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Stay hip,
David Basse, President and Editor

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LAST MAN STANDING

On September 21st, 2024, Benny Golson peacefully passed away at his long-time residence in New York City at the ripe old age of 95 years young. He will be fondly remembered as a great influence as a tenor saxophone player, composer and educator from the Bebop Era. Benny's career lasted over 7 decades.

Benny was not only a great musician, he was also a beautiful human being filled with an inner peace, and he shared a youthful loving energy to all around him. You could feel the aura from him when you were with him. My memory is that Benny always tried to make time to work with music education sessions, sharing his knowledge and stories from his lengthy career. I personally witnessed how fascinated the students would become with his workshops.

Now another interesting part of the beginning of Benny's career after moving to New York City in the early 1950's is that Benny was one of the new young musicians full of dreams. In 1958 a photographer for Esquire Magazine put out a call to the jazz musicians in NYC to gather for a photo shoot on August 12th, at the ungodly early time of 10:00 in the morning, with the help of the jazz writers and posters in clubs. The photographer Art Kane was pleased and surprised with the turnout. The photo was taken in front of a brownstone residence in Harlem at 126th Street. Benny was one of the musicians invited to be in the photo.

Musicians who did not appear in the photo, for whatever reasons, were Duke Ellington (although there were some of his orchestra musicians in the photo), John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, Bill Evans

continued

by Tom Alexios



Top (original) photo by Art Kane appeared in Esquire Magazine;
bottom (recreation) photo by Gordon Parks appeared in Life Magazine.

LAST MAN STANDING CONTINUED

and Miles Davis. Charlie Parker had already passed away in 1955. When you look back now at who did show up for the photo, it's amazing. I don't think that group of 57 jazz greats was ever all together at one event before that or after. The photo has now become an important part of jazz history and culture. Benny on numerous occasions would talk about the awe he felt at such a young age to be in the company of music heroes.

40 years after the Esquire Magazine photo was taken, Life Magazine hires Gordon Parks to make an attempt to find as many of the musicians as possible from the original photo who were still alive. The assignment was to try and recreate the original photo, with the remaining musicians. It also has to be mentioned that the only remaining



Mike LeDonne and Benny Golson at the 2017 Newport Jazz Festival

were Gerry Mulligan, Art Farmer, Milt Hinton, Marian McPartland, Sonny Rollins, Benny Golson, Horace Silver, Chubby Jackson, Eddie Locke, Johnny Griffin, Hank Jones and a young man named Taft Jordan Jr. He was the young boy sitting on the curb next to Count Basie. The gathering was an eye opening, stark reality reminder of how many of our jazz greats had passed away.

Jean Bach, who was a radio producer/writer, came up with the idea of making a documentary called a "Great Day in Harlem", built around the Art Kane photo Session, and also with the help

of Milt Hinton's wife, Mona, both of whom were avid photographers for years. Mona had a motion camera capturing the logistics of the putting the photo together. There were also musicians who captured some of the moments of the historic day, including Dizzy Gillespie and Mary Lou Williams, who were also avid photographers.



Benny Golson at the 2017 Newport Jazz Festival

Now I can explain where the title of the story comes from. This story is now being printed in 2025, sixty-seven years later. Now that Benny has passed away, there is only one great musician from the iconic photograph left. That is Sonny Rollins. In the original photo Benny Golson and Sonny Rollins were standing next to each other next to Thelonious Monk. Sonny now carries the legacy of the last living tie to a piece of jazz photography history.

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February 15-16 JCCC

The Midwest Trust Center begins 2025 with jazz. Two days of live jazz in Yardley Hall and Polsky Theatre, Saturday and Sunday, February 15-16. The live performances include clarinetist Lynn Zimmer and Friends, pianist Eddie Moore, saxophonist Doug Talley and his long-running quartet, Ensemble Ibérica, and internationally known jazz vocalist, Deborah Brown and her quartet.

These traveling artists, who happen to be a part of the rich Kansas City music scene, will lead up to the festival's headliner, Jazz at Lincoln Center Presents: "New Orleans Songbook."

Lynn Zimmer - performed and toured with famed swing era bandleader Clyde McCoy, Turk Murphy's Jazz Band in San Francisco and Grammy Award-winning trumpeter Al Hirt in New Orleans. He was featured at Dick Hawk's Gaslight Grill in Leawood for 11 consecutive years—five nights every week. Zimmer is Kansas City's clarinetist of choice and can be heard regularly with the New Red Onion Jazz Babies and the KC Dixieland Band.

Eddie Moore - is a keyboardist whose music and creativity run deep. Growing up in Houston's Third Ward, an area credited with some of the deepest roots in Black American Music, Moore, a



© Ziggy Spiz

Deborah Brown

Jazz Lecturer at the University of Kansas, incorporates a myriad of styles, including R&B, Hip Hop, Neo Soul, and Rock has been credited with "Pulling Kansas City Jazz into the Future."

Ryan Heinlein – is Associate Professor of Music and the Chair of Music, Theater and Record Arts at Johnson County Community College. His groundbreaking large ensemble, The Project H, recorded critically acclaimed music a decade ago. Dr. Heinlein has facilitated JCCC master classes with saxophonist and composer Benny Golson, trumpeter Roger Ingram, saxophonist Jaleel Shaw and

trumpeter and composer Sean Jones.

Libby Hanssen - is a writer based in Kansas City. She is the author of *States of Swing: The History of the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra, 2003-2023*, and has written for KCUR 89.3 FM, Classical KC, 91.9 FM KC Studio, The Kansas City Star and The Pitch. She earned degrees in trombone performance and Libby maintains the culture blog *Proust Eats a Sandwich*.

Doug Talley Quartet - Doug Talley has performed with jazz luminaries Jay McShann, Clark Terry and Dizzy Gillespie. He is a founding member of the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra and a familiar face throughout the Midwest as a jazz performer

continued on page 11

CHARLIE PARKER -AND- NICA ROTHSCHILD

On Saturday March 12th, 1955 the Manhattan, New York City medical examiner responded to a call from the address of 995 5th Avenue, the apartment residence of Pannonica "Nica" Rothschild at 8:45. I have a copy of the medical examiner's hand written on site report in my personal collection. This is the same report that shows the examiner's approximation of age of Charlie as 53, later crossed out and corrected to age 34. You can see this error on the first page of the report.

This has been mentioned over the years as one of the numerous legends about Charlie's long time life style as a contributing factor for his more aged look. Charlie passed away peacefully sitting on a living room chair in a bathrobe watching television. This March 12th, 2025, will be the 70th year of Charlie's passing. We all feel the impact that Parker has made on jazz. This impact reverberates to this day, and will continue to be studied by students and scholars for years to come.

A long-held rumor was Charlie Parker was still addicted to heroin at his death. There are two different stories of when and why Charlie started on heroin. One story is that he started on drugs/heroin at the early age of 13. Another story was that Charlie hurt his back from a car accident on



the way to a gig. The doctor prescribed opioids for pain. So, it could be a combination of both stories or one or the other. I don't know if we will ever know for sure.

What we do know is that, on the copy of autopsy report, which I also have a copy of, shows no barbiturates/narcotics in his system. Charlie was and had been clean before his death, thanks to changes in life style, and to Nica Rothschild and others' support of sobriety and trying to get healthier.

Something else, not well known, is Charlie had become an advocate for drug rehabilitation. The rumors that have circled around Parker's life before and after his death are unjustly false. A false rumor spread at the time Parker passed that he had

by Tom Alexios

a physical altercation with Art Blakey, and that Charlie passed from internal injuries. This was yet again another one of the numerous false rumors.

In 1951 Charlie Parker's life went in a major different direction that included clean up from rehabilitation, playing a gig with the Woody Herman Orchestra right after his release and the birth of his daughter with Chan, his common law wife. Eddie Baker used to bring Chan to Kansas City when he had the Charlie Parker Foundation for his yearly Parker Tribute for a few years. Their baby girl's name was Pree. She died at a very young age, of what might have been cystic fibrosis. Charlie was never the same after all of this. This was the catalyst of the sobriety and drug rehabilitation, all the way to the end.

Another highpoint in Charlie's Life after the Woody Gig was a performance at the Open Door Jazz Club in September 1953 with Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk and Roy Haynes. The Irony of the passing of Charlie on July 12th, 1955, was that

it was exactly one week after Charlie's very last performance gig at the world-famous Birdland Jazz Club on March 5th, 1955 that the club that was named in his honor before his passing.

Nica Rothschild played a role as an early patron to the support of jazz. When I worked with the Thelonious Monk Institute in the 1990's, Thelonious Monk Jr and Tom Carter had great stories about Nica and her support and friendship with Thelonious Monk. She also was one of the first to donate money that helped to get the Thelonious Monk Institute started. Nica Rothschild and Elaine Lorillard were two wealthy women, both of whom have now become part of the history and growth of jazz and the musicians.

Nica passed away in 1988. There is an old saying, "A legend doesn't die because the name does." The more we speak their names, the more we bring them back to life for a moment. A beautiful thought about all the people in our own lives that are important to us. ||



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APRIL MAY WEBB

WINNER OF THE 2024 SARAH VAUGHAN INTERNATIONAL VOCAL COMPETITION

As the curtain went up on the 2024 Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Competition in Newark, NJ, the packed house of New York area jazz fans was ready for something new. The star-studded judges were Terri Lynne Carrington, Bill Charlap, Lisa Fischer, Christian McBride and Madeleine Peyroux.

The contestants came from as far as Toulon, France. They hailed from New York City, or were living and working professionally there. But the artist who stood out from this talented crowd, came from Kansas. North Newton, Kansas, population 1,787.

As April May Webb put it in a recent interview, “North Newton is just different than Newton, it is a different city, with a different zip code and everything.” Not only that, it’s the hometown of Kansas



Finalist Angelique Nicolas

City saxophonist and educator, Brett Jackson, also proud to be from North Newton.

The MC, WBGO radio personality, Sheila Elaine Anderson seemed to sort of roll her eyes when she said “North Newton, Kansas” as she initially introduced the contestants, which made



April May Webb photo by Julianna Karr

April May stand out a little bit more at the beginning of the show. That had to do with where she was from, and once she hit the stage, it was all about who she is.

April and her husband, Randall are a “band within a band,” she confided. After graduating from the jazz program at Patterson University the couple formed their band Sounds of A and R. This led them to a prestigious opportunity to travel the world with drummer TS Monk.

He’s the son of acclaimed pianist and composer, Thelonious Monk. It was TS who coined the phrase

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"Sarah Vaughn Way" taken just outside the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, after the Sarah Vaughn International Vocal Competition.

a “band within a band,” and he remains committed to featuring April & Randall in each and every set



Third Place, Georgia Heers

that they play with him. “The thing I love about playing with TS is that he not only features Sounds of A and R,” said April, “he gives us a platform to reach a larger audience.”



Finalist Amira B

April is no newcomer to the Sarah Vaughan competition. She first applied in 2014. She placed second, as a finalist in 2021. As of the Sunday before Thanksgiving, 2024, April May Webb of North Newton, Kansas is the winner of the coveted Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Competition.

Her effort took a decade of commitment. “I moved to the New York area in 2010, to study in

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Paul and Sara Smith

Tom and Geri

Fred Slough & Pat Housh

Dan Sturdevant

Robert & Mary Wurtz





Second Place, Syndee Winters

New Jersey with pianist Mulgrew Miller, at Paterson University,” continued April, “My 2 older brothers had studied there and they said, ‘It’s good here,’ so I really wanted to study with him too.”

Sounds of A and R have 3 recordings to their name, “Let’s Stay Forever,” from 2016, “Sounds of A and R,” from 2021 and the latest, “Questions Yet Unanswered.” On February 21st the group will perform for the first time at Jazz at Lincoln Center, “We’re just having fun,” concluded April, “as long as we’re having fun and we’ve got a place to live . . . we’ll be all right.”

Editor



WINTERLUDE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

and educator, including many performances nationally and internationally.

Ensemble Ibérica – Guitarist Beau Bledsoe performs and records classical music, jazz, and folkloric music from around the world, seeking to integrate different musical cultures with new audiences through his many diverse projects and ensembles. His recording, “Yalnız by Alaturka,” received 4.5 stars and was named one of by Downbeat Magazine’s Best Albums of 2013.

Deborah Brown - has traveled the world and recorded with the top talent, she effortlessly wows vocal students and audiences alike. Bassist Ben Liefer and drummer John Kizilarmut are on-hand to set the pace, they have been first-call recording musicians themselves for more than a decade.

On Saturday evening, hear Deborah share her story and create high-level improvised music with an exceptional group of musicians. Deborah features her close friend & pianist George Colligan for this event. He is winner of the DownBeat Magazine Readers Poll, and a veteran of the jazz scene in New York City. Now in Portland, these sought after artists recorded one of her many recordings in New York. (Songbird)

Individual Tickets

The JCCC box office, Yardley Hall and Polsky Theatre are located in the Midwest Trust Center on the campus of Johnson County Community College, 12345 College Boulevard in Overland Park, Kansas.

tickets online, MidwestTrustCenter@jccc.edu or by phone 913-469-4445



LAST MAN STANDING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

One more thing about Benny Golson and his tie to the Great Day in Harlem photo was a movie based on the premise about the son of a European whose dad was a huge jazz buff and had accumulated the autographs of all of the jazz musicians in the Great Day in Harlem photo, except for one autograph left that his father had not gotten before passing away. The immigrant in the movie is played

by Tom Hanks. He is on a quest to come to New York City to get the last autograph needed, and it is from Benny Golson, who also has a cameo in the Tom Hanks movie called "Terminal."

Well I wish all the good possible for Sonny Rollins in his senior years. I think his meditation and how he treats his health has a lot to do with longevity.



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THE FOURTH ANNUAL JAM AWARDS

2024

Kansas City's Favorite Players

The board of the Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors had a ball presenting the 2024 JAM Awards this past December. Many hours are spent each year, in an attempt to find the best way to entice you, your fellow listeners and denizens of the night to step up and vote for your very favorite local musicians.

After all, it is YOU, the regular live-listeners music who bring this contest to life. You were there at the nightclub when that magic solo or new composition was premiered. You feel the heat, before the others. Because the casual listeners are not out as much, and less able to share that magic. And we all know that musical magic and lightning sel-

dom strike twice, so when you hear it, let us know and make your voice heard in the JAM Awards.

Write it down, and when the nominations open use your own *jazz notes* to celebrate your *go to* players. This year, for the first time, the board began *last year*, to plan for this year's JAM Awards.

Here's how it all will go down.

In this issue of JAM Magazine, the FEB-MAR addition, we are getting the nominations rolling. We've listed the winners and nominees from 2024, right here, so it's easy for you to remember.

Beginning in March, you'll have your chance to submit your favorites. This gives you plenty of time to listen, around town, to *all* the excellent players and singers and make your educated choice



KCK Community College Jazz Futures band that played at the annual Jam Awards

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Winners/Nominees

Winners listed first in each category

Favorite KC Vocalist

Laura Barge
Alex Abramovitz
Cherice Woolf
Chloe McFadden
Cynthia Van Roden

Favorite KC Trumpeter

Justin Crossman
Alex Abramovitz
Byron Jones
Stan Kessler

Favorite KC Saxophonist

Billy Winston
Adam Larson
Max Levy
Mikole Kaar

Favorite KC Bassist

Jeff Schwartz
Ben Leifer
James Albright

Favorite KC Pianist

Drew Madden
Bram Wijnands
Charles Williams
Joe Cartwright
Michael Pagan

Favorite KC Trombonist

Joshua Lampkins
Trevor Turla

Favorite KC Guitarist

Rick Cole
Clayton DeLong
Danny Embrey
Rick Mareske

Favorite KC Keys/Organ

Drew Madden
Brian Ward
Chris Hazelton
Ken Lovern

Favorite KC Drummer

Mark Warrell
Kenneth Davis
Zach Morrow

Favorite KC Jazz Band

The Kicks Band
Alex Abramovitz's
KC Jazz Band
Baby J & The
Cradle Robbers
Cynthia Van Roden Quartet
Guitar Elation
Kansas City Jazz Orchestra

Favorite KC Jazz Club

The Phoenix
Black Dolphin
Green Lady Lounge
Johnnie's Jazz Bar

Favorite KC Jazz Venue

The Folly Theatre

Favorite KC Jazz Entertainer

Laura Barge
Alex Abramovitz
Cynthia Von Roden
Lonnie McFadden

Favorite KC Jazz Radio Personality

David Basse
Brad Gregory
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Favorite KC Instrumentalist/Singer

Alex Abramovitz
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KC Jazz Ambassador of the Year

Eboni Fondren
Chris Burnett
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Ernest Melton
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Lynn Abrams



for the hidden gems we hear in the nightclubs each and every night.

We'll then figure out who received the most nominations from you, and set up the 5 finalists in 16 categories.

This all sounds simple. It is, if we hear from you and your friends. The more avid listeners we hear from, the better the 2025 contest and awards will be. We're looking for a real consensus, vote once, then take your jazz friends out to hear what you heard, and encourage them to do like you, and vote for their favorites.

Many of the acts, musicians and venues who won in 2024 are out there and open practically nightly. That is step number one: Listen.

Right now, Kansas City supports over 50 venues that offer jazz.

Of course, that is not the swoosh of the subway and you are magically transported to another \$35 cover charge, and another set of stellar jazz performances. This is the Midwest, after all. The music is accessible, high octane, and just a tad more polite than in NYC, and completely accessible to the listener, you.

Last year, in 2024, a lot of swing and a bit of cabaret seeped into the awards. We've provided a complete listing that shows you, the winners and those who were "that close" to being the winner. Consider this a gift that you can share with friends, and then share with the world.

Listen on, Kansas City and stay hip!

David Basse

President, KC Jazz Ambassadors



One of the funds supported by your membership, sponsorship and donations is the Tommy Ruskin Memorial Fund for Jazz Education. It's named for the beloved Kansas City jazz master who mentored and inspired countless performers who continue his great legacy today. This fund supports Jazz Futures, a program consisting of quarterly live performances throughout the school year where jazz studies programs from area colleges bring their best combos to local nightclubs to show off their talent. The Jazz Ambassadors then give a significant donation to each institution's jazz program.

Jazz Futures

PRESENTED BY

KANSAS CITY JAZZ AMBASSADORS

**Upcoming Jazz Futures shows at Voo Lounge:
February 20th KU Jazz Band
April 17th UMKC Jazz Band**

A Winter Wednesday at the Green Lady Lounge

The lights are dim. The walls are red. Yellow candlelight illuminates the room. It's a cold winter night outdoors, but in here the room is warm with jazz: saxophone and organ and drums. On break, during a multi-set night, saxman Doug Talley mentions what a joy it is to be backed by Brian Steever (on drums). "So much space. So melodic," I say. "All that, and Brian makes it (your solo) sound like what you play was the only thing to play...and Brian Ward has two hands going and one foot (on organ) and makes a tune he has only seen once sound like he's been playing it 20 years. So natural."

Talley talks to me after "Westport," the last song of the set. "I wrote 8 or 9 songs just for tonight," Talley says. Katie, who accompanied me to the club, says, "I liked when you played 'Summertime'" in the short documentary she recently saw about Talley. "Play that," Talley says, "and they'd throw us out," he jokes, since Green Lady Lounge is an "all originals" club, an ardent supporter and proponent of new music. During his solo on "Boo's Waltz," a Ward composition, Talley steps out. When he ends, claps mask my whisper. "Near the beginning of that solo," I say, "he quoted 'Summertime.' For you," I say.

Talley's tune, "The Sleeping Child" opens with an intro that resembles "Naima." Talley's tune is equally meditative and intimate, tender. They say



when Coltrane died, no one would touch that tune: a nod, a bow. Similarly here: it's delicate and points to the heart of one man, the jazz educator returned to the bandstand full time, first and last love.

(Saxophonist Doug Talley recently retired from teaching music, including jazz, in the Shawnee Mission Schools for decades.)

("Boo's Waltz" can be found on the Brian Ward album "Palouse Skies.")

—Kevin Rabas

*Wednesday 15 January 2025, night,
Green Lady Lounge (1809 Grand Blvd, KC)*

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Reflection & Brief Performance Review

For the Record

Eboni Fondren with Laurent Marode Orchestra **Swinging with Strings**

(2024)

Maybe even better than “Charlie Parker with Strings,” Eboni Fondren’s new album, “Eboni Fondren with Laurent Marode Orchestra,” is a hit.

Bright and full, Fondren’s vocals are aptly showcased on this album. She is up front of a large supporting musical cast; one she floats upon and blends with perfectly. There’s really nothing else like this recently: a Paris orchestra with jazz trappings and ample strings. And it’s bright and driving. Fondren is at the wheel.

Fondren and crew set “Solitude” to a blues-reggae groove, mixing blue, green, and orange, as if this were a watercolor palette. The tune is lively, but subdued, and has elevated past reductionist, despairing versions and interpretations into new, promising, hopeful territory.

Fondren shines brightly on “Ain’t Nobody Like My Baby,” where she is utterly convincing in each line of this slow-groove tune that has plenty of back-beat for an orchestral version. There is a bountiful blend of strings and jazz orchestra in this tune, a perfect mix, something fiery in a long-stemmed glass. Every tune on this album is delicious, but this one is dessert.

This album’s Paris sound (especially the horn work) reminds me some of another local’s stylings, Jackie Myers. A joy to hear this overlap between KC and the City of Lights.

Laurent Marode (bandleader/pianist/arranger) and (especially) the horns create a compelling musical canvas for Fondren. They paint the field with every flower, every color. It’s bright, but never over-



bright. And there’s just enough oncoming darkness; dusk and twilight wait on the horizon line.

Two Fondren stellar albums recently dropped, including this. Get them both.

—Kevin Rabas

Eboni Fondren **The Journey to Kansas City with Love**

(2024)

Eboni Fondren is a KC standout. With a golden voice and passionate, thoughtful delivery, I take every opportunity to hear her live. (And so should you.) Aside from hearing her in person, Fondren has a new album. It’s a live album that captures that live sound well. It’s next best.



Fondren’s original tune “1,000,005” seemingly charts her own journey from Chicago to KC, and even includes a hat tip to the late great bandleader/organist Everette DeVan, who was an early advocate for Fondren when she newly arrived on the KC scene.

Throughout, the album is well balanced. At once upbeat, then balladic. And Fondren’s voice has such presence and warmth. I believe her every word.

Fondren’s rendition of “Do Nothing Til You Hear from Me” is especially soulful, and the Hammond B3 accompaniment almost harkens to DeVan, a characteristic KC sound. Legend has it the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, who grew up in Lawrence, cleverly asked that the tune be played at his funeral. Ian Corbett’s sax solo on the tune is warm and sultry, as is Jamie Anderson’s on guitar. And Fondren’s scat solo is rhythmic and syncopated, as well as melodic, showcasing her distinct ability to be both vocal and instrumental.

Danny Rojas (on drums) is always energetic and tasteful, achieving a sound somewhat like a cross between Mike Warren and Todd Strait. On this tune, everything and everyone is in keeping with the tune's lyrics and vibe. It's an album of tunes like that.

As one of many standout moments, the album includes an exquisite upright bass solo on "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," that is crystal clear, audio-wise, something not always a snap for a live performance album, with a crowd and stage separating the technicians from the musicians, and the soundboard from the upright bass. Jordan Faught is both passionate and measured during his solo. There's no rush. And there isn't a single audience whisper. It's pin-drop attention that Faught commands.

Fondren's version of "Solitude" is distinct. It travels forward with a "big 3," halftime shuffle (the backbeat on 3) and Champaign-bright B3 organ comping. It's hopeful. Others make the tune almost maudlin. Not so with Fondren. There's brightness, agency, optimism. (It's an album like that.)

A torch song album for KC, "The Journey..." captures KC spirit well. It's solidly in the tradition. But it also holds today's sound(s). It's hip. (Get it and give it a listen. Even put it on repeat.)

—Kevin Rabas

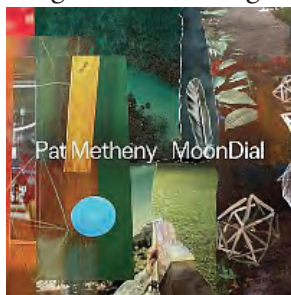
Pat Metheny

MoonDial

(2024)

Guitarist/bandleader/composer Pat Metheny, who came up in KC decades ago, has a new solo guitar album of covers and originals. It's a delight. It's full of quiet energy, sparse, but electric.

The title track intersperses a bossa feel with a contemporary straight-ahead ambient feel. The tune begins with a mournful intro and includes a bass B drone which reappears at the head and lends co-



hesion to the tune. That bass, it's the understated surdo drum, a sonic, rhythmic underpinning. Overall, the tune feels very present-day Metheny.

Metheny's version of "Here, There and Everywhere," by Lennon and McCartney (The Beatles), is contemplative, meditative, and soulful. Balladic, it plays to Metheny's strengths in its full, open voicings along with Metheny's careful use of space.

"MoonDial" is the third in a series of solo guitar albums by Metheny, including "One Quiet Night" (Warner Bros., 2003), followed by "What's It All About" (Nonesuch, 2011). The album is half originals, half covers, including tunes by Chick Corea and Matt Dennis.

Metheny brings a bit of instrumental invention to these solo albums, which includes an innovative tuning system that expands the range of the strings at both ends of his custom-made guitar.

In "You're Everything," Metheny pays homage to the late great Chick Corea, who, with vibraphonist Gary Burton, Metheny collaborated on the album "Like Minds" (1998). In interpretation, there is a difference. You can clearly hear the melody over a very unadorned accompaniment. Whereas Corea's version is a fast-dance samba, Metheny's is a lover's slow dance. Whereas Corea's tune sparkled with busy-ness and tinsel, lit like a Christmas tree, Metheny's is a single candle.

Metheny has won 20 Grammys and has over 50 albums. Add this to your collection. It is a balm to sea changes and uncertain days.

—Kevin Rabas & Ramiro Miranda

∴

The Purist

(For Poet Stanley E. Banks)

No diluting, tainting or watering down -
He likes the real thing, not a facsimile.
An instrument has to have its own sound;
every word has to pack a punch.
Contemporary jazz is an oxymoron.
He believes an actor must
inhabit a life worthy or not.
He likes the Count as in Basie,
the Duke as in Ellington,
the coolness as in Miles.
This bona fide man
is purely my soft spot.

Janet M. Banks

The Rhythm

My father thumped a dense
tune into and on my head,
backbeat a regular jam session.
My grandmother knew how
to soothe the madness
of the beatings,
helped me deal with
the years of Blues
from my father.
My grandmother always had
the right Jazz response --
taught me that it is
in the grooves where I
would find gravity
by letting each downbeat
slide off smooth and easy.
My father tried his best to drum
a harsh rhapsody
into my spirit.
It took years before
his loud notes
slowly played out.

Stanley E. Banks

Current Jazz Ambassadors Members

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| LYNN ABRAMS | CYNTHIA DOLLARD | QUINTON LUCAS | RANDELL SEDLACEK & MARY VENTURA |
| JIM ADAMSON | WALTER DRAHEIM | J P MAKUS | FRED SLOUGH & PATRICIA HOUSH |
| FANNY ALAADEEN | NATHANIEL DUBOSE | SIDNEY & FRANCES JONES-MALONE | CURTIS SMITH |
| TOM ALEXIOS | JOHN & MARIA ECKARDT | STEPHAN & TERRELL MANN | MIKE STEINEL |
| BOB & BRIDGET BAGBY | MARK EDELMAN | DOREEN MARONDE | WILLIAM STILFIELD |
| MELANIE & JOHN T BAILEY | AWC ENTERPRISES | RICHARD MARTIN | FRANK STRADA & DOROTHY MURRAY |
| JULIA BARTLETT | NELSON & MARY ELLEN FARNEY | HARRY MILLER | DAN & MARY STURDEVANT |
| CATHY BASSE | MIKE & DEBRA GERKEN | HELEN SEYMOUR | YOKO TAKEMURA |
| DAVID BASSE | STEPHEN & TRACIE GLASSCOCK | ROD MCBRIDE | ROBERT THOMPSON & MARY WURTZ |
| BOB & JUDY BASSE | WAYNE GOINS | CORKYMCCAFFREY | NANCY TRAGER |
| ROB & SHELLY BASSE | GREG GORMAN | DON & JANE MCCLAIN | DALE & VICKIE TROTT |
| KARLA BAUER | TOM GREEN | LINDA MCSHANN GERBER | JULIE TURNER RUSKIN & BRIAN RUSKIN |
| ORSOYLA BENE | RICHARD HAITBRINK | MIKE METHENY | ALAN VOSS |
| PHYLLIS BECKER | STEVEN & PATRICIA HARGRAVE | EDWARD MORRIS | ALTON WALLER |
| BETTY BERRY | CAROLE HARRIS | DONOVAN MOUTON | STEPHANIE |
| JOHN & ALICE BLEGEN | STEPHANIE HARPER | VALERIE OTIS-JACKSON | WALTERS |
| TERESINA BRADLEY | BRUCE & DENISE HEDRICK | KIM PARKER | ANGELA & JAMES WARD |
| BILL BROWNLE | BRUCE HOFFMAN | DAVID & GLORIA PARSLEY | DAVID & SARAH WATSON |
| LYNN BURKLUND | DARRELL HOFFMAN & DINA CLAIBORNE | DOUG PEARSON | JAMES & SARAH WEITZEL |
| RICK CAGAN | CURTIS & ELAINE JOHNSON | SHEILAH PHILIP & ROBERT HARTLEY | TOM WELLS & GERI ST CLAIR |
| MARILYN CARPENTER | JOAN JOHNSON | JESSICA POELL | GRACE WEST |
| ABIGAIL CALVA | MARVA JOHNSON | JON POSES/WE ALWAYS SWING | ANNE & KEITH WIDENKELLER |
| STANLEY CHAPPELL | MIKOLE KAAR | PAUL POST/SUNFLOWER MUSIC FESTIVAL | ANNE BLANCHE WILLIAMS |
| BOB CLARK | KATHE KAUL | KEVIN RABAS | STEPHEN WILSON |
| LORIN CRENSHAW | LINDA KLINE | KENNITH RICKER | MAXINE WRIGHT |
| JOANNE COLLINS | CHRIS KLOCKAU | MIKE ROGERS | ROBERT WURTZ & MARY THOMPSON |
| DANIEL COMPO | LARRY KOPITNIK | ANNA SAJOVIC & CHUCK GOWANS | MARILYN YORK |
| JUSTIN CROSSMAN | STEVE KRASKE | DONNA SCHENCK-HAMLIN | DEREK ZINGER |
| BETTY CROW | BRETT KYNARD | RICHARD SCHIAVI | |
| ANTHONY DEMARCO | | | |
| JAMES DICKERSON | | | |
| ALICE DIEDERICH | | | |
| JOE DIMINO/NEON JAZZ | | | |



Folly Jazz Series

Branford Marsalis & säje

The Folly Jazz Series, a vital part of the now 125-year-old historical theater's life. The series has now run continuously for more than 40 years, and two of its biggest shows of the season coming to town.



On the “New Voices,” side, the four-piece vocal quartet säje (rhymes with “beige”) brings their dazzling jazz stylings on Friday, February 28. The more traditional (but still wildly innovative) Branford Marsalis Quartet will bring their decades-long collaboration to the Folly on Saturday, March 15.

säje—Friday, February 28, 7:30 p.m.

Though relatively new, säje has achieved a lot, especially in bringing women's voices and perspectives to jazz. In her acceptance speech for the “Best Arrangement, Instrument and Vocals” Grammy for the song “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning” (a collaboration with the Jacob Collier), group member Sara Gazarek emphasized, “We arrange and release and produce all of our own music, so we hope this feels like a win for all female-identifying creators and independent musicians.”

säje includes singers Gazarek and Erin Bentlage, based in Los Angeles, and Amanda Taylor and Johnaye Kendrick, based in the Seattle area. All four are accomplished vocalists, and in 2018 Gazarek proposed a retreat in Palm Springs to get acquainted and see if they worked as a group. They clearly clicked.

The first song they wrote at that retreat, “Desert Song,” was also nominated for a Grammy in 2020. Their silky, ethereal sound, with intricate suspended chords and interweaving vocal lines, has buoyed collaborations with artists as varied as Ambrose Akinmusire, Michael Mayo, and Terri Lynn Carrington. Their original songs, like Kendrick's “Never You Mind,” an elegy for black lives lost at the hands of police, are both beautiful and haunting.

“I was introduced to säje through my friends at KCK Community College's jazz program,” says Rick Truman, President and CEO of the Folly. “When I heard them, I was blown away by their



excellent musicianship. I immediately knew I had to present them at the Folly.”

An Evening with Branford Marsalis—Saturday, February 15, 7:30 p.m.

It's been four decades since Branford Marsalis's saxophone talent first caught the jazz world's

continued on page 24

VETERAN MUSICIAN FINDS A NEW HOME & SOBRIETY INTO A NEW JAZZ YEAR

Since the age of 20, Veteran Kansas City-based Multi-Instrumentalist and Singer Bryan Hicks has been captivating audiences with his unique blend of entertainment. Here in a new year, he overwhelmingly represents a bridge to the rich KC past as he oversees the present with clarity and wonder.

“2024 was a hell of a year. I moved out of Kansas City and threw myself into the Lawrence music scene, but I’m also doing my Kansas City stuff. The stuff I was doing 30 years ago is going to guys much younger than me,” Bryan noted. “Also, I’m a recovering addict and alcoholic. I finally came up with a way of dealing with that. I’m in a program and I’m getting better.”

As he noted, Bryan is reinventing himself between the Lawrence and Kansas City scenes. This flurry of activity later in life is very representative of his time during the heyday of playing in Kansas City. Relationships with local legends like Rich Hill and Rod Fleeman have kept that jazz bridge strong and the bonds flowing with gigs.

“Everything is good there. I have been in the process of reinventing myself,” Bryan noted. “I have sort of a short attention span so it’s nice to have a lot of projects going on.”

The real biological wake-up call for Bryan came during the throes of the pandemic when work dried up and breathing became mighty difficult.

“It wasn’t like COVID symptoms. We were told to stay out of emergency rooms and I wasn’t insured at the time. I didn’t know what to do. I thought I was gonna die,” Bryan said. “I went on like that for about two months. Then, as the COVID panic was sort of subsiding and I got some bloodwork, they told me I had congestive heart failure.”

Following that, he got treatment and he felt very grateful to be alive. During that time, he had plenty of time to reflect on a hectic life that has centered around his love of music, jazz and performing.



Bryan Hicks

It all began in Denver, Colorado. He was the youngest of five kids and his dad was a musician. When he was very young, they moved to a little farm outside of Bourbon, Missouri. A small town about three-and-a-half hours away from Kansas City proper. From there, he migrated to Kansas City, Kansas in Western WYCO and that’s when the music began in earnest.

“When I got into junior high, I started playing guitar. I started getting into the acoustic blues and a lot of the rock and roll that was happening at the

by Joe Dimino

BRYAN HICKS CONTINUED

time. I was more into the quiet stuff,” Bryan said. “Then, my sister met this guy who became my brother-in-law later on. He was from New York and he had a real eclectic music taste. He introduced me to The Drifters, Joni Mitchell and Dave Van Ronk.”

It was then that he struck up a friendship with Bruce Ricker, who was a legendary jazz advocate and made a film called *The Last of the Blue Devils*.



It was a documentary that celebrated the early days of jazz in a roaring Kansas City.

“Bruce took me over to his record collection and he picked out about 20 jazz records. He loaned them to me and said to go listen to these and then bring them back and he would give me some more,” Bryan said. “I didn't understand it at all. Then, he gave me a Charlie Parker record and I had never heard anything like that. Bebop was just completely unfamiliar to me, but I knew that it was quality stuff.”

That made him want to become a better player. From there, he started going to the Mutual Musicians Foundation off 18th and Vine and got in even though he was way too young. There he would catch KC legends like Sonny Kenner, Herman Walder and Jay McShann. He was hooked and enamored of that world of sophisticated older cats and it made him want to emulate their vibe.

He would try college for a year but ended up drinking most of the time, and hitch hiked back to Kansas City. When he was back, he struck up a friendship and what turned into a long working relationship with Pianist & Vocalist Rich Hill.

“About a year after I got back, I started playing with the Inner City Orchestra. I was so impressed

FOLLY JAZZ SERIES CONTINUED FROM 22

attention as a member of Clark Terry's group, and then with his brother, Wynton, in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. His career spans dozens of musical styles (from jazz to classical and beyond) and hundreds of collaborators (famously including Sting and the Grateful Dead). As a composer, he's written everything from traditional jazz pieces to classical suites to re-workings of Hungarian folk songs. He's been cited by the National Endowment of the Arts as a “Jazz Master,” and even that title seems like an understatement.

In the past few years, Marsalis has performed with symphonies across the U.S. and the world. He's composed scores for films as varied as *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (based on the August Wilson play), *Rustin* (from the life of Bayard Rustin,

who helped Martin Luther King, Jr. organize the March on Washington in 1963) and the History Channel's documentary *Tulsa Burning: The 1921 Race Massacre*.

Branford will perform at the Folly with his long-standing quartet, founded in 1986. Their rapport, range and creative musical brilliance are audible in everything they do, on full display in their most recent album, 2023's *The Secret Between the Shadow and The Soul*.

For jazz fans in need of warmth, camaraderie, and amazing music to help them through the last few weeks of winter, the Folly Theater is the refuge you need.

Tickets and information can be found at www.follytheater.org - (816) 474-4444

with that whole group and suddenly I'm playing with all these guys I admired. That was cool," Bryan said.

His big Kansas City break came at the age of 21 when he began playing with the legendary Ida McBeth. It came from the urging of Rich Hill and the concept took off fast.

"I had never played in a group that was that good. We sounded real good and Ida was just an otherworldly kind of phenom with no pretense. Everything was just from the heart," Bryan said. "She was just so gut level, man. It was just such a visceral thing for her and it just touched people. After I played with her for a while, you could never take that granted, man."

Witnessing the magic of Ida was a real turning point for Bryan, yet he noted a checkered path and past that plagued what could have been for him during a roaring KC era.

"In those days I was pretty wild. I wish I'd worked harder and taken advantage of the opportunities that I had, I've blown a lot of stuff, but I've recovered pretty well," Bryan lamented. "From time to time, it could have taken me out. Yet, I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm still around and I've changed my ways."

One of the central early figures for him during the Foundation days was a friendship he had with Ernie Williams, who was one of the last of the Blue Devils. The elders were always there and passing along their wares to the next generation. Tends to be a staple of the Kansas City scene.

"KC is an easy place to live and there's quite a bit of work and it pays pretty well compared to other places. You can actually kind of make a living here," Bryan said. "I was able to walk around fairly comfortably as opposed to living life on the edge in New York City or Paris or something like that. It's a pretty forgiving city, which means a lot."

As he reflects on the decades he spent in Kansas City, he feels the current scene is quite healthy. He's cognizant of his place on the timeline and his gigs, yet he's moved aside for the younger cats so that they can feel the warm glow of the current stage and keep the KC jazz tradition very alive.

"I love these guys and I play with a lot of them. It keeps me young and they're taking care

of business. The scene has changed and that's how it's supposed to be," Bryan said. "Music is changing and always evolving. Jazz is a music that is supposed to be a living, breathing thing. I've become more nostalgic in my old age and I'm fine with that."

About 18 years ago his life changed quite a bit when he traded in the single world and got enamored with a new step-daughter. She was almost three and he had to step into a role he never thought he would be in.

"I had to act like a grown up. When I took that job, I initially surrendered to it and changed me a lot. It was a slow change with a lot of stumbles and mistakes. I had to learn to be humble," Bryan said. "It puts music, my career and me into perspective. I figured out that it's not just about me."

As Bryan grabs the reins of sobriety and oscillates between Lawrence and Kansas City, he remains busier than ever. Gigs in places around Lawrence with a bevy of singers and in KC stalwarts like Chaz on the Plaza, the Market at Meadowbrook and the Quality Hill Playhouse. Finally, he's ecstatic to announce a public screening of *The Last of the Blue Devils* on October 10, 2025 at the Gem Theater.

In all the complexities that go into a veteran like Bryan, it really all comes down to a very simple philosophy of life.

"This is gonna sound weird, but on a good day it's a connection to something divine. You know, it's a way to look in the face of God and feel like music and art are manifestations of a higher power," Bryan noted. "The pursuit of this ever-elusive sort of thing. I'm not looking for perfection, but it's all perfection. The whole universe is just the way it's supposed to be."

**

Everything Bryan

<https://www.facebook.com/bryanhicksmusic/>
The Last of the Blue Devils Film:

<https://www.amazon.com/Last-Blue-Devils-Kansas-Story/dp/B00005M2CK>

Full Bryan Interviews via Neon Jaz:

Part 1 in 2023 - <https://youtu.be/ce-5dsu4IJM>

Part 2 in 2024 - <https://youtu.be/O6bDqIza-LoM>

Nominations for 2025 Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors JAM Awards will begin in March

The JAM Awards honors your favorite Kansas City jazz musicians. Jazz lovers are invited to vote for their favorite local jazz musicians in a variety of a categories. This is a people's choice award, so it's a chance to honor your personal favorites! Voting will begin in the fall. Winners will be announced at the Jazz Ambassadors Annual Meeting/Party in December. Watch for updates in the next issue of the JAM and on our Facebook page.

A large, colorful poster for the 90th anniversary of the Count Basie Orchestra. The background is a vibrant red with gold and black accents. The text is in gold and white. The poster features stylized illustrations of Kansas City buildings and landmarks. At the bottom, there are logos for Creative City KC and the Kansas City City of Music, along with a QR code and a call to action to get tickets now.

CREATIVE CITY KC PRESENTS
THE 90TH
ANNIVERSARY
of the
COUNT BASIE
ORCHESTRA

30 APRIL 2025
at the
KANSAS CITY
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