

# Jam

Jazz Ambassador Magazine

APRIL + MAY 2025

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Nominations for the Kansas City Jazz  
Ambassadors 2025 JAM Awards began in March

**Yoko  
Draws Basie**

**Carl Allen**

**Roger Wilder**

**Duke Ellington**

**Bach Aria Soloists**

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*G. Johnson*







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Stay hip,  
David Basse, President and Editor

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# The Belfast Four Touring the World UNESCO Style

The 18th and Vine Brewery is an excellent place to get a fresh cold beer and to meet up with Jazz musicians, patrons who enjoy jazz and those wanting a cold, refreshing beer. Since the brewery is owned by musicians, the venue welcomes musicians. It is a great place to express yourself as a musician and meet up with friends.

Recently, I found myself at the brewery in a fast-moving discussion about music, musicians, and the importance of funding. At first, I thought



Melissa Robinson

I had been transported to another universe or at least another city because as many of you know, Kansas City is known for trying to get musicians to perform at bargain-basement prices. Everyone was hyped up discussing funding for the music, musicians, vocalists and others.

One was Melissa Robinson, Kansas City Councilwoman, who happens to be a niece of legendary Kansas City pianist George Salisbury, one of the

framers of the current jazz program at UMKC, back in the 1960s and 70s.

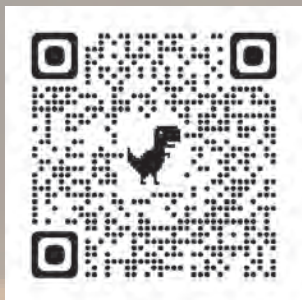
Ms. Robinson spoke about government support of United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and individual artists. Her first comment was very provocative, "How do we turn musicians into homeowners and get them to the table for multi-million-dollar civic development?"

*continued on page 32*

# Nominations for 2025 Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors JAM Awards began 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.



# 2024 Winners/Nominees

*Last year's 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  
Roger Wilder

## **Favorite KC Instrumentalist/Singer**

Alex Abramovitz  
Dan Sturdevant

## **KC Jazz Ambassador of the Year**

Eboni Fondren  
Chris Burnett  
David Basse  
Ernest Melton  
Jeff Harshbarger  
Lynn Abrams





# American Music 100th

This is the 100th year anniversary of the forming of the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Duke was part of a band called Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians in the early 1920s. Elmer was not paying the band members, so they threw out Elmer and voted Duke the new leader of the band in 1924. Thus, Duke began forming the beginning of history.

How this came about and how it evolved is from information I have learned from historians, the Ellington family and stories from Clark Terry and Barrie Lee Hall Jr., both of whom worked with the Duke in the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Barrie Lee Hall Jr



also had a unique perspective because he performed with not only Duke, but also with Mercer Ellington and with Paul Ellington. Some of this story is also based on my experience dealing with the Duke Ellington Collection, which is housed in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Duke's Band morphed into various forms, from band, sextet and orchestra. He had a 50-year run as an influential contributor to music and to jazz history. Duke never wanted to be known as just a jazz musician.

He thought that was too narrow a definition of his music.

Written by Tom Alexios



I met Duke in 1972. The times I was in his company you could tell he was slowing down and a bit frail compared to the times I had seen him perform. Even through Duke's waning years, he was still kind and very interesting to talk to. Duke won 11 Grammy's over his career.

The following are a few of the many highpoints in Duke's career.

Duke Ellington Orchestra becomes the House Band at the Cotton Club in New York City in December of 1927 for about 5 years. During those 5 years the Cotton Club broadcasted on the top radio station nightly Duke Ellington performances. This was a great move in building a following and name recognition from the radio promotions.

It was in the 1930s that Duke wrote Mood Indigo, a huge success for him. Then there was Satin Doll and Sophisticated Lady, and then so much more after that. He never stopped writing and tweaking the music he had already written.

Duke was now starting to compose songs for Broadway productions, motion pictures and some television shows, and also for ballet productions and other areas of music. Duke was interested in all of it.

Next was Duke bringing his music to Carnegie Hall in New York City in January 1943. He wanted to bring his music out of the clubs and into the better venues. I am enclosing one of the copies I have of a weekly page from Duke's payment book for the wages of the orchestra, and also showing who was in the orchestra then, and the differences in pay scale. The Carnegie Hall performance was the introduction of the Black, Brown and Beige Composition. which was a huge success.

Duke's appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1956 was another well-timed booster shot for his career. That timing garnered Duke with the Man of Year cover for Time Magazine. A very big deal back then.

Next came a prestigious invitation to perform for Queen Elizabeth at the Festival of the Arts in Leeds, England in 1958. The Queen really enjoyed the performance by Duke, and she was quite taken

by Duke in conversation after the event. Duke was also very honored by it all.

That's when Duke returned to the United States. He sat down with Billy Strayhorn to collaborate on the writing of a Special Suite exclusively for just the Queen. Duke paid for all the expenses out of his own pocket for the recording and for the studio time for all the musicians. Then Duke had only one record pressed. This was then specially delivered to the Queen who, by the way, was very pleased by the gesture.

Pay Roll  
Pay Roll for week ending April 22, 1942.  
Tristram Ballroom, South Gate Calif.

NAME	SALARY	DREW	UNION	S SEC	AMT DUE
ELLI GTON	250.00	151.80	10.50	5.00	82.70
STEWART	125.00	100.00	7.00	2.50	15.50
JANCE	100.00		7.00	2.00	91.00
W JONES	85.00	25.00	7.00	1.70	51.30
BARDECK	100.00	40.00	7.00	2.00	51.00
CARNEY	125.00	10.00	7.00	2.50	105.50
BIGARD	125.00	10.00	7.00	2.50	105.50
HODGE	125.00	65.00	7.00	2.50	40.50
WEESTER	100.00	40.00	7.00	2.00	51.00
NANTON	100.00	88.00	7.00	2.00	91.00
TIZOL	125.00		7.00	2.50	115.50
BROWN	100.00	88.00	7.00	2.00	91.00
GUY	100.00		7.00	2.00	91.00
HAGLIN	75.00	40.00	7.00	1.50	28.50
GREEN	120.00	100.00	7.00	2.50	10.50
ANDERSON 51Days	89.20			1.98	87.22
JEFFREY	50.00	22.99		1.00	26.01
STRAYHORN	75.00	20.00		1.00	55.00
M ELLINGTON	50.00	88.00		2.50	49.50
R B JONES	55.00	25.00		1.10	28.90
CHAS L BOYD	105.00			2.10	102.90
TOTALS	2181.20	649.78	109.50	47.58	1280.90

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Next point of time was now the passing of Billy Strayhorn in May 1967. This was Duke's friend and collaborator for so many years. This was a time of reflection of his own mortality, with the loss of Billy and his own early health issues. This created a spiritual awakening in Duke, and was the inspiration to write the Sacred Charts, which was considered by Duke to be one of his finest works. Duke Premiered the Sacred Charts at St. John the Devine Cathedral, January 1968. He performed the Sacred Charts to an audience of over 6000 people who were very pleased with the experience.

continued on page 35



by Joe Dimino

UMKC Jazz Director

# Carl Allen

## Reflects on First Album in Decades & Growing into His Teaching Gig

On the cusp of a brand-new year, we caught up with Veteran Drummer & Educator Carl Allen who enthusiastically discussed his first album in 20 years and his relatively new gig as the Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. The album is called 'Tippin' and is out on Cory Weeds' Cellar Live label with a cast of legendary familiar guests.

"When I started thinking about who I wanted to play on the album, Christian McBride came right to mind. He's like a brother. With Chris Potter, there's something about the way that he plays that reminds me of Michael Brecker and Freddie Hubbard," Carl said. "Normally when I do a record, it's a story I'm piecing together. For this one, I had a storyline together and prepared all the music. We didn't rehearse until we got to the studio. We were in and out in 5 hours."

The serendipity of this album and the spark that is consistent throughout was like a rendezvous of familiarity. McBride reminded Carl that he teamed up with Potter exactly a year prior to do a project together in the same famed Rudy Van Gelder studio in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

"Kicking the album off with Parker's Mood was ringing in a new chapter for me. I always say that if you do a record with no blues on it, maybe

it's not a jazz record," Carl said. "Me splitting my time between New York and Kansas City, it just seemed like a natural thing."

His journey to Kansas City began back in 2020 when the legendary Bobby Watson stepped down as the Director of the UMKC jazz program that brought to life a new crop of stellar musicians. There were some big shoes to fill and Carl was ready with his vision.

"Things have gotten better. It was not so great in the beginning. I'm originally from the Midwest in Milwaukee and noticed with a lot of small markets there is a vibe of being territorial," Carl said "I come in as the director of the jazz program from New York after teaching at Juilliard and there is a wall that is up. It was rough for a minute. I have high standards."

When Carl took over the program, it was during COVID and for the first year there was no real director of the program. The mentality was loose with the students and he was ready to groom them into the next generation to carry on the rich jazz tradition of the Kansas City lineage.

"Here I come with this whip saying class is at 10 and we start at 9:50. I look at it this way, you are not doing this for me. We gotta do what we gotta do to serve the music," Carl noted. "When



## CARL ALLEN CONTINUED

I had folks that complained, I told them I would give them a long list of successful musicians that studied under me.”

He reminds the students that if they want to hop on stage with the legends and be a part of a music business that can be brutal, you have to get some thick skin. Also, it’s all about respecting the artform.

“Part of my role and responsibilities as the director is to get the student to understand what you have to do to be worthy of this music. It is very special music,” Carl said. “I have been blessed to grow up playing and knowing folks that I listened to. The likes of Art Blakey, Freddie Hubbard, Jackie

McClearn, Hank Jones and Elvin Jones. Those guys talked to me about what this means.”

Warming up to the Kansas City scene has been akin to his growing pains with guiding the UMKC program.

“About a month or so before I started at UMKC, I was invited to be a part of a zoom call with all the movers and shakers in town. One of the things they told me at that time that didn’t make sense, yet I found out over time, was that there is a lot of music in this town and the problem is that we all work in silos,” Carl explained. “I could not understand why everyone feels like they are competing with each other. There is a lot of talent here.”



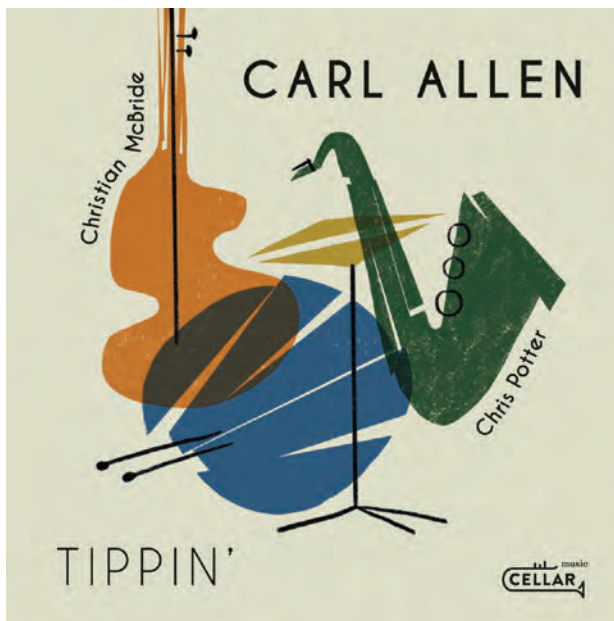
Carl believes more listening rooms like The Blue Room would bode very well for the KC scene. Places where fans are serious about the music, willing to pay a cover and contain their talk while the show roars on stage.

“Part of my challenge is getting students outside of Kansas City to see what we have there. Many of the students of UMKC have traditionally come from the surrounding areas,” Carl said. “Quite often when I travel and recruit, I get people that didn’t realize there was a jazz program here. As a city and a scene, we can do a better job talking about who we are and what we do.”

Over the years, he has been groomed on his approach to the bandstand and reverence of the music by the likes of Benny Golson, Freddie Hubbard, Jackie McClean, Art Blakey, Dr. Billy Taylor and Benny Green. Particularly, how do you take care of the folks that take care of jazz?

“The big secret about me is that I’m kind of an introvert. I am more comfortable being by myself. When we came off the bandstand, I would watch Benny Green talk to everyone in that club. I never understood or appreciated that at the time,” Carl said. “Now as I look back, I think there is something to that. You start to understand how important one’s personality is to the music. One of the things Benny Golson would talk about is that we either have a fragrance or an odor.”

The other thing he learned about the legends is to listen and figure it out. Essentially, if you question advice, the elders will stop dispensing advice because they assume you want to find the shortcut to the solution. Art Blakey told him to sit up while



playing and to let the bass drum breathe some more. Bobby Hutcherson would always tell him to drink a warm glass of water with lemon in it to boost his immunity.

“I always say that when you spend time with people that leave an impression on you, there is a part of them that becomes a part of you,” Carl said. “For instance, I love pocket squares. That comes from my time with Benny Golson and Art

Farmer. I love suits. That comes from Benny Golson and Freddie Hubbard. I love nice pens. That comes from Jackie McClean. I love Tumi luggage. That comes from being with Billy Taylor. None of them would talk to you about it. You would want to be like them.”

Once he made the pilgrimage from Green Bay to New York, he stitched together his reverence for the community. Something that runs deep at both UMKC and in the KC jazz scene.

“One of the reasons why I run the program the way I do is because the students need to know what it’s like to be in the presence of people like Max Roach and Art Blakey,” Carl said. “I want you to know what great looks like. Aspire to a higher level. I know that message can ruffle some feathers and hurt some feelings, but what we are trying to aspire to is that next level.”

## Everything Carl

<https://carlallen.com/>

Full Carl Allen Interview with Joe Dimino

<https://youtu.be/zy2Z93xDkEQ>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/60d98TxClGhh-DxzXZqn3zJ?si=RFWMg1DCQVWzCa0g35aCdA>

# FULL OF SOUL

## KIM KEYS AT THE BLUE ROOM

(performance review)

KC-based Kim Keys offered a rousing recent performance at The Blue Room, one that seamlessly brought the audience into the act. It was a night of pure soul. Keys joked that the audience was now singing background and said, “Yeah. I’m hot for background singers,” during one of her singalongs of popular tunes from the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, including “Best of Me,” “All

Night Long (All Night),” and “Happy Feelin’s.” Keys opened the night with a forewarning and a promise, “I’ve (only) got a little bit of a voice, but I’m gonna give you what you came for.” And she gave a figurative nod to the tip jar, “If you’ve got anything for the band, this is our full-time job.”

Keys had the floor audience in the palm of her hand. Mostly couples, they swayed and leaned into their dates, like valentines. Keys proved she knew how to put lovers in the mood. Keys—backed by a melodic, articulate, powerful drummer, an understated and soulful bassist, and atmospheric keyboardist—opened every door, a heart locksmith.



Keys’s bassist provided that low tone you can feel in your chest, like the first pangs of love when you are aware of your heart and breath as much as you are of your hands and feet—and a bass groove can guide the first footsteps of that new dance.

At the end of the first set, Keys said, “If you don’t got to go to Sunday school, stay... in your seat.” Perhaps enchanted,

most stayed.

In an interview with “Canvas Rebel,” Keys says, “The way I show myself on stage. Whenever I do it, I plan to leave it where I am. My crowd participation is above and beyond. I plan to keep it that way” (19 Jan. 2023, [canvasrebel.com](http://canvasrebel.com)). On her Facebook page, she lists it like so: Kim Keys Muzic: “Up and coming artist from Arkansas now residing in Kansas City, KS. Just grooving through life and hope you follow to enjoy the ride.” In a postdated 11 Feb. 2024, Keys writes, “I’ve been here 4.5 years so I can call it HOME!!!! #CHIEFSKINGDOM...”

*continued on page 35*



# Yellowjackets

at the Folly

(performance review)



Yellowjackets returned to KC's Folly Theater this winter and warmed and lit up the room.

Bandleader Mintzer said, "This room (the Folly) has a long history, and we're happy to be a part of it...I hope your team (the Chiefs) wins

tomorrow...You know I'm a huge fan of baseball," he joked. "I play saxophone." Rick Truman of the Folly, who emceed, said, "I must say, is it not the best time to be a Kansas Citian?"

*continued*

Bandleader Bob Mintzer (tenor sax, EWI) led the quartet through a compelling evening of originals. Stately, but energetic, this is a band that knows how to build. It seemed like a night of thoughtful crescendos, tune to tune, solo to solo, where the band was not to be rushed, and patience paid. A slow stream of energy, sparks of static, built into cloud-to-cloud lightning. The crowd could first be seen bopping their heads, then tapping their feet, then erupting into hand-claps and whoots.

Mintzer was consummately melodic on sax, and his work on the EWI (electronic woodwind instrument) revealed an uncommon range and mastery of that contemporary implement. He would start a tune in an upper register and end much lower, one person playing like many, a kind of contemporary Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Russell Ferrante often began his piano and keyboard solos sparsely, but got busy, near solo's end, his fingers

blurred across the keys, centipede-like. Dane Alderson often comped with a subdued, understated approach, always in the pocket. But his solos built to Jaco-like intensity. With his closing flurries on six-string, Alderson was always a compelling watch and listen.

As a drummer, I focused on William Kennedy. In the audience, before the music, one local says, "His hi-hat is (set) really low." Another guy responds, "But he plays left-handed." The first guy says he asked drummer Kennedy about his drum set up some time ago, saying, "I've noticed your ride cymbal is getting progressively lower," over the years, to which Kennedy allegedly said, "I'm getting older, and I have to, to keep playing." Kennedy is 64—and energetic. There is no slowing him. (Kennedy keeps his ride cymbal just past and above the hi-hat. A leftie, his primary cymbal is within easy reach.) On the tune "Intrigue," a swing-funk

*continued on page 35*

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# EARLY ROGER WILDER

(PIANO)

In the 1980s, I met Roger Wilder at the Eastman School of Music at the six-week-long summer program. He was a trombonist then. We befriended each other, and he showed me around Rochester because it was his hometown. The next time I saw him he was a pianist. I started coming to KC around 2001, and he was good then, but now he's just off the charts, and everyone knows it. He has a humble heart, and everyone wants to play with him. There are good pianists in KC...but Roger is on another level. When Roger moved to the greater New York City area, I was the one to show him around. He moved to the suburbs above the Bronx. Sometimes,



when we went to New York, we would go to the club and I would introduce him to people. Then we began working together in earnest in Kansas City; it was mainly me traveling from the west coast to work with him, every few months...I kept returning, and I'm still returning.



I've known Roger since I was 15 and Todd Strait since I was 22...These guys, both of whom I met in New York, were my foot in the door to KC. We convened to perform there.

PS Scheps returns to KC about twice a year (or more) and performs at Westport Coffee House on Sunday, March 16 at 6 pm with "The Brad Gregory Sextet Plays the Music of Rob Scheps." The group goes into the studio the next two days. This includes newish original compositions by Scheps for the Jazz & Soul Portraits Project.

—Rob Scheps and Kevin Rabas





# *In the Nightclubs*

## Tim Reid Jr. Trio-Eddie V's

As I enter Eddie V's, I immediately take note of the guy on upright bass moving, as if in an affectionate dance with his upright bass, and sounding at times dynamic and other times moody.

Later I'm struck by the dexterity of the guy on piano as he interacts with the audience. He intuitively knows how audience members make their living, knows they're good at it, tells them so. And then the steady beat of the drums on each tune settles me down into a good place.

Tim Reid Jr., who leads the trio with piano and vocals, comes from Chicago and L.A. Dave Del Gandio, on drums hails from the East Coast. And Taygun Ozakinci, on bass, is a long-time K.C. resident who teaches music at Spring Hill High School, and is the director of orchestra in the Spring Hill area. It's obvious, he's got chops.

Eddie V's seems to want combos to focus on popular music, so the Tim Reid Trio accommodates them. Ozakinci switches to electric bass. They play,

among others, Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight, Benny and the Jets, and Just the Two of Us. The latter was done with piano, organ, and strong vocal. On It's Too Late Baby Ozakinci plucks out a fabulous solo, a fabulous solo I begin to realize I can count on in each tune.

One of Tim Reid's gifts is writing his own songs. So, we heard several original pieces like Just a Crush, Another Part of me (written by Reid?), and a memorable one called Katie. Maybe Mabel was a crowd pleaser which he tells me was written quickly in fifteen or twenty minutes. Because of these original pieces they often play at The Black Dolphin and Green Lady Lounge.

And then there were the standards, my favorite.

They did a great Lullaby of Birdland with a piano solo that sounded like a babbling brook in places. Along with another energetic and skillful bass solo. And the steady, expressive drums with an abrupt ending.

They did Lazy Bones, Moon River with a cool electric bass solo, My One and Only Love with another good bass solo, and Mr. P.C.

How High the Moon was crafted with scatting and a lilting piano solo. The consistently nimble-fingered excellence of the bass. And a good strong drum solo. Then they traded fours and tagged the ending three times.

Gee Baby Ain't I Good to You was the highlight of the evening with a soulful rendition from Reid along with a great solo from Ozakinci, again. I left Eddie V's and walked home on clouds.

Reid and Ozakinci play every first Thursday at Chaz. And they play at Eddie V's and Johnnie's Jazz Bar and Grille, sometimes on Main and sometimes in Liberty.

—Marilyn Carpenter



# My Uncle Louis And Me

grooving with my Uncle Louis as  
he pulls out thirty-threes dropping  
them carefully on the turntable  
one-by-one as we listened to Miles,  
Coltrane and Mingus, giving me  
an appreciation for jazz. I was  
an 8-year old girl coming of age.  
My ears perked up hearing the sultry  
moaning voice of a woman who  
sounded like she'd been worn-down.  
My soul connected to  
to her as if we were the  
same person. My Uncle Louis  
introduced me to Nina Simone.  
I closed my eyes and shook to the sound.  
While my hands held the album cover,  
I examined the picture on front as  
if it was a reflection of me.  
My uncle seemed to know that one day

I would be a woman who would  
experience the same drama  
as Nina Simone and it would  
possibly hurt me. He taught me  
about his struggles as a gay man  
and how he had to hide his life from  
his friends and family. It crushed me  
to see the far-off stare on his face  
when he thought I wasn't looking.  
I didn't quite understand the struggles  
of his life at 8-years old,  
he seemed to know I didn't judge  
him. It was our time together.  
If he were alive today, I would  
let him know I had his back.  
But, back then as an 8-year old girl,  
I was happy in the  
living room with my Uncle  
Louis, Nina, and me.

Janet M. Banks

# Club Scene

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Robert Altman's Movie

# Kansas City

Thirty years ago, this month of April, Robert Altman started the filming of a lifelong goal. A movie that would capture some of the major memories of Robert's life growing up in Kansas City, and as a teenager sneaking down to 18th and Vine to listen to the jazz of the time. This experience helped to shape Robert into a lifelong lover of jazz, and was a part of his life's experience that he wanted to pay tribute to on film. In 1992 an outline of a Kansas City movie script and concept started to come together.

After Robert returned from the military, Frank Bathydr Jr., the son of Frank Bathydr, gave Robert a job at Calvin Company, a company that was making industrial films. This opportunity was the spring board that motivated Robert to move to Los Angeles. It was also the start of Robert's directing career working on Alfred Hitchcock shows and the Western, *The Rifleman*, among many others, where he was con-



Fine Line Features

stantly honing his skills. This was around 1957.

Now fast forward to the 1990s. Robert Altman just finished a movie called "Ready to Wear," a satire comedy about the under belly of the haute French fashion industry. This film was funded by a French film consortium of investors. The consortium was interested in what Altman was planning next. He mentioned to the group about his lifelong dream to pay homage to his Kansas City roots and its rich jazz history. The French investors loved our jazz, and this was a story that hit all their energy of putting up the approximately \$20 million to fund the movie once Robert mentioned that

he not only wanted to do a movie on the 1930s, but that he also wanted to have a standalone soundtrack of top end jazz performances. Robert envisioned having performances in the movie and on the soundtrack. Knowing how popular jazz was then and still is, the investors knew the audience

by Tom Alexios

*continued on page 22*

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of French lovers of jazz would like the movie and would definitely like the soundtrack.

Robert now had funding and a script. And then he made a surprising pick for the music director, Hal Wilner. This was a surprise because most people thought Robert would pick Johnny Mandel, who Robert had worked with in the past.

Hal had worked with Robert on the movie, "Short Cuts" and had a large cult following as a music producer. With a unique production style, Hal was tasked with putting together a top lineup of jazz musicians. The hunt was on. And I don't think anyone was disappointed with the lineup Hal put together.

The Kansas City Movie soundtrack was released on Verve Records in May 1996. The lineup included Josh Redman, who had just won the prestigious Thelonious Monk Foundation Saxophone Compe-

tition in 1951. The year Josh won was my first year working with the Thelonious Monk Institution. Josh played Lester Young, Craig Handy played Coleman Hawkins, Nicholas Payton played Hot Lips Page, Cyrus Chestnut played Count Basie, Geri Allen played Mary Lou Williams and our beloved Kevin Mahogany played Big Joe Turner. Christian McBride, James Carter, Mark Whitfield, Victor Lewis, Ron Carter, James Zollar and Tyrone Clark were some of the others in the unbelievable lineup. Hal brought in Butch Morris as music arranger. I think we can agree that Hal did a great job on the soundtrack.

I had the good fortune of meeting Hal Wilner when I signed in to cover the film making when I was with Downbeat magazine. My friendship with Hal continued till his passing in April of 2020, twenty years after the filming of the movie. In one

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.

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of my conversations with Hal before he passed away, he told me he still considers his opportunities to work with Robert Altman as highlights to his career.

Chuck Haddix was a consultant on the film. Chuck's memories of the film were all very favorable, including the lengths that Hal went to in order to get as close as possible to the jazz style of the times.

A young Dennis Winslett was hanging around the various legendary jam sessions that were taking place later into the evenings, after each day of filming. It made enough of an impact on him that he later became the Director of Music Education at the American Jazz Museum for a few years in his music career.

I also talked with Josh Redman recently for this story, about his memories of the time. He said it brought a smile to his face. Regarding the lineup he got to work with, he mentioned Geri Allen and Nicholas Payton and all the other musicians with whom he continued friendships.

I don't want to leave out Harry Belafonte, who played a gangster in the movie, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Miranda Richardson, who replaced Kim Basinger, and Steve Buscemi, who had a cameo. The movie got mixed reviews from the critics. It was the soundtrack that got rave reviews. I had the opportunity to watch some of the filming of the movie. It was an interesting experience of watching the past hey days of KC in the 1930s being filmed with old cars and the clothing in front of me. Behind me was the modern time of the day. Quite a contrast of times.

The finished movie was premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. And there was a Gala Film KC Film VIP Showing in July 1996. Quite the gala experience.

I have talked with the Ellington Family, and one of this year's National Duke Ellington Awards will be posthumously presented to Kevin Mahogany for his love of music, and for his dedication to Music Education and to our Jazz Music History

this April during Jazz Appreciation month. A point of interest is that Kevin Mahogany was a graduate of Eddie Baker's Charlie Parker Foundation, and actually started off as a saxophone player.

To this day, I still look at the 18th and Vine Area completely differently with the memories that are still etched in me. They are memories of being thrown back in time and of what it must have felt like during the convincing filming of the 1930s era, especially when the fake store fronts were still there. The film-set fake storefronts along 18th Street stayed for years, long after the movie had ended. It helped to fill in some of the blank spots until the redevelopment program really got started. The one thing for sure is that the movie, "Kansas City", was good PR for Kansas City and tourism back then. I wonder if maybe a new movie about our rich jazz history should be made to bring some fresh new attention to who we are historically. It couldn't hurt. :||

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The Kansas City Jazz Orchestra

# For the Record

## Jackie Myers What About the Butterfly

March 2025

With the grit of Janis Joplin and the lyrical dexterity of Diana Krall, Jackie Myers is KC's songbird wonder, and her music is not only full of heart and heat, but is also often full of spirited energy, a party.

Jackie Myers's new album, "What About the Butterfly," already called a "masterpiece" by 577 Records, may just be, but my hope and hunch is there is also much more to come.

Myers and crew use a unique (or unusual) tonal system for this album, but it does not seem out of place. It seems natural. It seems part of a whole and vision—and it adds spice to the album, an exotic or (other)worldly element, strains of French jazz or orchestral aleatory music. It is a gem—and a rare one, especially for KC.

The album includes an enthusiastic rhythm section, full of controlled fire and simmering, sizzling groove. Matt Leifer's New Orleans-inspired rhythm on the title track is particularly remarkable and perhaps draws on Myers's years near or in the French Quarter.

Myers's lyrics are among her most prominent skills and gifts. She is hands down my favorite KC lyricist, a jazz singer-songwriter of the highest order, especially for our region. There appears to be no better.

Her title track includes the magnificent, poetic, observant lines: "What about the butterfly, / the

beautiful colors? / Do we tell her how slow she flies, / even though she flutters?" Lines like these reveal a sharp, perceptive mind and a strong heart. Part performer, part poet, Myers is unlike anyone in town. The spotlight is hers.

The sax, trumpet, and strings accompaniment are also album standouts, which make the album very international (and full)—and Myers and Rich Wheeler (tenor sax) solos, although experimental, groove hard (and light) and are almost airy and ethereal, but also exhibit a hint of the traditional, bop.

In her liner notes, Myers explains her use of "microtones," of the "in-between notes...in vocal jazz," which pay homage to French spectral composer Gerard Grisey and Tristan Murail, who, Myers writes, show us "how to embrace the perspective that the physics of sound should inform the compositional process....(and that) the improvisational aspect of jazz music provides an expanded context for microtonality from a spectral composition standpoint." Collaborator Rich Wheeler (tenor sax) was brought on, at least in part, because of his "notable experience in blending jazz and classical music and his knack for microtonal composition." KC and Jazz Messenger legend Bobby Watson, among others, are also brought on board for this album, lending the album a "greatest concert ever" vibe.

A piano tuner and backyard concert YouTuber during the pandemic, and somewhat new to KC, I'm grateful Myers persevered (and stayed). KC is better for it. (Much better.) Catch her new album, while it is hot (on vinyl, CD, streamed, or downloaded)—and may this white-hot, blue-hot album burn on and on, like a big bright star.

—Kevin Rabas

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# Helen Sung

## Meets Bach Aria Soloists

Bach Aria Soloists, the Kansas City-based chamber trio dedicated to the genius and relevance of Johann Sebastian Bach, are celebrating their 25th anniversary this year, and they needed a special way to celebrate their silver anniversary.

They quite naturally turned to jazz.

"I've always felt jazz was heavily influenced by Bach," says BAS founder, artistic director and violinist Elizabeth Suh Lane with a smile. "With the counter-rhythms and the walking bass lines... it was already happening back in the 1700s."

Blending Bach and jazz is not exactly typical, but it's certainly not unprecedented. For instance, French composer and pianist Claude Bolling (whose Suite for Cello and Jazz Piano is part of their 25th Anniversary concert) always understood the natural match. There's Brad Mehldau's After Bach and Tiempo Libre's Bach in Havana. There's even a contemporary Swedish jazz trio called, simply enough, Bach Jazz.

For their April 5th concert at the Folly, Bach Aria Soloists initiated a brand-new Bach/jazz collaboration with acclaimed jazz pianist and composer Helen Sung, a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow. When Lane first heard Sung perform her own compositions about ten years ago, she loved every piece. "I was so enamored with her music," Lane remembers.



"I could hear Bach's influence in her compositions." That connection planted the seed for this spring's collaboration.

Of course, collaboration has been at the core of Bach Aria Soloists' performances since they began. In addition to dancers, visual artists, and poets, over the years, they've worked with a huge range of musical genres...including jazz. "(For instance) eleven years ago, we invited Bobby Watson to improvise with Bach's chord progressions," Lane remembers.

*continued*

By Mike Warren

## HELEN SUNG CONTINUED


In Bach Aria Soloists, Lane is joined by Grammy-winning soprano Sarah Tannehill Anderson and the versatile multi-instrumentalist Elisa Williams Bickers (harpsichord, organ, and piano), who are more than comfortable with jazz. Interestingly, Sung herself began her undergraduate career at the University of Texas as a classical musician (although she soon answered the siren call of jazz). Finding common ground wasn't difficult at all.

The centerpiece of the concert is the debut of a Bach-inspired original composition by Sung. In the tradition of Duke Ellington's "Too Good to Title" (also on the program!), the piece is still unnamed. But its movements give Sung and the Bach Aria Soloists plenty of room to explore.

One movement is based on the poem "The Place Where Heaven Fell," by acclaimed poet R.S. Gwynn. Anderson, who began her musical life as a violinist, will have room to improvise vocally in

another movement. "We're looking forward to hearing (Sung) improvise with us," says Lane.

The concert also features Bach's "Prelude in D" from *Kleine Praeludium*, as well as Bach's *Partita in E*, with Sung's improvisations. From the jazz side, Chick Corea's "Armando's Rhumba" and Astor Piazzolla's "Oblivion" will feature improvisations from Bach Aria Soloists. The performance will be a collaborative swirl, with musicians, melodies, and genres combining in every possible way. This celebration pulls from music miles, cultures, and centuries apart...and shows exactly how it all fits together.

"Helen Sung Meets Bach Aria Soloists," the final 2024-2025 Folly Jazz Series performance, is at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 5. Tickets and information can be found at [www.follytheater.org](http://www.follytheater.org) - (816) 474-4444. 



# World Class Trombonist Lights Up Westport

Posi-Tone Records Recording Artist

# Altin Sencalar

World class trombonist Altin Sencalar is playing a one-night-stand at Kansas City's Westport Coffeehouse Theater on Sunday, April 13th, 2025.

Sencalar is noted in the jazz world as a fast rising player of note. Recently joining saxophonist David Sanborn for a few of his final performances, Sencalar works closely with Michael Dease, a trombonist & baritone saxophonist long with Posi-Tone Records. Sencalar has recorded 2 recordings with the 'house band' that creates most of their releases and appeared on recordings.

I asked Altin when he got his start as a recording artist. "Hmmm, said Sencalar, "My first recording as a leader was in 2017, 'Introducing Altin Sencalar,' but the one that got radio play in KC and reviews, was my 2nd record. That one was co-lead titled, 'Realization' and that group was called, 'The Sencalar/Glassman Quintet' released in 2020.

Altin Sencalar will be joined by an 'A-List' group of Kansas City musicians Brant Jester, Seth Lee and Brian Steever.



The fun begins at 6pm, food and drink are available. Tickets at the door.

—Editor

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# B.A.C. MUSIC KANSAS CITY



## Bird-Willie Cole

Seeing your product used on TV by an expert during the Superbowl is one of the great moments in history for a small business owner. That moment happened for Mike Corrigan, President of B.A.C. Musical Instruments in Kansas City, during the

2025 Superbowl in New Orleans, when music sensation "Trombone Shorty" played one of BAC's hand-made custom horns. "Shorty" and his group were seen by hundreds of millions of people that

night, and B.A.C is busy making some of the most desirable horns in the business.

For Corrigan, the Superbowl moment underscored a series of notable events since the company relocated their manufacturing to an historic metal works site, near the 18th and Vine Jazz District. The building had previously been used to manufacture musical instruments for over one hundred years. For creating and repairing instruments for jazz greats such as Jack Teagarden, Frankie Trumbauer, and a host of other hot musicians in the cradle of jazz.

Trombonist, Jason Goudeau owns a B.A.C. Horn Doctor, Kansas City model tenor trombone. He has played the horn professionally around Kansas City for the past 10 years. "I have found this horn to be extremely versatile," said Goudeau, "I've used it in every musical setting that I have been a part of." The B.A.C. horn is also a very durable instrument. "Overall," said Goudeau, "this trombone

*continued on page 31*



Willie Cole 2024



**You Are Cordially Invited to Attend**  
a Memorial Event for

Ms. *Queen Bey*

**PHENOMENAL SINGER, ACTOR AND JAZZ AMBASSADOR**

Saturday, April 19

7:00 pm to 8:00 pm

The Blue Room

1616 East 18th Street

Please contact Pat Jordan at [pjordankc@aol.com](mailto:pjordankc@aol.com)  
for further information | Special thanks to the American Jazz Museum





# Jazz Portraits Tell KC Story



## Jazz is a quintessential part of the Kansas City story.

An extraordinary collection of photographs of Kansas City's jazz musicians will celebrate the music they brought to life in Kansas City.

The portraits are by Pulitzer-prize winning photographer Dan White, who started taking jazz musician portraits in 1987 as a way of documenting

the vibrancy of the music and the players on the Kansas City jazz scene.

The jazz portraits will be exhibited at the Truman Presidential Library in Independence in an exhibit scheduled to open at the end of May and continue through December.

*continued on page 36*



would be a great fit for almost any intermediate to professional level musician.”

Mike Corrigan is happiest when he is assisting others in achieving greatness with his instruments. There are countless stories about Corrigan giving an amazing deal on pro instruments to those that cannot afford them and deserve to play them. His work enhances Kansas City’s reputation for jazz in particular, and Kansas City’s music scene in general.

Corrigan has expanded beyond performing arts to visual arts too!

Corrigan built a business and friendship with renowned visual artist Willie Cole, who has created major sculptural works from his facilities in New Jersey and Los Angeles. Mayor Quinton Lucas invited Cole to exhibit his brand of “recycled art” at Kansas City International Airport. The mayor

wanted art to honor Charlie “Bird” Parker in a prime spot, at the beautiful new airport.

The airport art piece involved taking brass saxophones and reconstructing them into a large flock of brass birds. “We had a bunch of old alto saxophones laying around and we were helping Willie find a KC studio.” Said Corrigan, “So, we offered him the old altos and he made them into birds.” In essence Corrigan helped deconstruct the saxophones as Cole reconstructed them into an array of birds.

When you stop by or rush past the River Market Coffee Shop in the new Kansas City airport, you will see what looks like a flock of large brass birds hovering overhead. Remember, Mike Corrigan had a hand in this incredible artwork created by Willie Cole.

—Editor

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

**30 APRIL 2025**  
*at the*  
**KANSAS CITY  
 MUSIC HALL**

GET  
 TICKETS  
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KANSAS CITY CITY OF MUSIC  
 KANSAS CITY JAZZ

Councilwoman Robinson created a buzz of ideas with that one question. Of course, profes-



Bukeka Blakemore

sional musicians like the idea of homeownership. We, like everyone else, work 6-7 days a week at our craft to provide for our families and own a home. We may perform our craft in nightclubs, taverns, fancy concert halls and lavish private events, but we have a desire to care for our families.

Later, the conversation morphed into a discussion about world travel and touring. The UNESCO Creative Cities program, Kansas City Jazz

Orchestra, Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors, KC Jazz ALIVE, and others are doing what they can to bring talented artists to the forefront for jazz in the US and globally. Too often musicians must tour on their own time or get help for the basics from non-profit organizations.

Bukeka Blakemore, UNESCO Creative Cities spokesperson, Vocalist and Activist, introduced four musicians who recently returned from Belfast, Ireland. Their tour was funded by UNESCO.

The Belfast Four, (a term they adopted on the



Jass R. Couch

group's return from Ireland) was very upbeat about their trip, the warm welcome that they received, and the possibility of touring full time. Once an artist experiences the thrill of performing in another country, with its own vibrant music scene, an artist is looking for the next tour.

Then came questions from the attentive crowd.

Amber Underwood, an Educator and Artist, recently returned from an UNESCO trip with an



Kemet Coleman, Jass R. Couch, Kadesh Flow and Clarence Copridge

all-girl band from Kansas City. She asked, "What is the difference between going to a city with UNESCO support and going on your own?" The answer came immediately from the floor. "Even if you are self-funded, it really helps to be connected," said vocalist, Eboni Fondren, a rising local star who recently traveled to the G20 in India to perform on her own, and with a travel stipend from UNESCO.

Recently, Eboni ended a 3-year residency at the Uptown Lounge where she recorded a beautiful recording reviewed in JAM and followed up with recordings made in Paris, France, also reviewed in the February-March issue of JAM Magazine.

In 2017, Kansas City became the first UNESCO World Music City located in the US, the organization has championed several local events

here, video shoots and recording sessions. Globally, the group has opened many doors for Kansas City musicians to travel and co-create with like-minded artists from around the globe. This sort of interaction feeds musicians' souls.

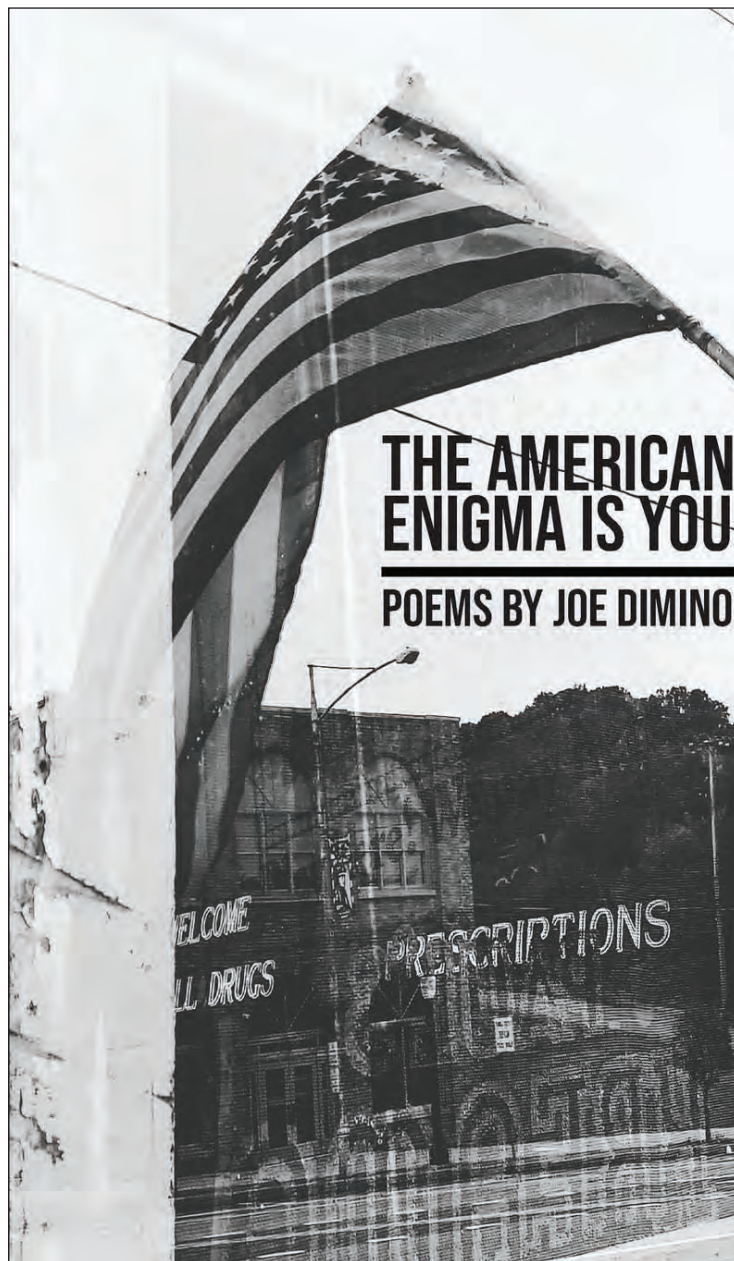
The organization wants to maximize the opportunities for local musicians. Their programs include racial and gender equality. They have lobbied for the city to invest in their endeavors and they intend to create a new "musicians at the airport" program similar to the one at the old KC airport.

A group featuring flutist Amber Underwood, baritone saxophonist Aryanna Nemati, pianist Angela Ward and vocalist Paula Saunders Lewis traveled to Frutillar, Chile in January of 2023 for Semanas Musicales. These 4 talented women



performed with three local Chilean musicians in a concert of mostly original compositions. It was funded by the US Embassy in Chile.

Four Kansas City musicians traveled to the Belfast International Art Festival in Belfast, Northern Ireland in November of 2024. They performed at a local showcase event focused on rap, hip hop and R&B. The group included



18th & Vine Brewery

R&B vocalist Jass R. Couch, guitarist and keyboardist Clarence Copridge, MC Kemet Coleman, and trombonist & MC Kadesh Flow.

On April 30th, Creative City KC goes 'old-school' by presenting a 90th Anniversary concert at the Music Hall with the Count Basie Orchestra, directed by Scott Barnhart. This multi-Grammy winning musical organization had humble beginnings at Kansas City's Original Reno Club around 1935, and the stunning Art-Deco Musical Hall opened in 1938.

Tickets to this rare-treat of a concert are available here.

<https://www.bandsintown.com/e/1033918926-the-legendary-count-basie-orchestra-at-bartle-hall>

—Editor



## Duke passes away in 1974

Duke's only son Mercer Ellington takes over the orchestra. Mercer studied at Julliard School of Music, performed on and off with the Ellington Orchestra and also had his own orchestra. He always felt that he was living in the shadow of his father, Duke. Having his own orchestra was his opportunity to prove himself.

Mercer made a business decision in 1976 to release for the first time *The Queen's Suite* to the public. The first time in almost 20 years. The recording was a huge marketing success.

Mercer won a Grammy during his career running the Duke Ellington Orchestra before his passing in 1996.

Next to take over the Orchestra is Mercer's youngest son, Paul, who continued on with the legacy of the rich history, and to become the third generation of Ellingtons to run the Orchestra.

Mercer's oldest son, Edward, performed with his grandfather, Duke, and his dad, Mercer, on various occasions. Edward is a guitar player. He

and were talking about this story I am writing, and about his fond memories of that experience. He was not interested in the challenges of running the Orchestra, which created the opportunity for Edward's younger brother take the reins and run it.

I guess I can sum this up with the respect for the achievements of being the 100th year and third generation of Ellingtons. ¶

## KIM KEYS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Her packed-house crowd reveals she's at home, and her audience is also at home with her.

Join her at a local show and you too may very likely find yourself singing along while holding tight to a loved one. ("Date night!")

—Kevin Rabas

*The Blue Room, 22 Feb. 2025, KC.*

PS Kim Keys can also be heard on the album "Love Makings of Me" (30 Sept. 2022) ¶

## YELLOWJACKETS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

tune on the 2022 "Parallel Motion" album, Kennedy's absolute control is showcased. His body is statuesque, like Bird, while his fingers, hands, and arms do swift work. His main cymbals dry, Kennedy creates a dotted staccato effect. He's virtuosic across the cymbals, like Wertico (P. Metheny), but achieves a cleaner, darker, more pronounced timbre, like Braille on a page.

During the "Jazz Talk," prior to the night's performance," drummer Kennedy spoke about some of the pleasures of teaching today, including using new technology and teaching the songs of today's youth. He said, "Teaching drums includes...play alongs... One song, by Willow Smith, Will Smith's

daughter, 'Symptom of Life,' in an odd meter, (is) challenging to teach to a young student...(but) you want to know what your students are listening to, what's important to them...and it's always inspiring," learning new music. Luminary Yellowjackets also teach the next generation, and the world burns a bit brighter in turn.

Yellowjackets albums include "Parallel Motion" (a 2023 Grammy nominee), "Jackets XL" (2020), "Raising Our Voice" (2018), among many many others, including two Grammy wins. Buy an album. Go see a show. You won't be disappointed.

—Kevin Rabas, 25 Jan. 2025, KC

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"I began photographing jazz musicians in 1987, hoping to create a visual record of these talented artists and to help preserve Kansas City's tradition as the birthplace of jazz," said White.

The exhibit will feature 50 black and white portraits White took over a 19-year period from 1987 to 2006. The exhibit will include recent color photographs of a new generation of KC jazz musicians.

The black and white photographs include musicians with national reputations such as Jay McShann and Claude "Fiddler" Williams. It also includes lesser known musicians who made the Kansas City jazz scene special.

"It has been an extraordinary experience to meet, listen and photograph these amazing musicians," said White. "I only wish I had started sooner."

About three-fourths of the musicians in the black and white portraits have passed. Many were

members of the Musicians Protective Union Local 627.

The Mutual Musicians Hall, located in the 18th and Vine jazz district, is on the National Register for Historic Places and continues as a venue for live music.

The exhibit will include information about the musicians from Chuck Haddix, who has an exhaustive background on Kansas City jazz.

Haddix is host of the weekly NPR radio show "The Fish Fry" which he has hosted and produced for 30 years, and director of the Marr Sound Archives, a collection of 350,000 historic sound recordings housed in the Miller Nichols Library at the University of Missouri–Kansas City.

The exhibit will include public programs at the Truman Library and other venues sharing the Kansas City jazz story.

## More information

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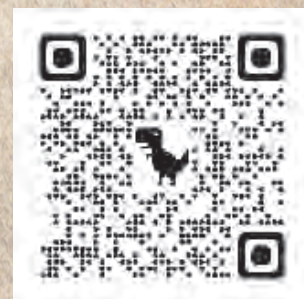


Jay McShann





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# SUN FLOWER MUSIC FESTIVAL

**Celebrating 38 Years!**

**White Concert Hall | Washburn University**

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**Featuring Classical and Jazz Music**

**FREE concerts June 20th - 28th**

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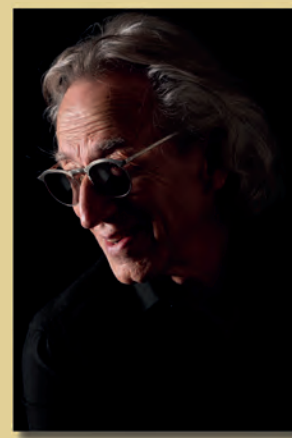
**Monday, June 23th @ 7:30 P.M.**

**featuring**

**Lisa Henry**

**Todd Wilkinson**

**David Basse**



Chamber Orchestra - Friday, June 20th @ 7:30 P.M.  
Chamber Ensembles - Saturday, June 21st @ 7:30 P.M.  
Jazz Night - Monday, June 23rd @ 7:30 P.M.  
Chamber Ensembles - Tuesday, June 24th @ 7:30 P.M.  
Chamber Orchestra - Wednesday, June 25th @ 7:30 P.M.  
Chamber Ensembles - Friday, June 27th @ 7:30 P.M.  
Blanche Bryden Concert - Saturday, June 28th @ 3 P.M.  
Chamber Orchestra - Saturday, June 28th @ 7:30 P.M.

**Sponsored by the Liz Stratton Foundation**

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