

# Jam

Jazz Ambassador Magazine

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Stay hip,  
David Basse, President and Editor

Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors  
A 40 Year Tradition. . . . . 2

Spencer Reeve  
The California Kid Finds Home  
In History Rich KC Jazz Scene . . . 6

Remembering Carol Comer . . . . . 9

Phoenix KC Jazz & Blues. . . . . 11

Club Scene. . . . . 12

Flutienastiness. . . . . 15

Become a Jazz Ambassador . . 16

For the Record . . . . . 18

There's a Little Old Man . . . . . 21

Newport Jazz Festival  
70th Anniversary . . . . . 22

Coming Back to  
Kansas City . . . . . 25



# KANSAS CITY JAZZ AMBASSADORS

## *A 40 Year Tradition*

Kansas City's elite music tradition began in 1906, when 2 young men from Fort Worth stood at the corner of 12th and Baltimore. As the men looked east at a bustling city of haberdasheries,

barrooms, and pawnshops one said, "I'm going to get me one of them pawnshops and make myself a fortune." His colleague, ragtime pianist, Euday Bowman responded, "I'm going to write me a song about those 3 balls hanging out front of the pawn shops and make my fortune."

Bowman's composition, "12th Street Rag," became a best seller for Jenkin's Music, then located between 11th and 12th streets on Walnut. First, as piano rolls for the popular player pianos of the time, and later as sheet music for folks to play on their pianos at home.

The song's "3 against 4" rhythm paved the way for the swing era. This type of swinging rhythm was foreign at the dawn of the twentieth century. Jenkins Music published the song and was able to have it "hit" twice, once to listen to (if your family owned a player piano) and later for folks to learn to play the song for themselves.

Published in 2005, some 99 years later, author and record collector Chuck Haddix set history straight about Kansas City's infectious mix of jazz & blues. Chuck's first book, "Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop" is basically a combination of Frank Driggs' early jazz photos and Chuck's research in the archives of the Kansas City Call newspaper.

Add to that Chuck's late-night extracurricular activities at KC nightspots & dance halls such as the Grand Emporium, City Light and the Mutual Musician's Foundation and KC's reigning musical historian was born.

The decade that Chuck spent behind the counter at 2 popular Westport record stores; Penny Lane & the Music Exchange, garnered a record collection too large to contain on the main floor of his 1970's bachelor pad.

Haddix' love of the genre has recently led him to a contract with Verve Records for the 2024 release of previously unreleased recordings of Charlie "Bird" Parker playing at a jam session in a private Kansas City home in the early 1950s.

Our city's jazz legacy is alive and well because of the long-time efforts of a handful of people like Chuck Haddix.

Take former mayor, Richard Berkley. Berkley passed away in 2024. In the early 1980s, Berkley realized the value of KC's rich musical past. He and his wife, Sandy, attended jazz events, and even "made the scene" in the local nightclubs. An amateur photographer, Berkley would document these occasions, shooting candid shots of the guests and of the musicians.

Berkley supported the renovation of the Folly Theater, the construction of the Vista "jazz" Hotel (now Downtown Marriott) and inadvertently laid the groundwork for the KC Jazz Ambassadors.

Former legislator and Jackson County Executive, Mike White was chosen to lead mayor Berkley's Jazz Commission. Mike is now a partner in the law firm Rouse Frets White Goss Gentile Rhodes, P.C. Throughout his long career, White has also been known as a prominent tenor saxophonist on the scene and as someone who recorded with piano great Jay McShann, drummer Tommy Ruskin and legendary bassist Milt Abel.

A couple of decades later, it was discovered that the Mutual Musician's Foundation, located at 1823 Highland, never had a liquor license. "It's hard to be playing jazz at 3 a.m. if you are at a temperance meeting," said White at the time, "the Mutual Musician's Foundation, it seems, never did have a liquor License," continued Alan Scher Zagier when writing "Jazz Hall," and quoting White.

White called the House Majority Leader in the Missouri Legislature, Mike Talboy, and they drafted an amendment to the state law to fix the problem. The Foundation's legendary late night jam sessions had gone on for over 70 years when the lack-of-license was noticed.

Jazz fan, and KC Jazz Ambassador's president at the time, Ed Fenner, loaded up a rented over-the-road bus with jazz fans and took them to Jefferson City to show their support for creating the state's ONLY 6 a. m. liquor license. The jam sessions



Mike White, Eddie Saunders, Claude "Fiddler" Williams, (unknown) and Jay McShann

began in 1930. Back then, laws were viewed as suggestions in KC and political boss Tom Pendergast reigned over a city "rife with gambling halls, brothels and juke joints that never closed," Continued Scher Zagier.

Vocalist, Ray Reed, who for many years, doubled as doorman for the Musician's Foundation said, "What we had was a world-class speakeasy." Ed Fenner and his group were able to help White conjure up the license for the MMF in Missouri's capital city.

The tradition jams on today. Once the home of the Black Musicians Union Local 627, it's listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the 2 story building holds the distinction of being (arguably) the longest running jazz venue in the world.

The Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors began in 1984. It was a part of then-mayor Richard L Berkley's Jazz Commission. The non-profit 501©3 is still governed as it began, by a volunteer operating board. The organization's mission is to preserve and ensure the future of Kansas City's jazz tradition. Back then, when mayor Berkley's jazz commission was headed by Mike White. The group met regularly in the "Yardbird Suite" of the brand-new Vista Hotel.

JAM Magazine began in 1986. The commission is gone, and the KC Jazz Ambassadors have continued as the largest volunteer organization in Missouri, the city's oldest non-profit governed by an operating board of volunteers, implementing

## KCJA A 40 YEAR TRADITION CONTINUED

the popular Tommy Ruskin Memorial Fund, Jazz Futures, the John Booth Legacy Fund, and the JAM Awards.

Gary Becker, president of the Jazz Ambassadors a couple of decades back, rightfully credits a great deal of the city's current and future jazz heritage to one of the city's renowned native sons, celebrated alto saxophonist, composer, arranger and educator, Bobby Watson.

"Bobby traveled with the legendary Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers, where he learned how to play, dress, and behave as an artist," said Becker, "he's also traveled over 25 years with other notable jazz artists." Becker continued, "He's brought back all his experience and unique style, and imparted it with his students."

Those students, in turn, have created their own high standards. Their musicianship and style are simultaneously passed down to the next generation, allowing jazz in the city to continuously grow and change.

Watson returned to Kansas City to become director of Jazz Studies at UMKC in 1998. After his 20 years of service, often working closely with

Canadian saxophonist, Dan Thomas, the school is recognized as a center for artistic excellence, innovation and engagement.

Master drummer and the current UMKC Jazz Studies director in the School of Music and Dance is Carl Allen. Allen played himself in the HBO series *Treme*. He joined the faculty of Julliard and became the Artistic Director of Julliard's Jazz Studies program in 2008, and continued on until 2013, when Wynton Marsalis became his successor. Allen is a founding member of Christian McBride's long-running small group *Inside Straight*.

Carl Allen will be featuring his current student group in concert and in conjunction with the KCJA on April 17, 2025 at Voo, in the old Muehlebach Hotel.

A lot has changed in Kansas City since 1906. Our convention and visitor's bureau has become Visit KC. Their website states, "KC's rich jazz history is alive, thriving." Amazing, when you consider our style of jazz was born here one hundred and eighteen-years-ago, and we have all but had one-big continuous musical party the entire time.

Our city's jazz legacy is alive and well because of the long-time efforts of a handful of people like Chuck Haddix, former mayors, Emanuel Cleaver (who was primarily responsible for the creation of the American Jazz Museum at 18th & Vine) Richard Berkley and Mike White.

Others, working with the KCJA & MMF, like Mike Metheny, Roger Atkinson, Anita Dixon, Dean Hampton, Joe Dimino, Curtis Smith and Linda & Jayne McShann have made very important changes. Not to mention the fans and illustrious musicians who have played in our town and realized what a musical jewel Kansas City is.

Let's celebrate Kansas City, where jazz and blues meet. The KC Jazz Ambassadors invite you to join us on December 12th at Voo of Jazz Futures & the Jam Awards, and we'll be announcing a celebration of JAY McSHANN (on cover) in JANUARY at Uptown Lounge, at the December 12th event. ||



Bobby Watson

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# SPENCER REEVE

## THE CALIFORNIA KID FINDS HOME IN HISTORY RICH KC JAZZ SCENE

Everyone has a turning point in their lives. Especially jazz musicians as they navigate an industry that can be particularly difficult in revenue and exposure, yet that's what makes the jazz world such a tenacious one flush with talented young cats. Kansas City has one of those in bassist Spencer Reeve and a mentor who has provided so much to him.

"During the pandemic, I was lucky to be around Matt Otto. He actually helped me get a place way cheaper than it should have been during a time when the chance of making any real money was gone," Spencer noted. "The isolation was weird,

but on the other side of things for musicians or artists in general, we kind of had this boon. All of a sudden we had all this time to focus on the things that we got into music for and not necessarily the day to day grind."

He's a California kid at heart and grew up in Fresno for the first 18 years of his life. His dad was a guitar player and he was late to the jazz game. He was into the music his dad loved like Kiss, Van Halen and Led Zeppelin.

"I loved watching my dad play guitar. That was always fun. So he got my sister and I playing piano

BY JOE DIMINO





pretty young and for whatever reason I just didn't like it. I begged and begged him to let me quit," he said. "And finally he made a deal with me that he would let me quit piano as long as I picked a different instrument. At that time, it became the drums."

It was around nine years old he got into the bass and that coincided with his dad introducing him to jazz. From there, he went to jazz camp and was introduced to his mentor in Fresno, a cat named Richard Giddens.

"When he was young, he moved out to New York and started playing there and had a lot of success and met a lot of people," Spencer said. "Then,

he came back to Fresno to kind of be around his family again and to find the next step in his career. He had studied with Charlie Hayden, who is one of my favorite bass players of all time."

That is ultimately the reason why he decided to make the trek to Kansas City. Richard was good friends with the Lawrence-based Matt Otto at the University of Kansas. But there was a twist in the migration story of college in the Midwest.

"I didn't go to school for music. I was dead set on going to school for physics, which is what I ended up doing. Richard wanted me to study music and said he would be really happy if I ended up at KU with Matt," Spencer said. "I took that to heart

## SPENCER REEVE CONTINUED

and got accepted to KU before I had heard back from anywhere else.”

He had always heard about the middle of the country and Midwest living as a native Californian, yet he had no idea how that life would translate to reality for him.

The freedom and collaboration have been the cornerstone of his jazz life in KC. Spencer is very cognizant of a vibrant history Kansas City holds as an original cradle of jazz, and it permeates his approach to his craft.

“It’s definitely a heavy thing. It’s something



“I love KC and I’m sticking around. I wouldn’t mind getting back to California eventually, but also that’s a hard thing to do. It’s easy to get out, not easy to get back in,” Spencer said. “Hearing from my friends who are playing in LA who are starting to come up in that scene and it sounds brutal. We’re pretty lucky out here in KC in a lot of ways with the amount of work and cost of living.”

that’s very different from the environment I was in on the West Coast. The history here runs deep and it’s amazing because it’s everywhere you look,” Spencer said. “I’ll be playing on stages that have been around for 100 years. The city is just old and jazz has a deep cultural history.”

He loves the democratic nature of being on stage creating art and it grounds him as a human.

*continued on page 10*



# Remembering Carol Comer

Carol Comer vocalist, pianist, educator, jazz festival entrepreneur recently passed away. There was never a time Carol wasn't singing. Music was always a part of her life. As a young child she sang in a gospel trio with her brother and sister at the Wichita church where their father was a minister. "There were times we didn't have meat," she told friends, "but we always had a piano." Her sister got the lessons, but she listened and learned by ear. In 1957 Carol moved to Kansas City and took a job typing papers at Research Hospital. One of her favorite pastimes was to go to a record store at 40th and Main and listen to records in the record booth. The store owner heard her singing along to Peggy Lee and Jo Stafford records and suggested she contact a club owner friend of his. After that first gig it didn't take long for local jazz musicians to hire the new singer in town with the smoky voice, impeccable pitch, and musical honesty. By 1960 Carol spent her nights singing in clubs and her days singing jingles for band leader Warren Durrett's production company. "I sang lots of jingles standing between Marilyn Maye and Patty Tucker, who just happened to be Marilyn's husband Sammy's first wife," she recalled. "That was pretty interesting, but also great fun." Pianist Paul Smith sums up why Carol was so popular with musicians. "She had such a cool aura that carried over into her singing. She would scat a little, but it was mostly her treatment of the lyrics and her ability to play around with the melody that made gigs with her so fun." Carol also had a job as the reporter on the Kansas City Jazz Scene for Downbeat magazine, and it was in that capacity that she and friend Dianne Gregg went to Wichita



in 1977 to report on their Jazz Festival. They bemoaned the fact that only one woman appeared on the bill. Dianne remembers Carol saying, "What if there was a jazz festival of all women." By the time they had driven home they convinced themselves to put together such a festival. The Kansas City Women's Jazz Festival became the first all-women's jazz festival in the world. From 1978 through 1985, scores of women per year were given stage time and encouragement, and went on to change the perception of women in jazz. Concert lineups included musicians such as Marian McPartland, Carla Bley, Jane Ira Bloom, Melba Liston, Joanne Bracken, Toshiko Akiyoshi, and Mary Lou Williams, to name a few. Carol and Dianne's work to assure that women jazz players are seen and heard reverberates even today. Post-festival, Carol's work in jazz education spread her love of jazz to a new generation and continued her emphasis on gender inclusion. Anyone who experienced one of her Young Audience clinic/concerts came away with a tune in their heart and a smile on their face. With Carol's passing Kansas City, and the jazz world, lost a jazz heroine of the first magnitude. She will be greatly missed. ❧



*Carolyn Glenn Brewer is a longtime music educator who has written for Jam Magazine and published two books on the 1957 tornado in Ruskin Heights, Missouri, and one on The Women's Jazz Festival, and one on Pat Metheny in Kansas City. She has played clarinet in bands, chamber groups, and orchestras throughout the Kansas City area. She lives in Kansas City.*

Carolyn Glenn Brewer

Ultimately, he's an explorer and Kansas City tethers him to his craft.

"I feel like I'm trying to take as much time these days to explore a bunch of different avenues. I hope that what people get when they hear me play is that no matter which avenue I'm taking, I'm trying to be a supportive player," Spencer said. "Trying to support the other musicians and the audience as much as possible. I aspire to just have a good time."

He loves the activity and the future Kansas City holds. Spencer falls back on the most popular answer for most KC musicians, it's all about the community.

"I've rarely seen a community that is so good at collaborations between artists and so many people who are interested in it. That really astounds me," Spencer said. "It inspired me seeing all these dif-

ferent types of artists like set builders, actors and writers coming together. I haven't seen stuff on that scale happen in other cities. It's an underrated beauty out here."

Everything Spencer:

<https://www.instagram.com/reeve.singular/>

Full Spencer Neon Jazz Interview Links:

<https://youtu.be/tKdHbddCFFQ>

<https://spotifyanchor-web.app.link/e/adwN-VW5JcNb>



If you haven't already done so, become a member of the KC Jazz Ambassadors today to help us achieve our mission of supporting local jazz musicians and the venues where they play. As an extra incentive, for the month of December, we're offering a special holiday discount of 50% off a premium membership, which includes a printed copy of the new and improved JAM delivered to you bi-monthly!





## KC Jazz & Blues

The Phoenix, a popular nightclub on the first floor of the landmark three-story Phoenix Hotel, is located in Kansas City's Garment District neighborhood. This popular nightclub came into existence in 1990, when the classic 1888 brick building where it is located was renovated and placed on the Historic Registry.

Prior to the club's 1990 renovation, the corner of 8th and Central had long been an excellent place to get a warm meal on a cold day or a cool drink on a summer afternoon. In addition to serving the local population, earlier eateries and watering holes at this site catered to travelers up and down the Kaw and Missouri Rivers, which happen to have their confluence less than a mile from the Phoenix's front door.

The current owner of the Phoenix says it this way, "I guess I was in the wrong place at the right time." After a stint in the corporate world some friends asked Matt Jones to get involved in the bar business in Westport. Firefly, The Dark Horse Tavern and Jaywalker's on the West side followed. In 2008, Matt bought the Phoenix from Jaylee Lambert. The nightclub had been closed for a time, and Matt said that he is very happy that he got involved when he did. "I have learned a lot, and had a lot of fun," added Matt, reminiscing that he is actually a fan of country music.

Valerius Saloon, the first drinking establishment at 8th and Central, opened in 1888 and was named after its proprietor, Frank Valerius. If



one looks closely, they can see Frank's last name etched into the stain glass above the front door. An etching of Charlie Parker's original gravestone was hung on the wall at the nightspot's opening to add to the original Valerius style cache, sadly and was mysteriously lifted from the wall years ago. As was Bird's original gravestone in Lincoln Cemetery, fitting, I guess.

When the club opened in 1990, the concept for the Phoenix was that of a piano bar. The bar was built around the piano so that the patrons could be close enough to request songs or buy the piano-player a drink. Weekdays the business lunch crowd was hosted by Phoenix owner-operator Ron Schoonover and his lovely wife Vicki. A few months before the piano bar was open to the public, he hired pianist Russ Long and me to perform at an event for the Kansas City Historical Preservation Society, in honor of the building's historic significance. Following the success of the party, we were

*continued on page 14*

# Club Scene

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www.trivediwine.com

offered a piano-vocal duo position, five nights a week, for the foreseeable future.

Ron, who really knew the bar business and never did anything halfway, built the biggest, sturdiest piano bar of all time. That is why, after almost 35 years, Lonnie McFadden can jump-up and tap-dance on that bar, or Millie Edwards can jump over it and belt out a song. The bar structure of that bar can easily support just about anything.

The Phoenix first really started to cook when pianist Tim Whitmer came back from a year-long hiatus in Sedona, Arizona, in late 1990. Tim put his five-piece band of jazz veterans in an early evening slot on Friday nights and with that, a KC jazz tradition began.

Those early forays into after-work jazz continue to this day. With Lonnie McFadden and his trio up the street at the Ambassador Hotel's Reno Club and Tim Whitmer's Goodtime Review at the Black Dolphin, a new generation or two has captured the fun on the Phoenix's stage.

Whitmer's multi-generational band included three members of the Five Scamps, a beloved local band that was formed in 1943 by pianist Rudy Masingale. These elder statesmen of jazz included Lucky Wesley, Rusty Tucker, and LC "Speedy" Huggins. Their well-honed character added polished authenticity to the effervescent charm that Mr. Whitmer brought to the stage.

A natural showman, Tim easily provided entertainment that bridged the gap between the bustling lunch crowd and the low-key 9pm piano bar offerings provided by Russ Long, Joe Cartwright and others. These elders of the music were well balanced by another band member, the young dapper sax-man about town, Jim Mair. Jim was fresh from UMKC's jazz program at the time, offering reeds and some very swinging arrangements to the mix. Mr. Mair made a recording about that time, called "8th and Central". The recording attests to the sense of Kansas City jazz history that he found, and helped cultivate, in the new nightclub.

The swingin' icing on the Whitmer jazz cake was the self-described "Whore-House Trumpeter", Pat Morrissey. A Kansas City native, Pat began the tradition of playing while standing on the bar when capacity crowds began filling the Phoenix around 4:30 each and every Friday afternoon. There was simply not enough room to play the trumpet with the velocity that Pat generated at ear level of the crowd, so Pat "walked the bar" to the delight of the club's many patrons. That tradition of walking began years earlier: Kansas City saxophonist Ben Kynard finely tuned his bar walking during his stint with the Lionel Hampton Jazz Orchestra in the 40s and 50s to the delight of patrons around the country.

In 2017, Phoenix owner Matt Jones said there was a possibility of adding out of town acts to the high caliber local acts the Phoenix has relied upon. "I have a staff of 17 led by General Manager Carisa Lynch and Chef Jacob Silvey. We get calls every day from musical acts coming through town who have heard about us and want to play the Phoenix." The MGDs were born at the Phoenix, cramming a 7-piece horn band onto the cramped stage, and they, and others, have now turned into traveling bands themselves.

Phoenix founder, Ron Schoonover knew jazz. He had learned much of it from the time he spent managing The Chicago and Kansas City Playboy Clubs. But beyond his skills at club management, jazz, was something Ron really liked and supported. "The Phoenix was my moment in the sun," said Schoonover, in a recent telephone conversation.

The Kansas City Playboy Club was located high atop the Continental Hotel, at 11th and Baltimore. Well known pianists Russ Long, Pete Eye, and Frank Smith were all mainstays of this famous venue, along with veteran drummer Tommy Ruskin, Milt Abel and others. Russ Long had even had the cream-puff Playboy gig; playing several years at

*continued on page 17*



# FLUTIENASTINESS:

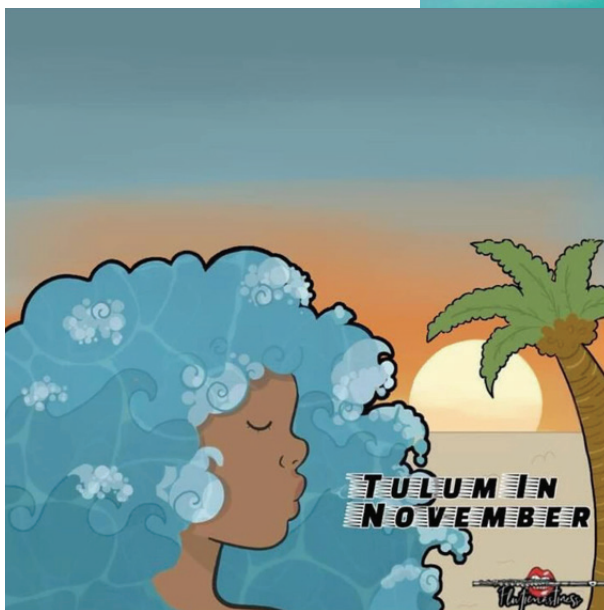
## Tulum in November (2024)

Amber “Flutienastiness” Underwood recently dropped a new single, and it’s funky, disco-like, and full of ‘70s era vigor and vibrancy. The new tune lights up a cold December room like a disco ball.

Heavy on the 2 & 4, it’s new music. In it, Underwood soars, her notes full and silvery. Her held high notes are divine, secular, but church-like. There’s a psalm or two in this tune.

For those who say there’s nothing new in Kansas City, this tune argues the contrary. KC is as hip and new and in as anywhere, and folks like Underwood keep proving it, tune by tune.

Throughout, the violin’s intone, pulling quick on the off beats, reminiscent of the theme song for SHAFT. And the drum track is full of electronic



hand claps. It’s hip. It’s fun. It made me want to dance.

Get it. As before, it will warm a room.

“Tulum in November” is available on major streaming services. ¶

—Kevin Rabas

by Amber “Flutienastiness” Underwood

# Become a Jazz Ambassador!



The KC Jazz Ambassadors' mission is to help keep jazz alive in KC by supporting local jazz musicians and the venues where they play. If you want to be a part of this mission, read on for ways to get involved!

If you haven't already done so, become a member of the KC Jazz Ambassadors today to help us achieve our mission. As an extra incentive, for the month of December, we're offering a special holiday discount of 50% off a premium membership, which includes a printed copy of the new and improved JAM delivered to you bi-monthly!

Get all the news of upcoming events in the JAM Magazine; help recognize and spotlight local jazz musicians at the JAM Awards; fund Jazz Futures (the local jazz education program); provide end-of-life assistance to local jazz musicians; and provide assistance to local musicians in need! See details below about the funds and programs your membership supports.

Annual JAM Awards is a people's choice award where KCJA members and jazz fans honor their favorite local artists and venues in a year-end ceremony at the December Jazz Futures show. This is where we shine a spotlight on some of the great talent in KC, and is a great opportunity to recognize some of the exciting up and coming young local musicians. This year's event will be on December 12 at Voo Lounge. SAVE THE DATE! Scan the QR code below for details about this fun event!



Tommy Ruskin Memorial Fund for Jazz Education is 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 of monthly 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. The KCK Community College Jazz Band, led by Brett Jackson, will be the featured Jazz Futures band at this year's JAM Awards Ceremony on December 12th.

The John Booth Legacy Fund is a recently established fund, named for a local jazz musician who wanted to provide a way to support uninsured and underinsured local jazz musicians by covering expenses associated with end-of-life arrangements. Through the Legacy Fund, we seek to prevent a lack of resources from depriving any of our local jazz legends of their dignity, and to ensure that they are remembered and cherished as they rightfully deserve in times of illness or passing.

Musicians Assistance Fund (MAF) continues to assist local jazz musicians with medical bills, housing/living expenses, replacement of stolen equipment and other types of hardship that interferes with their ability to play gigs and earn money. During times of crisis like the coronavirus pandemic, we used this fund to make grants totaling \$16,000 to support local jazz musicians.

We have 3 membership levels designed to fit any budget. Student/Musician: \$35 a year; Supporting

*continued on page 24*

Member: \$50 a year; and Premium Member: \$89 a year (includes a printed copy of the JAM mailed to you bi-monthly). If you're already a member, this would be a great gift to give to your friends who love jazz, especially with our exclusive 50% discount on a premium membership - only available during December!

You can also become a sponsor. This allows you to advertise in JAM Magazine and with a banner

ad on our website to help raise awareness about your event, program, business, etc. to an audience of jazz enthusiasts. Choose a sponsorship level that fits your needs.

Scan the QR code below to become a member or sponsor and you'll be able to show that you're a proud Jazz Ambassador with our gift to you of a jazzy tote bag with the KCJA logo on it!



## PHOENIX CONTINUED FROM 14

the flagship resort of the Playboy chain in Geneva, Wisconsin.

In the 1970s Ron ran a nightclub named Mother's on Main. Located just north of 51st and Main, Mother's had been a show-lounge, with Vegas acts and rock acts such as the Buckingham's, who had enjoyed a pop hit or 2 and were now playing clubs. In the Urban Cowboy days of the late 1970s, Ron and Chiefs player Kenny Kramer opened Ron's Chouteau Inn. Ron and I became friends back then and so it seemed natural for him to ask me to join him again when he opened the Phoenix.

The patrons of the Phoenix are varied and of all age groups. Matt Jones, who now has an almost twenty-year history at the nightclub said back in 2017, "I really love to speak with regulars from Omaha, Springfield or Tulsa, who drive into Kansas City once every month or two to catch an evening with Lonnie or Tim."

Downtown Kansas City has really changed in the past 35 years, and there is a large group of "loft-dwellers, condo-kids and empty-nesters" living walking distance from the restaurant and bar. "That is our main crowd," confided Matt, "but I really love the idea that the Phoenix draws tourists. I didn't make the place . . . the Phoenix is much better than I am."

As the Phoenix was finding its place in Kansas City, pianist Tim Whitmer came back to town and

the fire started. When Ron's niece, Karrin Allyson graduated from college in Omaha, she began recording and playing in Kansas City. This eventually brought international jazz attention to the Phoenix.

"I had done my master's recitals in classical music," says Karrin Allyson, "I was leading a female rock band called Tomboy and playing a few



Karrin Allyson

clubs around the Midwest. My uncle Ron asked if I could come to Kansas City and play a few nights in his jazz club," said Karrin. Ron said it was his dad, Karrin's grandfather, who used to drive her to piano lessons as a kid that told him, "call your niece and get her down there to play some jazz".

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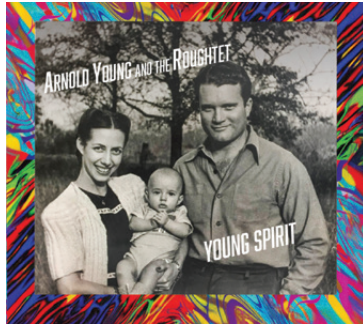
# For the Record

Arnold Young and the Roughtet

## Young Spirit

(2024)

Arny Young has been a fixture and bright star in the KC scene as far as I can remember, as a fellow drummer. And he does things differently, such as with his Roughtet, where he recruits mainly younger musicians to learn and perform music sometimes on the fringes, including new music that's as hip as a Mingus or Monk tune—or tunes that draw heavily on world music, like West African rhythms. Young is a pro at playing “out” and revitalizing the scene, such as through music dubbed “free jazz,” which the Roughtet indubitably plays—and with zest and passion and musicianship. On this last count, many shelve and exclude free jazz because it's often played by new and green (and often lackadaisical) musicians, but not so with Young and the Roughtet. These are skillful players—with a sense of the jazz tradition and a deftness on their instruments. It's not noise. It's almost symphonic in the way a Mingus tune harkens back to an Ellington tune. With all this in mind, you are ready to hear Arnold Young and the Roughtet's new album, “Young Spirit,” a fine addition to an already growing discography by this group and a fresh, new sound in KC. Go hear these guys live at Westport Coffee House Theater and beyond. It'll move you. And it'll move the dial on what you know and listen to, if you let it. And it's easy to. It's energetic, rhythmic, melodic mu-



sic—and Arny reminds me of Dannie Richmond, Mingus's drummer, on drums. Or Art Blakey, since this is Arny's band. It's hip. It's melodic. And, one must remember, Richmond began on sax, and so melodicism begins.

Some of my favorite moments on the album include when Arny trades fours with his Roughtet. They're sophisticated conversations through music, Arny often choosing a phrase from the sax or piano and playing it across the drums and cymbals, but altering and adding to it, making it “drum music.” Max Roach was great at this. So is Arny. I also appreciate how the melodies of Arny's tunes also have a similar effect, a conversation between the horns and drums on the head of the tune. Other composer-drummers do this, but few in our town. I can't think of many. And Arny's nods through music to folks like Mingus are not sycophantic, but instead homages—new and fresh and forward-facing. This is our music, the music of this time and place, made by one of own.

The album is anchored by KC luminary Gerald Spaits on bass, along with John Nichols and Nick Gasser on select tracks. It grooves hard. All of the horn section graduated from UMKC under tutelage and era of Bobby Watson, including Jacob Schwartzberg (tenor sax), Quin Wallace (trumpet), Brady Johnstone (alto sax), Nicholas E. Howell (trumpet).

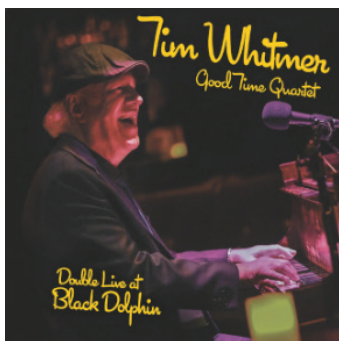
Enjoy a new addition to what is KC, now and beyond. And go see this Roughtet, when you can.

—Kevin Rabas

# Tim Whitmer Good Time Quartet Double Live at Black Dolphin

(2024)

In a new album, KC perennial Tim Whitmer brings the live feel of a night in the illustrious Black Dolphin listening room in a double set, double album. Like the group's title ("Good Time Quartet"), the album is lively, upbeat, warm.



Whitmer, who has been performing in KC more than four decades, brings his usual bright, upbeat, celebratory style across the entire album.

And, like at the club, it's a party. You can dance. You can drink. And you don't want to talk. You want to listen.

De Marchi on drums is always musical and can always structure a melodic, engaging epic solo, as is demonstrated on "Kind of Pretty," which has some resemblance to "Cute" (Hefti) in that it begins with solo brushes interludes (short brushes solo, band, short brushes solo, band), but is also all its own. Later in the tune, De Marchi switches to sticks and solos in his characteristic melodic way. (You can always clearly hear the tune.)

Overall, the band is very KC, harkening to an earlier age with tunes like "Jumpin' Wit Joy," which barrel forward at break-neck speed, like a run-away streetcar. Michael Herrera II, on sax, bops his way through, and Chase McRoy pulls us onward, fingertip by fingertip, fast, across upright bass strings. "Jumpin'" also includes an impressive, burnin' solo by McRoy. (This is not

a bass solo you'd snooze through, but instead be awakened by.)

The album appears to be one of all originals (and reimaginings), featuring not only Whitmer's bandleader and pianist skills, but also his deft expertise at composition. There are nods to KC luminaries, Jay McShann, maybe Bird, certainly Basie. The album reinvigorates history and gives it a place in the present through these new stylings of now classic sounds.

But I don't want you to think the whole album is of one fiery tenor. "Montego Breeze" is a slower latin tune for flute, and "Dancing with Theresa" is solo piano: haunting, chilly, with a classical touch.



For the price of admission, you essentially get a double, almost two hours of music. If you can't get to the Black Dolphin tonight, you've got this. A bright, warm listen, during a cold winter. Get it.

—Kevin Rabas

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# Current Jazz Ambassadors Members

LYNN ABRAMS	WALTER DRAHEIM	SIDNEY & FRANCES JONES-MALONE	FRED SLOUGH & PATRICIA HOUSH
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BOB & BRIDGET BAGBY	AWC ENTERPRISES	HELEN SEYMOUR	FRANK STRADA & DOROTHY MURRAY
MELANIE & JOHN T BAILEY	NELSON & MARY ELLEN FARNEY	ROD MCBRIDE	DAN & MARY STURDEVANT
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ANTHONY DEMARCO	J P MAKUS		
JAMES DICKERSON			
ALICE DIEDERICH			
JOE DIMINO/NEON JAZZ			
CYNTHIA DOLLARD			



# There's a little old man

There's a little old man  
that sits slumped over so far  
he's almost at a  
50° bend  
when I go to the jazz at noon series off his-  
toric 18th & vine  
while his wife sits next to him holding his  
hand  
& I feel the history  
& lots of jazz  
flowing through them  
& it's the most quintessential beautiful  
thing  
I think that I could ever witness in a paltry  
populated crowd  
as the band swings  
& his head moves ever slightly to all of the  
thick memories that made him  
feel just right  
on this here planet of ours.

Joe Dimino

# NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL 70TH ANNIVERSARY

July 17th and 18th of 1954 was the very first historically relevant Jazz Festival. This event permanently changed the way an audience experienced Jazz outside of a typical Jazz club setting. It also opened up an audience that previously was more comfortable going to hear Jazz in a club setting.

George Wein was a young man in his early 20s running a small Jazz Club in a Boston Hotel called Storyville. In the winter of 1953, one of the customers who was a regular fan of Jazz, Elaine Lorillard, approached George with the idea of creating a Jazz event in Newport, Rhode Island, where she and her husband, Louis, had one of their large homes. The Lorillards were heirs to the Lorillard Tobacco Company. The purpose of the event wasn't an idea originally conceived for the masses, but instead for the purpose of entertaining the elite residents of Newport, Rhode Island during the heat of the summer.

This proposal gave George the early idea of a completely new way to present Jazz in a more family friendly environment. Elaine Lorillard committed \$20,000 to George to get the event concept started. George worked with Elaine for a location in Newport, and George worked on the booking of the musicians.

George not only owned his own Jazz club, he was also an excellent pianist. There was a love hate relationship with some of the Jazz musicians, who felt that George was not paying them enough. But at the same time, they needed the opportunity for the exposure they received playing such a high-profile event.

I am honored to have met George through Clark Terry in the late 1970s, and I will always

be grateful for the opportunities that Clark and George afforded me. I can remember talking with George early in our friendship about how he had no idea how this new opportunity would change the trajectory of his music career. George was a great businessman, and I was one of many that George gave opportunities to work in the Jazz world, on numerous levels. He became a huge influence in the producing of concerts and Jazz. His influence will continue for many years to come.

Now let's talk about the lineup of the first Newport Jazz Festival. Eddie Condon, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Oscar Peterson Trio, Lester Young, Gerry Mulligan and others. An unbelievable lineup. After the festival was over each night, the Lorillards invited all of the Jazz lineup to an after-hours jam that lasted into the early morning.

There were many memorable performances over the years of the various forms and formats of the evolution of the original Newport concept. The next memorable performance was in 1956. This was the first year that Duke Ellington appeared at Newport Jazz Festival. Duke's career was just chugging along. His performance started off as just another performance, until he decided to combine two pieces of music from 1937, Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue, with an unbelievable lengthy solo by tenor sax player Paul Gonsalves. To say that this performance brought the house down is an understatement. Next was 1958 and the memorable block buster performance by Anita O'Day. Then there was the 1971 historic performance of the legendary Dave Brubeck. All of these are part of the numerous recordings of the many memorable performances.



# SARY

The second year of the Newport Jazz Festival had a last-minute addition to the lineup. George was approached by Miles Davis, who was just cleaned up from heroin addiction, to give him a chance to redeem himself. George agreed. The recording of Miles' performance was beyond what anyone expected, and it changed the perception of Miles' career for this period in his personal struggles.

Now let me go back to 1959 to talk about the some more history. The folk music market was larger than the Jazz following. George contacts Albert Grossman and Pete Seeger about the development of a new concept for an outdoor festival. This became the Newport Folk Festival. The early sponsorship for the event was Ben and Jerry Ice Cream. Of the many memorable music performances was the performance and recording of the Kingston Trio.

In 1962 George created Festival Productions Inc. A month after the 1969 Newport Jazz Festival, there was another game changing music event, Woodstock Music Festival.

Because of Newport Jazz Festival's success and popularity, Newport felt that the Festival was attracting an unruly crowd, and it was canceled in 1961. The Festival resumed the next year. After this George expanded the Newport Jazz brand with a World Tour in 1962. Some of these World Tours were coordinated with the US State Department. Woody Herman performed in 1970 at the first Newport Jazz Festival in Osaka, Japan.

In 1971 there was another incident that caused the Newport Jazz Festival to be relocated to New York City. At first it was called the Newport Jazz Festival/ NYC. Then there was a period of time that



the Festival was renamed The Kool Jazz Festival because of a new sponsorship from Kool Cigarettes Company. In 1981 George brought the Newport Jazz Festival back to Newport, Rhode Island and also kept a second version in NYC, as Newport Jazz Festival/NYC. The Newport Jazz Festival was still being kept alive when the Kool Jazz Festival in New York City was renamed to The JVC Jazz Festival, funded by The Japanese Victor Corp in 1984 and that continued to 2009. This is how it became a two-location annual event.

During ten years of the JVC Festival, George gave me the opportunity to bring in 3 different advanced students to perform as opening acts for headliners of the ten-day event. Two of those schools over those years I picked were Jim Mair's students from KCK Community College and

## NEWPORT CONTINUED

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Clarence Smith's from Penn Valley Community College. I have about a dozen or so early posters from the Newport Jazz Festival, Kool Jazz Festival and the JVC Festival that George gave to me over the years.

It's difficult name a Jazz great who has not performed a George Wein event. George passed away a few years ago. His influence and impact on Jazz music still continues, with world events and the Newport Jazz Festival, which continues to have a major impact on the Jazz audiences of

today and long into the future. Along the way there were a couple of attempts to create competing Jazz Events in Newport, Rhode Island, but none of them were ever able to compete with the Newport Jazz Festival.

I know I have jumped around a bit with this incredible Jazz history. I encourage you all to research the diverse list of Jazz greats who have performed at a Newport Jazz Festival and at the other numerous Jazz festivals under various titles here in the U.S and around the world. It's amazing, to say the least. ||

## PHOENIX CONTINUED FROM 16

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"He gave me 2 weeks, solo, stated Karrin, "I filled in for Tim Whitmer and ended up meeting Bob Bowman and the guys I made my first records with; I met Danny Embrey, Rod Fleeman, Todd Strait, Russ Long, Milt Abel, Frank Smith and the conductor of the Kansas City Symphony, Bill McGlaughlin, all while hanging out at over at Milton's, on the trafficway."

"It was my wonderful Grandfather, Ron's dad who said, 'you got to listen to your niece, she can sing a little bit or whatever'... so he gave me a shot, I stayed at the Savoy, and then I moved to KC eventually, from Minneapolis." Karrin continued, "It was great. I got to meet Speedy Huggins, the Scamps, oh my goodness! Then Rod (Fleeman) and I played a duo there, amazing."

When Frank Sinatra played Kemper Arena in the early 90s, he too graced the tiny Phoenix stage and an 8 X 10 photo of ol' Blue Eyes was placed over the piano bar in commemoration of his late-night foray.

There haven't been a lot of changes to the Phoenix since 1990, when the club transformed into what it resembles today. It has gone through 3 or 4 owners, one of whom closed it down for 6 months or so, but the popularity of the nightspot and the jazz fans that frequent it, demanded the Phoenix's rise from the ashes.

"I'm so glad to see that the place is still open," states Karrin, "Ron was so great, and I have a special place in my heart for the place when he was there. Because he was actually a host when he was there, he would make me crack up with his sense of humor. He could be so geeky! He was really good at that, and I was so sad when he left... well I guess it was me that left first! Actually, I feel really, really lucky that I had my time in Kansas City."

A few of the same musicians still frequent the Phoenix; Millie Edwards, from the Wild Women of Kansas City, hosts the Sunday brunch. By changing with the times, the Phoenix features a brand-new crowd of exciting performers, including Chloe McFadden, Lonnie's daughter on Thursday nights, and the readers of JAM Magazine have just voted The Phoenix the most popular nightclub in Kansas City in 2024! Drop by and hear live music six nights per week, enjoy a full menu, and a brunch featuring live jazz, every Sunday from 10am – 2pm.

David Basse

Updated from KC Jazz Ambassador Magazine  
2017 ||

# Coming Back to Kansas City

I could not wait to leave Kansas City.  
Never wanted to be a child,  
wanted to grow up and escape the  
wide boulevards of this city.  
So I left, only to come back home  
broke and disappointed.  
Now I drive the boulevards, just east  
of Troost, this boundary of east  
side and west, filled with hidden text.  
Decaying mansions on both sides  
of the boulevard are boarded up,  
divided up, converted into churches,  
and apartments. They hint at past beauty,  
grandeur, manicured lawns, lilies  
and forget-me-nots. I've come back  
to this polite and slumbering city.  
I now admire the fountains, Spanish  
tiles and well laid boulevards.  
Have a circle of family and friends,  
sit in jazz clubs, have finally found  
home and intersections of east and west  
in the rhythms and riffs.

Phyllis Becker

# Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors 2024 voting results are in!

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 categories. This is a people's choice award, so it's a chance to honor your personal favorites! Winners will be announced at the Jazz Ambassadors Annual Meeting/Party on December 12th.

Click on the following link or QR Code for more info:

[www.facebook.com/events/424878050374130](https://www.facebook.com/events/424878050374130)

