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This has been a tumultuous time for the Jazz Ambassadors.
Problems with our website have superseded most of our
activities for many months. Our mission, to serve the ever
widening Kansas City jazz community remains intact, and
our resolve is strong. Consider supporting us with your
membership, donations, and volunteerism.

Stay hip,
David Basse, President and Editor

Sam Johnson, Jr.

The Woody Herman Award

We received a photo of the Woody Herman Award that Tom Alexios and Clarence Smith presented recently to Sam Johnson Jr., and posthumously to Sam's late wife, Pam Hider-Johnson. The award was presented for their work in music education. That is merely the tip of the iceberg.

"The Woody Herman Awards are important. We want to give them all the support they deserve," said Tom, formerly of Down Beat Magazine and a longtime representative of the Woody Herman and Duke Ellington Families, and a former KCJA board member. "I was given the honor to present the Woody Herman Award for excellence to Sam Johnson and posthumously to Pam Hider-Johnson for their many years of services to the jazz community of Kansas City,"

continued Tom. "This Award, lets Sam know that the community has not forgotten them."

Long before Pam's passing in October of 2020, Sam became bed-ridden due to a flu shot gone wrong. Sam was a pillar of the KC jazz scene. He grew up in a musical family and, as an adult, stood well over six feet tall. He perfected his craft playing the drums in the US Army. He learned the basics at 1823 Highland, in the 18th and Vine district of Kansas City.

His father was a well-known Kansas City bassist, and his mother was a part of the woman's auxiliary that used cook dinners and help out around the Mutual Musicians Foundation when it was still the Black Musicians Union 627 Hall. In those days there was a house, with a kitchen attached to the south side of today's Mutual Musicians Foundation (MMF).



Sam Johnson, Jr. recording "Old Friends, New Point" at the New Point Grille. Courtesy LaBudde Library UMKC



Sam was Ida McBeth's drummer in the 70s & 80s. The band was called Rich Hill and the Riffs. The riffs were Sam and bassist Bryan Hicks. They were riding high in the 1970s at a plush Westport restaurant called "Zhivago", and all around the city at festivals, jazz venues, and street parties.

Sam became the President of the MMF. It's a lofty title connected to a job description that includes cleaning up after the all-night jam session each week, settling disputes of all sorts, collecting the dues and donations, and mowing the lawn, which Sam did religiously throughout his tenure.

As Sam and Pam became a couple, Pam's grant writing and Sam's stature in the community brought them to venues like Saks Fifth Avenue, on the Country Club Plaza, for annual fundraising events. Sam could speak publicly. In

fact, his public speaking moved people to open their hearts and their pocketbooks on many occasions. Major corporations and benevolent organizations from all over the country supported the couple's many tireless efforts to help the aging musicians that put this town on the map in the 1930s and beyond.

"I met Ms. Pam at an art gallery event during one of the Charlie Parker Celebrations. I was around 16 years-old," said saxophonist Morgan Faw, who now lives and performs regularly in Brooklyn, New York. "She became my 'grandmother' and I became her 'grandson'. She, along with a few others in 'my village', were at the heart of (those) who encouraged me to fight for my dreams, search for my purpose, and plant my

WOODY HERMAN AWARD CONTINUED

roots. She is one of the few, early on that accepted me into the small village that is 18th and Vine.”

‘Ms. Pam,’ as Morgan calls her, gave young Morgan the opportunity to perform many times with The Elder Statesmen of Jazz, an organization the Johnsons founded in the 1980s. The Elder Statesmen band was a vehicle for the older musicians to be honored, and to keep the early music vital when few younger bandleaders would hire them. Younger players like Lee Brown, Steve Hicks, Jason Goudeau, Carmell Jones, and some of the older musicians, like Step Buddy Anderson, Coots Dye, and Orville

“Piggie” Minor even played with Bird when they were younger. Morgan was becoming connected with the history and the legacy in this community, while meeting younger colleagues who were currently on the scene.

Pam was insistent on having Morgan performing as much as possible as a teenager, and being in the music as much as he could. “She is one of the reasons why Kansas City and 18th and Vine are so important to me,” continued Morgan, who recently graduated from Berklee College of Music, “when she got sick and was

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Hermon Mehari in Tokyo

"I want my listeners to feel something and evoke their happiness!"

Hermon Mehari, a trumpeter who got his start in Kansas City, came to Japan for the first time in 2015. At that time, Hermon was first introduced to Japanese jazz fans in this column.

Since that time, Hermon has been performing mainly in Europe, and based in Paris, France. He has released albums in quick succession, including "Blue", "A Change for the Dreamlike", "Ark Fiction", and "Asmara".

It is clear that he is establishing his own style. One can definitely see progress in his playing.

In November of 2023, Harmon returned to Japan for 10 days. He had a busy schedule and performed in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Yoko and Hermon first met in Kansas City, and he agreed to take time out for an interview. First via email before he arrived in Japan, and he answered additional questions face-to-face in Tokyo.

YT: It's been a long time since you've been to Tokyo. Welcome home! Is it better to say that? The last time you came to Japan was in 2015. Is it the first time in 8 years? What is the purpose of your visit to Japan this time?

HM: Yes you can say welcome home! I've missed it so much! My purpose is to reconnect with the country, the culture, my friends, and of course the music scene!

YT: How many years has it been since you moved to Paris?

HM: I moved to Paris from Kansas City seven years ago, so I haven't been to Japan since living in Europe.

YT: What kind of activities (not only music) do you do in Paris?

HM: In Paris I'm surrounded by a community of artists, writers, cooks, wine experts, and more. So I'm constantly doing things that teach me about so many different aspects of life in a way that I can continue growing.

YT: It seems like musicians from many countries are gathering in Europe now.

HM: Yes this is true, especially in Paris where there is a lot of opportunity for creation. It is a very diverse city, and this diversity allows people from many places to feel comfortable.

YT: You perform in many countries within Europe on a working visa. In what kind of places (countries, clubs, jazz festivals, etc.) do you perform? What kind of musicians do you meet?

HM: At this point, I've played almost everywhere

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HERMON MEHARI, COVER PHOTO BY MARIA JARZYNA



HERMON MEHARI CONTINUED

in Europe—Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and so on. In all of these places there are many great festivals and jazz clubs. I'm touring with my group or with musicians from some of these countries who ask me to join them and I find that each country has its own influence on the music they create. So it's always interesting to hear their different influences within jazz music.

YT: Would you tell me some names of the Jazz Festivals that you have played?

HM: For example, I've played at Les Trans Musicales (Rennes, France), Les Sons d'Hiver (Paris, France), Jazz Des Cinq Continents (Marseilles, France), Oslo Jazz Festival (Oslo, Norway), INNtöne Jazzfestival (Diersbach,

Austria), Sile Jazz Festival (Treviso, Italy), Gezmatatz Genova Jazz Festival (Genova, Italy), Taormina Jazz Festival (Taormina, Italy), Torino Jazz Festival (Torino, Italy), and Nilüfer Jazz Festival (Bursa, Turkey).

YT: Do you feel there is a difference between American and European musicians?

HM: I find many differences between musicians from Europe and those from the US. In general, the musicians in Europe tend to prioritize harmony over rhythm, while the Americans emphasize rhythm. I can usually hear if someone is from America or not when I hear them play (or at least I can tell that they're European). There are of course exceptions, like in Italy, especially in southern Italy. The culture there really holds on to tradition, not only in music but it also applies to their ap-



proach to jazz. As a result, many musicians from there tend to give a lot of importance to the swing tradition.

YT: Have you experienced any major changes in yourself since leaving America and making your base in Paris?

HM: I think that any person who leaves their home country, will be challenged and will have to grow as a result. To have to adapt to a new culture, leave all the comfortable things behind, learn a new language, develop a new life—all these things have affected me. As I mentioned earlier, I'm surrounded by a very diverse and thoughtful social group in Paris, so I am constantly learning about life. I am now in my mid 30s, and I feel like this move has helped me continue to be curious and open.

YT: Why did you decide to live in Paris?

HM: I decided to live in Paris because after many years of visiting Paris, I came to really love the city and (to) make many friends there. Paris is a very multicultural place; it is inspiring and has lots of opportunities. It is also easy to move around Europe from there. Believing that life is too short, and I had spent most of my life in one country, and I wanted to experience more of the world.

Hermon Mehari's Music

YT: Following your last visit to Japan, in 2015, you released self-produced CDs in quick succession, including "Bleu", "A Change For The Dreamlike", "ARC FICTION" with Alessandro Lanzoni, and "ASMARA". Please briefly tell us the purpose of each production.

HM: "Bleu" was my debut album, in March of 2017, and like many debut albums it was the sum of my musical experience from the beginning up until that point. I wanted to make a statement in the "modern jazz" context and introduce my personal voice to the conversation at the same time. It features

some of my favorite musicians and inspirations including Aaron Parks on piano and Logan Richardson on alto saxophone.

"A Change for the Dreamlike" was an unexpected album that came in 2020 during the first lockdown of the pandemic in France. I was in the French countryside for three months and conceived a series of compositions that were deeply personal. I also wanted the album to feel many things at the same time such as the contrasting feeling of being isolated, but being able to reach out to your loved ones who were all in the situation and feel like you were together. This is why I created the album by myself but had my musical guests send me their parts from Kansas City, Paris, Los Angeles and other places around the world.

I created "Arc Fiction" as a co-leader with Italian pianist Alessandro Lanzoni just after the height of the pandemic. We had been playing together with other groups for a while but always found that we had a good chemistry between the two of us. So, we entered the studio and started improvising. To our surprise, we created improvisations that were almost song-like. There would be introductions, a direction, and an end. In the end we included a couple of original compositions also but the idea was to blur the line between composition and improvisation.

My latest album "Asmara" was born out of an exploration I started in "A Change for the Dreamlike," of my Eritrean heritage. I was proposed to fully explore this by producer Antoine Rajon, in Paris. That was great because it was one of the many ideas in my head at the time.

YT: Especially "A Change For The Dreamlike" and "ASMARA" seem to be works that are very conscious of your roots. (Mehari's father is from Eritrea, a neighboring country

continued

of Sudan in North Africa) You are currently collaborating with artists from various countries. Was the location in Paris convenient for creating your work? What artists are you playing with that inspire you?

HM: “Asmara” is the first album I recorded in Paris and it was convenient because three of us live in Paris, and the guest singer Faytinga, lives in Switzerland. Only the vibraphonist/pianist Peter Schlamb, had to travel very far, from Kansas City (which is pretty far obviously). The artists I’m playing with that inspire me right now are Peter Schlamb,

Alessandro Lanzoni, Rick Rosato, and Rob Clearfield.

YT: When I listen to these two CDs, I feel like I’m in paradise. As far as I know, you are a serious person and don’t talk much in public. But I feel that you are also very positive, bright and optimistic.

HM: Thank you, that is so great to hear! My ultimate goal is to make the listener feel something, but I do want to inspire feelings of happiness. I try to keep a positive spirit in most situations in my life. The beautiful thing about a lot of Eritrean music is that it is often joyous. We use it a lot in celebrations, weddings, and for dances.

YT: Let’s talk about “ARC FICTION”. I personally like this CD and listen to it often.

Is there a reason why you chose to make an album that focuses on original songs?

Your original songs are good, but Charlie Parker’s “Donna Lee” was really good.

What was it like working with Lanzoni? When I listen to it, it feels like two people are playing a game.

HM: I may have partially answered before, but I will go in-depth. With Alessandro, we found that our ability to listen intently to each other when improvising mixed with our mutual trust and willingness to take the music in any direction. A special thing. We were truly improvising with no preconceptions. But the most beautiful thing about it was how cohesive it sounded—there was direction, a line, stories, intent. As you said, “We were playing a game but it was like two people playing a game who can read each other’s minds.” “Donna Lee” was one of those beautiful moments where we ended up “quoting” it towards the end of one of our improvisations—so without saying anything we just started playing it! It felt very natural.



YT: "ASMARA" is dedicated to your father's home country, Eritrea, and I feel that it has a strong ethnic theme. Your playing on other albums is very sophisticated. Do you find it difficult to balance the ethnic and urban aspects?

HM: Yes it is dedicated to Eritrea (my mother is also from there). Harmonically speaking a lot of the music on this album ended up coming from modal and spiritual jazz because Eritrean harmony is very specific. As soon as you start adding other chords it sounds completely different. This is a side of me I haven't expressed on my other albums, so I found it a great opportunity to lean on it.

YT: It seems like you often play as a duo. You seem to be compatible with Peter Schlamb, who lives in Kansas City. It seems like he toured with you in America before coming to Japan. How many years have you known Peter? What do you like about him (musically or as a person)?

HM: I've known Peter since my high school years, so about twenty years! He's one of the few musicians who has played with me for such a long time. We're very close friends and know each other very well. Peter was always an incredible musician, even at an early age. Everyone looked up to him, and he was a big source of inspiration. Musically he continues to grow, and this is a quality I think is important with the musicians I want to associate with. He's one of the best vibraphonists in the world, and he's playing the piano at a very high level.

YT: How do you think about your position when performing with a small unit like a duo and with large groups like "A Change For The Dreamlike" and "ASMARA"?

HM: Performing as a duo is very intimate and exposing. Each instrument becomes more important because it is half of the ensemble! But I feel like this allows a certain amount of



expression that can only happen in a duo. At the same time, the conversation between the two musicians is extremely interesting.

YT: You've been playing the trumpet all your life, and I'm sure you've always felt that this instrument suits you best. Was there ever a moment when you truly felt glad that you were playing this instrument? Also, was there a moment when you realized that you were glad you chose the career of a musician?

HM: Great question! I realized in my early 20s that I was glad I chose the trumpet. It is certainly one of the most difficult instruments to play. It has so much expression and flexibility. The amount of sounds you can make with the trumpet and how connected it is to the breath, fascinates me. I think around the age of 25 or 26, I was realizing how glad I was about choosing this career. I almost felt like I was cheating in life. It was unbelievable to me that my job was just to wake up

continued

and play music! I'm responsible for myself, I work when I want, I get to see the world, I get to make people feel great, and so on.

YT: Over the past few years, the situation in the world has been changing rapidly, including the COVID pandemic (which is still ongoing), abnormal global weather, and wars.

What are you thinking about when you are playing? What do you want to convey to people through your music?

HM: I try not to think when I play and clear my mind like in meditation. In this way I don't interrupt the flow of what I'm hearing in my head. But my intention is always to make people feel something strongly. In doing this they may forget about their problems, or be reminded of other moments in their life, or smile, or cry, or have many other reactions. This is part of the beauty of music, it can transport you away, (or conversely you could say we are very much "in the moment").

YT: You're no longer considered young. What do you hope for young musicians in their teens and early 20s right now?

HM: Thanks, LOL!!! I'm hoping that the young musicians are still connecting to and respecting where this music comes from. Jazz is a folk music with a specific lineage. The tradition in this music has always been to create and innovate, but it has always come from a place of understanding what came before. Every generation needs to do this, for the music to evolve while having a foundation.

YT: What kind of musician do you want to be?

HM: I want to be the best musician I can be with the ability to completely express myself. I want to always keep growing and always stay curious. I think I've developed a personal voice and I want to continue staying true to myself.

YT: Please tell us about your future plans.

HM: Most of my near future plans are focused on developing more tours in Europe with my group. I'm also trying to spend more and more time in New York City, because I have a big community of musicians there. I have plans to work on a new album, one that I've wanted to make for many years now. I don't want to reveal any details yet, but it's something that might take a long time! Besides that, I want to start incorporating Asia more into my career, so I will explore more ways to do that.

YT: What about your private life?

HM: Since I'm traveling a lot I have developed strong communities of friends in many places, especially around Europe. I have people that are very close to me in lots of cities in Italy, as well as in Lisbon, Brussels, Istanbul, and other places. So I feel at home in all these places! However, I do enjoy my life in Paris with all the people I know there. I love food and continue to explore restaurants around the world. Specialty coffee and natural wine are also a big part of my life. Besides eating, I enjoy reading and running!

Japan

YT: It's been a while since you last stayed in Tokyo. Did you feel any difference in Tokyo compared to your last visit?

HM: It is hard for me to say because even if Tokyo has changed a lot in 8 years, it's still a place that is so culturally different from what I'm normally surrounded by, that the differences can be lost. I also find very often, my perspective about a place can feel fresh because I, as a person, change a lot. I appreciate and notice different things; I interact differently with the environment and the people. As for the music scene, I asked many musicians about how Tokyo is now and they told me that everything is finally coming back to

how it was before the pandemic.

YT: Where did you go on this trip? I heard that you went to Osaka and Kyoto, Please tell us your impressions about those cities.

HM: I went to Osaka for a few days with my DJ friend, Danilo Plessow (Motor City Drum Ensemble). I was shocked to see how different it was from Tokyo! It seems less formal and younger in demographic. I also saw many tourists; way more than I see in Tokyo. Of course, I had some great okonomiyaki and takoyaki!

YT: Where and whom did you perform with? (Tokyo and Osaka)

If there are any Japanese musicians you would like to play together again, please let us know.

HM: I performed at “No Room for Squares” in Shimokitazawa with bassist Shin Sakaino’s group. It was David Negrete on saxophone and Gene Jackson on drums. I also played at “B Flat” in Akasaka with drummer Yozo Ohe’s group.

The band was:

Shinnosuke Matsubara—alto sax

Ryunosuke Yamanaka—tenor sax

Yuichi Inoue—piano

Jorge Siro Tanaka—bass

I would very much like to play with bassist Satsuki Kusui again, we played a lot together in the past and he is sounding great. Also of course, it would be great to play with Yoshio Suzuki. I heard pianist Mayuko Katakura, play a couple of times on this trip and it would be nice to play with her. There’s also many others: Hina Oikawa, Naoko Tanaka, and Nami Kano for example.

YT: Did you notice any changes in Japanese musicians compared to last time?

HM: Only that everyone is sounding great! I listened to some shows and went to a couple of jam sessions and was happy to hear many great players.

YT: Are there any differences between Japanese musicians and Western musicians?

HM: When speaking about jazz, I would say there’s a difference between American and non-American musicians (so not just Japanese, but also European). It’s easier to hear the difference as an American. It makes sense, as the music is part of our culture, just like there’s a difference between Brazilians playing Brazilian music and Americans playing it. The differences are subtle to non-musicians, but a lot of it has to do with rhythm, instinctive musical choices, attitude (the “way” someone plays an idea/melody, not just “what” they play), and very often the incorporation of the blues. There are always exceptions and many of these (not always) are people who have spent a lot of time in the US.

YT: I wonder how Japanese musicians will be involved in the music you’re planning to create in the future.

HM: I’m always open to collaborating! I create very organically and only when I’m inspired.

YT: Is there a possibility that Peter Schlamb or other American and European musicians will travel with you on your next visit?

HM: There’s always the possibility. It just depends on the conditions of my visit.

YT: I would like to ask you about things other than music, where and what did you do and what was the most memorable thing for you on this trip?

HM: I was mostly exploring food and coffee, like I always do. I went to many restaurants, bars and cafes. My friend, Danilo, who I mentioned earlier, was in Japan to perform, so I accompanied him on his shows and his shopping trips for records. My most memorable meal was the omakase we did at Udat-su Sushi. The best coffee I had was at Glitch (both Tokyo and Osaka).

YT: What attracts you to Japan Tokyo, Osaka etc.? Please tell us what was most impressive during your visit to Japan on this trip.

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VOCALIST

Tyreek McDole

NEWLY ANOINTED MALE JAZZ SAINT

After three years of trying to make his mark on the world of jazz via the annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, 23-year old New York City-based Jazz Singer Tyreek McDole finally realized his dream when he heard his name announced, subsequently christening him as only the second man ever to win this prestigious competition.

“I was in a daze. There was much tension building up to see who the first place winner was. I thought there was a chance I could win,” Tyreek said. “When I heard my name called, I could only accept it. I worked really hard for it. I could hear my family and friends cheering me on. I was ecstatic.”

The road to this pinnacle accolade for him all began in Saffron, New York where he was born in the year 2000. His family then pivoted to a small Florida town called St. Cloud after the 9/11/01 terrorist attack on NYC.

“There was nothing but orange groves, cows & sunflowers when we first moved there. It was actually quite beautiful,” Tyreek noted. “My aunt had a piano in the house. It got me enamored. What really sealed the deal for me was when *The Princess and The Frog* movie came out. After I saw the alligator or Terence Blanchard play Louis’ trumpet parts, I wanted to join the band.”

This led to symphonic, orchestral and improvised pursuits to get his head into the jazz game. Yet, the voice was not his focus until one accidental day when he was playing classical percussion in a high school play called ‘In the Woods’. One of the actors who sang was sick and Tyreek was urged to give it a shot.

“I began singing and noticed everyone looked towards me with a ‘wow’ look. They couldn’t believe that a percussionist could sing,” Tyreek said. “Little did I know that the jazz director Edwin Santiago was in the back of the hall

TYREEK MCDOLE CONTINUED

listening. From there, he asked me to join the jazz band. That's where it all began. It was my start."



Growing up in Orlando, there was not much live jazz for Tyreek to absorb. His bastion of history and intrigue was YouTube. He could see Miles in Rome or Louis in Paris. The world was at his fingertips. Yet, it was the mentors that ultimately led him to delve fully into his dreams.

"I have to give credit to two mentors. The great bassist Rodney Whitaker and his wonderful daughter Raquel Whitaker, who is a singer and a great friend," Tyreek said. "Thanks to them and moments at the Dr. Phillips jazz camp during the Summer in Orlando, I realized it was possible to do this and there was a community waiting for me. I was thankful."

That led him to The Oberlin Conservatory

of Music where he got a degree in Jazz performance. From there, his road to accolades and wider attention began in 2018 when he stepped into the Essentially Ellington National Competition at Jazz at Lincoln Center for his vocal debut. That landed him an Outstanding Vocalist Award presented to him by none other than Mr. Wynton Marsalis.

"I totally discovered my voice by accident. I knew I had a voice, but had no idea of the impact my voice would have," Tyreek said. "These competitions and awards have been validating moments to consider getting into that lane."

He is now in elite company for winning this award. Prior winners have been the likes of modern stars like Samara Joy and Jazzmeia Horn. With that said, many doors to collaborate and expand have been opening.

"I have been asked to record with so many folks. With the likes of Theo Croker and mentor Eric Wyatt," Tyreek said. "Eric, or The Mayor of Brooklyn, has been significant in terms of helping me navigate the scene. Showing me both the fun and not so fun side of being an artist."

One of the best parts of his career taking off is being interwoven into such a warm community of artists.

"I think the best part of the jazz community is that we celebrate our individuality as a collective. Seeing everybody win. I love to see friends collaborate with some 'Grade A' artists," Tyreek said. "It's beautiful that this community is all about giving back to those that invest in it. There's not a lot of gatekeeping. It's all about love and the folks that are driven and love it."

His dream gig would be to land at SummerStage in Central Park to pay homage to the musicians that have inspired him, like Roy Hargrove and Sarah Vaughan.

"During the pandemic in one of my lowest points with all of the Black Lives Matter activi-

ty and the suffering, one of the lights I had was seeing Roy Hargrove in the 1990s playing September in the Rain via YouTube on that stage,” Tyreek said. “That was one of my happiest moments during the pandemic.”

He also realizes the impact the jazz world can have on the outer world at large. Moments like Charlie Parker writing “Now’s the Time” during the Civil Rights movement, John Coltrane penning the song “Alabama” after the horrific church bombing, Louis Armstrong doing a state department tour in Africa and Dizzy Gillespie going to South America.

“It’s all about humanity. It’s all about the people. That’s what great art is supposed to be. It’s supposed to connect us. It’s a form of communication. This music does it the best,” Tyreek said. “It can take a learning curve for most folks, but when something feels good... it feels good. That’s the universal feeling. We all speak that language.”

In the whirl of this new flurry of activity and as an artist that is surely on the rise, Tyreek stays

grounded and heeds to what the jazz community collectively does best.

“I’m just a person. God put me on this planet for a mission. I am trying to figure out what is now. Right now, I just want to spread love, music, peace and knowledge,” Tyreek said. “That is the job we have as artists. Be advocates for things we believe in. Those before us showed us the road map for what we can do with this music. That’s why I think I am. I just love singing and sharing it with everyone.”

Everything Tyreek:

<https://www.tyreekmcdole.com/>

Full Tyreek McDole Neon Jazz Interview

Links:

<https://youtu.be/xiPwHC31k-g>

<https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/joe-dimino/episodes/NYC-based-Jazz-Vocalist--Educator--Recording-Artist-Tyreek-McDole-e2dn6qe> ¶

HERMON MEHARI CONTINUED FROM 13

HM: I have to say my favorite part is the food—from the high end Michelin restaurants, to street food, to convenience store food. But food, is very important to me. I do love other things about Japanese culture too—I’m a fan of Akira Kurosawa, Haruki Murakami, and anime in general. I also love big cities, and Tokyo is maybe the best example of a functioning modern metropolis. And of course how can I not love hearing jazz in almost every store I go to?

YT: Will you come back to Japan again?

HM: Yes, very soon I hope! Eight years was too long and this trip was too short. So I’m telling myself I have to come back soon and for a longer visit— especially so I can see other

places in Japan.

YT: Would you please give a message to your fans in Japan?

HM: To my fans in Japan, thank you for your continued support. I am working hard to bring my projects to Japan so that you may experience them. I will also continue to release new music!

YT: Thank you very much!

HM: You are welcome.

Interviewed via email November 19th, 2023

Interview and translation by Yoko Takemura

(People and Music in Kansas City #136, <https://jazztokyo.org/interviews/post-15105/>) ¶

Turns out jazz and religious worship go together like bread and butter.

Trinity Jazz Ensemble (TJE), seven men who've been together for years, came together Sunday evening January 14th to honor Martin Luther King Day at Westport Coffeehouse.

TJE is an ecumenical faith-based jazz group and out of the twelve numbers performed that night, three were spirituals and the others were hymns or hymn-like. Four were originals by Mike Pagan and Tim Brewer.

Throughout the evening horns declared the word. Bass plucked steadfastly. Drums praised percussively. And piano told it like it is.

Here's the lineup: Leader Mike Parkinson on trumpet; Mike Pagan, piano; Earlie Bragg, trombone and vocal; Tim Brewer, bass; Mark Olson, drums; Doug Talley, tenor sax; Br. John Anderson, vocal and reader.

Two of the Highlights of the evening were Pagan originals: the premier performance of The Trumpet, the Sax, and the Holy Bone, a jazz take on the old Doxology (Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow) featuring a call-and-response between drummer Mark Olson and the front line horn players; and Deep in my Soul, a gentle bossa nova tune with a melody like a prayer.

Another highlight was Tim Brewer's original tune Transcending. The composer, Brewer, took a powerful bass solo; Doug Talley and Mike Parkinson traded fours.

I was surprised to learn from Brother John that Martin Luther King, who was obviously a jazz fan, gave the opening remarks at the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival.

continued



JAZZ SPIRITUALITY ALA

By Marilyn Carpenter



TRINITY JAZZ ENSEMBLE

“When life itself offers no order and meaning, the musician creates an order and a meaning from the sounds of the earth which flow through his instrument.... Much of the power of our freedom movement in the United States has come from this (jazz) music,” he told the crowd.

In *Take My Hand, Precious Lord*, arranged by Mike Parkinson, Earlie Braggs used his rich baritone voice powerfully and reverentially. Tim Brewer used his bow in an almost dirge-like way that I felt deep in my gut. Next Talley’s tenor sax jazzed it up. And the audience joined in on the last stanza.

It stood out for me because I will always feel something catch in my throat as I sing it.

The Reverends Robert Johnson and Karen Nyhart played important parts as well. The Reverend Johnson led us in prayer, assuring us that

people will continue to celebrate Martin Luther King’s life and legacy through jazz.

There are books proclaiming jazz as religion, that jazz gives some people a deep, solemn experience not found in church, an experience of the sacred, along with the charisma of jazz heroes like Armstrong, Parker, Coltrane. With communal understanding that is sect-like in rituals that support the jazz mystique.

I talked to two people who experienced something sacred that evening: Carolyn Brewer explained that what Trinity Jazz Ensemble does is satisfy a spiritual need. And Linda McShann said of her experience on that cold below-zero evening of music, “It touched my soul.”

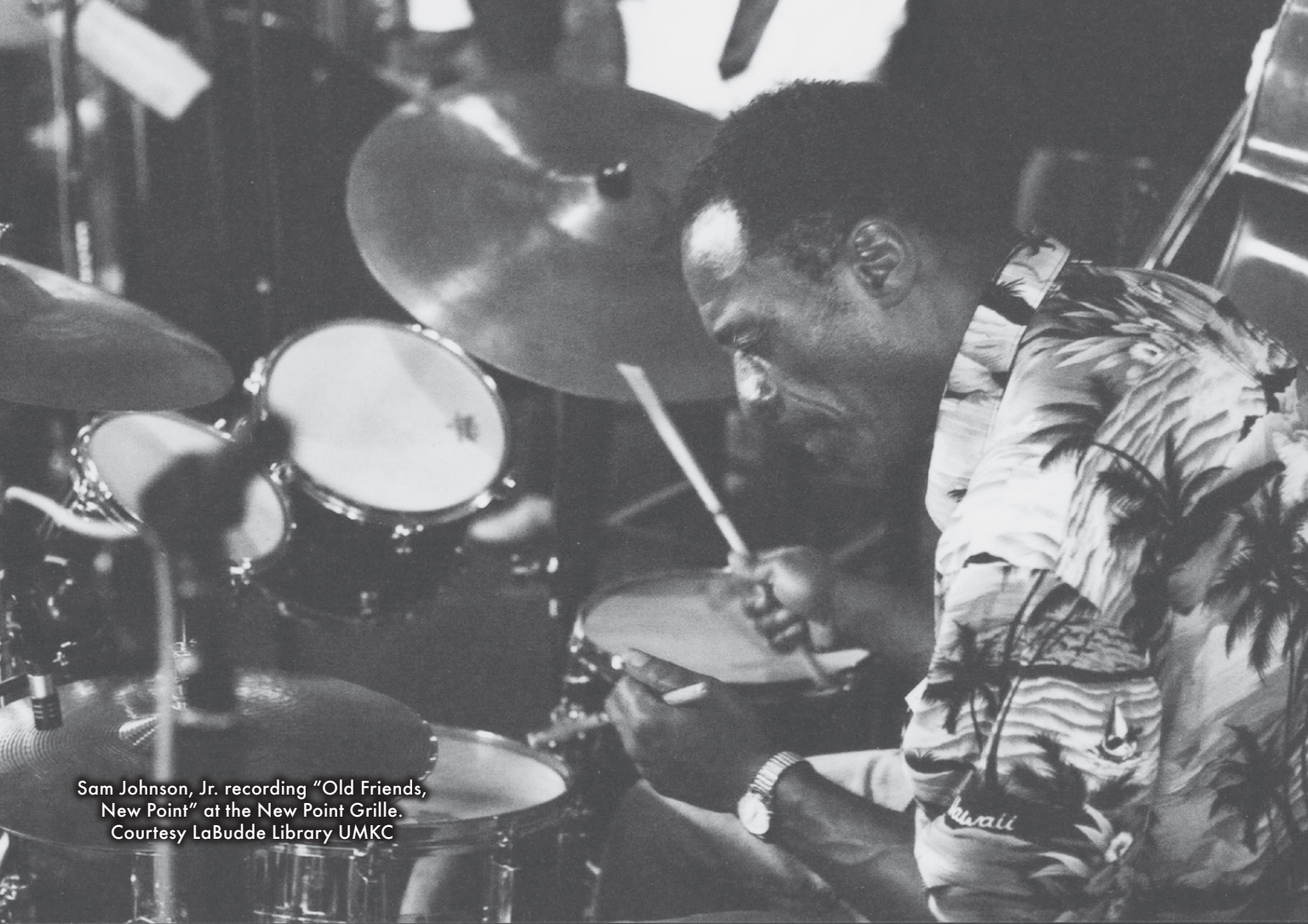
Trinity Jazz Ensemble touched my soul too. I think most of the audience would agree it created an atmosphere of depth, inspiration, and goodwill. :|

HERMAN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

living in hospice care with Sam; I would visit her every semester when I was home for break. And at least once a month when I was home during the 3 months of summer.”

“Having her remember me, always made me so happy, because there were times when I would have to remind her who I was to her. She made my world brighter. She always believed in me even when I was down on myself,” said Morgan. “She had set high expectations for me. Now, I am out here in New York fighting to meet those expectations, in service to people like her and all those like her that are no longer here who so tirelessly poured their time and life into the next generation.”

When she passed it was one of the saddest days of Morgan’s life, he had lost his village leader, and a grandma. “I will never forget Pam Hider-Johnson, for she loved all of us and she loved



Sam Johnson, Jr. recording "Old Friends, New Point" at the New Point Grille. Courtesy LaBudde Library UMKC

this music, and she knew she had to get it into the next set of ready hands," added Morgan. "She lived in service of her family and the music that was her life."

"Early in 2010, our church drummer, Sam Johnson Jr., wondered if a pantry for musicians could happen?" Sam stated that he, "had all these cats to feed," said Kirk Perucca, pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church. Kansas City is a wonderful jazz city and so the "cats" he was talking about were not the feline kind. "Cats" was the term that Sam used to refer to his musician friends. The conversation continued and soon the Musicians Food Pantry was opened twice a month at the church.

Soon after opening the pantry, Village Presbyterian, Covenant's sister church, which shares

a passion for jazz, urban ministry and feeding the hungry, reached out to support the ministry. The pantry has expanded from two to five days a week and welcomes all, not just musicians. The Musicians Food Pantry (they kept the name to honor the musicians that led to this ministry becoming a reality) is staffed by Covenant members. In 2018, served more than 3,700 households — over 11,000 people.

In early 2017, Covenant Community Health and Wellness Center opened. They brought on board a registered nurse, Laura Hyland, who serves as Covenant's faith community nurse. Hyland, along with two other community health workers who volunteer, greet people from the pantry and ask, "Do you have anything that you would like to talk about regarding your health?"

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WOODY HERMAN CONTINUED

More than 900 individuals have been assisted with their health care, taking advantage of health screenings, medical referrals, fitness and health classes. The wellness center also works to engage the community. We have convened the Southeast Kansas City Youth Coalition, focusing on alcohol, tobacco, drugs, violence and suicide.

And it all began with an out-of-the-box idea from drummer, Sam Johnson, who simply wanted to help feed his “cats.” Together, Pam and Sam spent their lives advocating for jazz musicians and their well-being. “From managing the education stages at area jazz festivals to creating their non-profit program at PVCC,” said educator Clarence Smith, “you couldn’t find any two people more dedicated to the city’s youth and their learning and performance of jazz. My Paseo Academy students are forever grateful to them.” Jazz fans everywhere can be thankful for the dedication of musicians and fans like Sam & Pam.

Editor

The Mutual Musicians Foundation (MMF) is a performance venue in Kansas City, Missouri that ranks among the most historic locations in American jazz. Previously housing the local union for African American musicians, the Colored Musicians Local 627—which included numerous jazz pioneers during Kansas City’s musical heyday—today MMF serves as a jazz performance venue, social club, rehearsal space and classroom. MMF has hosted late-night jam sessions every Friday and Saturday for nearly 100 years.

UNESCO/International Jazz Day/Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz ¶

John Stein No Goodbyes

REVIEW & PROFILE

Whaling City Sound [WS 139]

Jazz guitarist John Stein is here to announce that there will be No Goodbyes in his near future. The album title couldn't be more appropriate, considering that Stein thought he just might be saying goodbye to his performing career and, dare I say, maybe even life itself. After two months of hospitalization from a sudden illness that seriously sidelined him (to the point where he wondered if he would ever play again), it took him more than an entire year to recover. Recorded in three days in early March of 2023, John is back to his old habits—with his musical supporters Ed Lucie on bass and Mike Connors drums. To add extra punch, he invited Berklee vocal professor Cindy Scott to serve up vocals on five tracks.

The album opens with “Zip Line,” a brisk, sixteen-measure minor key bopper. More specifically, it's two eight-measure phrases. After an opening salvo from Stein, Lucie's bass, and Connor's drum solo, the guitar and bass then swap “eights” with the drums, a pattern that continually halves itself until it eventually diminishes to trading “twos.” The band then heads back to the melody and exits gracefully.

Most jazzers are familiar with Steve Swallow's “Falling Grace” because it's one of the first tunes encountered in the original issue of the



“Real Book” assembled by Berklee students at the beginning of the ‘70’s. The tune has a non-traditional form: the first phrase is eight measures; the second phrase is six; and the third phrase is ten, which means the melody takes its own unique, winding journey. “Many of the song’s cadences have reverse harmonic rhythm—tension chord on the strong spot, resolution chord on weak spot,” Stein informs us. “The melody is really strong and ties all the disparate phrases together.” Lucie and Stein each take two choruses on this through-composed piece, addressing the chord changes and the form dexterously.

“Dig Blues” is a medium-up tempo swinger that employs jazz-blues changes with bebop melody in the key of G. Vocalist Cindy Scott joyfully joins in at the top to scat the melody. Stein first unveiled this tune, originally titled “BB Blues,” on Conversation Pieces (his fourth album release) which featured David “Fathead” Newman, Keala Kaumehiwa, and Greg Conroy. “The title was a problem,” Stein recalls. “It is a G blues and people mistook the “BB” in the title for the key of B flat, whereas “BB” was an abbreviation of BeBop. Thus, I changed the title.”

Another re-tooling of Stein's tunes appears on “What If Love Never Dies,” as the original version was titled “Rio Escuro” and appeared on the album Watershed [Whaling city Sound 2020] recorded with native musicians in Brazil. This new version is derived from the lyrics composed by vocalist Cindy Scott (thus the subsequent title change). Stein, clearly pleased with the results, states emphatically, “Cindy’s lyrics are deeply personal and poetic. They fit the musical phrases beautifully.” Stein delivers a thoughtful, carefully measured solo that complements Scott’s sensitive and sultry style.

continued

“Courage” features a 6/4 time signature which gives the tune a natural buoyancy.

The form is AABA: two choruses of twelve-bar minor blues anchored by an eight-bar bridge and a final minor blues chorus. Stein’s solo reflects the harmonic minor modality implied within the chord progression, as does Ed Lucie’s bass solo.

A wonderful addition to the collection here is A.C. Jobim’s well-known standard, “Triste”

After the melody statement and guitar solo, Stein incorporates a fresh approach by creating an abstract vamp by inserting and extending the altered harmonic dissonant flavor of a Maj7#11 chord for the bass and drum solos. After restating the main theme, the dissonant vamp is revisited for the tag.

The title track of the album, “No Goodbyes” once again features lyrics and vocals by Cindy Scott. The original instrumental version—titled “Lonely Street”—first appeared on *Concerto Internacional de Jazz*, recorded in Sao Paulo, Brazil for Whaling City Sound in 2006. “This was the first song for which Cindy wrote lyrics,” says Stein. “I liked them so much I asked her to compose lyrics for more of my tunes, initiating our collaboration on this project.”

Stein’s instincts clearly paid off, as evidenced by Cindy’s contribution to “Every Stepping Stone,” as she supplies tailor-made lyrics to the bebop instrumental. “Articulating all the words and singing the arpeggiated intervals at a brisk tempo is a challenge—and Cindy rose to that challenge!” This tune was first released on *Conversation Pieces* [Jardis Records 2001]. “It was original titled ‘Stepping Stones,’” John informs us. “The second release was on *Emotion* [Whaling City Sound 2014] with Matias Mingote German, Rebecca Kleinmann, Evan Harlan, John Lockwood. This new title is derived directly from Cindy’s lyrics.”

“Jardin del Turia” offers clean melodic lines from Stein and features a tasty brushwork solo

from Mike Connors that appears after a chorus from bassist Lucie. More importantly, there is a story to be told here. In John’s own words, he describes the evolution of the piece: “It’s a bright tune named for the park in Valencia, Spain, that was created by changing the course of the River Turia after it flooded, doing much damage to the city. The river was moved away from the city center, and its former riverbed was turned into a wonderful park that circles the old part of the city. During the semester I spent at Berklee’s Valencia campus, my commute was a stroll through the park.”

With regard to “Our Love Will See Us Through,” the piece has traveled well over the last twenty-four years, and has now seen no less than three iterations. Stein provides the details: “This tune originally appeared as an instrumental on my second release, *Green Street* [first released by A Records 1999, then rereleased by Whaling City Sound 2007] with David “Fathead” Newman, Ken Clark, and David Hurst. My longtime friend and band leader Ron Gill wrote lyrics for it and we recorded and released it on our album, *Turn Up the Quiet* [Whaling City Sound 2009]. This 2023 version features Cindy’s wonderful vocals and the band’s deep pocket.” John, clearly proud of this tune, adds: “I gave the recording to one of my friends and she told me she likes slow dancing to this tune with her husband.”

Stein closes the collection with a fluid rendition of “Groundswell,” a medium-bright original bossa nova piece that is crafted in the key of E flat, delivered in 32-bars with the typical AABA form that serves as the roadmap the song. Stein takes the first solo, followed by Ed Lucie’s lucid bass.

Playing his trusty 1936 Gibson archtop guitar, Stein is as steady and confident as always—it’s nice to know he hasn’t lost a step with his trusty trio—they have played together for more than three years now. Executive producer Neal Weiss and his Whaling City Sound record label

has been incredibly loyal to John's career and legacy. His many albums, and their high quality and consistency, stand as a visible testament to the bond they've built and enjoyed over the years. To be sure, John's a lucky man; but he's worked hard and consistently—for quite a long time. He deserves every ounce of grace that comes his way. ¶

—Dr. Wayne Goins

Betty Bryant

Lotta Livin

REVIEW

Singer/pianist Betty Bryant, who has lived decades in LA, still has that KC swing—and a new album, “Lotta Livin.” Bryant moved to the west coast in 1955, but her signature sound is KC's. Our city even declared 1987 “Betty Bryant Day.” Her history here runs deep.



“I was born in Kansas City. Wheatley Hospital,” Bryant told Joe Dimino of KC's Neon Jazz. “My father was a teacher who wound up being a Dean of Penn Valley College.” Bryant said. “(My father), he was a teacher all of our lives...so I grew up in that type of environment...classical music, as a little girl....I went to college in Topeka, Kansas, at Washburn University...got a degree in Fine Arts...majored in art, got a teaching certificate...But along the way, I started listening to jazz. We used to play boogie-woogie, which is the same changes as blues. You know: I, IV, V...I don't even remember how I met Jay McShann, but somehow or another I met him, and he was my idol. I just adored Jay...and he sort of took me under his wing. And he was playing a place called Johnny's...and I would stop by there af-

ter I got off from my own gig, and he would let me play the piano there, there on the gig with his band, and that was just heaven for me, after having played a night of...answering requests.” There is a famous photo of Bryant with McShann in the lobby of the American Jazz Museum.

Bryant is almost peerless, difficult to compare. But, if one must, she has the wisdom and fine-wine-from-the-vault quality of the late great Myra Taylor and the lyrical wit of Angela Hagenbach or Cynthia van Roden, and when she sings her words are light, but heavy, like very closely observed light that is at once a particle and a wave. Like Diana Krall, her voice and piano work are cut from one cloth. There's an imperceptible seam where one ends and the other begins.

Some lose zest and fire, as they age, and only glow, ember-like. Bryant does not. The fire's lit and burns bright and high.

Torchy, Bryant not only breathes new life into songs from other decades, she airs up white-wall tires, and gives new life to songs that never lost their style and still have loads of classic air in them.

As is evident in her rendition of Bobby Troup's tune “Baby Baby All the Time” (track 3), (or her classic rendition of “Scratch”), no inch of the songs Bryant sings hold unseen mysteries for her. Every bit of lyrical wisdom is brought to the surface and known. It's like listening to a yogi sing. Love songs (blue ones) are a strength. And her small combo group is perfect on this album in support of her.

Bryant mused about the pandemic's effect on the jazz world in LA, saying, “A lot of things have not reopened. That's the bad part...It just shut them down forever. Clubs and restaurants.” But Bryant is back, and all is well.

Listen to her new album to get a salt breeze of the west coast mixed with that inner air of KC:¶

—Kevin Rabas

FIRST ANNUAL JUNETEENTH JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL TO BENEFIT BANNEKER SCHOOL FOUNDATION RESTORATION PROJECT PARKVILLE, MO, SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 3PM-9:30PM

For years, scores of local jazz and blues musicians would gather annually to perform in English Landing Park, adjacent to a picturesque bend in the Missouri River, with the Quindaro neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas on one side, and Parkville, Missouri on the other.

Park University's campus meanders up a hill on the other side of 9 Highway and a south, or northbound train occasionally chugs through. This



is the setting for Banneker School Foundation's Juneteenth Jazz & Blues Festival on June 8.

Parkville's annual jazz and blues festival in the park morphed into a street festival years ago. "Reviving the jazz and blues festival in the park would be great for the city," said Board BSRF member Ann Noland. The free and open to the public festival has now become a reality, and it is set to raise

funds for a new \$150,000.00 capital campaign for the Banneker School Restoration Project.

The Banneker School Foundation and Historic Site in Parkville, MO is restoring a one-room schoolhouse where African American children were educated from 1885 to 1905. They have been using the Brick Capital Campaign, offering a purchase of a brick of the school to support their efforts.

"There are descendants of former students who attended the school still living in Parkville," said BSRF Board member Lucille H Douglass, "We want to see the school preserved for future generations to be able to remember our heritage."

Parkville Mayor, Dean Katerndahl, is overwhelmed with gratitude that the Board of Banneker School is reviving the annual festival. "The jazz and blues festival brought folks from all over Kansas City up here," said Dean. "We are ready and willing to make this an exciting annual event with local food and spirits, and Kansas City music echoing across the river and throughout the city."

The Juneteenth Jazz and Blues Festival will begin at 3pm on June 8. The event is free and open to the public. There will be four bands, to be announced soon. The foundation requests that you bring your own chairs and purchase food and spirits from local vendors, in support of restoration of the Banneker School. Who knows, you might even want to bring a donation, or purchase a brick while you are there enjoying the fun.

For information about the restoration of the Banneker School, please go to <https://bannekerschool-parkvillemo.org/>.

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