

PHILIP AABERG (Apr. 8, 1949 – May 23, 2026) The pianist-composer, classically-trained but also facile at jazz, bluegrass, rock and new music, died from pneumonia at age 77. By 14 he was performing with local bands in his native Montana, eventually moving to the San Francisco Bay Area post-college, where he played in blues clubs. His recording debut was with blues-rock guitarist Elvin Bishop, with whom he'd record a handful of albums in the '70s. He was also in singer Peter Gabriel's band, with Robert Fripp and Tony Levin, recording *Submerge* (1978). Aaberg returned to Montana, signed a recording contract with Windham Hill in 1985, and in 2000 began his record label Sweetgrass Music. He performed on over 200 albums with credits including William Ackerman, Jim Brickman, Mike Marshall and the Turtle Island String Quartet as well as Juice Newton, The Doobie Brothers and others.

JOHN EATON (May 29, 1934 – May 24, 2026) The Washington, DC-born pianist, a champion of the Great American Songbook and longtime leader of the Blues Alley house band, died at his home in Chevy Chase, MD, at age 91. Eaton recorded extensively for Chiaroscuro, and had credits with Stuff Smith (Smith's *Cat On A Hot Fiddle* Verve album was the pianist's 1960 recording debut), Eddie Condon, Maxine Sullivan, Lou McGarity, Wallace Davenport, Wild Bill Davison, Marian McPartland and others.

RON ESCHETÉ (Aug. 19, 1948 – May 20, 2026) The master of the seven-string guitar, a native of Louisiana who toured with singer Buddy Greco, then in 1970 relocated to L.A. (where he became a fixture in the West Coast jazz scene) died at age 77. He was an original instructor at L.A.'s Guitar Institute of Technology (GIT) and taught at various institutions, including Cal State-Long Beach. Escheté performed and recorded with Ray Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Milt Jackson, Diana Krall, Dave Pike, The Clayton Brothers, Gene Harris, Jack McDuff, Mary Stallings and others. He released albums on JAS (his 1977 leader debut), Muse, Bainbridge, The Jazz Alliance, Concord Jazz and SMS Jazz.

GARY FOSTER (May 25, 1936 - May 24, 2026) A prolific woodwind player in the LA studio scene, Foster died at age 89. Foster recorded over 500 motion picture soundtracks (starting with 1973's *Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid* with Bob Dylan), plus hundreds of TV scores. As an educator, he was on the faculties of Pasadena City College, University of Missouri-Kansas City and UCLA. He was also inducted into the California Jazz Foundation Hall of Fame. Foster had his own or collaborative albums on Revelation (1968's *Subconsciously* was his first album as leader), Discovery, Concord Jazz, AJI and Capri and credits with Clare Fischer (his 1963 recording debut was Fischer's *Extension*), Dennis Budimir, Warne Marsh, Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band, Alan Broadbent, Cal Tjader, Marty Paich, The Manhattan Transfer, Rosemary Clooney, Diane Schuur, John Patitucci, Arturo Sandoval, Milt Jackson, Nina Simone, Mark Masters, Poncho Sanchez, Shelly Manne, Mary Stallings, Tierney Sutton, Madeleine Peyroux, Lalo Schiffrin and many others.

ABDULLAH IBRAHIM (Oct. 9, 1934 – Jun. 15, 2026) Born Adolph Johannes "Dollar" Brand in Cape Town, South Africa, and a symbol of resistance against apartheid, the pianist died at age 91. In 1959, he co-founded the Jazz Epistles (with Hugh Masekela), but with increasing state repression, he moved to Europe in 1962. Through his then wife, vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin, he met Duke Ellington in Zürich, leading to the recording *Duke Ellington presents The Dollar Brand Trio*. Brand moved to NYC in 1965, studied at the Juilliard School of Music and converted to Islam in 1968, changing his name to Abdullah Ibrahim. His 1974 composition "Mannenberg" became the unofficial anthem for the anti-apartheid movement. Throughout the '80s and beyond, he led his group Ekaya, performing globally. He was awarded an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship (2018). His albums appear on Black Lion, Blackhawk, Chiaroscuro,

ECM, Enja, Ekapa, Elektra, Freedom, Gearbox, Intuition, Sackville, Spectator and Tiptoe, among others.

RONELL JOHNSON (Sep. 23, 1976 – Jun. 14, 2026) The trombonist-tubist and vocalist who was a fixture in the New Orleans brass music scene, especially with Preservation Hall Jazz Band, died at age 49. In April 2020, Johnson suffered a heart attack requiring emergency medical intervention and a significant recovery period. In 2023, he released his sole album as leader (*On My Way*). He was a member of Soul Rebels Brass Band, Coolbone Brass Band, Oscar Washington's New Wave Brass Band, Doreen's Jazz New Orleans, New Orleans Legacy Band, Louis Ford And His New Orleans Flairs and Brian Carrick And His New Orleans Band.

JOE NEGRI (Jun. 10, 1926 – May 30, 2026) The guitarist and pedagogue, best known as "Handyman Negri" on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, died at age 99. After serving in the US Army he became a fixture on the Pittsburgh music scene, becoming WTAE-TV's music director for over two decades. His leader debut *Guitar, With Love* (True Image) was released in 1968. Instrumental in establishing jazz guitar as a formal discipline in higher education, he taught for nearly five decades at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as at Duquesne University and Carnegie Mellon University. Negri performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He had albums on MCG Jazz and credits with Joyce Breach, Nancy Wilson, Michael Feinstein and others.

CLYDE POUND (Dec. 3, 1934 – May 23, 2026) The pianist passed away at National Park Medical Center in Hot Springs, AR, at age 91. Pound's career began in San Francisco, where he performed with artists such as Dizzy Gillespie, Maynard Ferguson, Dave Pell, Bud Shank, Chris Connors, Helen Humes and Johnny Mathis. In Las Vegas, he worked with the Dukes of Dixieland and in the house band for the *Viva Les Girls* show at the Dunes Hotel. Returning to San Fran, he was musical director and conductor for the San Francisco production of *O Calcutta*, before relocating to Hawaii for 33 years. He served on the Board of the Hot Springs Jazz Society and was Chairman of the Hot Springs Jazz Festival (2007-17).

DON PRELL (Aug. 4, 1929 – May 25, 2026) The jazz and classical bassist died at age 96. Prell established himself in the West Coast jazz scene, where he formed a significant musical partnership with Bud Shank, becoming a member of the saxophonist's original quartet in 1956. Prell also had a long-standing tenure with the San Francisco Symphony, where he performed for 30 years. Following his retirement from the symphony, he formed the Sea Bop Ensemble. He had credits with George Redman (Prell's 1954 recording debut), Buddy Rich, Chet Baker, Bob Gordon, Claude Williamson and others.

KENNY "SPIDER WEBB" RICE (Jun. 15, 1944 – Jun. 2, 2026) The drummer, who worked in jazz, R&B, funk and pop genres, died at age 81. The Detroit native moved to New York in 1967, where he played with King Curtis' Kingpins (Curtis' *Sweet Soul* in 1968 was Rice's recording debut). He played drums for Harry Belafonte from 1969-72. Rice relocated to L.A., playing with Gabor Szabo and soon cementing his reputation as an A-list studio musician. Beyond session work, Rice was a member of the Funk Brothers and his credits include Eddie Fisher, Chuck Rainey, Jim Pepper, Hampton Hawes, Gene Harris, Carmen McRae, Freddie Hubbard, Herb Alpert/Hugh Masekela, Grover Washington, Jr., as well as Albert and Freddie King.

WALTER THEODORE "SONNY" ROLLINS (Sep. 7, 1930 – May 25, 2026) A giant in the history of jazz, the tenor saxophonist died at age 95 in Woodstock, NY, the last survivor of the 57 jazz musicians depicted in the famed 1958 photograph known as "A Great Day in Harlem." Rollins grew up in Sugar Hill, Harlem, to a musical family.

Largely self-taught, he played in a neighborhood band during his high school years and was mentored by (and would record with) Thelonious Monk. He began on alto saxophone, switching to tenor, influenced by his idol, Coleman Hawkins. Rollins began playing professionally after high school, making his first recordings in early 1949 with singer Babs Gonzales. His career advanced quickly, but in 1950, heroin use led to a robbery conviction and jail time. After attaining sobriety, he recorded *Saxophone Colossus* (1956), which is frequently cited as a high-water mark in jazz. In his seven-decade music career, Rollins, who became known as "saxophone colossus," became an NEA Jazz Master (1983), received a GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award (2004), plus Kennedy Center Honors and National Medal of Arts (both 2011). Rollins had albums on Prestige, Blue Note, Contemporary, Riverside, Impulse, Milestone, RCA and numerous other labels including his own Doxy, which released four volumes of live *Road Shows*. His credits are too numerous to mention, but included Fats Navarro, Bud Powell, Miles Davis, Art Farmer, Clifford Brown/Max Roach, Kenny Dorham, Abbey Lincoln, Dizzy Gillespie, Modern Jazz Quartet, the Milestone Jazzstars and The Rolling Stones. (*see *Special Feature tribute: p. 14-15*)

JAMES "BLOOD" ULMER (Feb. 8, 1940 – Jun. 3, 2026) The guitarist, singer and composer, died peacefully at age of 86. His father, a Baptist preacher, gave him his first guitar when he was four years old and his first professional gig was singing gospel with his father's vocal quartet, the Southern Sons. Relocating from the rural South to Pittsburgh, after high school, Ulmer accompanied doo-wop groups, followed by moves to Columbus, OH, and then Detroit, MI, where he taught music while playing local clubs with drummer Doug Hammond. In 1971, Ulmer moved to NYC, joining Ornette Coleman's harmolodic funk band, Prime Time. His final gig amid declining health was at the Detroit Jazz Festival (Sep. 1, 2024). He released his own or collaborative albums on Artists House (1979's *Tales of Captain Black* was his leader debut), Rough Trade, Columbia, Caravan Of Dreams Productions, Blue Note, In+Out, DIW, Bellaphon, Hyena and others. Ulmer was a founding member of the Music Revelation Ensemble, Phalanx and Third Rail. Credits include Hank Marr (Ulmer's first recording was Marr's *Sounds From The Marr-Ket Place* in 1968), Larry Young, Joe Henderson, Rashied Ali, Arthur Blythe, Juma Sultan, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Cornell Rochester/Gerald Veasley, David Murray, G. Calvin Weston, Big John Patton, Jayne Cortez, James Carter and others.

JOHN B. WILLIAMS (Feb. 27, 1941 – Jun. 4, 2026) The Bronx-born bassist, who was in the bands of *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and *The Arsenio Hall Show*, died at age 85. Williams transitioned from percussion and piano to bass during his service in the US Marine Corps, and studied classical bass with Ron Carter. In 1967 he joined the Horace Silver Quintet whose *Serenade to a Soul Sister* (Blue Note, 1968) was his recording debut. In the mid '70s, he formed his Expectations band (featuring Ernie Watts and Bill Mays) and began work with vocalist Nancy Wilson, with whom he played for over 25 years. In his latter career, Williams focused on solo projects and tributes, most notably 2024's *The African Queen*, dedicated to the legacy of Silver. He had credits with Johnny Hodges, Buddy Tate, Louis Armstrong, Roy Ayers, Count Basie, Billy Cobham, Louie Bellson, Benny Carter, Jon Hendricks, The Manhattan Transfer, Bennie Maupin and many others.

TONY WILSON (Jun. 26, 1959 – Jun. 6, 2026) The Canadian guitarist, who had been active in Vancouver since the '80s and was associated with the West Coast creative music scene, died in his sleep at age 66. He had his final concert the day before in Vancouver as part of *Butoh Jazz*, in a quartet with a trio of Kororo Dance performers. Wilson had his own or collaborative albums on Shire Editions, Spool, Drip Audio and Songlines and credits with François Houle, cellist Peggy Lee, Bill Smith, his co-led Pugs & Crows (with guitarist Cole Schmidt) and others.