



**HELEN SUNG
BIG BAND
ORACLES**

- Trumpets & flugelhorns
TATUM GREENBLATT (lead)
MIKE RODRIGUEZ
ALEX NORRIS
NATHANIEL WILLIFORD
- Trombones
JAMES BURTON III (lead)
SARA JACOVINO
WILLIE APPLEWHITE
GINA BENALCÁZAR LÓPEZ (bass)
- Saxophones
DAVE PIETRO (lead alto & doubles)
ALEJANDRO AVILES (alto 2 & doubles)
JOHN ELLIS (tenor 1 & doubles)
NICOLE GLOVER (tenor 2 & doubles)
ANDREW GUTAUSKAS (baritone & bass clarinet)
- Rhythm
HELEN SUNG piano
VICENTE ARCHER bass
ADAM CRUZ drums
SAMUEL TORRES percussion

SSC 1799 / AVAILABLE 6/12/26

Helen Sung is a shining example of the heroic journey to self-realization through the art of Jazz. As a soloist, arranger, composer and band-leader she [Helen] has developed an expansive vocabulary that encompasses the richness, virtuosity, freedom and humanity that defines the best jazz...the little details that define our music are well represented and attended to with care and intelligence. That's why this is a great listen...All you have to do is check it out.



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A preview of the **American Piano Awards'** biennial jazz competition took place at Dizzy's Club (May 6), featuring five young (aged 18-30) finalists—Joe Block, Caelan Cardello, Brandon Goldberg, Connor Rohrer and Brahm Sasner—the first event of an eight-month competition that concludes Spring 2027. The five were selected from 300+ nominees for their technical proficiency and artistic voice. Each played solo for about 12 minutes, first a standard, then another or an original. First up was Sasner with an interpretation of “Out of Nowhere” (Johnny Green), employing a left-hand montuno figure and a dazzling array of textures, followed by a relaxed, original ballad. Second was Rohrer, starting “Spring Is Here” (Richard Rodgers) delicately but with flashy fills, kicking into a swinging groove of nicely voiced chords on “I Believe In You” (Frank Loesser). Up third, Goldberg took a different tack, eschewing skillful display for artistic immediacy in his soulful rendition of “I Concentrate on You” (Cole Porter), followed by an equally tasteful original, “Lullaby”. Fourth came Cardello, whose performance of “My Ideal” (Newell Chase, Richard Whiting) showcased his intelligent virtuosity. Last up was Block, who, like Goldberg, emphasized artistic voice over technique, delivering a spare, heartfelt “But Beautiful” (Jimmy Van Heusen), then a quietly ecstatic, gospel-inflected original, “Horizons”, capped by an ultra-tasty, less-is-more coda. The copious chops and soul displayed by each pianist certainly bodes well for jazz piano's future. — *Tom Greenland*



Joe Block @Dizzy's Club

While the animated feature films of Studio Ghibli are familiar to many Americans, their composer—Joe Hisaishi—is probably less so. Where better to champion his playfully inventive compositions than Bushwick's Red Pavilion, an Art Deco and 1950s Shanghai-inspired neo-noir nightclub. The venue's Ghibli Jazz series (May 7) featured violinist-vocalist **Alyssa Chetrick**, fronting a trio with Victor Lim (piano), Adi Meyerson (bass) and Rintaro Mikami (drums). Opening with two numbers from *Princess Mononoke*, “The Legend of Ashitaka” and the titular heroine's theme song, Chetrick played the first and sang the second (in Japanese), navigating the latter's suave but angular 5/4 melody with aplomb. “Carrying You” (from *Castle in the Sky*) opened with a drum solo sounding like a gathering storm, Lim following Chetrick's sung theme with stuttered phrases closely echoed by Mikami, both romping to the finish line over a 6/8 outro. “A Town with an Ocean View” (from *Kiki's Delivery Service*) saw more fine soloing from Lim, here with a touch of the blues. The second set commenced with an empathetic violin/piano duet on the title theme of Takeishi Kitano's pre-Ghibli *Fireworks*, ending with a flourish from Chetrick, followed by a joyfully marching arrangement of “The Merry-Go-Round of Life” (from *Howl's Moving Castle*) and a funky workout in 7/4 over “Vapor Trail” (from *The Wind Rises*), concluding with the leader's cleverly chameleonic original “LPM”. Considering how well his tunes fit into an improvisational context, one hopes Hisaishi's name will become more familiar in jazz circles. (TG)

Hunter College's “American Voices” series focuses on popular music with the template of a band and several notable vocalists, interspersed with educational information, headed by American Voices Director Paul Alexander. At the Kaye Playhouse (May 12), the program was **Louis Armstrong, A Celebration of The Father of American Jazz**, with music director, pianist Adam Birnbaum and guest artists Anna Anderson, Catherine Russell, Champion Fulton, Matt Doyle, Brandon Victor Dixon and Bettye LaVette, backed by Dan Block (clarinet), Alphonso Horne (trumpet), Mariel Bildsten (trombone), Neal Miner (bass) and Alvester Garnett (drums). Opener was a swingin' “When the Saints Go Marching In”, fronted by Horne (what a tone!), with Anderson, plus a surprise switcheroo of polymath Armstrong expert, Ricky Riccardi, at the keys. Each vocalist presented three tunes apiece. Representing jazz were Russell, with a double homage of Armstrong and her father, Luis Russell (former Armstrong music director), in “Back O' Town Blues”, and Fulton with “I Cried for You”. Broadway was center stage via Doyle, with “Hello, Dolly!”, and Dixon in a high-energy “What a Wonderful World”. But the evening's highlight was the singular, amazing blues/R&B queen, LaVette, who offered the definitive “St. James Infirmary Blues”, reaching even deeper into her core than ever before. The entertaining, if somewhat staid, program (no Jazz at Lincoln Center outing this) ended with a bookend of “Saints”, an all-cast hootenanny fronted by Horne. — *Marilyn Lester*



Catherine Russell, Bettye LaVette @Kaye Playhouse

While it may be “all about the bass” for some, at the latest Rizzoli Music Aperitivo (May 3), it was all about pianist-vocalist Les McCann (1935–2023). The program for the intimate Union Square bookstore event was devised by pianist-keyboardist **Joe Alterman** and electric bassist **Mocean Worker** (aka Adam Dorn), who both worked with and called McCann friend. Completing the quintet were John Ellis (tenor), Steven Bernstein (slide trumpet), Lenny White (drums) and Daniel Sadownick (percussion). The set began with saxophonist Eddie Harris' “Listen Here” featuring a dynamic conga intro, and closed with another Harris tune, a punched-up “Cold Duck Time” (most famously recorded by McCann with Harris). In between were McCann's “Burnin' Coal” and “Lemme Tell Ya”. While each first-call musician had generous features and delivered excellent tradeoffs and harmonious togetherness, especially Ellis and Bernstein—and Alterman's energetic, full-bodied playing style was fun to watch in itself—the sameness in the groove-based selections left veteran drummer White with little to do but hold a repetitive beat. But there's much more to the music of McCann, a soul jazz innovator and an influencer for electric piano and synthesizer, whose recordings have even been famously sampled by hip-hop artists. The penultimate “Gimme Some Skin”, a proto-punk jam, did raise the energy higher, but it wasn't till the lively “Cold Duck Time”, that a nearby audience member declared, in an overheard Monty Python-ish tone of relief, “finally something different.” (ML)

For this aging percussionist, a onetime Downtown vibes player, few things are more enjoyable than discovering new vibraphonists on the scene. Featured at Bar Bayeux on a perfect Brooklyn night (May 15), **Yuhan Su**'s new trio melded cultures, even as it championed jazz' avant heart. Su's compositions reflect her Taiwanese roots through spacious, often complex structures that never fail to swing over the shimmering chromatics she deftly navigates. And while hers was the only chordal instrument, bassist Luke Stewart crafted entire contrapuntal works beneath her. The still-youthful Stewart, no stranger to new music quarters, has rapidly progressed over the last decade and now stands among the masters of the idiom. Watchfully maintaining the groove while continuously shifting the pulse and feel of any given piece, he and drummer Kweku Sumbry uplifted and pulled tempi in ways that created a special timelessness, particularly in Su original “Hope for Things to Get Better”. The vibraphonist doesn't use her instrument's motor but instead applies effects in a pick-up system including vibrato, reverb and delay, used in this piece and in others. An evening highlight: the original “Ringside”, grown from a gripping Sumbry solo and a series of repetitive accents, developed into a kind of call-and-response chasing-the-changes. To close, the trio tore into Ornette Coleman's “Round Trip”, deftly pummeling free jazz aspects, with Sumbry channeling Ornette drummer Ed Blackwell's float and sting, Stewart owning terra firma and Su's four mallets blurring all that is blue. — *John Pietaro*



Yuhan Su @Bar Bayeux

Free improvisation that severs genre and crisscrosses multiple avant gardes? Only in hipster Brooklyn, it seems. **Tim Berne** collected a powerful quintet for a weeknight at Lowlands (May 12), and by opening downbeat, the place was mobbed. The alto saxophonist has been a vital downtown voice since it was *that* “downtown,” and has led countless combos, but this one is an absolute keeper. With the astonishing **Aliya Ultan** (cello) in the role of a second horn, and swept by Gregg Belisle-Chi's pedals (guitar), the ensemble was propelled by the unstoppable energy of Trevor Dunn (bass) and Ches Smith (drums). Opening the first, lengthy piece, with Belisle-Chi establishing a sonic cloud and drone, Ultan immediately cast modal, dreamlike lines, just dark enough (she's not called the Nocturnal Cellist for naught), matched by Berne even when she bowed just off her instrument's bridge, tossing harsh, high-end barks over the audience. Once Berne began an Ornette-like jazz head, toying with the mode, Dunn and Smith shredded the solemnity with roaring uptempo free bop. The latter has made a career of muscular, yet deeply nuanced drumming, and the small room rocked under the weight of thunderous fills and howling cymbals. Dunn's almost percussive pizzicato added another layer to the firestorm. With the reins off, the collective interplay of Berne and Ultan, while threaded tightly, embarked on a death match. The cellist, tossing her head and thicket of black hair theatrically, appeared possessed, feeding off every accent and contrapuntal response of this tireless ensemble. (JP)

Rain pushed the show indoors, from Mama Tried's backyard into its barroom (May 9), where series curator **Dan Friel** swiveled on an office chair behind a keyboard-and-electronics rig festooned with lights. He opened with crunchy synthesizer figures that often resembled video game music, gentle melodies tucked inside the noise. **Mari Rubio** (violin) and **Jessica Pavone** (viola) followed. Four pieces formed a narrative arc: a sustained meditation on mournful, harmonized drones; one of quick motor-like strokes where tensions and consonances surfaced between the two instruments; a melodic interlude; and one that began with Rubio and Pavone pressuring their strings past pitch into a whining yawp of distorted scraping, before imperceptibly resolving into something like a lullaby for the BQE, whose cars streamed past as rain audibly fell outside the window. Closer was Editrix—**Wendy Eisenberg**'s avant-rock trio with Steve Cameron (bass) and Josh Daniel (drums). Eisenberg is a ferociously gifted guitarist and charismatic leader. Moving with Minutemen economy, the songs carried the signature of Eisenberg's idiosyncratic songwriting: angular lines, crooked phrasing, lyrics funny and revealing in the same breath. On “What's Wrong”, the guitarist's fingers skittered spider-like across the fretboard, mapping out heavy riffs—a perverse mix, Thelonious Monk-like, vocal melodies over Melvins instrumentation. Eisenberg thanked Mama Tried, calling it a “perfect bar,” one of few spaces that could hold a bill this unruly without straining. — *Ariella Stok*



Wendy Eisenberg @Mama Tried

A two-night **75 Dollar Bill** stand at Union Pool (May 6) felt like an occasion since appearances by the Rick Brown-Che Chen duo have been recently scarce. The opening improvising trio set—led by Shara Lunon (vocals), with Felice Rosser (bass) and Cinque Kemp (drums)—unfolded like a ritual, Rosser tracing geometric repetitions that borrowed pulse from dub and dance hall, locking with Kemp's ceremonial pocket. Rosser sang baritone harmonies beneath Lunon, who ran her voice through electronics for echo and shading. The lyrics were interrogative: “Whose streets? Whose land?”, “No kings, no crown,” while her vocal range covered enormous emotional territory: soft moans, feral caterwauls, soaring wails, conveying power in fragility. She seemed to know where she was going even at her freest. “Choose light,” she intoned, caressing bells on a hemp chain. The Little Big Band expanded the duo to seven: Talice Lee (violin), Sue Garner (bass), Barry Weisblat (electronics), Cheryl Kingan (baritone) and Steve Maing (guitar), arrayed around Brown who sat center stage on his plywood crate, working a maraca and tambourine like an energy healer. People danced onstage and off, as tunes dissolved into trance states: Chen's refretted guitar produced quarter tones, vibrating against Lee's violin drone, Garner's bass doubling Kingan's baritone. They plunged so deep into suspension you forgot a song had started, then surfaced on cue. Closer was “Wzn #3”, nodding to Chen's studies of Moorish modes, encoed by “I'm Not Trying to Wake Up”—full band shaking maracas in plenary unison. (AS)

WHAT'S NEWS

M³ (Mutual Mentorship for Musicians)—co-founded by Co-Presidents Jen Shyu and Sara Serpa—announced its 2026 “Luminary Award” recipient: saxophonist-educator **Jessica Jones**. The award “honors members of the M³ community whose decades of fearless creativity and vision have helped transform the musical landscape.” An expansive initiative created to empower, elevate and give visibility to overlooked musicians (whether due to cultural background, identity, sexuality, etc.), M³ offers a unique model of mentorship and musical collaborative commissions. An event honoring and featuring Jones will be held at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem (Nov. 6) to celebrate her ongoing contributions, which include past work with Joseph Jarman, Cecil Taylor, Don Cherry, Connie Crothers and saxophonist-husband Tony Jones. For more info visit m3musicians.org.

Last month was highlighted by nationwide college and university graduation ceremonies. While the focus was on a fresh crop of new candidates who would soon flood the job market, many well-established and veteran jazz musicians were acknowledged and presented with Honorary Doctorates: Gary Bartz (New England Conservatory), Jason Moran (Manhattan School of Music), Vinnie Colaiuta (Berklee College of Music), Jon Batiste (Columbia University), Cécile McLorin Salvant (Williams College) and Don Was (Wayne State University). Hats off to all!

The **Peanuts** jazz catalog owner, Lee Mendelson Film Productions (LMFP), is taking the US government and three private companies to court. LMFP—the administrator and guardian of the music to *Peanuts* TV specials since the early '60s (including “A Charlie Brown Christmas”, “A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving” and “A Charlie Brown Valentine”) filed four copyright lawsuits last month in the federal courts of NY and Washington, stating that pianist Vince Guaraldi's distinctive jazz compositions and immediately recognizable, classic, piano-driven themes were being used without permissions. The legal actions continue an overall impatience with what has become casual digital borrowing and stealing of cultural touchstones and artistic, as well as legal, rights. LMFP says its numerous seize and desist demand letters to date have been ignored. For more info visit mendelsonproductions.com. In related news, the artist-led AFFW (**Artists For a Free World**)—founded by Arts for Art director and Vision Festival organizer Patricia Nicholson-Parker—joined with MWA (Music Workers Alliance) last month (May 19) to stand up for musician rights. Indie musicians and concerned fans of music, culture and society, gathered to protest on what was a hot, 94 degree day, walking from Columbus Circle to Universal Music Group (UMG) at Broadway/56th St., rallying at Warner Music Group (WGM) on Broadway/51st St. There are ongoing negotiations between major record labels UMG, WGM and Sony, with AI companies, about rights to musicians' music. With these major labels negotiating deals to license recorded music to generative AI companies, they are looking to consequently remove and replace the creator's voice with AI. This is not only bad for the music, but bad for humanity, as it will lead to a mass displacement of working musicians, as well as an overall devaluation of music as a human practice. For more info visit artistsforafreeworld.com.

Inspired by Sam Baum, a young, gifted pianist and composer who is also on the autistic spectrum, the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization **Special Audiences and Musicians** (SAM) is one of the only, if not THE only, organization dedicated to supporting jazz musicians with disabilities. For nearly 10 years, it has been providing jazz by musicians with disabilities to nursing and assisted-living homes, hospitals and other institutions in the tri-state area. To date, the SAM Jazz Ensemble has produced three jazz albums, including its most recent *From My Shiny Imagination: Tunes by Sam Baum*. Bronx Music Hall hosts a concert on Autistic Pride Day (Jun. 18), featuring SAM Jazz Ensemble and special guests David Amram, Bobby Sanabria, Ciara Moser and Dan Block. Also, be sure to mark your calendar for next month: Disability Pride Month is celebrated every July. For more info visit specialaudiencesandmusicians.org.

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