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STEPHEN MATLOCK

New Year, New Faces

The Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors elects the organization's officers for the coming year each December. That makes this probably my favorite President's Corner column, because it's my chance to introduce the new board members who are key to running the Ambassadors show.

Suzy Spencer takes over as Treasurer for 2018. Suzy is a life-long Kansas City native. With an MBA in finance and accounting, she has worked as a contract negotiator for healthcare providers for nearly twenty years. But she also brings a passion for music. While growing up, her mother always kept jazz playing (all mothers should do that!) and encouraged her love of the music...and performing. Suzy learned the piano, clarinet, alto sax and guitar. She enjoys working with the musicians, and helping to find them the resources necessary to further their quality of life, support and promote their career, and spread the love of jazz throughout KC. She's jumping in to help grow the Jazz Ambassadors and all of Kansas City's wonderful jazz community.

Shelly Kinnune joins the Ambassadors board as Secretary. She was born in Oregon but, following a few corporate reloca-

tions, Shelly, her husband and two sons settled in the Kansas City area six years ago. She has served on the boards of several organizations, as a corporate executive, and as a management and educational consultant. Currently, she works with private equity in the food and agriculture industry. One son is an aspiring saxophonist, introducing her to Kansas City's incredible jazz community, which has supported and encouraged her son's musical endeavors. Now she's ready to give back by devoting time to the Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors and other organizations.

Jen Wismeier, who most recently served as Ambassadors Treasurer and who – as we all keenly recognize – has been the Jazz Ambassadors glue over these last few years, steps in as President-elect, solidifying the organization's future.

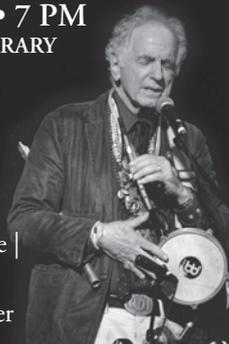
And Shelly, ready to fill more than just the Secretary role, takes over as chair of the Ambassadors Scholarship Committee. Note the ad to apply now for the 2018 Tommy Ruskin Memorial Scholarship elsewhere in this issue (the application deadline is April 30th).

continued on page 6

DAVID AMRAM: A MUSICAL LIFE

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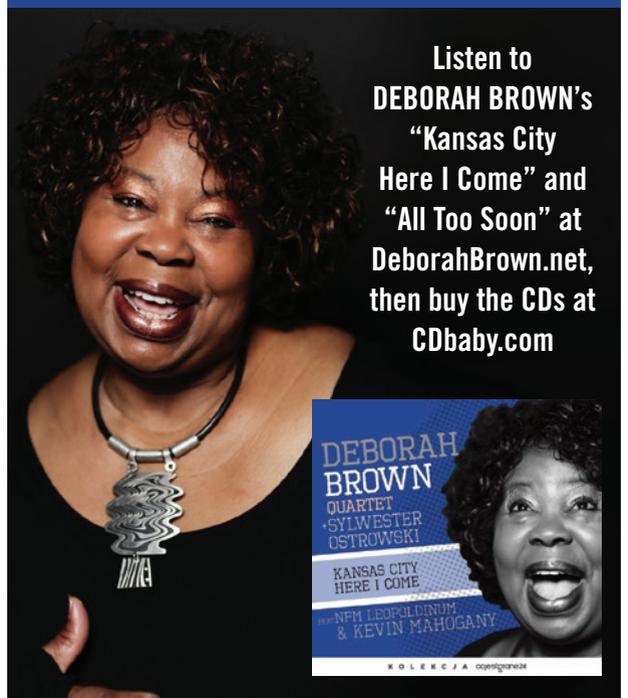


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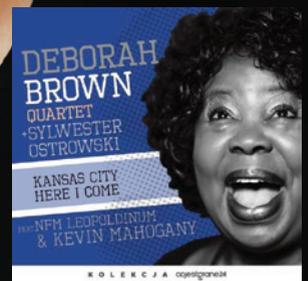
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Jam

Jazz Ambassador Magazine

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To contact the KC Jazz Ambassadors, call (816) 888-4503.

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Jam, P.O. Box 36181, Kansas City, MO 64171-6181. To contact the editor, email editor@kcjazzambassadors.org. "Jam" and "Jazz Lover's Pub Crawl" are Registered Trademarks of The Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors, Inc. *Jam*/Jazz Ambassador Magazine (Online) ISSN: 1533-0745

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PRINTING
Single Source Printing

DISTRIBUTION (PRINT)
K.C. Jazz Ambassadors

DISTRIBUTION (ELECTRONIC)
www.kcjazzambassadors.org

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The Board of Directors gratefully thanks Darrell Hoffman and Bob Clark and the *Jam* distribution team for their untiring contributions to the KCJA.

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On the Cover:

Photographer Jason Dailey captured pianist Bram Wijnands in the Majestic Steakhouse, where he performs regularly. Wijnands, originally from the Netherlands, delights crowds with a sound you would have heard there when jazz was this city's soundtrack.

No Jazz In the Woods In 2018

After 28 consecutive years of summer music festivals, the board of directors of Jazz in the Woods has decided not to stage the event in 2018. Board president Pete Belk said, “We are trying hard to figure out what it will look like in 2019 if we choose to come back with it.”



Jazz In the Woods, 2015

In a statement on the festival’s website, *jazzinthewoods.com*, organizers say, “It takes over \$200,000 to produce this annual family-friendly music festival.... Unfortunately, our club was unable to solidify the funds we need to provide the high-quality experience our community deserves.”

Belk explained that “our funding model is not working.” That model has relied on donations and sponsorships from local businesses.

Jazz in the Woods is produced by the Overland Park South Rotary Club to raise money for children’s charities. Over its lifetime, the event has donated more than \$1.5 million.

Once known as the Corporate Woods Jazz Festival, it started small, with local musicians performing on a stage on the back of a trailer. Under the Rotary’s stewardship, it grew into a two-day celebration, with a stage flanked by video monitors, an emphasis on contemporary jazz, and weekend crowds estimated in the tens of thousands.

The board will meet again in March to discuss the event’s future. Options under consideration include a return to the festival’s roots, or perhaps moving it indoors to a nearby hotel.

Original KC Jazz Streaming On the Internet

GreenLadyRadio.com has launched and is streaming original Kansas City jazz.

The internet-based commercial radio station is a longtime ambition of Green Lady Lounge owner John Scott, to make the jazz Kansas City can hear seven nights a week available



GreenLadyRadio.com

around the world. The site streams original music composed and performed by KC jazz musicians.

Music is licensed from the musicians, and they are paid by Green Lady Radio when their music is played. Payment is split between the owner of the sound recording, the song’s copyright holder, and the musicians.

Currently, eleven hours of programming cycles around the clock on *greenladyradio.com*, and the music library is growing.

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Dates Set for 2018 Charlie Parker Celebration

The dates for Kansas City's 2018 Charlie Parker Celebration have been set by KC Jazz ALIVE, which organizes the



At the Charlie Parker Celebration, 2015

ten-day event. Set aside August 16th through 25th this year. No other details have yet been released.

257 Musicians in Front of the MMF

A photo of 257 Kansas City musicians taken in front of the Mutual Musicians Foundation (MMF) in 2009 has been printed as a poster. It will be given away at Knucklehead's Garage on Monday, February 12th. Admission is free.

The poster of musicians gathered in front of the Foundation has not been previously released. Dawayne Gilley has coordinated its printing. The musicians who participated will each receive a copy, as will anyone who shows up at Knucklehead's for the Blue Monday jam on the 12th.

Music starts at 6 p.m. The presentation of the poster is scheduled for 8 p.m.

Mike Perryman

Elsewhere in this issue you'll find tributes to Kevin Mahogany and Dean Hampton. Kansas City recently lost another of its longtime jazz musicians, Mike Perryman. Bassist Ron Roberts, who performed with Perryman, contributed the following remembrance.

The Kansas City jazz community lost one of its stalwarts with the death of Mike Perryman at age 74. He lost his long battle with Alzheimer's disease on January 13, 2018. He is survived by his wife Sharron, his eight children, and nineteen grandchildren.

After leaving the Navy in 1964, Mike began his career as a drummer with the Ron Roberts Trio at the Baghdad Lounge. He played bass with Pat Loftus and drums with the Tom-



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NEWS & HIGHLIGHTS CONTINUED

my Martin Big Band and the Red Onion Jazz Babies, and was a staff drummer at Worlds of Fun. In 1979, he joined the Steve Miller Big Band with Julie Turner, and played in all of its variations over the years. Mike played clarinet with the Jazz Masters and tenor saxophone with Milt Abel.



Mike Perryman at the Baghdad Lounge, 1965

One of the most versatile KC jazz players, he performed professionally on all four of those instruments. He was also a credible pianist and guitarist. Everyone who knew the happy-go-lucky Irishman loved him. ||

PRESIDENT'S CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

New talent on the board is not the only exciting news. The Kansas City Jazz Orchestra is traveling to Hanover, Germany in May to perform, and the Ambassadors are helping to organize a fundraiser for the trip on April 29th. More details will come on that in the next issue. For now, block that date out on your calendar.

The Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors have been publishing this magazine and supporting jazz in Kansas City for more than thirty years. We're excited to have people in place who are ready to propel us into the next three decades...at least! ||

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Kevin Mahogany



The New York *Times* wrote that singer Kevin Mahogany “arrived on the national jazz stage in the 1990s boasting a silky tone and a languid swagger. His style drew on Kansas City’s tradition of blues male vocals, while also reflecting the influence of R&B and jazz from the 1960s and ’70s. His voice was weighty and wide, yet his articulation always remained crisp.”

Mahogany died in his Kansas City home on December 17th.

Kevin started playing piano in third grade, switched to baritone sax, then joined Eddie Baker’s New Breed Jazz Orchestra at age twelve. He studied with saxophonist Ahmad Aladeen and attended Lincoln High School and Baker University. While at Baker University, he began to consider himself a vocalist. He told *London Jazz News*, “A lot of my improvising style came from my instrumental playing. I had the thoughts, but my fingers wouldn’t cooperate enough. I started singing it and it just seemed to work out.”

He released his first CD, *Double Rainbow*, in 1993 on the Enja label. He toured the world following his first Warner Bros. label release in 1996, *Kevin Mahogany*. In total, he recorded more than a dozen albums.

Kevin played a blues singer modeled after Big Joe Turner in Robert Altman’s 1996 film, *Kansas City*. He taught at Boston’s Berklee College of Music and at the University of Miami. He returned to Kansas City last summer after the death of his wife, Allene.

Kevin Mahogany was 59 years old. ❧

Photos clockwise from opposite: Kevin Mahogany at last summer’s Kansas City Jazz and Heritage Festival; Kevin at the 2014 Prairie Village Jazz Festival with Joe Cartwright (piano), Tyrone Clark (bass) and Michael Warren (drums); Kevin Mahogany at the 2014 Prairie Village Jazz Festival

Photos by Larry Kopitnik

Kansas City jazz woke up on Thanksgiving day to the news that the night before, on November 22nd, we lost one of the music's greatest fans and ambassadors, Dean Hampton. Former *Jam* editor Mike Metheny has collected remembrances and tributes from people who knew Dean. If you knew him, you recognize what he meant to the KC jazz community. If you didn't know Dean, you're about to understand.

BY MIKE METHENY

Thank You, D

Longtime Kansas City Jazz Ambassador Dean Hampton is remembered for his steadfast support of the music and the friendship he shared along the way.

"I think I must have met Dean at the Phoenix back in the day. We became friends and eventually he was my website designer. That was at the beginning of the digital age, so he was a forerunner of that era and was always interested in helping the artists and the clubs get the word out. He *loved* the music and its history. He also loved good food, which we talked about often. I had a party for him several years ago that I think he really enjoyed. He deserved to be shown that appreciation for his dedication and for being such a good, good man. Thank you Dean; I will treasure our very good memories."

—Karrin Allyson, *vocalist, recording artist*

"Dean Hampton was a good friend and a huge supporter of Kansas City jazz. He did this in the most direct way possible, and one in which we all could do more of – he showed up. Whether this was volunteering at a jazz function, or simply coming to see someone's performance in a local club, he was always around. We will all miss him dearly.

—Doug Auwarter, *drummer and percussionist, "Sons of Brasil"*

"Back when smoke still filled the local jazz joints, Dean Hampton showed up at our steady gig with a love for the music. He listened intently. He brought together those he thought needed to know one another. Several jazz advocates, including former mayor Dick Berkley, were given purpose by the common sense ideas that Dean presented. We watched in awe as thousands joined in the original Jazz Lover's Pub Crawls and as jazz steadily increased in its following. Dean Hampton is missed and revered by many. His love for the music lives on in the institutions and ideas he fostered in honor of Kansas City Jazz."

—David Basse, *host of "Jazz With David Basse," Kansas Public Radio*

"Dean Hampton always struck me as a truth-first old school newspaper reporter. Smoker, drinker, gravely voice with a great laugh. When he was the editor of *Jam*, he did an interview with me and had to fight to get me featured and on the cover. I was 'only a bass player and it wouldn't create any interest,' he was told. That was in 1989. (The magazine was a smaller format back then.) I didn't see him much the last few years. He was someone who, when he did come out to listen, he listened. Even when he was engaged in a conversation to be polite, you knew he was still listening. Dean did so

DEAN!

much to get respect for jazz in Kansas City. His loss leaves a void that will never be filled.”

—Bob Bowman, *bassist, recording artist*

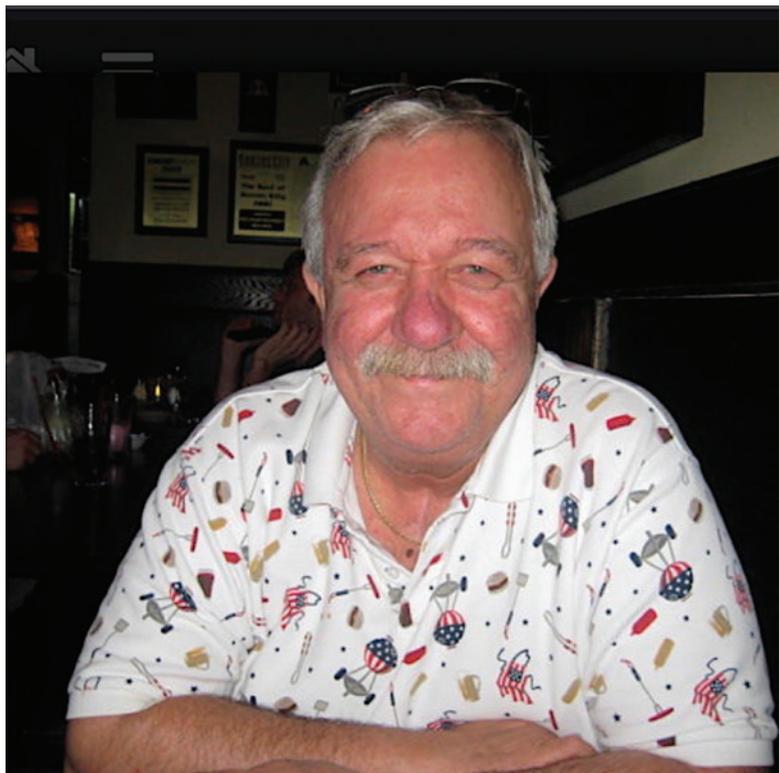
“Dean Hampton was always there for our Kansas City musicians. He dedicated himself to bringing attention and recognition to their music. He was a talented writer who enjoyed publicizing and supporting KC jazz musicians. We loved working with Dean in the KC Jazz Ambassadors.”

—Nelson and Mary Ellen Farney,
KC Jazz Ambassadors

“The main thing I remember about Dean was when I was first involved with laying out the magazine. As a member of the KCJA board, Dean was very hands-on regarding things he wanted to see in *Jam*. I try not to be a temperamental artist, but my initial instinct was to push back. But most of what he was asking for made the magazine better, and some of those things are still part of the magazine today. Another contribution from Dean was version 1.0 of the Jazz Ambassadors website. Not everybody had one in the mid 1990s, and this was long before there were website builder applications that let anyone who is passably computer literate build a site. Dean was a lot older than the typical person who would take on trying to design a website, but he dug in, figured it out, and he made the site something even the *New York Times* took notice of. Dean’s energy as a Kansas City jazz advocate was unmatched.

—Rod McBride, *graphic designer and Jam layout artist*

“The passing of Dean Hampton last November was a big loss for Kansas City jazz. Among many things, Dean was a



tireless advocate for and fan of the music. He was a dedicated contributor to jazz journalism in KC, especially when we worked together at *Jam* from 1994 to 2003. (Dean was Director of Publications for the Jazz Ambassadors, I was the magazine’s editor.) He was also an excellent web site designer, sharing his talents with a wide range of musicians and clients. Most of all, Dean was a true and loyal friend. I will miss our lengthy (and



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THANK YOU, DEAN CONTINUED

lively) phone calls; I will miss his sincere and steady rapport; and I will miss his good cheer, always up, never down.”

—Mike Metheny, former Jam editor, trumpeter, educator

“My earliest memory of Dean was around 1990 in the 18th and Vine district, near what is now the Blue Room. I was outside on the corner and a man approached and asked what I thought of the music. He didn’t recognize me as a local jazz aficionado, so I introduced myself and told him I had recently returned to KC, was an ardent jazz lover, and had participated in the formation of the Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors years earlier in 1984. Right then and there I got an official introduction to *real* Kansas City jazz from Dean Hampton, including a brief history of KC jazz heritage, where to go, which musicians I absolutely had to hear, who to know in the jazz community, and where and what to eat. I felt like I had struck gold! Dean made me feel so welcome and comfortable that I began to frequent new and different clubs and met many new friends, all thanks to Dean Hampton. Almost thirty years later, I can still see his smiling face. In fact, his entire being was lit up and animated by the music. His love and appreciation were contagious to everyone around. Although I left KC in 1993, I remained attached to the scene and kept in touch with Dean for all things Kansas City jazz. He always maintained his infectious enthusiasm and was a constant source of knowledge and lore. I will be forever grateful to Dean for teaching me and countless others how to appreciate and love Kansas City jazz.”

—Karen Ralston, KC Jazz Ambassador, Santa Fe, NM

“Dean was a great friend and the original ‘sled dog’ of the Jazz Ambassadors. I’m pretty sure Dean, Vicki and I, along with the Farneys and Dorothy Edwards, joined at the same time in 1990. We all picked up the torch and started running with it and, unlike us, Dean never stopped. More than once he said, ‘If you really believe that the KC jazz scene is chilly, then you either don’t like jazz, or you haven’t tried to find the hot spots that will warm your blood back to the temperature of the living!’”

—Mike and Vicki Rolf, KC Jazz Ambassadors

“Dean was my first (and best) friend in Kansas City. He was the best guide, the best web master, my big brother, and my mentor. It was beyond race, nationality, gender and generation. All of my Kansas City connections and activities started with Dean twenty years ago. Our friendship was unique and special. He taught me how wonderful Kansas City is. We shared not only jazz but many things in Kansas City. Thank you, Dean, for so much fun and laughter.

—Yoko Takemura, KC Jazz Ambassador, Tokyo, Japan

“Dean was a great guy and a wonderful supporter of jazz and the jazz community. He was so warm and encouraging; we lit up every time he honored us with his presence. Tommy [Ruskin] and I both thought the world of him, and he will be missed.”

—Julie Turner, vocalist, recording artist

“Dean’s daughter Shannon describes it as ‘a twinkle.’ Dean walked into a room with an exclamatory presence – and that twinkle – and with his booming baritone voice. It seemed he always began or ended whatever he had to say with a hearty laugh. He would have made a great Santa Claus. Being in his company certainly felt like a special season. His is one of those spirits that will remain beyond his physical presence.”

—Sharon Daugherty Valteau, KC Jazz Ambassador

“I met Dean Hampton in the late 1980s when he approached me about taking photos for the Kansas City Jazz Ambassador Magazine [*Jam*]. From that moment on,

he was a photographer and reviewer of live performances for the magazine, and he eventually became Senior Editor. Dean took thousands of pictures of local jazz performances. At the end of each year he would ask for help organizing them into photo albums. It was a daunting task, but I'm sure if the albums still exist they are incredibly valuable. Dean always had a positive spirit. He was someone designed to lend a helping hand, to find solutions. The Kansas City jazz scene is fortunate to have had someone like Dean Hampton in its corner."

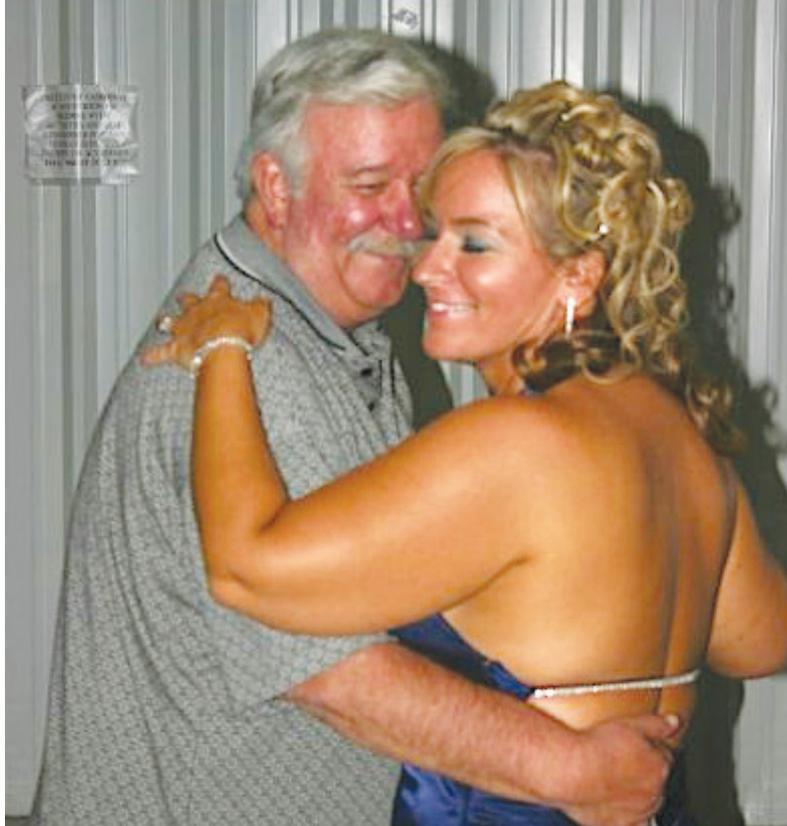
—Kathy Feist Vescovi, writer, former Jam editor

"Dean Hampton was a beneficial presence in all our lives, especially those of us in the Kansas City jazz scene. His total dedication to promoting and supporting the musicians gave all of us encouragement and joy. The twinkle in his eye and his big laugh added to the music he loved so much. He always signed off his messages and emails with the motto, 'Keep Swinging!' Thank you, Dean. Your life, dedication and legacy will live on in every note that is played in Kansas City. Keep Swinging!"

—Tim Whitmer, pianist, band leader, recording artist

"By the time I joined the Jazz Ambassadors in 1992, there was a cast of dedicated aficionados including Kathe Kaul, Michael and Vicki Rollf, Nelson and Mary Ellen Farney, Akers Aitch, Gary Becker and Betty Crow, who, alongside Dean Hampton, became an integral part of the KC jazz and blues scene. It was a real team effort, and Dean was one of our leading figures. Something about Dean was at once calming and motivating. I don't think I ever heard him say, 'No' or 'We can't.' He always had a smile and was quick to laugh. I remember him several times with a car full of *Jams*, late at night, driving to all the clubs to drop off the latest copy. Dean remained dedicated to *Jam* and to KC jazz for the long haul. He was genial and good-natured and amazing. He was smart and he embraced technology. Kansas City is a much better place for jazz, thanks to Dean's efforts and those of the Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors of the 1990s, of which Dean was an important part."

—Todd Wilkinson, saxophonist, educator, past KCJA president :||



Dean dancing with his daughter Shannon at her 2008 wedding.

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BRAM WIJNANDS

STRIDE PIANO VIA THE NETHERLANDS



Bram at the Majestic Steakhouse

BY JOE DIMINO

Welcome to the Kansas City jazz time warp.

Bram Wijnands' stride piano, bouncing with playful delight, catapults the listener to another era, a time when swing dominated this city. And wherever fans catch him – maybe downstairs at the Majestic Steakhouse, a onetime speakeasy, maybe at KC Bier Company – it's a very happy journey.

JAZZ IN THE NETHERLANDS

Wijnands' journey started in Eindhoven, Netherlands, when three year old Bram discovered the keyboards. "My aunt called my father and said that they had to get me a piano," he recalls, amused. "I wasn't the typical kid where the parents want to give their kids piano lessons. I was the other way around. I wanted to learn it, badly."

At age five, Wijnands heard Django Reinhardt with the Hot Club of France and knew he wanted to play jazz. But with no actual jazz teacher in his hometown, initially it was self-taught. "My father had a big hand in the beginnings of getting into jazz," he says. "He gave me examples of stuff he liked. It just worked out that way. I have been playing swing music ever since."

"I saw *Stormy Weather* on the BBC when I was eight and Fats [Waller] doing 'Ain't Misbehavin'." After I saw that movie scene, it was an easy decision." Wijnands laughs. "It sounded so rich and was so much fun. I thought, I have to do that."

His interests expanded to Errol Garner, Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson, and Bud Powell. "They had such great harmonics," he says. "It was really interesting, intelligent and fun."

Wijnands calls 1930s and '40s music, when most record sales were jazz, the height of artistic creativity. "That was the only time when popular music and intelligence went hand in hand," he wryly laments. "I have not seen it since."

Wijnands attended the Hilversum Conservatory and graduated with a degree in jazz instrumental education and performance in 1991. "That was when I got totally immersed into jazz," he recalls. "I loved it and learned so much there. There were things I wanted to know that I couldn't figure out on my own. They taught me a lot about block harmony. That was the style that George Shearing played, very chordal. I look back fondly on that time. I had great teachers."

Connections to Kansas City began at the Conservatory, where he met vocalist Deborah Brown (last issue's cover profile). "It all started as a student and I got to know her very well," Wijnands says. "I was also a piano student and was asked a lot to be in lessons and accompany her vocal students. I performed for her and knew her as a person and how she taught vocals."

Wijnands also cultivated a musical partnership with Kansas City jazz vocalist Richard Ross. Brown persuaded Ross to perform with her in the Netherlands. Bram backed them both with his trio.

His first visit to the United States was with Brown and Ross, to New York then to Kansas City. "We didn't have a hard time getting around or feeling at home in KC," he says. "There were

PHOTO BY JASON DAILEY



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PHOTO BY LARRY KOPITNIK

Bram at the 2017 Prairie Village Jazz Festival

a lot of people that were very nice to us. KC people are more casual and have their feet on the ground.”

The size of the crowds pouring in to City Lights Jazz Club to hear Wijnands with Richard Ross violated the fire code for eight consecutive nights. “At the end of that first trip, KC was so much fun. We made so many friends,” he says. “In 1992, we were traveling back and forth a lot with Richard between KC and Europe. At the end of that year, we officially relocated to KC. It was a process, but a lot of fun.”

Many of today’s KC jazz fans never had a chance to hear Richard Ross or his booming vocals, perhaps most reminiscent of Jimmy Witherspoon. Wijnands remembers him as funny and laid back. “The most interesting thing about Richard was that he was a terrible stutterer when he talked,” Bram says. “When he got on stage, he would sing without any stuttering. It was very interesting.”

WORKING IN KC

From 2000 through 2015, Wijnands taught at the UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance with Bobby Watson. Today



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he teaches at Kansas City Kansas Community College with Jim Mair.

But after landing in Kansas City in 1992, Wijnands started a long regular stint at The Phoenix. When the club changed ownership, the time was right for new opportunities. "I figured out where all the jam sessions were at," he explains. "I went to The Levy when [drummer] Tommy Ruskin was playing and would sit in with [guitarist] Sonny Kenner sometimes. That was great fun. It was a good way to get to know people."



PHOTO BY LARRY KOPITNIK

The Bram Wijnands Swingtet at the 2017 Prairie Village Jazz Festival

After reading an article in *Jam* about a new owner at The Majestic, he called on the steakhouse with a downstairs jazz club that, in KC's wide open 1930s, was the speakeasy reportedly favored by politicians.

"If you don't ask, you are not going to get it. I told him who I was and that folks were coming to The Phoenix all the time," he says. "He gave me a shot and it's worked out ever since. It's made life a lot easier for me."

Wijnands explains that Fats Waller and Erroll Garner played a rich sound when they played big chords. Under that foundation, a pianist can support the melody and make the sound more orchestral. That's the backbone of Bram Wijnands's jazz philosophy. Whether performing with his six-piece Swingtet, with quartets, or working solo, he says, "I'm always going for the richest possible sound. With the band I focus on good arranging."

Wijnands will always remember April 6, 1998, when then-Kansas City mayor Emanuel Cleaver proclaimed Bram Day. A show at New York's Carnegie Hall followed. "I was surprised when I got that proclamation and felt honored he recognized that as significant for me and the city since I decided to live here," Bram says. "I still look on that very fondly. I didn't see that one coming at all."

"It's a beautiful city. There is a lot going on culturally. When you make contact with musicians here, they are very welcoming and not stand-offish at all. In New York, they are

either very nice or very competitive. Here it's not the case. I always feel very at home here.

"I am making a decent living doing what I do. It's the recognition that you receive from different sources that means the most. When I did Carnegie Hall or Jazz at Lincoln Center with Bobby Watson back in 2005, those are great high profile things you can stick under your belt."

Wijnands still plays gigs with Kansas City's New Red Onion Jazz Babies and travels to Pennsylvania for a jazz festival.

He also performs at universities throughout this country and returns home to the Netherlands for a string of shows when visiting his family.

Reflecting on the jazz differences between Kansas City and the Netherlands, he notes, "It works different here. A lot of gigs you land here are regular ones. Even shorter ones can last for several months. You don't see that in Europe much at all."

Jazz talent has passed down to the next Wijnands generation. His daughter Lucille just finished a string of dates as a jazz vocalist at Birdland in New York. "She is turning into a great jazz singer. I'm very proud of her," he says. She is studying at the conservatory at State University of New York (SUNY) Purchase. "I'm planning on doing a recording session with her this year. I'm hoping to get my swing band to back her up. She has been maturing so quickly. It's really something else."

Wijnands laughs loudly. "If someone comes to give me a million dollar album contract, I'd do it, but I like what I do and I'll just keep doing what I'm doing. At the end of the day, I'm spending my life with things that I like because if I'm unhappy, people around me will know and they won't be happy. I don't want that."

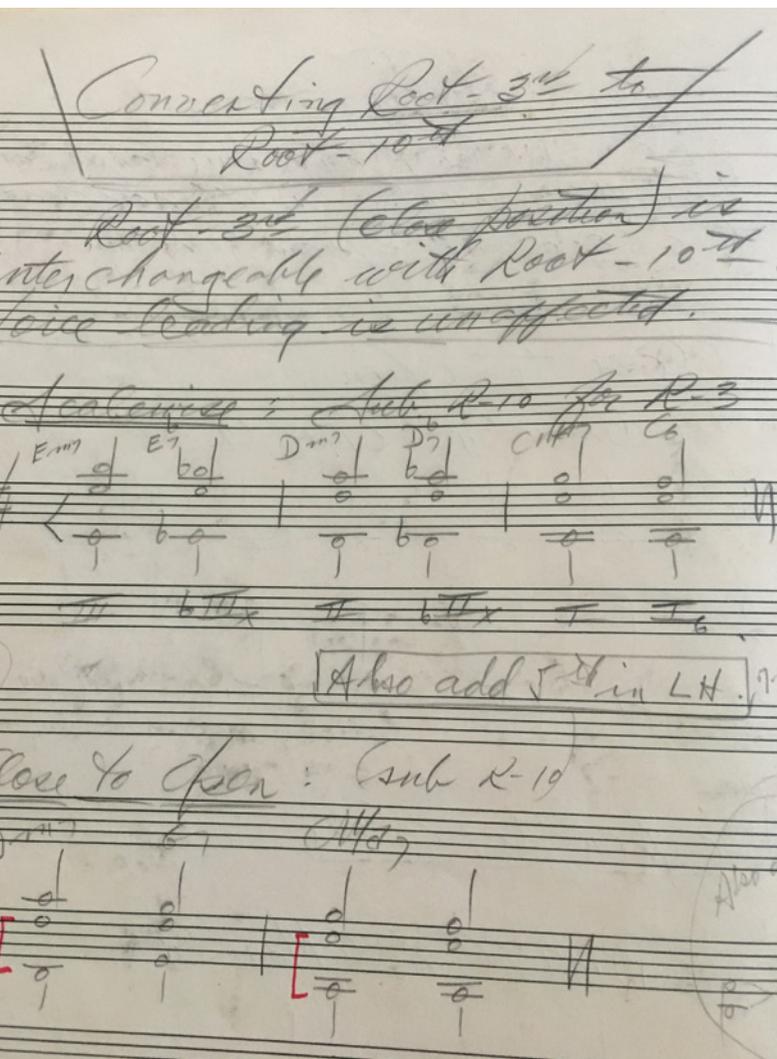
"It's fun to play. It keeps your brain working.

"It's a viable art form."

||

JOHN ELLIOTT:

THE THEORY GURU WHO INFLUENCED A GENERATION OF KC JAZZ MUSICIANS



A page from John Elliott's lessons

"If you wanted to be a working jazz musician in Kansas City in the seventies, you got there through theory lessons with John Elliott." Pianist Steve Million's comment resonates with baby-boomer-and-beyond jazzers who began their careers in Kansas City. Pat Metheny, Bobby Watson, Rod Fleeman, Danny Embrey, Stan Kessler, David Belove, Larry Williams,



John Elliott Trio with Mary Welch. Left to right: Tommy Ruskin, Bob Branstetter, Mary Welch, John Elliott

Steve Cardenas, Karrin Allyson, Dave Scott – some alumni of John Elliott's studio – not only learned from him the complexities of jazz harmony at a time when jazz theory wasn't taught even in schools known for their jazz programs, they also spread his teaching methods throughout the country. "It was important

BY CAROLYN GLENN BREWER

to John that young musicians played correctly. He wanted his stuff out there,” says trumpeter Kessler. “He set me up for life.”

This legacy might have surprised John, although he never doubted the value of his method. Often described as shy and humble, as well as acerbic, cerebral, and reticent, those closest to him considered John’s temperament incompatible with self-promotion. His perfectionism was legendary. Fellow members of the Kix Band, which he co-founded, remember him quickly pulling one of his charts out of the book when a rehearsal of it wasn’t going well. Linda Durrell, who sang with John’s trio in the late seventies, took a few piano lessons from him to get a better understanding of jazz harmony. John’s habit of writing out the next lesson while listening to her play prevented him from watching Linda’s hands. “One day I was doing one of my scale exercises and he stopped me and told me I was doing it all wrong. I told him I was doing it the way I always did it. So he said, “Then we have to go back to the beginning and start all over.””

A lifelong resident of the Kansas City area, John graduated from the Kansas City Conservatory with a degree in composition in 1950. It was at the Conservatory that John met another aspiring young composer, Bob Brookmeyer. The two bonded over their love of playing and writing in a way that would last the rest of their lives. Brookmeyer’s widow, Jan, recalls that Bob highly respected John’s musicianship, and always looked to him for an honest opinion about a new project. This sharing

continued on page 27

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GALE TALLIS

Improvising Life and Sardines Real Hot

Cyrille Aimée
February 17th

New York *Times* reviewer Nate Chinen described vocalist Cyrille Aimée as having a “sweet, girlish voice that she controls with a sniper’s precision.” The *Wall Street Journal* dubbed her “one of the most promising jazz singers of her generation.”



Improvisation isn’t just a technique for Cyrille Aimée. It’s a way of life. She has ventured from singing on European street corners to winning the Montreux Jazz Festival Vocal Competition and the Sarah Vaughn International Jazz Vocal Competition. She has gone from sneaking out to sing in gypsy encampments in her native France to co-starring with Bernadette Peters in New York, in a tribute to Stephen Sondheim

and backed by Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

Improvisation in life led Aimée to jazz. Her first album in 2008, *Cyrille Aimée and the Surreal Band*, mixed buoyant swing with French and Latin tinges, adding touches of folk and pop. A pair of duo albums with Brazilian guitarist Diego Figueiredo followed, then live dates captured at Birdland and Smalls Jazz Club, the latter featuring trumpeter Roy Hargrove. Next was an ebullient session with the Chicago Jazz Orchestra. Her two latest albums, from 2014 and 2016, feature two guitarists, one playing contemporary jazz and the other gypsy-style steel strings.

Cyrille Aimée improvises her way to the Folly stage on Saturday, February 17th at 8:00 p.m., preceded by a JazzTalk with Cyrille and David Basse at 7:00 p.m. Tickets start at \$20 and are available at www.follytheater.org or by calling 816-474-4444.

Hot Sardines March 9th

Take energetic brass, a boisterous three-man horn section, and slather it over lively stride piano. Now add the cool vocals of Miss Elizabeth to those hot horns and pick a tune they would’ve played in the ’20s – or maybe one from a little earlier or a smidge later – and have lots of fun.

I’ll bet this is what it sounded like in a speakeasy. But instead of a decadent nightclub, let’s put this music on the Folly stage.

And call the band the Hot Sardines.

Jazz Times dubbed their self-titled debut album “one of the best vocal albums of 2014.” It spent more than a year on the Billboard Jazz Chart. Meanwhile, *The London Times* praised their live performances for “crisp musicianship” and “immaculate and witty showmanship.”

Bandleader Evan Palazzo and singer Elizabeth Bougerol met in 2007 after they both answered a Craigslist ad about a jazz jam session above a Manhattan noodle shop. They bonded over a mutual admiration for the music of Fats Waller, Dinah Washington, Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday.

“When we started out as a band,” says Elizabeth, “we played illegal parties in these secret spots in Brooklyn. Down and dirty, and that was one of the reasons we loved it.” Since then they have performed with the Boston Pops, played the Newport and Montreal jazz festivals, and have toured the world.

“Just be yourself and do what you like,” adds Evan. “Which is really how we approach playing music.”

The Hot Sardines website proclaims, “Fueled by the belief that classic jazz feeds the heart and soul, the Hot Sardines are on a mission to make old sounds new again and prove that joyful music can bring people together.”



Sounds kind of lofty to me. Actually, they’re just a whole bunch of joy.

The Hot Sardines will raucously swing the Folly on Friday, March 9th at 8:00 p.m. A La Mode opens the show. Molly Hammer hosts a JazzTalk at 7:00 p.m. Tickets start at \$20 and are available at www.follytheater.org or by calling 816-474-4444:|

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CLAIRE MCDONALD AND MARISSA BAUM

The Neon Signs of 18th & Vine

Most of us are familiar with the welcoming neon sign which towers above the Historic 18th and Vine Jazz District. There are a handful of neon signs along 18th Street, but imagine a time during the jazz age when the entire neighborhood was illuminated with glowing signs advertising shops, restaurants, and clubs. You can experience a piece of 1920s nightlife by stepping into the permanent exhibition of the American Jazz Museum. On display are original and replica neon signs that once filled business and the entertainment district with a colorful glow.

At a time when prohibition ruled in other American cities, thanks to Tom Pendergast, spirits flowed freely in Kansas City, making it a hotbed of revelry and nightclubs. Some say nearly 120 clubs and 300 bars operated during prohibition, most open 24 hours a day. This raunchy reputation earned Kansas City the nickname “Paris of the Plains,” likening it to the French city

and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson could all enjoy the fine dining experience denied to them at all-white establishments elsewhere in the city. Hotel Street also boasted the original Blue Room jazz club (the namesake for the Museum’s own jazz club) which hosted jam sessions where the distinctive Kansas City swing sound developed.

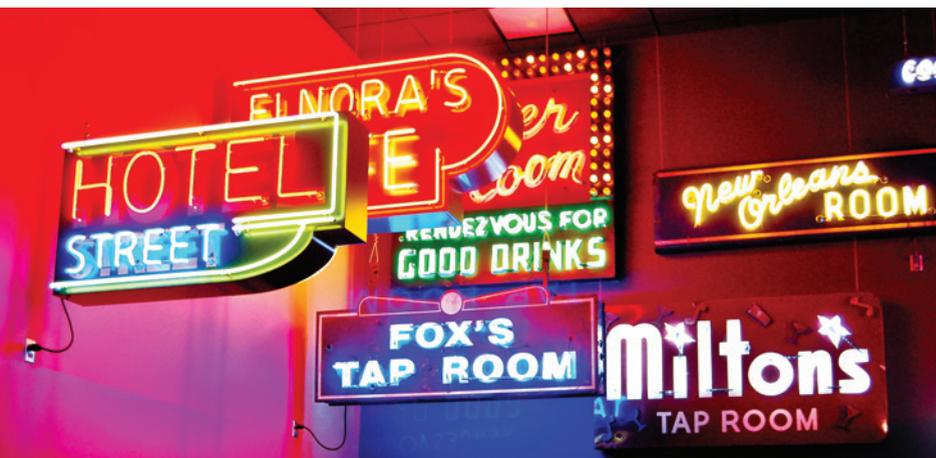
Three doors down on 18th Street, one could find The Subway Club, where musicians played into the wee hours of the night. Next door to the Subway Club was Elnora’s Cafe, one of the few fine dining options for African Americans. Elnora’s was well known for being open late enough to serve hungry jazz fans leaving the clubs after late night sets.

Directly across the street from Elnora’s, on the south side of 18th Street, was Fox’s Tavern. The Museum’s sign reads “Fox’s Tap Room” but photographs from the period show a sign for “Fox’s,” indicating that there may have been different names for the same venue. Fox’s original location was in the Hotel Street, but when a new building opened on the South side of 18th street, Fox’s moved to the new prime location between the Monarch Baseball Club office on its left, and the Piccolo Club on its right.

Some of the neon signs in the American Jazz Museum’s collection are not from 18th and Vine, but instead from 12th Street, another vivacious late night center. A well-known proprietor along 12th Street was club owner Milton Morris. The Milton’s Tap Room sign on display at the Museum once stood outside one of the many clubs Morris operated. Morris was a recognizable character in Kansas City. A personal friend of President Harry Truman, Morris unsuccessfully ran for elected office multiple times and was one

of the club owners who gave Count Basie his start. In a Kansas City *Times* article, Basie recalled that Morris paid him \$5 a night, and his band members \$3 plus room and board. Morris stands out for his recognition of the value of jazz musicians and the role they played in creating the lively atmosphere which people flocked to night after night.

These signs preserve the rich history of 18th and Vine and 12th Street, and the popular venues that earned Kansas City a national reputation. It was here that the Kansas City jazz style, beloved all around the world, flourished because of partygoers, flowing spirits, and excellent cuisine, all under the glow of neon lights. ||



known for its lascivious nightlife. The 18th and Vine district and the clubs on 12th Street were centers for jazz and entertainment.

The modern neon sign welcoming all to the 18th and Vine district sits atop the building where the Hotel Street once operated. Reuben Street’s hotel – more commonly referred to as Street’s – was the most luxurious hotel available to African American travelers. Street’s was the preferred spot of Negro League baseball players when they passed through Kansas City for a game against the hometown team, the Kansas City Monarchs. At Street’s, one could find sixty well-appointed rooms with running hot and cold water. For upscale dining, there was the Rose Room, where Billie Holiday, Cab Calloway,

LOCAL LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

18TH & VINE

- J The Blue Room**
18th & Vine 816-474-2929
Mon. — Blue Monday Jam
Thur. - Sat. — Live Jazz
- J Kansas City Blues & Jazz Juke House**
1700 E. 18th Street 816-472-0013
Thurs. - Open Jam session 7:30-11:30 p.m.
Fri. - Live Band 6:00 - 10:00 p.m.
Sat. - Live Band 5:00 - 9:00 p.m.
- J Mutual Musicians Foundation**
1823 Highland 816-471-5212
Fri. - Sat. — Late Night Jazz 1:00 a.m.

DOWNTOWN

- J Black Dolphin**
1813 Grand 816-215-2954
Fri. - Sat. — Live Jazz 7:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
- J The Brick**
1727 McGee 816-421-1634
Live Jazz & Eclectic
- J The Chesterfield**
14th & Main 816-474-4545
Wed. — West Coast Swing
Fri. — Swing
Sat. — Salsa
- J Corvino's Supper Club**
1830 Walnut 816-832-4564
Tues. - Fri. — Jazz Soloist 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Fri. - Sat. — Jazz, Latin 9:30 p.m. - 12:30 a.m.
- J Green Lady Lounge**
1809 Grand 816-215-2954
7 days a week — Live Jazz
- JB The Kill Devil Club**
14th & Main 816-588-1132
Fri. - Sat. 8:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
- J Majestic Restaurant**
931 Broadway 816-221-1888
7 days a week — Live Jazz
- JB The Phoenix**
302 W. 8th Street 816-221-jazz
Tues.-Thurs. — Live music 7:00 - 11:00 p.m.
Fri. — Live Music 4:30 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
Sat. - Sun. — Live Music 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Sat. - Live Music 4:30 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
- B Prohibition Hall**
1118 McGee 816-446-7832
Thurs. — Blues Jam 7:00 p.m.
- J Reserve Restaurant & Lounge
Ambassador Hotel**
1111 Grand Blvd 816-298-7700
Sat. — Live jazz 8:00 - 11:00 p.m.
- J The Ship**
1217 Union Avenue 816-471-7447
Thurs. — Live Jazz 9:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
- J Tank Room**
1813 Grand Blvd 816-214-6403
Mon. — Live Music 8:00 - 11:00 p.m.
Sat. — Live Music 8:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
- J Yi's Snack Bar**
128 W. 18th Street 816-472-5533
Wed., Thurs., and Sun. — Live Jazz

MIDTOWN/WESTPORT

- J Californos**
4124 Pennsylvania 816-531-1097
Live Jazz
- JB Jazz - A Louisiana Kitchen**
39th & State Line 816-531-5556
Mon. - Sat. — Live Music, 7:00 p.m.
- B The Levee**
16 W. 43rd St. 816-561-5565
Wed. - Blues Jam 8:00 p.m.
Thurs. - Sat. — Live Music
- JB Westport Coffeehouse Theater**
4010 Pennsylvania 816-756-3222
Wed. - Thurs. — Live Music
- B Westport Saloon**
4112 Pennsylvania 816-960-4560
Mon., Thurs. — Live Blues 9:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.
Tues. — Blues Jam 10:00 p.m.

PLAZA

- J American Slang Modern Brasserie @
InterContinental Hotel**
401 Ward Parkway 816-303-2945
Sundays: Jazz Brunch w/Jessica Page Duo 10am-2pm
Tues. - Thurs. Live Music 7-11pm
Fri. - Sat. - Live Music 8:00 - Midnight
- J Café Trio**
4558 Main Street 816-756-3227
Tues. - Wed. — Live Jazz 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.
Thurs. - Sat. — Live Jazz, 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.
- J Eddie V's**
700 W. 47th St. 816-531-2537
7 days a week — Live jazz in the lounge
- J Parkway Social Kitchen on the Plaza**
616 Ward Parkway 816-214-5616
Live music every Thurs. - Sat.
- J Plaza III**
4749 Pennsylvania 816-753-0000
Sat. — Lonnie McFadden 7:00 - 11:00 p.m.
- J Raphael Hotel, Chaz Restaurant**
325 Ward Parkway 816-756-3800
Mon. - Sat. — Live Jazz
Sun. — Jazz Brunch 10:00 - 1:00

NORTH

- J Cascone's North**
3737 North Oak Trfy. 816-454-7977
Sat. — Live Jazz
- B Frank James Saloon**
10919 MO-45, Parkville 816-505-0800
Thurs. — Open Mic 7:00 p.m.
- B The Hideout**
6948 N Oak Trafficway
Gladstone 816-468-0550
Mon. — Blues Jam 7:00 p.m.
- JB Johnny's Back Yard**
1825 Buchanan, NK 816-985-1157
Fri. - Sat. — Live Music 9:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.
Sun. — Blues Jam 7:00 p.m.
- J Repeal 18th**
1825 Buchanan St., NK 816-527-9819
Wed. - Sat. — Live Music
- J Soirée New Orleans Bistro**
14121 Earthworks Drive
Smithville 816-476-6002
Fri. - Sat. — Live jazz 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.

EAST

- B B.B.'s Lawnside BBQ**
1205 E. 85th Street 816-822-7427
Tues. - Sun. — Live Blues
Sat. 2:00 - 5:30 — Jazz & Blues Jam w/Mama Ray
- B Bodee's BBQ & Burgers**
522 S Main, Grain Valley.... 816-867-5511
Fri. — Jam 8:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m.
Sat. — Live Blues 8:00 p.m.
- B Daily Limit**
523 E Red Bridge Rd 816-942-0400
Fri. — Live Blues 8:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m.
- B Dirty Harry's**
3100 MO-7, Blue Springs.... 816-224-2779
Wed. - Fri. — Live Blues
- B Joe's Standard**
1204 NW Hwy 7,
Blue Springs 816-228-4878
Wed. — Jam 7:30 - 11:30 p.m.
- B Knuckleheads**
2715 Rochester Ave. 816-483-1456
Wed. - Sun. — Live Music
Sat. - Sun. — Blues Jam 1:00 p.m.
- B Konrads Kitchen**
302 SW Main,
Lee's Summit 816-525-1871
Fri. — Live Blues 8:30 p.m. - 12:30 a.m.
- J The Piano Room**
8410 Wornall Rd. 816-363-8722
Fri. - Sat. 8:00 - 12:00 — Dave McCubbin

SOUTH

- J Bristol Seafood Grill**
5400 W. 119th St. 913-663-5777
Sun. 5:00 - 8:00 — Live Music
- J Cascone's**
6863 W.91st. Street 913-381-6837
Sat. — Live Jazz 7:00-10:00 p.m.
- J Gaslight Grill and Back Room**
5020 W. 137th Street 913-897-3540
Wed. - Sun. — 6:30 Lynn Zimmer Jazz Band
- J La Bodega Tapas & Lounge**
4311 West 119th St. 913-428-8272
Sun. — Live Music 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
- B Llywelyn's**
6995 W 151st 913-402-0333
Tues. — Blues Jam 7:30 p.m.
Sat. - Sun. — Live Music
- J Sullivan's Steakhouse**
4501 W. 119th St. 913-345-0800
7 days a week — Live Jazz

WEST

- JB 4220 Rhythm & Blues Lounge**
4220 Leavenworth Rd,
KCK 913-232-9827
Sun. — Jazz/R&B/Blues Jam 6:00 - 10:00 p.m.
- J Jazz at Legends**
1859 Village W Pkwy,
KCK 913-328-0003
Wed. - Sat. — Live Jazz
- B Kobi's Bar and Grill**
113 Oak, Bonner Springs.... 913-422-5657
Sun. — Live Blues 2:00 - 6:00 p.m.
- J Lucky Brewgrille**
5401 Johnson Drive 913-403-8571
Thurs. — Live Jazz 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

J Jazz B Blues

Danny Embrey Dues Blues

Jazz Daddy Records

Personnel: Danny Embrey, guitar; John Beasley and Dave Loeb, piano; Bob Bowman, bass; Steve Houghton, drums.

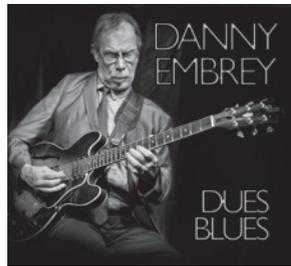
Tracks: Everything I Love, Trane Tracks, November, The Duke, Dues Blues, Caravelas, Funkallero, Daabah, Leonard.

Recorded at Ocean Way Recorders, Los Angeles, 1988. Engineered by Don Hahn. Transfer from original DAT by Chad Meise. Mastering by Collin Jordan at The Boiler Room Mastering.

Dues Blues is a welcome reissue of Danny Embrey's only leader date, recorded in 1988 during his years on the west coast. He had previously recorded with bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Steve Houghton on *The Steve Houghton Album*.

Pianists John Beasley and Dave Loeb (on different tracks) have been added to complete the quartet. Both Embrey and Bowman returned to Kansas City, where they recorded together in the fabulous Interstring and played and recorded with Karrin Allyson. Danny's many credits also include the decades with the Sons of Brasil.

It is easy to hear why Embrey brought this record back. It is a gem. By having a pianist in the band, Danny has freed himself from rhythm section duties so he could function as



a "horn" soloist. The result is an outstanding showcase of his prowess.

On uptempo tracks such as the fast blues "Trane Tracks," the title track "Dues Blues," and the closer "Leonard," Embrey is smoking-hot fast. "Trane Tracks" is a blowing tune like the late 1950s John Coltrane would tear into. It is an intricate blues line, and Danny delivers several blistering choruses. You won't want to miss Bob's contribution here, either. "Dues Blues" has a melody played in unison with the piano, a device that is effectively utilized throughout the record not only with guitar/piano but also with guitar/bass. When Danny enters his solo, the band goes double-time and he flies. (How many times did I have "flies" written in my track notes? Many times.) "Leonard" is the perfect set-closing smoker.

The most familiar tracks are the opener, "Everything I Love," with a great Latin rhythm from Houghton and Bowman, and Dave Brubeck's classic "The Duke," with Bowman's nice walk through the bridge. Bowman's ballad "November" was recorded a decade later by Interstring, and Bob's counterpoint with Danny's reading of the melody is a highlight of this beautiful track. Bob's solo is another highlight. "Caravelas" sounded familiar to me as well. If it was not in the Interstring book, it could have been. There is a recurring phrase here that is simply a great hook.

On "Funkallero" Danny pays tribute to the octave style of Wes Montgomery, and Bowman has an extended intro that is just great bass playing. Everyone solos on "Deebah," another swinger that has extended fours with Houghton.

I have not mentioned the pianists, but they are fine throughout. Unfortunately, we can't tell which pianist plays on which track, and Danny apparently could not remember, either.



Drummer Houghton is a great player who nails the rhythms everywhere.

Kansas City jazz fans have enjoyed the live Danny Embrey for decades and should be ecstatic with the availability of *Dues Blues*. We have known that he has long been one of the top drawer of jazz guitarists, anywhere. This record is consistent with that reputation.

—Roger Atkinson

Stanton Kessler Skywalker

Standing Bear Music

Personnel: Playground (tracks 1, 5, 10): Stanton Kessler, trumpet and flugelhorn; Roger Wilder, piano; Bob Bowman, bass; Todd Strait, drums. Crossroads Quartet (tracks 2, 3, 4): Kessler, trumpet and flugelhorn; Andrew Ouellette, piano; Karl McComas-Reichl, bass; Brian Steever, drums, Matt Otto, tenor saxophone (track 3). Parallax (tracks 6, 7, 8): Kessler, trumpet and flugelhorn; Wilder, piano; Bill McKemy, bass; Steever and Ryan Lee, drums; Dave Chael, tenor saxophone (track 7). Lee and Steever, drums, track 9.

Tracks: Dave's Place, Airbourn, Jim's Delight, Juggernaut, Gratitude, Remnant, Skywatcher, So Large, R & B Drums, For All Seasons.

Recorded by Craig Rettmer at CR Sound, Kansas City, Missouri. Mixed by Stanton Kessler and Craig Rettmer. Mastered by Craig Rettmer.

Over the years Stanton Kessler has led and participated in a broad spectrum of musical projects, from the long-running Sons of Brasil and their broad celebration of Brazilian music, to Gregorian Chant, Flamenco, the music of Horace Silver and the reconstruction of television theme music. *Skywalker* brings us three Kessler-led bands of more recent vintage, playing music composed by Kessler. These bands are in the mainstream jazz tradition.



I like the way that Stanton has organized the program. The tracks by Playground open and close the record, with another that separates the tracks by the Crossroads Quartet and Parallax. The opener, "Dave's Place," is an uptempo composition that features solid soloing from pianist Roger Wilder and Bob Bowman's walking bass, plus a Todd Strait solo with fine support from Wilder. I like the tension and release here. Kessler's clean flugelhorn shines, and he multi-tracks a muted trumpet during the opening and close. "Gratitude" is the middle Playground piece, a ballad that builds on a "For All We Know"-like phrase into a sacred sounding piece. There is a wonderful build during Kessler's solo, and Bob Bowman has a nice solo also. "For All Seasons" is the closer, with a loping bossa nova rhythm that finds excellent Strait drumming throughout, with perfect ac-

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cents, rolls and the trademark cymbal work all while driving the rhythmic momentum of the track.

The Crossroads Quartet includes pianist Andrew Ouellette, bassist Karl McComas-Reichl, and drummer Brian Steever. “Airbourne” has another gorgeous Kessler melodic line. I like how Steever breaks up the rhythm during Stanton’s solo. Tenor saxophonist Matt Otto is added on the “Jim’s Delight,” a tune with an interesting bridge. The rhythm section is solidly swinging here, and the fours between Kessler, Otto and Steever are truly exciting. McComas-Reichl, Otto, Kessler and Ouellette all solo on the track. “Juggernaut” fades in with a vamp from the rhythm section, then Stanton comes in, absolutely soaring in his solo. Ouellette then starts his turn simply and slowly comes to boil.

Parallax has a unique two drummer lineup, with Ryan Lee joining Steever. Their work together is so complementary that it seems like a single drummer with extra legs and arms. Bassist Bill McKemy provides a great bottom depth to the Parallax sound. Pianist Wilder opens “Remnants,” which may remind the listener of a memorable Chick Corea line. Kessler is soaring once again here. The mellow title track is the best example of McKemy’s bottom presence, and the drummers are really cutting it up. David Chael is the guest here. Wilder opens “So Large,” a tune in the style of the Miles Davis Quintet of the 1960s. He returns after Stanton’s solo, a bit abstract but solidly swinging.

Throughout the record Stanton Kessler again proves to be an intriguing composer and exciting soloist on both of his horns. His pure tone and imaginative melodic lines are the glue that holds this disc together. If you have not heard these excellent bands, you’ll want this record. Those who have heard the bands will have likely already found a copy. *Skywalker* is wonderful modern mainstream jazz from three great bands led by Stanton Kessler.

—Roger Atkinson

Lonnie McFadden Live at Green Lady Lounge

Jazz Daddy Records

Personnel: Lonnie McFadden, trumpet; Andrew Ouellette, piano; DeAndre Manning, acoustic and electric bass; Tyree Johnson, drums.

Tracks: Moten Swing, In the Club, Voyager, Our First Date, El Montecristo, Get Ready, In the Basement, What a Wonderful World, I Believe In Music, Swing Like Count Basie, Tap’n the Blues

Recorded by Ethan Erisman. Mixed by Robert Rebeck. Mastered by Collin Jordan at the Boiler Room Mastering.

“I am an unapologetic Kansas City jazz guy,” Lonnie McFadden says at the start of his CD, *Live at Green Lady Lounge*. “There’s nothing about being from Kansas City that I don’t like.”

Before his comments are complete, pianist Andrew Ouellette launches into the opening notes of “Moten Swing.”

There’s been plenty of arrangements of “Moten Swing” over the years, but this one hews closely to its 1930s Kansas City original. McFadden’s trumpet wails with intensity. While I more often associate Ouellette and DeAndre Manning with this city’s contemporary jazz ensembles, they prove that they know Kansas City’s jazz roots. Manning’s blithe bass solo is a delight. Drummer Tyree Johnson propels the swing just right.

Think of the McFadden Brothers and chances are you first picture tap dancing (we’ll get to that). Lonnie’s mastery of the trumpet shouldn’t come as a surprise. But here it stands out. On “In the Club,” McFadden joyfully mines a guttural bluesiness in an original composition by Johnson and himself.

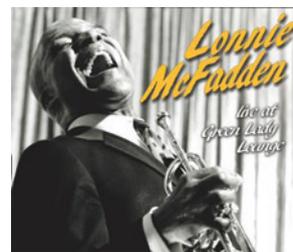
Yet, this album isn’t all about swing and blues. In his introduction to Ouellette’s composition, “Voyager,” McFadden says, “This has taken me into the new millennium.” Here’s the more adventurous music I’m accustomed to hearing from Ouellette, Manning and Johnson. McFadden plays through the journey with finesse and ease (you really ought to try more of this, Lonnie).

McFadden sings on his composition, “Our First Date,” dedicated to his wife. On “El Montecristo,” also by McFadden, his trumpet finds grace spiked by a delicious audaciousness, while Ouellette’s piano explores. “Get Ready” brings some funk to the proceedings. It’s written by Manning and further showcases his versatility. McFadden sings again, and his trumpet bawdily captivates, on “What a Wonderful World.” It’s a longtime favorite of his shows that fans are going to enjoy having available to hear any time. Another McFadden composition, “Swing Like Count Basie,” does just what the title says, punctuated with some trumpet brashness.

“I’ll tell you what,” McFadden says on the final number, “Since you all are still here, I’m going to dance since nobody else did.” The veteran McFadden, tapping with more energy than I’ll ever know, with Andrew Ouellette on piano, DeAndre Manning on bass and Tyree Johnson on drums, improvises a generation-spanning blues to conclude the CD with applause and a smile.

Lonnie McFadden Live at Green Lady Lounge is a snapshot of jazz you’ll hear in Kansas City today. It begins and ends with the traditional KC sound, but in between you can catch a little of what the new generation of musicians is bringing to town. It’s a CD that mirrors McFadden’s personality. It wants to have fun, and it does. Nothing wrong with that.

—Larry Kopitnik



of musical insights started in the orchestration and composition classes of Francis Buebendorf. John and Bob were honored in 1949 when they won the Sir Carl Busch Prize, Bob, in the Choral Division, for his Kyrie for Mixed Chorus and String Orchestra, and John, in the Orchestral Division, for his Rhapsody for Oboe and String Orchestra. John won the award again in 1950. Though John never talked about his early compositions and involvement in classical music, an early concert program bio mentions that after the Conservatory he went on to study with Vincent Persichetti at the Philadelphia Conservatory and with a local organist who had studied with Ottorino Respighi. He was deeply interested in twentieth century composition and reflected that in his piano compositions. His Piano Sonata won him a spot on the National Composers Symposium at the Cincinnati Conservatory. He played it himself.

But it was in the jazz clubs of Kansas City that John Elliott, on piano, built his reputation. In places like Channel Three, the Downtown Hilton, and the Playboy Club, John could be heard in trios and quartets playing standards and audience-pleasing pop tunes six nights a week. He was the consummate working musician, never without a gig, always working with the best musicians in town. Word spread that here was a piano player influenced by Bill Evans who, as Steve Million recalls, sometimes played chords that sounded like they came right out of a piece by Scriabin. Greg Meise remembers the denseness of John's harmonic choices and how he laid out those chords. Bob Bransetter, who worked with John at the Playboy Club Penthouse for several years, says John wasn't interested in technique for technique sake and thought vertically. It also became apparent that John's attitude toward the listening public was that they should observe the listening part more. Bob doesn't remember John ever saying anything directly to the audience about their chatter, but the pianist would turn grumpy in response to the crowd's inattention. Sometimes the tunes themselves irritated John. Steve Million remembers hearing John at a gig where he was subbing for another piano player. "As they finished their break tune, John turned to the audience and said, 'We'll be back in a few minutes with some more of these dandies.'"

John found a musical home of sorts at the Playboy Club. He played there for almost a decade, first with the Vince Bilardo Trio, and then with his own. "The Showroom Penthouse was a great gig," remembers Julie Turner, whose husband, Tommy Ruskin, played in John's trio. "It was exciting to do new shows every week or two with big name comedians and singers. They were constantly sight-reading. Tommy had tremendous respect for John's musicianship and his ability to quickly master new material."

In demand as much for his arranging as for his piano playing, John frequently arranged for entertainers on the Playboy circuit. Local bandleaders also commissioned him, Don Accurso, Vince Bilardo, and Warren Durrett among them. But these charts were always to someone else's specifications. In 1962, John helped form the Kix Band primarily to showcase

his original charts. These were the arrangements that showed his harmonic scope and love of re-imagining standards. Some of these tunes were so original they were hardly recognizable. His reworking of "Stella by Starlight," became "Stella, Is That You?"

Teaching had always been a part of John's professional life, but as he developed carpal tunnel problems and appeared to enjoy playing in public less and less, John turned toward teaching jazz theory. The legendary "John Elliott waiting list" was born. His studio grew to ninety students a week. "John was on the leading edge of teaching jazz harmony," remembers saxophonist and pianist Greg Howard. "The theory training I got from John in high school was much more thorough than anything I learned at North Texas State." Rod Fleeman had a similar experience. "I took lessons from John when I was a senior in high school. I thought I knew more than I did, so I really didn't take full advantage of what John was trying to teach me. Then I went to the University of Utah and realized John was miles ahead of their jazz program. I came back to Kansas City and went right back to John."



At Soundtrek Studio in 2007. Bob Brookmeyer is in the front. Ed Dix is to the left. John Elliott is in the back.

Because John's lessons were so meticulously thought out, he left no holes in a student's knowledge. He wrote each lesson out for each student. "You never skipped a step," says Greg Whitfield. "He wasn't flexible about that." Steve Cardenas remembers asking John why he didn't publish a book of his method. His response: "Because everyone would immediately go to the back of the book." Steve also asked John why he didn't teach in a college, and was told he only wanted to teach the way he wanted to teach.

Although everyone followed the Elliott order, John had a different approach for guitar students, of which there were many, and was open to meeting people where they were in their musical lives. Dorothy Brown, who had a degree from Eastman and played violin in the Philharmonic, also played piano in restaurants and wanted to freshen up her chord choices. Paul Smith remembers working with John on tunes he played every weekend with Gary Sivils. Classically trained pianist Ruth Young took lessons to broaden her harmonic palate. "John took

continued on page 28

me as seriously as he did his gigging students.” Tim Brewer, who was working on an orchestral composition degree at the time he took lessons, remembers that John was always happy to look over works in progress and offer encouragement.

Lessons were half an hour and, by 1980, \$10.00. There was little chit-chat. Every minute of that time was structured. Greg Whitfield remembers it this way:

“For the first ten minutes, I worked on a two-page theory lesson in every key on the piano. The second ten minutes was spent on three standards I had worked on, still on piano. The last ten minutes was another three songs, this time on bass, trading fours or eights with John. That was the part I looked forward to all week.” By all accounts, John showed far more kindness and patience toward his students than he did audience members. “He never made you feel like you had failed,” recalls Greg Howard.

But students had best be prepared. “Getting John’s smile of approval was everything,” says Danny Embrey. “I’d start on my new lesson as soon as I got home from the last one. Sometimes

he could be on the cranky side if a lesson wasn’t going well. He wouldn’t say anything, but his jaw would clench, and he’d leave the room to get a cup of coffee, sharpen a pencil, then come back in and say, ‘Try it again.’ We were all just a little afraid of that dark, gloomy moment and tried very hard not to do anything to put us there.”



Ed Dix Band with John Elliott on piano. Ed Dix is on tenor in the front. Bob Brookmeyer is in front of John Elliott. Late 1940s.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL SMITH

As ill health and more hand problems plagued John, those dark moods intensified. Linda Durrell, one of the last to sing with him, remembers that his chord choices became less dense and then diminished to just a couple of voices. “It was like he was disappearing.” Except for a brief time coaching Eldar Djangirov, he retired from teaching.

Although former students were delighted when John came to hear them play—even more if he stayed past the first set—they noted he seemed unhappy. There was speculation that he felt unfulfilled, that he wished he could have gone further with his playing and arranging, that at the end of his career he worried his talents were unrecognized. The paradox of John Elliott was puzzling. LA studio musician and Al Jarreau’s pianist, Larry Williams, who as a teenager soaked up all John could teach him, noticed that other musicians always treated John with great respect and admiration. Steve Cardenas recalls a conversation with Bob Brookmeyer about John. That Bob thought that John could have played anywhere with anyone was apparent. “He told me he really tried to get John to move from Kansas City, but he didn’t want to.” So many of John’s students had moved into high profile musical careers. Though there might have been a nagging regret that he hadn’t had that kind of career, his self-conscious, introverted, perfectionist personality had led him elsewhere. No one really knew what John’s hopes had been, because he didn’t talk about himself. No one knew what would have completely satisfied John’s musical itch. John Elliott’s Rosebud is still out there.

In 2001, Mike Metheny wrote an article for this magazine called “Thanks, John!” In it, a dozen former students paid tribute to the teacher they felt taught them a degree’s worth of jazz theory. “He had to know how much we loved him and his teachings,” reflects Danny Embrey. “So many of us who teach now have incorporated John’s method and made it ours.” So have the full-time players. Larry Williams says, “Today, whenever I’m stuck on analyzing a chord . . . I hear John’s voice telling me to find the bass, sing it if you need to, and then hear the color of the chord and each note in the voicing. It has served me very well for many years.” Most of his students still have their hand written staff paper notebooks. All have their contents indelibly imprinted in their minds. ||

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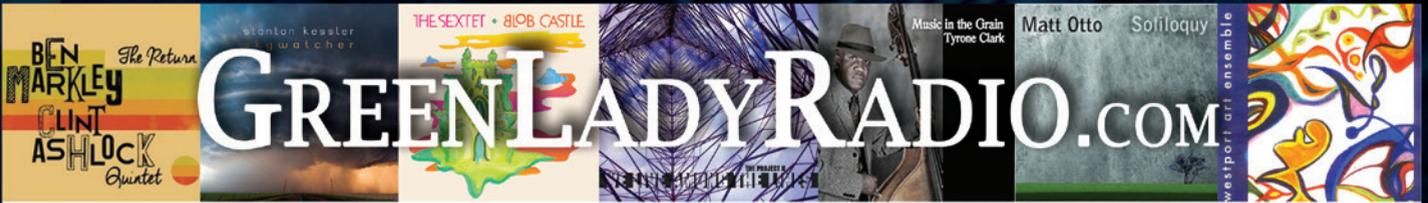
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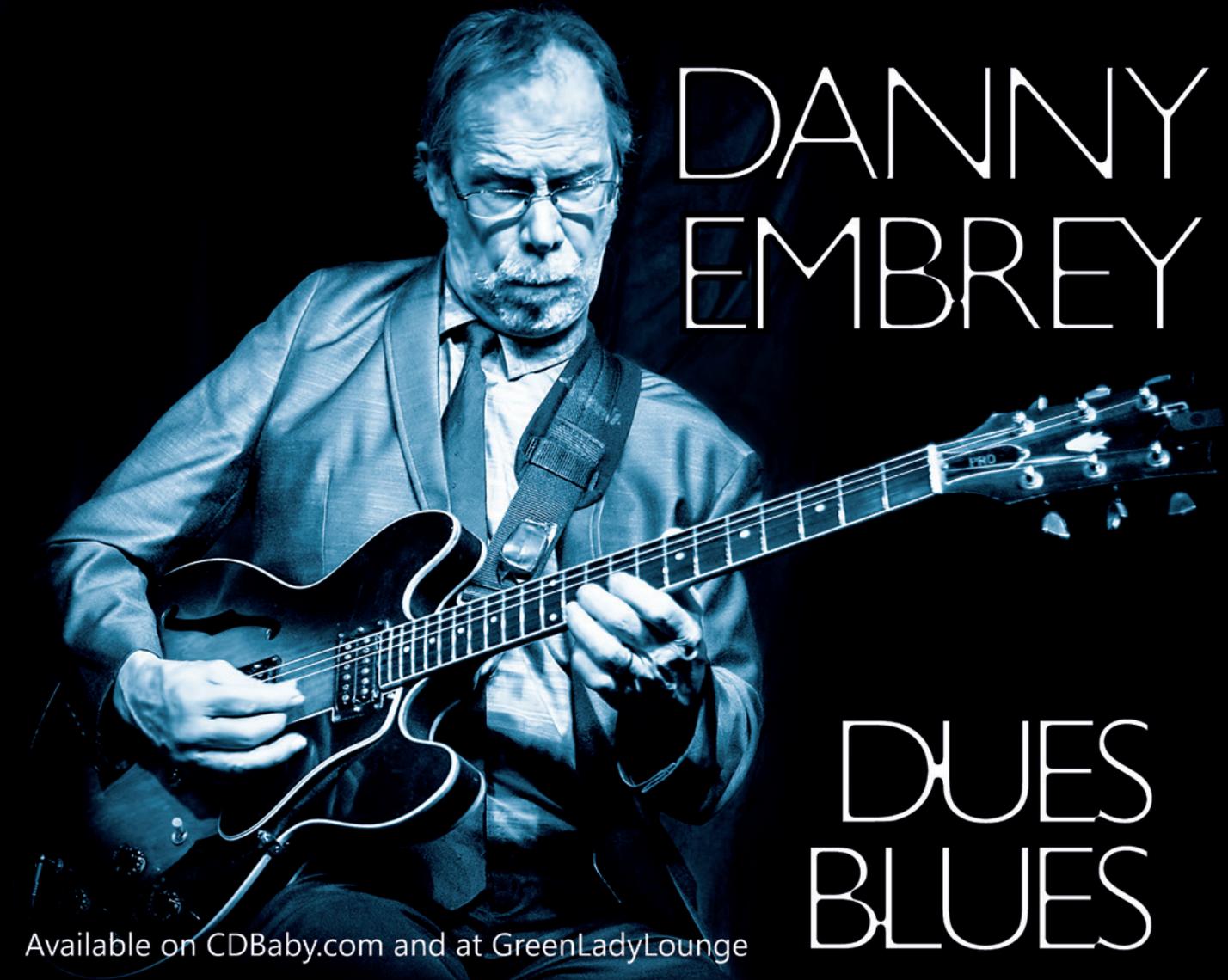
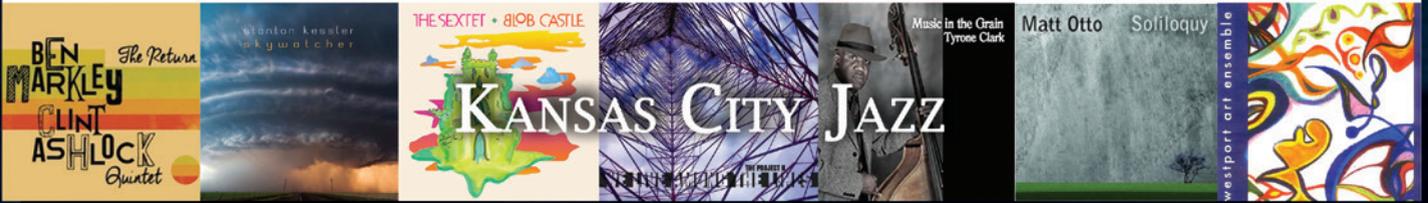
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