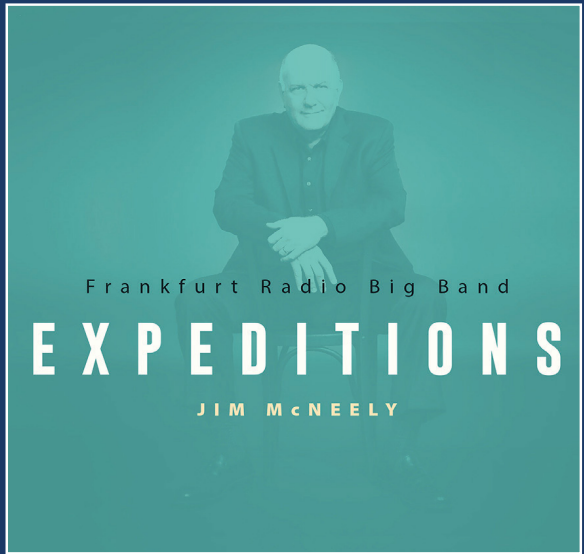




GAIA WILMER LARGE ENSEMBLE
feat. MÔNICA SALMASO
PARABÓLICO
SSC 18o8 / AVAILABLE 8/14/26

Saxophonist, composer and conductor Gaia Wilmer turns her attention to the work of the legendary Brazilian artist Gilberto Gil. With a repertoire chosen in collaboration with featured guest vocalist Mônica Salmaso, the large ensemble unites some of New York’s most renowned jazz musicians.



FRANKFURT RADIO BIG BAND
JIM McNEELY
EXPEDITIONS
SSC 1795 / AVAILABLE 8/21/26

In 2025, the jazz world lost one of its beloved talents in the arts of composing and arranging with the passing of Jim McNeely. But before he left, McNeely completed and recorded a suite of original music for his long time favored collaborative ensemble, the Frankfurt Radio Big Band. Expeditions is quite a journey, as the music suggests adventures through sound for individual musicians that McNeely had devised unique environments for.



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Prolific bassist **Greg Cohen** celebrated his 72nd birthday with a three-day residency at The Stone playing duos with a different guitarist each night. The second night (Jul. 2) featured Julian Lage and it was immediately apparent that the pair was well-comfortable with each other’s artistic proclivities. The pared-down setting engendered an experience similar to watching the 1981 film, *My Dinner with Andre*, where two intelligent, creative people (André Gregory and Wallace Shawn) discuss the facts and fictions of life as they perceive them. The conversation began with “Nature Boy”, anchored to a *cantus firmus* with crisscrossing counter melodies. Next, since we were on the (two-day) cusp of the nation’s 250th birthday, came a freedom suite, which included the WWI standard “There’s a Long, Long Trail” performed in a playfully soulful, avant-Americana style; and the gorgeous “Freedom”, composed by Bernard Herrmann for the 1966 movie *Fahrenheit 451*. The pair grew more garrulous on Cohen’s “Scramble”, taking the conversation outside of the bounds of decorum to the fringes of freedom before two Johnny Mandel gems, “Close Enough to Love” and “Emily”, returned the topic to standards. Lage, a master of diverse techniques, kept altering his tone and touch to suit musical exigencies. Cohen, equally limber, reacted with almost anything other than what you might expect from a bassist. The set ended, appropriately, with “Circle in the Circle”, written for late uber-fans Irving and Stephanie Stone, namesakes of the venue. — **Tom Greenland**



Greg Cohen @The Stone at The New School

Tenor saxophonist **James Brandon Lewis** made his Village Vanguard debut as a headliner in residency (Jun. 30 - Jul. 5) with his quartet of Aruán Ortiz (piano), Brad Jones (bass) and Chad Taylor (drums). Ironically, though the group was founded in 2019, with six albums (including just-released *Omni*) and extensive European touring, it had only appeared in NYC twice before. For Thursday’s (Jul. 2) late set, and reportedly the rest of the week, the room was fully packed. A scion of the downtown avant-jazz community, Lewis immediately established his presence with a big, brash, brusque, ecstasy-tinged tenor tone on a new blues/gospel song “Testify”, his sound signaling that he wasn’t going to hold back, that things might get a little raw. Ortiz’ light-handed acoustic piano brought yin energy to Lewis’ yang, creating a balanced flow, while Jones and Taylor brought animation, adaptability and edge. The foursome knew each other and the repertoire so well that they could afford to take chances during the performance—and indeed seemed to relish it—by bending, almost breaking the structures of the leader’s compositions, confident that the others would follow along and maybe catch them if they fell. The 80+ minute set ranged from ballads, swingers and funkies to odd-timers, Baroque hymns and free-blows. It sounded like the band really wanted to play—intros, solos, outro blowing and cadenzas were extended, repeated—but things never got so far-out that the saxophonist couldn’t bring everyone back to earth for a soft, soulful landing. (TG)

As part of Lincoln Center’s Summer for the City festival, trombonist **Sam Chess** presented and narrated *Louis Armstrong at 125, America at 250: A Birthday Celebration for Pops* (Jul. 5) at David Rubenstein Atrium, in collaboration with Jazz at Lincoln Center—making for a welcome double-dip into Pops over two days for your correspondent. The evening was a metaphoric Second Line, with a succession of A-list trumpeters, backed by a large ensemble, paying homage to the American icon, identified by Wynton Marsalis as a foundational, “transcendent genius of jazz.” This career-spanning, musical journey proved it. Leading the program with his usual gusto, was the two-time GRAMMY-nominated Alphonso Horne, perhaps the trumpeter most closely associated with Armstrong today. Along with Horne, appearing were Mike Davis, Joseph Boga, Bria Skonberg and Andrew Stephens, each of whom played three selections. Horne also paid homage to Armstrong spouse, Lil Hardin, with her “Struttin’ with Some Barbecue”, which included a bass solo by Nighthawks leader, Vince Giordano (who went for broke later on a “Tiger Rag” feature). He also played tuba, and sang *a la* Louis, “When You’re Smiling”, leading the audience in joyous clapping. Skonberg, a skilled vocalist to boot, aced “Dream a Little Dream of Me”. Chess finally soloed on “Who’s It”, while closer to a dazzling program full of Armstrong-flavored joy, was an all-cast, five-trumpeter, round robin salute to both Pops and his mentor, King Oliver, in “West End Blues”. — **Marilyn Lester**



Sam Chess @David Rubenstein Atrium

As is customary, the Louis Armstrong House Museum hosted its birthday celebration for its namesake, Pops (Jul. 4), at which THE leading authority on Armstrong, Ricky Riccardi, announced definitively that the trumpeter-vocalist was born on Independence Day. Amen. Due to extreme heat, the traditional garden festivities were moved indoors, across from the house, to the Louis Armstrong Center. The early afternoon kickoff, a curated, 30-minute listening session of original Armstrong vinyl, was spun by archivist Matthew “Fat Cat” Rivera, followed by a performance by students from the museum’s Trumpet Learning Program, with tubist David Ostwald, instructor-trumpeter Andrew Stephens and Riccardi at the piano, lending support as the kids gamely tackled “Down in New Orleans” and “West End Blues”, among others. The main feature (in two sets) then arrived: a concert by the seven-member **Armstrong House All-Stars**, led by trumpeter Alphonso Horne, largely showcasing Hot Five tunes. A treat was “Gut Bucket Blues”, the first track released from the Hot Five, recorded in November 1925. In homage to Armstrong mentor, Joe “King” Oliver, 1923’s “High Society” acknowledged Armstrong’s membership in the Creole Jazz Band, in which he played cornet. A Lil Hardin tune was also included, referencing his then wife as a creative in her own right as well as the catalyst for his career and fame. The historic 1926 recording of “Heebie Jeebies” commemorated the birth of scat, and Horne was heard in prime Louis scat mode. (ML)

A rare bass trombone-fronted combo, **Jennifer Wharton’s Bonegasm** gave a particularly satisfying celebration of all things trombone at Smalls Jazz Club (Jul. 1). Wharton—a low brass specialist, educator, bandleader and Broadway-leaning studio musician—was joined in the front line by fellow trombonists Nate Mayland, John Fedchock and Ryan Keberle, with Michael Eckroth (piano), Evan Gregor (bass, electric bass) and John Sturino (drums). The tight lineup presented detailed, challenging arrangements with flawless precision, often sounding like a big band minus trumpets and reeds. And most of the compositions were expressly written for this band. Vanessa Perica’s dramatic, multi-tempo “In Our Darkest Hour” (from the group’s latest album, 2023’s *Grit & Grace*) was a highlight. Sturino’s “Dream River” also stood out with its soaring melody over a tricky, odd-meter groove. From Bonegasm’s 2019 self-titled debut album, two clever features for the trombone section’s funky, rhythmic punch served as the set’s opener and closer, respectively: “Low Ball”, by the late Jim McNeely, and Mayland’s “Stellar”. All septet members were also heard as soloists, with some fun opportunities to compare and contrast individual styles, especially when Fedchock’s butter-smooth lines were juxtaposed with Keberle’s percussive, high-register attack. Wharton contributed warm-toned, lyrical solos showcasing her instrument’s rarely heard capacity for melody. In her stage banter between songs, the leader brought a boisterous sense of humor to the set, fitting for an ensemble with such a risqué name. — **Elijah Shiffer**



Jennifer Wharton @Smalls

At Kato Sake Works (Jul. 11), which is among a growing roster of Brooklyn breweries and distilleries hosting world-class jazz, **Subtle Delivery**—Nick Lyons (alto), Evan Francis (tenor, flute), Adam Lane (bass) and Vijay Anderson (drums)—played two sets of lesser-explored repertoire. Lyons, Lane and Anderson are often encountered in more avant garde settings, so it was fascinating to hear them essaying relatively straight-ahead material—though also included were songs by free jazz legends Ornette Coleman, Marion Brown and Bobby Bradford (Anderson has recorded with the latter). All members were facile, fiery improvisers and tasteful listeners, tuned into their bandmates, showing a deep reverence for the bebop and post-bop canons alongside their own creative perspectives. Lane, with his unique and powerful style, dug deeply into blues vocabulary on Sonny Rollins’ “Decision” and Benny Golson’s “Hasaan’s Dream”. Every selection had a subtly clever form, exploring all possibilities of interplay allowed by the chordless quartet configuration. There were plenty of backgrounds for soloists too: Francis sometimes restated a melody behind Lyons, plus trading and collective improv were almost as frequent as solos. The most intriguing arrangements were two Ornette tunes: Lane and Anderson gave “Humpty Dumpty” a downtown, punk-jazz edge with a groove between samba and uptempo rock; for “Mind and Time”, after the theme, the saxophonists continued the melody in reverse—somehow a fitting extension to the original. (ES)

Tap exists twice: as spectacle—arms carving shapes in the air—and sound. **Melissa Almaguer** built her new piece, “jalebrijes!”, on that duality. At The Jazz Gallery (Jul. 10), Almaguer’s feet, plus assorted gongs, served as the band’s percussion; her gestures echoed Jan Suphitcha’s projected animations of the leader’s drawings: black-and-white creatures prancing and floating across a dreamed landscape. The creatures are fantastical, hybrid animals, which Mexican artist Pedro Linares saw in a fever dream in the 1930s and realized in papier mâché—now folk-art canon, understood as spiritual guides. Almaguer, from Mexico, uses them to argue against a fixed identity, for the self and the shadow self. She learned tap by watching and listening, and she works as an improviser, though this was her first time writing for a band. Building gradually, her feet stated a rhythm. Almaguer’s mentor, David Virelles (piano) looped a Latin-tinged figure over it. Henry Fraser (bass) punctuated the beat, letting big tones ring. When Samantha Kochis (flute) and DoYeon Kim (gayageum) entered, the music pulled free and the bandleader’s tapping gathered velocity. Almaguer and Kim approach tap and gayageum, both often filed under heritage, as living forms. Later Fraser’s bass stalked, like one of the creatures, then softened into a duet with Virelles—the loveliest music of the night. She called this a first incarnation, which sounds right. Her improvising already becomes the focal point of any band she joins and Almaguer’s “jalebrijes!” suggests a composer just beginning to find out what she has. — **Ariella Stok**



Melissa Almaguer @The Jazz Gallery

Zeena Parkins designed her own electric harp because no such instrument existed. At Ibeam Brooklyn (Jul. 12), she spent the afternoon explaining it, and the evening making it growl and throb. Her workshop opened the second day of the third annual **Brooklyn Free Spirit Festival**, curated by Mara Rosenbloom, Melanie Dyer and Kyoko Kitamura, with improvisation exercises, including a miniature version of John Zorn’s *Cobra*. Next: listening with eyes closed, soon-to-be octogenarian Cooper-Moore played his recordings, spanning percussion duets, film scores and diddley-bow, supplying stories and counsel to Rosenbloom. Then Parkins’ trio, with Nate Wooley and Ryan Sawyer, realized her workshop’s principles of empathetic listening. Over 45 minutes, noise gathered, broke apart, then re-formed. Harp electronics buckled and flashed; Wooley’s circular-breathed trumpet tones stood like sentries; Sawyer prowled his drum kit. Standing at the instrument, a posture her design made possible, Parkins swayed, as if slow dancing with the harp, while Wooley switched to piccolo trumpet for a finale that whinnied into fire. The Interstellar Duo—Warren Trae Crudup III and Jamal Moore—stirred up (and threw down) something more organic and ceremonial from drums, bells, shells, reeds, congas and Moore’s custom-made Abujaphone. Intensity rose, tightened and receded, again demonstrating the possibilities of deep communion in improvisation. Between sets, people spilled onto the sidewalk for food and talk. That was part of it, too: a festival built around improvisation, community and belonging. (AS)

WHAT’S NEWS

The Annual **Francis Davis** Jazz Critics Mid-Year Poll has recently been published by *The Arts Fuse*. Founded in 2006 by the late jazz critic Francis Davis (1946-2025), the annual version of the poll originally appeared in *The Village Voice* (where it appeared through 2011). After the *Voice*, the yearly critics poll was published in *Rhapsody*, then via NPR (National Public Radio) and most recently *The Arts Fuse* (since 2021), helmed for the last few years by Tom Hull (both Hull and Davis were longtime *Voice* contributors). In addition to the year-end poll, this is now the second-ever mid-year poll with best-of lists, which Hull has compiled from 127 jazz critics. Drummer Tyshawn Sorey and Tomeka Reid top the results, with honorable mentions, including Adam O’Farill, Ambrose Akinmusire, Mary Halvorson, Immanuel Wilkins, Angelika Niescier and Bill Frisell, in addition to *Rara Avis* (archival) albums by Cecil Taylor and Joe Henderson. The independent cultural online arts magazine, *The Arts Fuse*—established nearly 20 years ago—covers dance, film, food, literature, TV, theater and visual arts, in addition to music. For the full results visit hullworks.net/jazzpoll/26my/index.php and for more info visit artsfuse.org.

As one of the country’s leading non-profit organizations for music education, **Save The Music** (STM), the devoted national music education charity, has helped almost 3K schools across the US to start, and expand, music programs and to collaborate closely with school and community leaders to tailor these programs to each respective school’s needs. STM advocates for the essential role of music within school curricula nationwide and promotes academic and personal growth, offering children a chance to succeed and express themselves creatively. Across the country, as music programs face ongoing and increasing challenges tied to funding uncertainty, staffing shortages, rising instrument costs and shifting education priorities, find out how you might be able to help STM continue its mission. To donate and for more info visit savethemusic.org.

The application deadline for the 17th **European Young Artists’ Jazz Award** Burghausen 2027 is Oct. 18 (note: applicants must not be older than 30 years of age by the first day of the 2027 festival). The prize is awarded annually to promote young jazz artists and will be presented in conjunction with the 56th Burghausen International Jazz Festival (Mar. 3-7, 2027) in Germany. The names of the four selected ensembles will be published this December. For the top three placements, prizes range from \$2K (third place) to \$5K (first place), plus a performance slot at the festival. Past winners include Trio Anaphora (Belgium), Simone Locami (Italy), Nils Kugelmann Trio (Germany), Trio LBT (Switzerland) and Elliot Galvin Trio (UK). For more info and to apply online visit b-jazz.com.

Last month the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music (BCM) announced the two winners of its sixth annual **Jazz Leaders Fellowship** (JLF), which supports emerging Black women and non-binary jazz musicians in NYC to “further their projects and careers.” Contemporary jazz vocalist Marikara (whose jazz foundation melds blues storytelling, hip-hop, R&B/Soul and the spirit of gospel) and Brooklyn-based, avant garde guitarist-composer-arranger alana amore colvin (who performs with Ryan Easter’s Trap Music Orchestra and S.A. Selendis Johnson’s Big Band) will each receive an unrestricted \$12,500 award, in addition to free rehearsal space and performance and curatorial opportunities. The JLF program was conceived by former BCM Board member Daniel DiPietro, and has been developed by the JLF Committee, led by vocalist-educator Fay Victor, with cellist Marika Hughes and vocalist Lezlie Harrison, among others. For more info visit bkcm.org/jlf.

NYCJR bids a fond farewell to the Lower East Side’s **Jazz Genius** (151 Essex St.), which officially opened its doors last November, but unfortunately had to close them early last month (just prior to NYCJR’s Cover Story Barry Altschul’s Jul. 9 scheduled concert date there). Though the venue didn’t make its one-year anniversary, in its brief existence it did host a bevy of NYC jazz talent, serving as home for a number of pianists in particular: ELEW, Ted Rosenthal, Ethan Iverson, David Kikoski, Marcos Varela, Jonny King, Yayoi Ikawa, Misha Piatigorsky, Jon Davis, Spike Wilner, Jean-Michel Pilic, Adam Bimbaum, pianist-vocalists Johnny O’Neal and Champian Fulton, among others. “We were open for just seven months. But it was about six months more than many people predicted!” said Marc Rabinowitz, founder and manager of Jazz Genius. Thank you, Marc, for putting your best foot forward, and here’s hoping for a jazzy, Genius resurrection.

To submit news email ldgreene@nycjazzrecord.com