.

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STANDING OVATIONS

New Album from Vocalist Tony Ziesat



By Bob Jacobson

Vocalist Tony Ziesat explains that his latest album, with pianist Stef Scaggiari, is titled *Standing Ouations!* because its nine songs "have struck a resonant chord in audiences during my live performances over the years." Many of those performances took place at Germano's, the Little Italy restaurant that often featured jazz and that, like so many others, did not survive the Covid pandemic.

Three of the album's songs—"You Make Me Feel So Young," "All the Way," and "Come Fly With Me"—are closely identified with Frank Sinatra. Ziesat's style bears some resemblance to that of Old Blue Eyes—his spot-on articulation of melody and lyrics, precise sense of time, spirited sense of swing, and his great delivery. But Ziesat's vocal quality and style often come closer to that of Broadway singers than to Sinatra or jazz vocalists.

One of the most pleasurable aspects of this album is that Ziesat includes the verses to two classics from the Great American Songbook—Cole Porter's "I Get a Kick Out of You" and Harold Arlen and "Yip" Harburg's "Over the

Rainbow." Verses were the segments that introduced many songs in Broadway musicals, films, and some pop songs but were often deleted on records and later performances. They were frequently gems which equaled or even surpassed the melodies we know and love. Ziesat also includes the verse to "The Shadow of Your Smile," the theme from the 1965 film *The Sandpiper*.

Demonstrating his linguistic skills, Ziesat sings three songs at least partly in languages other than English: "O Sole Mio" in Italian, "The Shadow of Your Smile" in Spanish, and "Never on Sunday" in Greek.

The only song I have not mentioned is "When You Wish Upon a Star," the 1940 Academy Award winner from the Disney animated film *Pinocchio*. Ziesat's marvelous performance makes me wonder why we have not heard this song from more artists over the years.

Whether singing swing, ballads or bossa nova, Ziesat really knows how to get a song across. I can easily understand how these nine songs were audience favorites. Not only vocalists, but horn players too, could benefit from paying close attention to his presentation. Stef Scaggiari, an excellent jazz pianist, excels in the role of accompanist, and my only disappointment with *Standing Ouations!* is that he isn't given a larger role on the album.

Search for Tony Ziesat and *Standing Ouations!* and you will discover several sources for purchasing either the CD or mp3 downloads.

Bob Jacobson, former Vice President of the BJA, plays saxophone and clarinet and leads combos "Sounds Good," "Swing 'n' Samba" and "Home Cookin." He has written numerous articles for the BJA newsletter.

We are thrilled to announce that Baltimore Jazz Alliance (BJA) has been approved for a \$10,000 Grants for Arts Projects award from the National Endowment for the Arts to support this year's Baltimore Jazz Fest.

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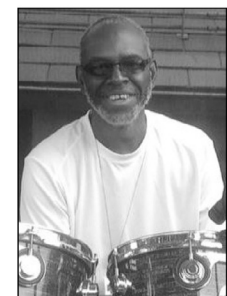
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HANNAH MAYER

From California to Peabody

(continued from first page)

me.” In sixth grade, Mayer enrolled at the Oakland School for the Arts, where she thrived through the end of high school.

Her interest in jazz blossomed, and she began to discover and immerse herself in the music of the greats. “So many musicians have influenced me,” she says. “I love Cedar Walton, Wynton Kelly, Bud Powell, Hank Jones . . . there’s an endless number to choose from.” By the time she packed her bags for Baltimore, she had been a member of Carnegie Hall’s NYO Jazz, the SFJAZZ High School All-Stars and the Monterey Jazz Festival Next Generation Women in Jazz Combo. With a background like this, it’s no surprise that she is making a splash around town.

Mayer has a wonderful collaborative instinct, striking the delicate balance between proactivity and reactivity in both her comping and soloing.

The few times I’ve heard Mayer play at the Bar 1801 session, I’ve been struck by her aural awareness of the others on the bandstand. She hears so much of what was going on around her, and there is a probing confidence to the harmonic and rhythmic support she gives throughout the night. Mayer has a wonderful collaborative instinct, striking the delicate balance between proactivity and reactivity in both her comping and soloing. Her fellow musicians agree. Drummer Brendan Brady says, “From the start, Hannah and I bonded over always wanting to play the same repertoire. Her playing is deeply rooted in language, and is always so interesting both rhythmically and harmonically.” Bassist Jeff Reed readily concurred, saying that Mayer “. . . does a phenomenal job of leading the group while listening to everything that’s going on around her and interacting at a very high level.”

My conversation with her turned towards the nuts and bolts of musical growth. “I’m always thinking of fresh and unexpected ways to connect chords,” she said when conversation turned to practicing. “It’s always been interesting for me, moving harmonies around and coming up with new approaches. I’m also always working on and thinking about time.” It’s clear to anyone who has heard her just how much that work has paid off.

Mayer also gives heartfelt credit to her theater influences and how central they have been to her growth. “I love theater, too . . . Stephen Sondheim, Jule Styne, Leonard Bernstein, so many others . . .” As a high school student, Mayer wrote a 30-minute musical adaptation of Ray Bradbury’s “All Summer in a Day,” and she hopes to write more for the theater over time. Most jazz musicians know just how strongly intertwined jazz and theater are, and it should come as no

surprise when someone operates and thrives in both worlds.

As for the future? “The first goal is to finish school!” she says with a laugh. “After that, I don’t know yet. I love Baltimore, and this city has been an incredible fit for me so far . . . but I’m also curious about New York and its jazz and theater world. I want to play gigs, I want to write, there’s lots of things I’m interested in. I want to keep growing and learn as much as I can.”

And keep growing and learning she will. No matter where life takes this bright young talent, fantastic things lie in store.

As of this date, Mayer will have performed the final show in a series, “Hannah Mayer and Friends,” at An die Musik Live! on May 17th, leading a group of Peabody Conservatory students in a performance featuring the music of Stephen Sondheim as well as original compositions. Mayer has also accompanied on piano for shows at Keystone Korner by Ebban and Ephraim Dorsey’s “Sweet Return” ensemble, and will no doubt be appearing there and elsewhere in Baltimore. Be sure to follow the BJA “Where’s the Jazz?” page and Mayer’s social media pages for the all the latest news.

An accomplished pianist, trumpeter, educator and writer, Greg Small has accompanied many noted jazz musicians. He is featured on the Grasso-Ravita Jazz Ensemble’s debut recording *Jagged Spaces*. Other releases include *Singularity* (original solo piano music), *72 Lanterns* (original poetry), and *How Alfred Won* (a novella).



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JOHN R. LAMKIN III SEXTET

Jazz Returns to The Castle

(continued from first page)

framing of pace-setting drums and spacious piano comping, all anchored by the relentless downbeat of the bass. An extended trumpet solo recalled the exuberance of Freddie Hubbard more than Miles's cool style, but both influences were apparent.

Gilliam is the only relative newcomer in this group, having appeared at Caton Castle once previously in a band that included Jones, his teacher at the Peabody Conservatory. At age 22, Gilliam flexes a grown man's voice on tenor sax. Green, on the other hand, has been a Caton Castle regular for more than a decade. It was long time, no see, with Green's masterly style on alto sax dazzling the audience, displaying the musical fruits of his sojourn in academia; Green and Jones are both on the jazz faculty of Peabody Institute of Music.

Thelonious Monk's "Evidence" featured the alto sax in Bird-like flight, rolling notes in the frenetic manner of the bebop master, while the tenor sax articulated the melody in repeated middle-register riffs, with insistent embellishments. A trumpet break was slurred, suggesting the swagger of trumpet icon Lee Morgan. A piano excursion channeled the offbeat Monk with an element of rhythmic hesitation, building tension that gave way to a bass solo, busy in its restatement of the rhythm. Through it all, the intricate refrains of pulsating drums and restless cymbals resounded.

It didn't take long for many of us to realize what we had missed during the extended live music drought. The explosive presence of this group was not just heard, but also felt. Even a few bars of "Happy Birthday," addressed to a lovely lady named Brittany, drew an animated audience response.

The trumpet shone on two jazz standards by trumpet masters. "Up Jumped Spring," Freddie Hubbard's waltz, suggesting breezes, flowers and birds aborning, showed the trumpet in a dexterous mode, tone shifting from crisp to blurred to screeching in a sing-song pattern as whimsical as the weather in March. Lee Morgan's "Ceora" introduced a Latin flavor to the proceedings, with the trumpet restating the melody in a lilting solo that contrasted with the harmonically trenchant alto sax and melody-stretching tenor sax, with its bracing tone peppered by well-placed accents.

On "Ceora," the piano was typically expansive, with an airy phrasing that included abstract tinkling within the melody and the terse interjection of vaguely recognizable harmonious themes. This pattern was repeated on "Straight Ahead," a galloping Horace Silver-type number that included a powerful drum solo.

For those who are partial to ballads, the group delivered two gems. "We'll Be Together Again" showcased the mellow tone of the alto sax, locating Green somewhere on the alto sax continuum of Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Stitt and

Jackie McLean. "Body and Soul" featured a bravura trumpet performance, captivating from its misty introduction, which hinted at the melody of "Stardust," before bursting into the clear outlines of the tune's famous melody. Alternating between prolonged notes and brief ejaculations, the trumpet defined the classic ballad, adding flashes of staccato accents. Along the way, there was shadowing of familiar tunes and other melodic conceits that were ultimately resolved in a climactic flourish by the trumpet. Indeed, the audience was treated to something special, and responded with a standing ovation.

Jazz standards appeal to the predominantly gray-haired Caton Castle audience. They take us back down memory lane. Trumpeter John R. Lamkin II, the father of this group's drummer, sat in on a spirited rendition of "Bye Bye Blackbird," a signature tune for Miles Davis in the 1950s. In this same vein, "Moanin'," pianist Bobby Timmons's hard bop classic, popularized by Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, closed out the show in a rousing fashion.

We know not what tomorrow may bring, but on this night jazz at Caton Castle returned in all of its glory.

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.

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Vocalist MARIAH BONNER – Born To Perform

By Liz Fixsen and Lauren Silinsky

The Baltimore jazz community was clearly thrilled to have Mariah Bonner back in her native city, judging from the audience turnout and enthusiasm at Keystone Korner for her April 13th event, “Yours in Song.” The diversity of her repertoire demonstrated the richness of her worldly travels and skills, as she delighted fans with a creative, eclectic set list.

Born in Baltimore as the third of six children, Bonner lived in France as a child and took up theater and ballet; in her teens she studied in London at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. From there, she pursued a career as an actress in Los Angeles, appearing in a variety of television shows and films. There she also entered the realm of cabaret with her first show at the Gardenia Room in West Hollywood. Since moving back to Baltimore in 2017, she has performed at Germano’s Cabaret, Jazz+Soju, De Kleine Duivel, The Wine Collective, and, most frequently, the cabaret at Monarque in Harbor East. She has also released her second album, *Yours in Song*, which was featured at her Keystone Korner show.

Her repertoire, in French and English, ranges from American standards and French ballads to show tunes to new material. Her fluency in French came through in her song selections, and she sang every word as if it were the most beautiful in the language. Her comfort level on stage and her ease in engaging with the audience, throughout song and dialogue, all attest to the truth that she was born to be a performer.

Joining Bonner on stage at Keystone Korner were Marcus Dagan, her musical director, on piano; Derek Wiegmann on bass; Corey Hewitt on drums; and Gabriel Wallace on saxophone and clarinet.

Lauren Silinsky attended the concert and shared the following impressions with me:

Most of the tunes would begin with



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIAH BONNER

a rubato piano introduction; then the other instruments would join and build in intensity as Bonner sang, ending the song in a decrescendo with just her and the piano.

Mariah Bonner certainly gives it all she’s got, with her confident stage presence and her warm rapport with her audience a testament to her nostalgic stories of being born to perform.

“Dance Me to the End of Love,” by Canadian songwriter Leonard Cohen, and written in a minor key, had an Eastern European feel. “Maybe This Time,” made famous by Liza Minnelli in the 1972 film *Cabaret*, was reminiscent of Bette Midler’s impressive vocal range, building to a climax and then coming to a soft and gentle ending.

“Mourir Sur Scene,” by composer Jeff Bernel and lyricist Michel Jouveaux, is widely considered to be one of the most popular French songs in music history. It tells a story most fitting for a cabaret singer: “There are those who

want to die on a rainy day / And others in full sun, / There are those who want to die alone in a bed / Quiet in their sleep / I want to die on stage in front of the spotlight / Yes I want to die on stage.” Bonner sang it in French with wonderful fluidity. Her theatrical background shone through her grand sweeping arm motions, which expressed her emotional connection to the tune. Bonner commented on a line from one of Shakespeare’s plays, “all the world’s a stage,” and so, she observed, we all are born and die on the stage of life—a rich and beautiful phrase to describe the creative process and its vulnerability, equating birth and death.

Bonner and Dagan teamed up on “Come in From the Rain” (by Melissa Manchester and Carol Bayer Sager) and “Warm” (written by David Buskin), with Dagan contributing his Bob Dylanesque speaking/singing voice to Bonner’s warm, rich tones, as they told the story.

Bonner displayed her expressive dynamics on another French tune, Edith Piaf’s “La Vie en Rose,” about being in love and seeing life through rose-tinted glasses. Bonner engagingly offered tips to the audience on how to speak French, inviting them to join her in singing a chorus of “la la la’s.” The audience cheered with delight—another testament to how connected her fans are to her and to her skills in creating those connections.

“Keepin’ Out of Mischief” was a jazzier Fats Waller swing tune in which drummer Hewitt had a chance to show off his chops after lying low. The song ended with a theatrical, Broadway-style flourish.

“The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,” made famous by Roberta Flack, also took on a storytelling mode. Bonner’s voice rose smoothly into higher octaves while Dagan provided whimsical piano accompaniment. She moved from singing into speaking, sometimes jesting, sometimes somber, with analogies about

the birth of a new day and having minimal regrets in life.

The 1941 song “Yours,” made famous by Vera Lynn, was sung first by Dagan in Spanish, and then by Bonner in English. She followed with nostalgic recollections of singing and dancing her way through childhood, ingraining music in her life since youth. She then transitioned to the next song with a charming anecdote about inventing songs for her family members on Valentine’s Day.

“Caught in Memories,” an original song with a calypso feel by Marcus Dagan about the dangers of keeping a diary, was a natural segue from Bonner’s reminiscences of childhood. Dagan’s song, however, warned against drowning in the past. On this song, Wallace switched from sax to clarinet, making a paradoxical contrast to the somewhat darker subject matter.

“This is My Life” was just released as a music video on April 10th, with Dagan on piano. This song also had some of the theatrical quality of a Broadway musical, with powerful lyrics feelingly emotionally delivered by Bonner partly in song and partly in spoken word.

Another opportunity for audience participation was offered when Wallace’s sax solo on “Nowadays,” from the musical Chicago, prompted the audience to clap along in time. Bonner played a tongue-in-cheek game with the audience on the next song, which she wouldn’t name. The song was made famous by Etta James, and is usually sung as a slow ballad—but on her

version of “At Last,” Bonner gave the song a distinctive, up-tempo swing treatment, flavored with a spicy sax solo.

The evening ended with what Bonner jestingly called her “obligatory encore”—Shirley Horn’s signature song, “Here’s to Life”—“No complaints and no regrets / I still believe in chasing dreams and placing bets / But I have learned that all you give is all you get / So you give it all you got.” And Mariah Bonner certainly gives it all she’s got; her confident stage presence and her warm rapport with her audience testify that she was indeed born to perform.

To learn more, visit Bonner’s website: www.themariah-bonner.com, where you can order her two albums, *At Last* and *Yours in Song*.

Liz Fixsen is a long-time jazz fan and a regular presence in the Baltimore jazz scene. She plays jazz piano and also performs occasionally as a jazz vocalist. She is a member of the board of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance; she edits and writes for the BJA newsletter.

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.

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MITCH MIRKIN 1962-2022

By Bob Jacobson



On March 18th, 2022, the Baltimore jazz scene lost one of its most distinctive voices. Mitch Mirkin died of a heart attack while bicycling near his home in Pikesville. Mitch's role in the local scene was unique. He was mainly known as a composer, having released two albums of his own compositions since 2019. Mirkin was a very good saxophonist and pianist who underrated his

skills and never performed in public.

Professionally, Mitch was Acting Director of Communications for the Office of Research and Development of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Four years ago, the BJA was fortunate enough to have Mitch volunteer to write for our newsletter. Soon after, he joined our editorial committee, which makes decisions about articles for the newsletter and website. Mitch wrote nine articles over that time, mostly profiles of musicians and board members, one CD review, a documentary film review, and a memorial article about his friend, mentor and collaborator, guitarist Yawn Jones, who passed away in February, 2021.

Mirkin began composing in his teens, but was away from it for over thirty years. When he returned, he came back with gusto, composing over forty tunes, mostly jazz. Initially reluctant to present his creations publicly, Mirkin gradually gained confidence from three sources: first, some of his tunes were played by Theljon Allen's jam session house band, which specialized in playing Baltimore composers' originals; George Spicka's combo played one of his tunes at an An die Musik concert; and he was tutored in composition and spurred on by Jones, his teacher at Music Workshop. In 2019 Mirkin released *Dance of the DNA*, and the following year, *The Madison Avenue Shul*. A third album had been completed and was being mixed at the time of Mirkin's death.

The bands on each album were named The Common Roots Jazz Ensemble, a multi-racial group composed of Black, white, and Asian musicians; Mirkin was an Orthodox Jew of East European ancestry. As Mirkin said in a 2021 article in the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, "I wanted to get at something that expressed the diversity of the group and the music itself. As always, music brings people together. Jazz especially is a beautiful force for equality."

Justin Taylor, the pianist who played on all three of Mitch's albums, says, "Mitch was interesting, a little different, with his own unique style of doing things. He was energetic and

funny at times." Brian Kookan, the guitarist who played on Mitch's third album, describes Mirkin as "always kind." About the recording process, Kookan adds, "It was all mapped out, but he gave us freedom." "He was always open to our suggestions," says Ron Pender, the saxophonist on all three projects.

Pender comments on Mirkin as a composer: "He was fully developed. I wish I had some of the ideas he had." Taylor says, "The tunes were cool. Some had a different harmonic approach." "Each tune is different and the form wasn't always a straight form," adds Kookan. Matt Belzer, in his review for the BJA of *Dance of the DNA*, describes Mirkin's music as having "interesting structures and textures" and involving "deviation from expected formulae."

"Mitch was interesting, a little different,
with his own unique style of doing things.
He was energetic and funny at times."

Pender, a mainstay of the Baltimore jazz scene for many decades, came to record Mirkin's compositions after a struggle with cancer. He says, "I needed a project like you need air. I'm so glad now that I put as much into it as I did. It turned out to be a legacy. I want to dedicate that last one [album] to Mitch. It's all about him now."

At this time plans for Mirkin's third album are unclear, but there is interest among the musicians to perform a concert of his music. His first two albums are available on Spotify and Amazon, and there is an excellent YouTube video of the recording of the tune "The Madison Avenue Shul."

Mirkin will be much missed, not only by his family, but also by his friends at the Baltimore Jazz Alliance and in the Baltimore music community.



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JOSH ESPINOZA

The Reality of Touring

By Liz Fixsen

I LOVE to imagine being a musician going on a tour. You load your gear in the van, fill up an ice chest with soda or whatever, throw in a pile of your favorite CDs, hop in with your bandmates, and you're off on a merry adventure to play to cheering crowds in clubs and concert halls across the USA.

The reality is not so simple, as I learned from pianist Joshua Espinoza, who completed one tour last fall, from Baltimore through Virginia, North Carolina, and other parts south, and another this spring throughout the United States, including Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas. In fact, a tour requires a lot of advance planning—up to a year of it—and it's like assembling a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle, with no picture on the cover to go by.

Espinoza starts with concert halls that are willing to consider hosting jazz performances AND that have an acoustic piano on site (he won't play on a digital piano), AND venues with a decent budget. Such halls are often booked up a year in advance. These are the anchor gigs, and the locations need to be no more than a day's drive apart. Once those major pieces are in place, he fills in with gigs at smaller venues where jazz is usually featured.

So how does he land those gigs, given that he is not a known quantity? The first rule to remember is: the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The venue may not respond to the first e-mail, or the second, or even the third. But maybe they'll respond to the fourth. Booking agents are busy people! First, he researches what kinds of music they have booked in the past, to try and make a connection. Then his message provides some background information, some press quotes, a

video, a history of performances at similar venues, etc. These also include his promises to help promote the show.

With all this work, it's easy to see how it can take a year to arrange a tour. Funding is another issue. Last fall, Espinoza received a Jazz Roads touring grant from South Arts, which offers provides up to \$15,000 to artists from anywhere in the USA who are touring anywhere in the USA. But they require a year between grant applications, so for his spring tour, Espinoza was looking specifically for presenters with big budgets and venues with a healthy subscriber list.

So why go on tour? As Espinoza explains, he likes to present the same music to different audiences in different ways with the same band members. It allows them to explore their repertoire more fully and dig in with deeper creativity. It also fosters a strong bond between the band members. His two sidemen, Kris Monson on bass and Jaron Lamar Davis on drums, are very genial touring buddies; the three have grown in trust and familiarity and in willingness to take chances. They like to go into the studio after a tour to more thoroughly work out the changes in their material that have developed on the road.

One of the notable venues where the trio performed on their spring tour was a beautiful old library at Oxmoor Farm, in Louisville. They played on an oriental rug over a parquet floor in front of a fireplace flanked by wall-high shelves of venerable books, looking for all the world like a scene from *Downton Abbey*. With the audience seated only a few feet away, the space had an intimate feel and great acoustics, says Espinoza. Another remarkable venue was the Memorial Hall, in Cincinnati, an elegant, century-old historic structure with a 556-seat round proscenium theater featuring exceptional acoustics, decorative murals, and Tiffany chandeliers.

How do audiences respond, especially in regions where jazz is not as closely tied to local culture? The smaller venues that Espinoza books are those that already feature jazz, so audiences know what they are getting. But the concert halls that book mostly classical music are often willing to take a chance on something different. And audiences who thought they "didn't like jazz" come away with a different perspective.

Having heard Espinoza play at Keystone Korner and other Baltimore venues, and having listened many, many times to his album, *Journey into Night*, there is no doubt in my mind that all of those audiences would have been blown away after attending his shows.

When not touring or planning tours, Espinoza runs Patterson Park Academy of Music, which he started during the pandemic. The school currently has five instructors and 80 kids enrolled. Teaching is his passion; he believes in making music instruction accessible to all. "There is a place for every musician," he says. "We need music everywhere."

As he continues his touring career, Joshua Espinoza is doing his part to bring his music just about everywhere. You can find him on his website, www.joshuaespinoza.com, on Facebook, and Spotify. And he is already building his fall tour.

Jazz: America's Secret Sonic Weapon

By Bob Jacobson

What a great event! On a beautiful May 12th evening, outdoors, behind Evergreen—the former mansion now part of Johns Hopkins University's Sheridan Libraries & University Museums—over one hundred people gathered for Dr. Anna Celenza's talk, "Jazz: America's Secret Sonic Weapon," illustrated with music by Kenyatta, a wonderful sextet of Peabody Conservatory students. The event was co-sponsored by Johns Hopkins University Museums, Peabody Institute, Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, and BJA. Besides being a beautiful venue, the setting was appropriate for an event about diplomacy, as Evergreen's former resident, John Work Garrett, was a U.S. ambassador to several countries in Europe and Latin America.

Since Dr. Celenza wrote on this topic in great detail in the Spring 2022 issue of the BJA newsletter, I will provide just a brief synopsis. During the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, American racism was being denounced by the Soviet Union throughout Europe and the Third World. To counter that message, the U.S. State Department and Congress combined to export a great example of American democracy—jazz—sending bands led by Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, and others to tour in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. All met with



From left: BJA President Tyrone Crawley, Lori Finkelstein, of JHU museums and Bob Jacobson



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KENYATTA, a wonderful sextet of Peabody Conservatory students
From left: Hannah Mayer on piano, Nico Wohl on guitar, Will Hazelhurst on bass, Claudio Silva on drums, Cyrus Mackey on trumpet, Robert Gilliam on tenor sax

resoundingly positive receptions and were in turn influenced by the music of each region where they toured.

Kenyatta's trumpeter Cyrus Mackey got things rolling with Louis Armstrong's famous opening cadenza from "West End Blues." Celenza informed us that this was the first tune Armstrong played when he arrived in Accra in 1957. Mackey was ably joined by Hannah Mayer on piano, Nico Wohl on guitar, Will Hazelhurst on bass, Claudio Silva on drums, and Robert Gilliam on tenor sax. These young folks know the tradition! I feel compelled to add that they looked sharp in suits or sport coats.

With deep knowledge of her subject, Celenza presented with minimal notes, in an almost casual manner. As she continued talking about the experiences of jazz ambassadors Gillespie, Brubeck, and Ellington, the band played some of those leaders' best-known compositions. Celenza related how Dave Brubeck, influenced by music he heard on tour in Turkey, dove deep into time signatures considered odd in the West,

encouraging his sax player, Paul Desmond, to compose a tune in 5/4: thus the birth of "Take Five." Kenyatta began the tune in 5/4, smoothly transitioning to and from a Latin version in 4/4. The band later played two Ellington tunes directly influenced by State Department tours—"Isfahan," named for the Iranian city, and "Afro-Eurasian Eclipse." Saxophonist Gilliam was featured on the former, sensitively presenting the ballad with a very personal sound. Earlier in the program, trumpeter Mackey revealed his charismatic side, leading the audience in vocal refrains on Dizzy Gillespie's "Barbados Carnival." At the program's conclusion, met with ovations and shouts of "encore," Kenyatta immediately went into Bernice Petkere's Great American Songbook tune, "Close Your Eyes."

As I left the talk/concert, I heard an audience member tell the band, "I felt like I was back at the Vanguard in the '60s." What great praise for a group of up-and-coming young jazz players—and well-deserved at that.

Mike Hairston



John Lamkin II



Mike Graham, Jr.



Bob Butta



Jesse Moody

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SCAN ME

Jazz Appreciation Month Event at Arch Social Club



EVENT PHOTOS COURTESY OF TYRONE CRAWLEY



By Liz Fixsen

Saturday April 16th, from 3 to 7 pm, the Arch Social Club (ASC) and the Baltimore Jazz Alliance (BJA) hosted a Jazz Appreciation Month celebration that was a success on all levels, with two DJs, a top-flight jazz band, and a 250-capacity hall filled with people grooving to the music, dancing, and socializing.

Opening remarks were delivered by Ron Miles, a community organizer who has spearheaded efforts to renovate the Chick Webb Recreation Center in East Baltimore, and by Peter Brooks, grandson of Baltimore jazz legend Cab Calloway. BJA President Tyrone Crawley made a presentation about the BJA, explaining its mission and programs, and announcing that a donation of \$20 or more to ASC would earn a free one-year membership to the BJA – an offer that was met with a rousing cheer from the crowd. Two BJA members, Alice Downs and Jean Farnsworth, were busy at the BJA table, where they eventually signed up twelve new members.

On that high note, DJ Sleepy J kicked off the music, playing mixes of hip-hop linked to the jazz and R&B songs that inspired the hip-hop samples. Many people were surprised to learn where those hip-hop samples originated.

The main feature of the event was The Craig Alston Syndicate, playing a blend of jazz and soul favorites, with Eddie Baccus Jr. on sax, Karen Linnette on vocals, Rodney Kelley Jr. on keys, Spyda the Drummer, and Alston on bass. Crawley called them “a force to be reckoned with,” and shares his impressions:

The crowd felt it as they whooped and hollered at several give-and-take moments. The vocalist was perfect for this event. She connected younger people to the older songs and vice versa. She got people on the dance floor, singing from their seats and keeping the barmaids hopping. If the bar is jumping, the joint is jumping! When DJ Lampdog [a.k.a. John Lamkin III] kicked off his set, there was no letdown. Once his set began, the dance floor was never empty. Alice [Downs] and I even shook off a few years out on the hardwood. Most people remained to the end and crowded the dance floor as

the DJ gave them a lesson in line dancing.

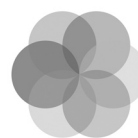
Crawley also gave kudos to BJA board member Tre Barr who created a promotional poster and arranged the entertainment, and also to Denise Griffith of ASC, who organized the event. It was a grand time for all who attended.

The Arch Social Club, a venerable Baltimore jazz institution at 2426 Pennsylvania Avenue, was casually founded in 1905 and officially incorporated on March 15th, 1912. One of the oldest Black social and civic organizations in Baltimore, it was a cultural and social haven for Black people suffering in Baltimore’s repressive racial environment. Today, the club occupies the former Schanze Theatre, erected at Pennsylvania and North Avenues in 1912.

Learn more at: <https://baltimoreheritage.github.io/civil-rights-heritage/places/arch-social-club>

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!



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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Marshall Booker, Jonathan Bor, Alexandria Bradley, Robert Burkett, Carolyn Domneys, Daniel Doty, George Evans, Brion Gill, Selina Gladden, Diane Hicks, LeVesta Jackson-Crute, Cyrus Mackey, Susan Mertes, Mary Park, Mona Powell, Jerome Richards, James Rouge, Greg Small, Gary Sullivan, Sharon Umphery, Wilbur Waymon

BOB JACOBSON

Bob Jacobson taught a course to retirees at Renaissance Institute called Meet Baltimore Jazz Artists, including interview, Q&A and live music at each class. Artists were Michael Spittel (guitar), Phil Ravita (bass), Derrick Thompson (piano), Eric Heavner (trumpet), Rhonda Robinson (flute,vocals), David Diongue (saxophone, piano) and Russell Hayward III (drums).

Bob's review of *Clarinet Omnibook* from Hal Leonard appeared in the March 2022 issue of *The Clarinet*.

ED HRYBYK

Congratulations to bassist Ed Hrybyk, who was designated Baltimore's "Jazz Hero" for 2022 by Jazz Journalists Association for his innovative responses to the Covid lockdown—porch concerts and pop-up jam

BJA Member Benefits

Your support is crucial to the success of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance! When you join, membership benefits include receipt of our quarterly newsletter, discounts on BJA merchandise, advance notice about all BJA events, and of course the satisfaction of being a part of Baltimore's best source of information and advocacy for Jazz. You can also help us to shape our support for jazz in Baltimore – apply for a member grant to help fund new programming, be it a recording, an event, an educational idea, or almost anything else! If you're not yet a member, JOIN TODAY!

BUT THAT'S NOT ALL! The following venues and other businesses offer discounts to BJA members:

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

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

Keystone Korner Baltimore offers \$5 on all tickets to BJA members, for tickets bought at the door (no online discount).

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Community News

- Alto saxophonists Ebban Dorsey and Quinn Rehkemper, Baltimore School for the Arts, joined their teacher Ed Hrybyk and Peabody's Sean Jones as players and educators at an April 14th concert and workshop co-sponsored by the Herbie Hancock Jazz Institute and the U.S. Department of Education.
- Ebban Dorsey will be joining her brother Ephraim at Peabody Conservatory next year.
- Melvin Miles, band director, retired after 50 years teaching at Morgan State University.
- During Jazz Appreciation Month, BJA's Jazz for Kids band did programs at three Baltimore County libraries (Woodlawn, Towson and Owings Mills) and at the Havre de Grace Blues & Jazz Festival on June 5th.
- The last week of May saw the passing of two well-known local jazz guitarists—Jim Podgurski, who among other accomplishments played Sunday brunches for thirteen years at Kelsey's, in Ellicott City, with bassist Larry Kinling; and Tom Gould, who for decades led The Gentlemen of Jazz, which recently included BJA members Tom Hensler and Bob Jacobson.
- BJA's condolences go to Warren Wolf, Jr. on the passing of his father, percussionist Warren Wolf, Sr.
- We are sad to report the passing of local drummer John Kessell, member of Big Band Theory, Powerhouse Big Band and Reisterstown Jazz Ensemble, as well as numerous combos.

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