

## BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

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VOLUME NINETEEN + ISSUE THREE + THE BJA NEWSLETTER + WWW.BALTIMOREJAZZ.COM



### Ravita's *ORIANA* Evokes Sights and Sounds of Daybreak in the City

By Jackie Oldham

**O***riana*, released March 25, 2023 by Phil Ravita Jazz, is Ravita's second album as a leader, following the highly praised 2021 album *Jagged Spaces*. In addition to bassist and leader Ravita, this quintet consists of Greg Small, piano; Nucleo Vega, drums; Benny Russell, saxophone; and Mark Leppo, vibes, congas; with vocalist Deidre Jennings.

I recently talked with Phil by phone, to learn more about his background. During our 20-minute conversation, I asked him three questions: "How did music find you?" "What led you to jazz?" and "Who were your greatest influences?" His answers yielded a wealth of similar experiences between us—

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### A Musical Walk through Baltimore's Jazz History with the John Lamkin II Quintet

By Liz Fixsen

**T**rumpeter John Lamkin II led a smoking hot band at Caton Castle on Saturday, April 15th with Michael Hairston on tenor, Bob Butta on piano, Mike Graham Jr. on bass and Jesse Moody on drums. This tight, energetic ensemble played an electrifying program that included a number of Lamkin's originals that took us on a journey down the memory lane of Baltimore's jazz history.

"Baker's Closet" was a hot, uptempo tune dedicated to Henry Baker, owner of a club called The Closet, on Franklin Street, active in the 1970s and '80s. Another original, "The Sportsman," in a minor key, recalled the Sportsmen's Lounge, established in the late 1960s by Lenny Moore. The band came on firing on all cylinders, outlining an artfully

(continued on page 3)



From left: Bob Butta, John Lamkin II, Mike Graham Jr., Michael Hairston and Jesse Moody

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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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## **Ravita's *ORIANA* Evokes Sights and Sounds of Daybreak in the City** *(continued from front page)*

two Baltimore natives who grew up listening to jazz (*The Harley Show*, a Baltimore jazz radio show on WBAL from 1952 to 1984), rock (the Beatles) and a wide range of other musical genres in households where music was a central part of our daily lives. Unlike me however, Ravita, who holds both a master's degree and a PhD, followed his passion for music to create a busy life of teaching at four Maryland colleges, while hosting a weekly radio program at one of them and performing throughout the Mid-Atlantic with both jazz and classical ensembles. Because I am primarily a self-taught "play it by ear" musician who reads music only when necessary, Ravita's insightful answer to my second question was music to my ears: "[I love] the freedom of [jazz] . . . the improvisational aspect of it. You can't articulate on paper what music really sounds like, and the meaning of it."

The title *Oriana* (Latin for sunrise or daybreak—feminine form of the Greek Orion) is perfect for this new album! Over its 10 tracks, Ravita and his bandmates explore the moods, sights and sounds of the hours before daybreak in the city. The tone ranges from brash to brooding, urbane to contemplative, all undergirded by an optimistic spirit. Even the song titles suggest variations on the theme.

The opening track, "Sepia" (one of eight original songs), has an in-your-face groove, anchored by an unrelenting, 4/4 "march" drumbeat, with blazing horns and saxophone riffs, tempered by mellow, melodious piano and vibes. Like "Sepia," "Boo's Blues" (track 3) features bold and brash sax, piano and funky, slightly off-beat accents by the drums. "December 2021" is a dreamy 3/4 time tune, reminiscent of Vince Guaraldi's "Skating," (from the album *Charlie Brown's Christmas*).

In contrast, the two cover songs performed by vocalist Deidre Jennings conjure up earlier, more blues-infused eras of jazz. "Black Coffee" (a 1948 song with

music by Sonny Burke and lyrics by Paul Francis Webster) has been performed by an eclectic group of artists since Sarah Vaughan's version charted in 1949, including Ray Charles (1957), Bobby Darin (1960), Rosemary Clooney, Ruth Brown, Petula Clark (1960s), k.d. lang (1988), Carmen McRae, Sinéad O'Connor (1990s)—and others, as recently as 2014. Ms. Jennings's version is smooth, yet delightfully bluesy and raspy, backed by lush piano and vibes, with this pointed lament for women: "Stay at home and mind your oven." Likewise, her rendition of "Caravan," backed by Ravita Jazz's jungle fever-like playing, harkens back to the exotic sounds of 1930s jazz.

Closing out the album are two original songs that reinforce the "daybreak" theme. "City Lights," with its soulful sax paired with tinkling piano and vibraphone, enhances a feeling of magic, a night-time romantic stroll under city skylines, a hint of mystery and wistful memories. "Heaven" has a classic gospel/blues jazz sound that reminded me of both Ray Charles's "Georgia on My Mind" and the old *Saturday Night Live* band's sign-off theme. The message for me was plain and simple: it was a long, hard night, but I lived to see another day, and I'm thankful.

Enjoy *Oriana* any time of the day—morning, evening, or noon; or in any setting—under the light of the moon, at a party or alone in your room; with your first cup of coffee, or your last sip of wine. You'll be glad you did. The album is available at <https://www.baltimorebass.com>.

Jackie Oldham is a Baltimore native who writes essays, poetry, memoirs, and short stories on many topics in her blog, [www.baltimoreblackwoman.com](http://www.baltimoreblackwoman.com). Her essays have appeared as editorials and letters in the *Baltimore Sun*. She retired from a career with the former Waverly Press and its successors. She is also a musician who loves all kinds of music including jazz.

## A Musical Walk through Baltimore's Jazz History with the John Lamkin II Quintet

(continued from front page)

ragged melody with intriguing quirks and twists but grounded in the blues. Butta's fingers pranced along the ivories with an abundance of funk, running up and down, out and around the harmonies on a melodic merry-go-round. Graham made a bold statement in his bass solo.

Lamkin then invoked the memory of beloved jazz singer Ruby Glover, who died in 2007, with a straightforward rendition of "Bye, Bye, Blackbird," one of her signature tunes. Hairston brought forth the bluesy heart of the tune on his sax, while Butta highlighted its playfulness, again running circles around the harmony.

The next old-timers to be honored, in Lamkin's "Homage," were saxophonists Harold Adams (1942-2021) and Major Boyd (1948-2016), who were mainstays on the stage at Caton Castle. The band played a slow, meditative melody over a steady funk/hip-hop style beat, followed by Lamkin picking up the groove in his flugelhorn solo, even giving the tune a cheerful lilt before transitioning to a more impassioned treatment. Butta took up the story on piano, and like the flugelhorn, unveiled the pathos, all while the steady beat of the drums and bass imparted gravitas. A call-and-response between flugelhorn and sax brought the tune to a soft landing.

Continuing in the nostalgic vein, the group played Lamkin's "The Avenue," recalling the heyday of jazz on Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue, with an angular melody over a driving beat. It made me vaguely think of a very heated rendition of "Caravan." Butta's solo skirted the edges of the harmony, at times venturing beyond it. He can string together more 16th notes without a break than just about anyone I know. The horns riffed over a thrilling drum solo that went just about everywhere that drums can go.

Still in a minor key, Lamkin's original "De Market" recalled the days when he and other jazz groups played at the old Lexington Market in downtown Baltimore, and people would dance. Answering the many requests for him to play danceable tunes, Lamkin wrote this funky number. Graham gave another impressive solo—his bass seems to be talking to us with emphatic and provocative statements. This solo, along with his solo on "Black Nile," drew appreciative cheers from the audience.

The third standard the band played was Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood." The flugelhorn spun sugar spiced with peppermint while the sax poured warm, creamy caramel over the "B" section, with lush and eloquent accompaniment on the piano. The two horns together were a tasty confection indeed.

The band finished with another Lamkin original—this one in a major key – titled, "All the Steps You Take While Walking Through Your Brain." Lamkin explained that many of his

tunes come to him during his early morning walks. This funky tune with a New Orleans groove featured a killing drum solo by Moody that had Tabasco sauce all over it—or maybe I should say, "Bayou Butt Burner Louisiana Hot Sauce."

This musical journey through the yesteryear of Baltimore jazz was enthusiastically received by the Caton Castle audience, many of whom are older jazz fans who have been regular patrons of the club for years, if not decades, and who know great jazz when they hear it. The John Lamkin II Quintet did not disappoint.

Liz Fixsen has been part of the Baltimore jazz scene for many years, as a listener and sometimes as a performer (piano and vocals). She serves on the board of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance and edits and writes for the BJA newsletter.

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# GENERATION Z & LIVE JAZZ

## We Are The Future

PHOTO CREDIT: DATACAPSYSTEMS



By Brynn Rhodes

Whenever I am out in a place featuring live jazz, I am often the youngest person there. Jazz suffers from common misconceptions that it is exclusively appreciated by older generations (the Silent Generation, Boomers, and Gen X), that traditional jazz is a slow and dying art form and that younger generations neither like nor listen to jazz. I constantly encourage my fellow Generation Z friends to join me at jazz clubs, and when they do, they thoroughly enjoy themselves. Some friends—whether they are knowledgeable in jazz music or not—enjoy the environment and the “vintage feel.” When we leave the venue, they say, “there’s nothing like drinking a glass of wine and listening to some cats cooking on stage.” More young people are becoming knowledgeable about jazz, to the point where our parents and grandparents are asking how on earth we know about Etta James, Duke Ellington, and John Coltrane. And to their surprise, we know enough.

... because age doesn't matter when we are all  
enjoying the beauty of jazz.

Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) are becoming more fascinated by musical nostalgia that nurtures (some of) our old souls. Within the jazz genre, there are emerging young jazz musicians such as recent Grammy winner and 23-year-old Samara Joy, whose beautiful tone is eerily reminiscent of Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Joy will be performing multiple sold-out shows at Keystone Korner from June 9 to 11; streaming passes are still available. There is Hannah Mayer, a 20-year-old pianist from California currently studying at Peabody. She recently performed at An die Musik on May 12, and continues to make a splash in the Baltimore jazz scene. Baltimore-based sibling duo, Ebban and Ephraim Dorsey, who are 18- and 19-years old respectively, have also been inspiring and leading forces in the Baltimore

contemporary jazz scene. They have recently made their debut at Blue Note Jazz Club in New York City while sitting in with Terrace Martin. I had the privilege of seeing them perform at Keystone Korner earlier in March, and the audience was one of the youngest I have seen, with students and young adults in groups. It’s refreshing to see young talent perform on stages where legendary acts have played, and it’s even more refreshing to see a younger audience.

Social media plays a major role in recreating the narrative of jazz discovery. Two of the main sources to discover new music are YouTube and TikTok (both #1 and #2 in a study conducted by MIDiA Research). TikTok, in particular, is a great resource for musicians to connect to and engage a community with their digital fanbase. It can also show daily, candid realities of a musician’s life through videos. Within an individual’s algorithm, they are presented with different videos on their For You Page (FYP) that are specifically curated to them, resulting in becoming a part of a certain “community” of TikTok. For example, I love jazz (if you couldn’t tell already), so I am presented with different videos on the history of jazz, live performances (either recent or from decades ago), and biographies of prominent jazz musicians. Therefore, I am a part of the “JazzTok” community and algorithm. Scrolling through the comments of JazzTok videos is shocking, as I underestimated how many young people would be so interested in jazz. It’s an eclectic mix of admiration and questions, both from music enthusiasts—whether jazz fans, or not—and young musicians. Jazz has also been incorporated in a multitude of other genres—most prominently rap, hip hop, and R&B—that has introduced jazz to new ears of the Gen Z.

Gen Z is building the new traditions of jazz discovery through the digital world, but what about the traditions, such as attending jazz clubs and going to live jam sessions? This is traditionally a space for the emerging musician, but what about the Gen Z’ers who just enjoy the music? Jazz clubs should continue to break age barriers, and create a space where younger generations feel like they belong in a jazz club, whilst coexisting with the older generations and introducing new jazz traditions. Local jazz clubs in the Baltimore area have incorporated student discounts, have invited younger musicians to perform, and have consistently introduced jam sessions to invite the emerging artist to perform; when there are younger performers, there is a younger audience. The Baltimore jazz scene continues to bring a sense of community to all ages and all music lovers, and I only hope that this inspires jazz communities in other areas around the world, as we are the future of jazz. In the end, I always remind myself that the surrounding music remains timeless, because age doesn’t matter when we are all enjoying the beauty of jazz.

Brynn Rhodes is a BJA board member, a recent graduate of Berklee College of Music and a music enthusiast.



# MARK KRAEMER

## Soulful Master Of The Saxophone

By Liz Fixsen

"The saxophone is an extension of my soul, and playing jazz is a way of life."

This quote is found on the homepage of the website of saxophonist and composer, Mark Kraemer. Both his long history of playing jazz since youth (as narrated in a bio on his website) and his soulfulness as a player attest to the truth of this quote. He has performed at numerous events and venues including Artscape, Blues Alley, Bohemian Caverns, Germano's Cabaret, Madonnari Arts Festival, Baltimore Washington Jazz Festival, River Center Theater of the Performing Arts in Baton Rouge and Brooklyn Exposure NYC. He has a long history as a band leader, sideman, recording artist, composer, and more recently, a teacher.

Kraemer has recently added two new Baltimore venues—Who Know'z (2101 Maryland Ave.) and Next Phaze (112 E. Lexington St.), where band members have included Moe Daniels (piano), Laurenda Featherstone (drums), Percy White (bass) and Jesse Powers (bass).

Kraemer plays both alto and tenor sax as well as wind controller, soprano and piano; but his real love is the alto; and maybe I can safely say that with the alto, he is his most soulful and expressive. This is true regardless of the style of jazz he is playing—but bop and hard bop are where his heart lives.

Kraemer brings a unique visual presence to his concerts—dressed in a natty blue pinstripe suit, with two-toned shoes, a pork-pie hat and dark shades, he is the image of the classic "hep cat" of yesteryear. Not only does he play his sax with energy and expression, he also can do a pretty mean scat. I have had great fun with him on a few occasions at jam sessions where we traded scattered fours on tunes such as "I Got Rhythm" and "It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got that Swing."

Sunday afternoon May 21st, Kraemer gave a concert at An die Musik



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK KRAEMER

From left: Bob Butta, Obasi Akoto, Mark Kraemer, Laurenda Featherstone and Ralph Magwood

with a band of some of his favorite players: pianist Bob Butta, bassist Obasi Akoto, percussionist Ralph Magwood and drummer Laurenda Featherstone. Kraemer introduced the band and then gave a kind of invocation, following the practice of his teacher and mentor Gary Bartz, asking that positive vibes would come into the room and that the Creator would bless the house and bless the musicians. Fittingly, the program began with Coltrane's "Spiritual," a free-floating minor 7th riff on tenor accompanied by rippling arpeggios on piano and punctuated percussion sounds before landing into the groove of "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise."

The program continued with more favorite jazz standards, including "What is This Thing Called Love" and "I Hear a Rhapsody." On most of the selections, the percussion imparted a Latin flavor while Butta's dazzling piano solos sometimes gave a hint of the heart of swing in the tunes. Akoto's nimble fingers on the bass, Featherstone's sure touch on the drums and Magwood's spirited work on the congas and other percussion gave all the tunes energy and thrust. Ralph Magwood gave a heartfelt vocal rendition of "My One and Only Love," with Kraemer on tenor.

One unusual selection that I don't often hear played was McCoy Tyner's 1981 "Walk Spirit Talk Spirit." This one had a distinct African flavor, and solos

by Magwood on percussion and Featherstone on drums evoked a tribal feeling, augmented by the expressive guttural squawks on Kraemer's alto sax.

Kraemer played alto on some tunes, tenor on others—always with a clear, pure tone and a deep respect for tradition, while bringing his own eloquent interpretation to the tunes. He played alto on "Everything Happens to Me," which he always plays with great soulful feeling. That feeling was echoed by Butta's tender and sensitive piano solo, while Magwood and Featherstone added evocative touches on their instruments. I loved the fluttering riffs that Kraemer added on the last head and the singing voice of the alto as he brought the tune to a close.

When the band played one of Kraemer's original tunes, "Paradise del Sol," he opened with a scattered riff. This is one of six tunes that he recorded on an eponymous album, produced by Jacques Burvick (but never released), which can be heard on his website at <https://www.markkraemersax.com/>.

During the last tune, a bouncy treatment of "Autumn Leaves," Kraemer threw in a fleeting quote of "My Favorite Things." Akoto's solo brought shouts of appreciation. The show ended with warm applause from the audience.

Mark Kraemer is a talent to be reckoned with, and we'll be sure to enjoy his gifts in more Baltimore venues in the future.

# Baltimore Jazz Mandolin

By Bob Jacobson

LOOKING THROUGH the summer catalog of Common Ground on the Hill, the Westminster-based folk arts center, I was struck by the course title “Unpacking Duke Ellington and Jazz Mandolin.” Wait a minute, jazz mandolin? I thought I would observe the class, hopefully interview the teacher, New York-based Tim Porter and some students, and that could make an article for this newsletter. But then I was surprised to learn from BJA board member Liz Fixsen that we have two jazz mandolin players right here in Baltimore—Joel Michael-Schwartz and Leo Hickman.

Michael-Schwartz grew up in a Chicago suburb, listening to Celtic, old time and his parents’ big band music. He started on fiddle, then moved to mandolin, taking weekly lessons from swing mandolinist Don Stiernberg, a student of “Jethro” Burns, the man who “split the atom,” according to self-described history nerd Michael-Schwartz (Burns pioneered playing mandolin with jazz harmonies and improvisation techniques). Michael-Schwartz then studied classical mandolin with David Evans at Goucher College, where he also learned jazz from guitarist Steve Yankee and pianist Jeffrey Chapell. He has been an active jazz musician for over a decade, playing restaurants, private parties, retirement communities, churches, An die Musik, Creative Alliance and Strathmore, usually with a trio including guitar or keyboard and bass. Michael-Schwartz teaches mandolin at Goucher and is associate director of the Baltimore Mandolin Orchestra. Yes, we have one and it turns one hundred next year!

Like Michael-Schwartz, Leo Hickman started playing music on another stringed instrument, the cello, in third grade. One day he wandered into a classroom at Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School, saw mandolins and



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOEL MICHAEL-SCHWARTZ

Joel Michael-Schwartz

began tuning one. The teacher, Laura Norris, enlisted him in her class, Mando for Kids, with which he twice toured mandolin’s native land, Italy. Hickman went on to Baltimore School for the Arts, where jazz director Eddie Hrybyk, “totally changed the course of my music education,” says Hickman. The young mandolinist enthusiastically described the experience of attending a Jazz Education Network conference in New Orleans with Hrybyk, playing “Dixieland” jazz on banjo.

“He’s just got an incredible ear. He can play any style of music, including bebop.”

Since 2019 (minus the pandemic lockdown) Hickman has been a regular at Michael Joseph Harris’s Django Jazz Jam in Hampden. I spoke with him on May 9th after a set in which he had played “On the Sunny Side of the Street,” “Caravan,” “Sweet Sue,” “Blue Bossa,” “Them There Eyes,” “Djangology,” and “Avalon.” Among seven string players on stage, Hickman was

literally Harris’s right-hand man, playing melodies, soloing with a combination of single lines and chords and playing spontaneous harmonies with a trumpeter. Harris says, “I’ve known Leo since he was in Mando for Kids. I noticed how great he was even then. He’s just got an incredible ear. He can play any style of music, including bebop.” Hickman will be starting the jazz program at UMBC in the fall [Look for a longer article on Hickman at [baltimorejazz.com](http://baltimorejazz.com)].

Michael-Schwartz also told me about Danny Knicely, who is from a musical family in the Shenandoah Valley. Though Knicely lives in Virginia, he has performed at 49 West in Annapolis with guitarist Tom Mitchell and bassist John Previti. He became friendly with pianist Larry Willis while recording an album at Mapleshade Records (Willis lived above the studio but later moved to Baltimore). Knicely’s work with Larry Willis is well-documented on video, including a 2018 concert in which they played Carla Bley’s “Lawns,” and Horace Silver’s “Cape Verdean Blues.” Knicely has also played with two other jazz musicians well-known to Baltimore-area jazz fans -- guitarist Steve Abshire and drummer Chuck Redd.

Michael-Schwartz told me about the song “Poor Mr. Chisholm” from the 1940 Fred Astaire/Artie Shaw movie *Second Chorus*, the gist of which is that jazz cannot be played on a mandolin. Obviously we have some local mandolin players proving otherwise. “The exciting thing about improvised music is that people can make this music coming from traditional places. Jazz is instrument-neutral,” says Michael-Schwartz, proudly adding, “We’re everywhere!”

Bob Jacobson plays saxophone and clarinet and leads combos Sounds Good and Swing ‘n’ Samba. He has written numerous articles for the BJA newsletter. He is a mostly-retired social worker who still dabbles in counseling, freelance writing, teaching, and writing about music. He was vice president of BJA for 12 years.

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# Baltimore Jazz Conference 2023

The Fourth Annual Baltimore Jazz Alliance Jazz Conference was held at An die Musik on April 22nd. Topics included: *A Music Census for Baltimore*, *Copyright & Royalties: Are You Leaving Money on the Table?*, *Funding your Art: Show Me the Money*, *Jazz Education*, *The BJA Vinyl Roadshow*, *Baltimore Jazz Stories*.

## Jazz Education In Baltimore

By Liz Fixsen

One of the sessions of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance Jazz Conference was on Jazz Education in Baltimore. The panelists were Lionel Lyles, new head of jazz studies at Morgan State University; Gregory Thompkins, Music Director of the Baltimore Jazz Education Project and woodwinds teacher at Winston Middle School; Brian Prechtel, director of Peabody's OrchKids program; Kwame Kenyatta-Bey, BJA board member and member of the Baltimore City Public Schools Board of Commissioners; and Anna Celenza, teacher of musicology at Peabody Conservatory of Music.

Lyles spoke about rebuilding the jazz education program at Morgan on a firmer jazz foundation, giving more prominence to the jazz ensembles. He also aims to cultivate stronger relationships with local schools.

Thompkins noted that through the Baltimore Jazz Education Project, he raised some \$180,000 for instruments, supplies, lessons, and concerts for Baltimore's youth. His goal is to teach the youth skills that are useful in both musical and non-musical careers, including promotion and technology.

Prechtel strives to connect all arts activities in the community. He arranges midweek student concerts, with bus transportation and free tickets to Title I schools. He says that arts organizations need to get out of their silos and start collaborating.

Kenyatta-Bey also spoke of the need to encourage more collaboration among arts organizations, to help overcome differences in culture and ideology. He wants to generate more equitably-distributed funding in musical education in the city schools. He observes that we are in an age that demands creativity and innovation—qualities that the study of jazz can foster.

Celenza said that children need to be led into music in accessible ways that allow for the time needed to develop competence. She wants music teaching to make more connection between the history of jazz and its social context, and to overcome the gulf between jazz history and classical history. She is aiming to develop data to show that schools with overall better performance are also schools that have strong arts programs.

Asked about barriers to music education, Lyles mentioned that change in staff can be a problem, as some students are easily distracted by change. Celenza notes that many children go into music to find a sense of comfort and asks how that comfort can be sustained. Kenyatta-Bey says that administrations ignore the social benefits of the study of the arts

and thus resist fully funding arts programs. Prechtel notes that the emphasis on "STEM" education leaves out the "A" for arts, seconding Kenyatta Bey in saying that the prevailing notion in society is that the expressive arts have little value. Musical gifts take years to develop; Kenyatta-Bey interjected a comment that we are a "microwave" society that wants instant results. And Thompkins agrees—he laments the lack of dedicated music classes; instead, children are pulled out of other classes for short sessions of music instruction. He takes videos of children's performances and sends them around to other teachers and administrators to show them what the kids can accomplish. Prechtel says that the whole system needs a consistent city-wide arts program; currently it is just hit or miss, school by school. Various members of the audience also spoke up to express support for a more robust music education program in the city schools.

Also in the audience was Marsha Green, a Baltimore native and founder and president of Next Up Music & Culture, Inc., (<https://nextupmusic.org/>), "a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting the next generation of talented musicians in Baltimore City by providing instruments and teaching life skills for success."

In short, the panelists and audience members all agreed on the importance to children and to society in general of arts education inside and outside of the schools, and that there is a need for more funding of and consistency in programming in the city schools.

## BJA Vinyl Roadshow

By Liz Fixsen

BJA celebrated National Record Store Day with the Vinyl Roadshow at the 2023 Baltimore Jazz Conference. This session featured Jackie Oldham, BJA member and music enthusiast; Doc Manning, former radio host and DJ on WEAA; and Rudy Wagoner, owner of Mr. Vinyl Records.

During this session-turned-conversation, we learned about two worlds of record collecting: high-end vinyl, and record store vinyl. Wagoner and Manning elaborated on the art of jazz vinyl collecting. Jazz vinyl collecting is very popular in England and Asia; "There is notoriety of jazz internationally, and there is a market for it," says Wagoner. Blue Note Record Label vinyls are one of the most popular and valuable jazz vinyls to collect, especially those produced before 1966. One vinyl can be worth \$5,000 to \$10,000 because so few of them were made. Many jazz vinyls are rare because at the time, you had to be "hip" to know the jazz artists releasing records at the time. For example, John Coltrane was not popular in the early 1950s, as he was just beginning to play with Miles Davis and was not as well known as he would soon be in the early 1960s.

Another takeaway was to take care of old, used vinyl! Keep them in plastic coverings if possible. To try and fix skipping on vinyl, first clean the vinyl with a clean, old t-shirt and water. Then, clean the grooves on the vinyl with a tooth-

pick. Unfortunately, many old vinyl collections tend to be thrown out, or hidden in someone's basement, where there is no knowledge of how valuable a collection can be. Make sure to check the vinyls stowed away in your homes, as your collections could be valuable treasures!

## Baltimore Jazz Stories

By Brynn Rhodes

One of the concluding sessions of the BJA 2023 Jazz Conference was "Baltimore Jazz Stories" with a panel consisting of Clarence Ward III, Quincy Phillips, Charles Funn, Marianne Matheny-Katz, and Howard Katz. This wonderfully engaging conversation among the panelists covered many topics regarding the Baltimore jazz scene, including about the emotional and cerebral improvisation of playing and singing live music, about "Baltimore's best jam session" led by Clarence Ward III at R House every Monday night, and about the generosity of Baltimore jazz musicians. Matheny-Katz mentioned how she, among many other artists, strives to pay homage to the Baltimore jazz musicians. "Musicians are generous in Baltimore, and they always play with all of their heart," she said.

Other topics of discussion included the powerful influence of Sean Jones, head of jazz studies at Peabody, on the Baltimore jazz community; the importance of live event spaces such as An die Musik that create great opportunity for jazz musicians; and the young, emerging jazz talent. There was also an open discourse about music and jazz education in Baltimore City and Baltimore County schools. Charles Funn, who is a retired band instructor of 44 years, and one of whose students was Clarence Ward III, discussed the importance of early music education. "[We should] bring the young talent up in the music, and put them in an environment where they're constantly playing, where it makes it easier to play in public," states Funn. "Young Black kids need to see older Black kids play instruments," says Clarence Ward III. "Music saves our children, but oftentimes the first programs to be cut in schools are music programs." The Baltimore Jazz Alliance, as well as the Baltimore jazz community, continues to serve as a voice for music education in Baltimore.

When asked about the Baltimore sound, Quincy Phillips eloquently said, "You have to understand where we come from, the struggle [we have had]. You can't separate that . . . and we navigate it through music. You're born in it, what you see, you can't separate it. What you're listening to is the truth. We are playing the beat from the heart. You can tell because the room is being transformed." The panel collectively agreed that they want to see the jazz audience expand, and for less competition and more collaboration among Baltimore's jazz musicians, to continue creating something amazing. It was clear from this discussion that Baltimore jazz musicians continue to play and speak with their hearts about their passion for jazz.



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## NEW BIOGRAPHY

### Chick Webb In Retrospect

By Gregory Lewis

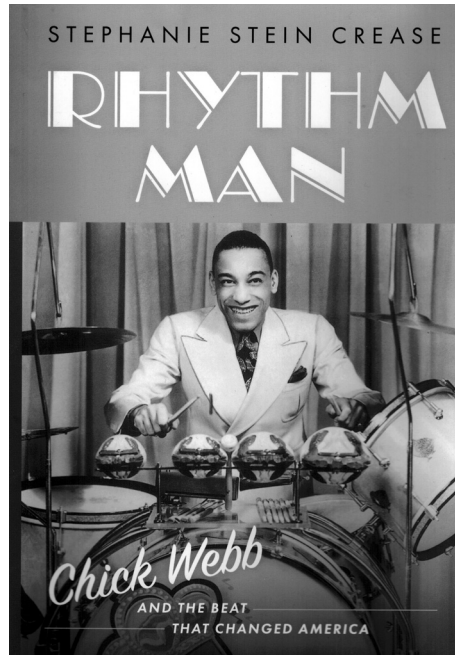
Thanks to jazz historian Stephanie Stein Crease, we now have a comprehensive biography of William Henry (“Chick”) Webb (1905-1939), the Baltimore-born musical prodigy whose innovative drumming technique helped to perfect rhythmic “swing,” the defining orchestral aesthetic of the Swing Era: *Rhythm Man: Chick Webb and the Beat That Changed America* (2023).

Standing at a mere four feet tall (childhood afflictions also left him hump-backed), the dynamic bandleader was known as the “Savoy King” because of his group’s storied exploits as the Savoy Ballroom’s house band in 1930s Harlem, New York. By popular acclaim, Webb’s dance band topped (“cut”) nearly all “battle of the bands” competitors, including Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson and Benny Goodman.

Born in the shadow of Johns Hopkins Hospital as racially segregated Baltimore entered the 20th century, Webb was a self-taught drummer who never formally learned to read music. In addition to health challenges, Webb’s early life was hardscrabble, but typical for Black people in the “Jim Crow” era.

Yet a “bootstrap” mentality seemed to prevail: obstacles were motivating as well as restraining. With money earned hawking newspapers (his preferred hustle), an adolescent Webb purchased his first drum set. With ears attentive to the “ragtime” rhythms popularized by fellow Baltimorean Eubie Blake, Webb anticipated a new twist on syncopation between musicians and dancers—The Lindy Hop and The Charleston—that awaited his stylized drum beats. Pursuing a dream, Webb followed pianist Eubie Blake’s trail to Harlem.

This detailed biography of Webb reminds us of a time when ballroom dancing was a “thing.” The bygone New Albert Hall, opposite the legendary Royal Theatre on Pennsylvania Avenue, carried on the local dance tradition into the 1960s. Crease’s crafty rendering of



Webb’s heroic triumph over life’s obstacles by “Stompin’ At The Savoy” (Webb’s signature tune) provides a window on a world where swing music was empowering. Nothing deterred Webb in his quest for stardom, not even what the book cites as the “drummer’s curse” . . . chronic hemorrhoids.

Webb arrived during the Savoy Ballroom’s inaugural year (1926) amid the Harlem Renaissance, a blossoming period for various forms of Black cultural expression, including theater, literature, and music. His talent was obvious to the likes of bandleader Duke Ellington: “Chick Webb was a dancer-drummer who painted pictures of dances with his drums,” he said. “The reason why Chick Webb had such control, such command of his audiences at the Savoy Ballroom, was because he was always in communication with the dancers and felt it the way they did.”

Webb’s impact on the music scene was profound. He put the drums front and center in jazz orchestration with a versatile style that expanded the percussive range of the drum kit by re-imagining the interplay between cymbals, bass, tom-tom and snare drums. Also, he incorporated drum parts and solos into big band arrangements. Was Webb the first modern jazz drummer? That’s the verdict of jazz drum masters quoted in the book, including “Papa” Jo Jones, Art

Blakey, Kenny Clarke, and Max Roach.

Of course, Webb’s legacy will always be associated with Ella Fitzgerald, the peerless jazz/pop singer whom Webb embraced as a teen-aged winner of a talent contest at the Apollo Theater. Under Webb’s tutelage, Fitzgerald became the “First Lady of Swing” as she fronted Webb’s Savoy band before breaking through “Jim Crow” bias (“jumping the fence,” in the idiom of the day) to mainstream American acclaim as the “First Lady of Song.”

Predating R&B, soul, or disco, Chick Webb reigned as the “Savoy King” of the dance music domain. This superb biography is a welcome addition to the historical record.

As an innovator, Webb understood the transient nature of popular music. The book recalls an incident where Webb and pianist “Jelly Roll” Morton, a noted ragtime composer, argued vociferously on a Harlem street corner. The bone of contention was summed up by guitarist Danny Barker: “Jelly’s music was considered corny and dated.” In the 21st century, that “corny and dated” gibe is also aimed at Chick Webb’s swinging rhythm. Every generation reserves for itself the right to determine what is “hip.”

However, Chick Webb’s name endures. After his untimely death at age 34, Ella Fitzgerald and other jazz luminaries raised money to help build the trend-setting Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center near Webb’s childhood home in East Baltimore. Subsequent generations have associated that name with many notable basketball players who emerged from playground leagues sponsored by Chick Webb and later Eastside municipal rec centers.

Chick Webb’s inspirational story provides proof of the sportsman’s adage: “What counts is NOT the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog.”

Gregory L. Lewis is a longtime Baltimore attorney whose jazz reflections frequently appear under the Caton Castle’s “show review” tab at [catoncastle.com](http://catoncastle.com) and at [reflectionsca-toncastle.blogspot.com](http://reflectionsca-toncastle.blogspot.com).





PHOTO CREDIT: KIWANA SELDEN OF DEFIANTSHOTS@OUTLOOK.COM

Mayor Brandon Scott and members of the RJY Chick Webb Council, at the groundbreaking for the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center renovation, May 24th, 2023

## Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center

By Bob Jacobson

In spring of 2021 we reported on the planned renovation of the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center, which had served the East Baltimore community since 1947. On May 24, 2023 the groundbreaking ceremony finally took place. The center will double in size and include a gym, event space, recording studio and exhibits on Webb, the famed drummer, bandleader and philanthropist.

The RJY Chick Webb Council, led by Ron Miles, spearheaded the campaign to renovate the center (RJY stands for Ralph J. Young, Webb's physician and friend who carried Webb's dream of a recreation center through to completion). At a brief question-and-answer segment after remarks by City officials, state legislators, a community representative, and spokesmen for the construction and architecture firms, Miles reminded all those assembled that the importance of the Chick Webb Memorial Recreation Center goes way beyond its meaning for East Baltimore youth. He talked about the center being an African American accomplishment of national proportions, relating the history of the initial fundraising event attended by 7,500 people, where heavyweight champion Joe Louis emceed and the fifty entertainment acts included Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, The Ink Spots and Jackie "Moms" Mabley.

Completion of the center's renovations is expected by fall, 2025.

*... I believe that jazz music has the strongest healing potential, and it's not just because I play it and love it so much.*

— Horace Silver

## CATON CASTLE

### Keeping The Jazz Alive In Baltimore

By Steve Everette

One of the best-kept secrets still tucked away in the southwest section of Baltimore (where jazz still lives) is the historic Caton Castle. It has changed hands and names several times. It was a German-owned club in the 1960s and '70s, and then became Sonny's Showcase Lounge in the 1970s and '80s. In the 1990s the Caton Castle was born, promoting the sounds of jazz. At any time you could be entertained by Wilfred "Mickey" Fields playing his saxophone, or by Super Dooper Nikki Cooper singing funky tunes with the band. Many musicians have graced the club with their presence, and through good times and bad they have kept the music going.

Today, as we recover from COVID-19, Ronald "Ron" Scott is still the trustee of Caton Castle and holds the keys to the door to let people enter. "It takes a lot of chicken wings to keep the doors open," says Ron on the challenges to maintain the club's existence. "Keeping a good, qualified mixologist and security are both very important to the customers."

Although Ron admits there are some challenges, he sees to it that Caton Castle continues to receive support from talented musicians. Drummer Dennis Chambers is in the Castle at times, Warren Wolf, Umoja with Curtis Lundy, Elijah Jamal Balbed Quartet featuring Lee Pearson, Paul Carr Quintet featuring Bruce Williams, and many others play there often and support the jazz.

Recently I visited the Castle with Liz Fixsen, another BJA board member. We came to enjoy a concert by the John Lamkin II Sextet, including band members Michael Hairston on tenor sax, Bob Butta on piano, Mike Graham, Jr. on bass, and Jesse Moody on drums. Liz and I met at the door, we grabbed a spot, and prepared to sit and enjoy the performance.

We both agreed the show was great. I thought Lamkin's tune "Homage" was amazing. It was a great tribute to all the first responders during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also thought "De Market" was clever. It felt like I was walking through Lexington Market, which was the inspiration for that piece.

Throughout the show, the horn harmonies were strong and I loved the bass player's running and walking lines. The drummer swung, and all the solos were sweet! The audience in the section where I was sitting really appreciated the sounds of the band. There was a call and response going on to the music the whole time.

Overall, we loved the ambience, the acoustics, and the music at one of Baltimore's most revered venues. Liz Fixsen has written a longer review of the tunes played in the concert. You can also check that out.

Steve Everette, MBA, has been a BJA board member for 10 years. He loves the bass guitar. Steve is the founder and owner of the Business Concepts Group.

# Sean Jones and the Baltimore Jazz Collective

By Bob Jacobson

Since 1987, Community Concerts at Second (Presbyterian Church) has been one of Baltimore's better-known concert series, best known for solo or small chamber ensemble performances by Baltimore Symphony Orchestra musicians. But in 2018 bass clarinetist Todd Marcus broke through the series' classical music glass ceiling, performing its first jazz concert. Exactly three years later, on May 21st, jazz returned to Community Concerts at Second with Sean Jones and the Baltimore Jazz Collective. The pews were packed with a diverse audience of around 300 listeners, proving once again that jazz can be a drawing card even in venues previously devoted to other genres.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRIS SHANNON

From left: Alex Brown, piano; Todd Marcus, bass clarinet; Blake Meister, bass; Sean Jones, trumpet; Eric Kennedy, drums; Brinae Ali, tap dance

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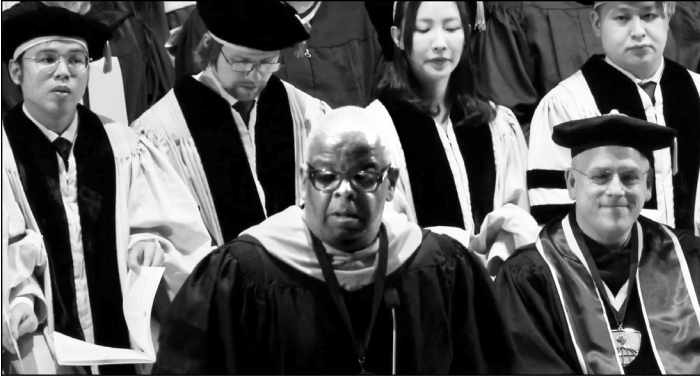


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## Terence Blanchard Addresses Peabody Graduates

By Anna Harwell Celenza

**O**n May 23rd, musician and composer Terence Blanchard gave the keynote address at the Peabody Conservatory's 2023 graduation ceremony. The graduates, including those who majored in jazz performance, warmly embraced his words of wisdom.

Blanchard, a seven-time GRAMMY award winner with achievements in film, television, the concert stage and opera hall, outlined the path and the challenges of a citizen musician and the socio-cultural issues that all musicians now face.

Blanchard first thanked the graduates' families and friends who for years have supported the class of 2023, jokingly saying, "Because they sound good now—but it wasn't always that way." Laughing along with the students, he reflected on his own early years when his mother made him practice outside while her soaps were on TV. "That's an experience I carry with me still," he said, shaking his head.

He commended the class of 2023 for making it to graduation, but warned them that they are "not finished." "Today," he said, "marks the day when you put everything that you've learned into practice. Today is the day when you really continue to grow and learn to help bring our society forward." He was welcoming them into a world where music makes a difference.

He shared a meaningful piece of wisdom imparted by his composition teacher Roger Dickerson: When times get hard or you are faced by a new challenge, "Trust your training." Passion and a strong work ethic will get you through the tough times. He advised them, "Keep your options open" and be willing to stretch into new fields, as Blanchard himself did, in composing for film and opera.

He explained that the new graduates follow a whole history of brilliant music—but "that music is just one person's opinion"—and with their training, these new musicians can create new music that is just as valuable.

The best sign of success, said Blanchard, is feeling joy in your work. And as he has learned over the course of his career, that joy comes from giving back: he has dedicated his

life's work to "opening people's eyes to the injustices of our community and our society." For example, music he created for his album *Breathless* and for the Spike Lee film *BlackKkklansman* changed the way people think about gun violence and the treatment of minorities by American law enforcement. "I'm telling you this," he explained, "so that you understand."

"In your darkest moments," he said, "when you think no one is hearing you, don't believe it. People are paying attention . . . So, from this day forward, get excited about anything that comes your way that allows you to create . . . From this day forward, we're all colleagues. We're all music nerds. We're all in the boat together!"

Link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwnamSnUIqA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwnamSnUIqA)

Anna Celenza is a BJA Board Member and a professor at Johns Hopkins University, where she teaches jazz history and creative writing.



Mayor Brandon Scott  
& the City of Baltimore

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## New Members

Reginald Baker, Susan Baum, Sarahia Benn, Don Braden, Paul Brosseau, Robyn Busch, Michael Darnell, Kathleen Delaurenti, Chad Dukes, Jordan Edwards, Marsha Green, Robert Hall, Larry Hofmeister, Ruth Howard, Desiree Jackson, LaShawn Knowles, Lionel Lyles, Nzinga Mack, Doc Manning, Thomas Owens, Luis Ozoria, Quincy Phillips, Brian Prectel, Augen Reed, Joanne Smikle, Rudy Wagoner, Josh Weinzapfel, Raynetta Wiggins-Jackson

## Member Notes

**Ed Hrybyk**, director of jazz studies at Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA), played bass in the Herbie Hancock Institute Quintet at the U.S. Department of Education for Jazz Appreciation Month. The quintet, with special guest Terrell Stafford on trumpet, included BSA juniors Julian Frazier on drums and Quinn Rehkemper on alto sax.

**Bob Jacobson's** review of the book *Eubie Blake: Rags, Rhythm and Race* appeared in the April issue of *The Syncopated Times*.

**Seth Kibel** (clarinet and saxophone) spoke about and played recordings of Baltimore jazz greats Eubie Blake, Chick Webb, Billie Holiday and Cab Calloway at an Engineers Club brunch for senior citizens April 23rd.

**Todd Marcus** (bass clarinet) was one of five nominees for Clarinetist of the Year by Jazz Journalists Association. Todd's jazz orchestra played an album release at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

**Warren Wolf** releases his 10th album as a leader, *Chano Pozo: ORIGINS*.

**BJA's Jazz for Kids band** played programs at five branches of Baltimore County Public Library (Loch Raven, Pikesville, Sollers Point, Rosedale and Hereford) for Jazz Appreciation Month. The group included Phil Ravita (bass), Greg Small (piano), Russell Hayward III (drums), Rhonda Robinson (flute and vocals), Benny Russell (sax).

**Michael Friedman's** photos are being displayed at Keystone Korner Baltimore as of May 31st.

## In Memoriam

BJA sadly notes the passing of two trumpet players in March: **Nathaniel Parks, Sr.** (aka "The Jazz Man") and big band leader **Don Arnold**, at age 96 (You can read our 5/13/18 article on the Don Arnold Big Band at [baltimorejazz.com](http://baltimorejazz.com)).

Pianist **John Baxter** passed away on April 29th at the age of 79. He played steady gigs at the Playboy and Center Clubs and was in Don Arnold's and Jerry Peterson's big bands.

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## Community News

Three albums of **Left Bank Jazz Society** shows from the mid-'60s to early '70s were released on April 22, Record Store Day. They are Sonny Stitt's *Boppin' in Baltimore*, Shirley Scott's *Queen Talk* and Walter Bishop, Jr.'s *Bish at the Bank*. National Public Radio did a feature story and Dan Rodricks devoted an entire column in the *Baltimore Sun* to this exciting development.

Congratulations to **Eric Kennedy**, who was selected by Jazz Journalists Association as one of 36 jazz heroes for 2023 from 32 cities. JJA cited Eric's work as an educator and mentor since 1996.

**Johns Hopkins University** has bought a collection of Billie Holiday-related materials—the first known photo of the singer (at age two), programs from clubs, hand-written set lists and 140 taped interviews including Baltimore friends and neighbors.

On May 4th, **RJY Chick Webb Council, Inc.** hosted a book release by Stephanie Stein Crease, author of *Rhythm Man: Chick Webb and the Beat That Changed America*, from Oxford University Press.

Saxophonist/teacher **Craig Alston** and saxophonist/teacher **Ray Winder** performed and Winder conducted in the ORCHKids 15th Anniversary Concert at the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall on May 17th.

Vocalist **Gregory Porter's** YouTube video of "Be Good (Lion's Song)" was filmed at several Baltimore locations, notably the American Visionary Art Museum, plus Federal Hill Park, Penn Station and the "painted ladies" homes of Charles Village.

Vocalist **Irene Jalehti** was one of six music finalists for the annual Baker Artist Awards.

## Baltimore Jazz History

In 1948, vocalist "**Little**" **Jimmy Scott** made his debut at Gamby's, on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The **Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra** played for the 1939 Loyola College senior prom at the Alcazar Ballroom (now part of Baltimore School for the Arts).

Saxophonist **Pete Brown** was born here in 1906. Brown played with John Kirby and Frankie Newton and is recognized as an influence on jump blues and R&B sax players.

The first performance of the **Art Farmer/Gigi Gryce Quintet** took place on Pennsylvania Avenue at Club Tijuana in March, 1954. Three months later the composition "Tijuana" appeared on a Prestige album of the Art Farmer Septet.

**John Coltrane's** last performance took place at Left Bank Jazz Society on May 7, 1967.

Vocalist/composer **Abbey Lincoln** was a grand marshal of the Preakness parade (along with actor Robert Urich of *Spencer for Hire*) in 1996.

Guitarist **Hiram Bullock** was born in Japan but grew up in the Idylwilde section of Baltimore, attending McDonough School and Peabody Conservatory. He then attended University of Miami, where classmates included Pat Metheny and Jaco Pastorius. Bullock played with the Brecker Brothers, Bob James, Spyro Gyra, David Sanborn and Michael Franks, among many others.

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