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Matt Munisteri and Evan Christopher performed with Jon-Erik Kellso's EarRegulars at the Greenwich House Music School on Jan. 15, 2016. Photo by Lynn Redmile.

Winter Jazzfest | *Hot Time In A Cold Town!*

**47TH Annual
Pee Wee Russell
Memorial Stomp!**

March 6
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Once again trad jazz had its own stage among the 12 venues at NYC's Winter Jazzfest. The Hot Jazz and Swing Party, presented in the ballroom of Greenwich House Music School, featured ten groups over two blowout nights. Top players from around the country performed music spanning the world of early jazz from its New Orleans roots through the Roaring '20s and into the Swing Era. *Jersey Jazz* contributor Lynn Redmile came in from the cold for the hot jazz party and her report and photos can be seen in this issue beginning on page 26.

Some Like It Hot | Trad Jazzers Fire Up Winter Jazzfest

Story and photos by Lynn Redmile

The NYC Winter Jazzfest, co-produced by Brice Rosenbloom and Adam Schatz, started in 2005 with one night featuring 19 groups, and the plan to give greater exposure to jazz in New York and beyond. Its popularity has continued to grow, and this year Winter Jazzfest was a four-day festival, in 12 venues, featuring over a hundred quality cutting-edge acts.

The New York Hot Jazz Festival (founded and directed by Michael Katsobashvili in 2013) sponsored the Greenwich House Music School stage for the second year, courtesy of Jennie Wasserman, the series curator at Greenwich House Music School (and formerly of SFJAZZ, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Joe's Pub and Carnegie Hall). I wish I had been able to see more of the full NYC Winter Jazzfest, but I concentrated on this stage — ten exciting acts were hosted over two nights on January 15 and 16 at the school, and it was standing room only for both nights.

Tom McDermott, one of New Orleans' premier piano players and composers, was the first act, opening with a unique and exciting rendition of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag." Playing ragtime since the 1970s, and being a Duke of Dixieland for much of the 1990s, Tom has composed for theater, television and movies, and he is also wonderfully adept at improvising and putting his own spin on the originals, enthralling all who listen. Whether he



The New Wonders are Emily Asher, Glenn Crytzer, Mike Davis, Jay Rattman, Ricky Alexander and Jay Lepley.

plays Choro (a Brazilian music form), ragtime, trad jazz, or New Orleans R&B, his performances and recordings (available on his Web site) are always highly acclaimed. Running through compositions like Duke Ellington's "Black Beauty," James P. Johnson's "Carolina Shout," and Jellyroll Morton's "The Crave," even classical composers were included in Tom's set, when he "ragged the classics" with Chopin's Valse in C# Minor. A Cuban rhythm on "Tennessee Waltz" was so beautiful, and a ragtime version of "Stars and Stripes Forever" was an exciting finale.



New Orleans's Tom McDermott performed an exciting "Maple Leaf Rag."

The Bumper Jacksons, comprising Jess Eliot Myhre (vocals, clarinet and washboard), Chris Ousley (guitar, tenor banjo), Dave Hadley (pedal steel guitar), Alex Lacquement (bass) and Dan Samuels (drums), took to the stage with mostly original compositions, and a few reworked traditional tunes in the style of roots jazz, country swing and street blues. Chris and Jess

are the Strathmore Maryland Artists in Residence this year, in addition to their performances scheduled around the US and Canada as part of their Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation touring grant, and Jess recently won the Mid-Atlantic Song Contest (Jazz and Vocals) for "Pretty Mama Put a Spell on Me," which was greatly appreciated by this concert's audience. Jess's impeccable rhythm on the washboard with her thimble-tipped long black gloves, and Dave Hadley's finesse on the pedal steel guitar added an extra dimension to the enjoyment this band brought to the stage — if you missed this

performance, be sure to pick up their latest CD *Too Big World*, released last summer.

Evan Christopher's Clarinet Road is always a pleasure to hear. From New Orleans, Evan combines virtuosity and enthusiasm with dynamic expressiveness, inspired by Sidney Bechet, Barney Bigard and others. For this event, he was accompanied by New Orleans guitarist Brian Seeger, and New York bassist Jacob Webb — you may recall Jacob being the recipient of the New Jersey Jazz Society Jack Stine scholarship in 2009. Evan has a residency at Jazz at Lincoln Center, and he takes every opportunity he can to showcase the New Orleans clarinet tradition. They opened with the traditional "Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor," followed by "Mojo Blues" and Evan's composition "Old Sober March." Hilary Gardner's beautiful vocals added another layer of exquisiteness to the set, joining them on "Everything I Have is Yours" and an evocative rumba-rhythmed "Moon Ray," an Artie Shaw composition. The rest of their set, including "High Society," was equally enthusiastically received. The trio is releasing a CD in March, the fourth in the Clarinet Road series, entitled *Surrender Blue and Other New Orleans Sketches*, which I believe would be a worthy addition to every jazz lover's collection.

The EarRegulars can be heard at the historic Ear Inn on Spring Street in Manhattan each Sunday, but a special configuration of the quartet took to the

stage, with co-founders Jon-Erik Kellso (who most JJ readers know as a member of Vince Giordano's Nighthawks) on trumpet and Matt Munisteri (a prolific composer and lyricist, and currently musical director for Catherine Russell) on guitar, accompanied by Pat O'Leary on bass and Evan Christopher on clarinet. Jon-Erik's original composition "Out of the Gate," based on James P. Johnson's "Victory Stride," opened the set, and was followed by another of his originals "EarRegularity," after which, the well-known "Panama." New York vocalist Kat Edmonson, who has performed at the Montreux Jazz Festival as well as on tour in Europe and the USA, joined them for Cole Porter's "Let's Do It" and took everyone's breath away with an incredibly emotive "The Very Thought of You." Their finale of "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" was also fresh and fun — the audience didn't want to let them go! The EarRegulars' latest CD, *In the Land of Beginning Again*, was recorded in New Orleans last year and features Jon-Erik Kellso, Matt Munisteri, Evan Christopher and New Orleanian bassist Kerry Lewis.

For the final set of the evening, Mike Davis's *New Wonders*, named for the model of cornet played by the enigmatic genius Bix Beiderbecke, was perfection. Exquisite attention to musical detail and the Manhattan-based band's deep passion for the original recordings is evident, bringing the dreams and drama of American's 1920's Jazz Age to life. Cornetist Mike Davis wrote most of the arrangements for the sextet and was ably accompanied by Ricky Alexander on reeds, Emily Asher on trombone, Glenn Crytzer on banjo, Jay Rattman

on bass saxophone and Jay Lepley on drums. "Poor Papa" opened the set, followed by "Borneo," and "Smile, Darn Ya, Smile." Each piece was introduced with a little history — but the audience didn't seem to believe him when Mike said he listened to the original records on his Victrola! Little do they know! Their four-part vocal harmony on Donald Heywood's "Clorinda" was particularly loved, as was "Arkansas Blues," "I Lost my Heart in Dixieland," and "The Baltimore," to mention a few. After being begged for an encore, the sextet closed with "Royal Garden Blues," garnering a well-deserved standing ovation.

The second night on the New York Hot Jazz Festival stage for the NYC Winter Jazzfest held at the Greenwich House Music School started with Grammy-nominated New York jazz pianist Christian Sands, a protégé of the late Dr. Billy Taylor. He has played with a number of jazz luminaries, including an outrageous, highly publicized duet with legendary pianist Oscar Peterson, and has played at jazz clubs all over the world. Opening with "Get Happy," Christian transitioned almost seamlessly into Fats Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'," followed by a unique variation of "Maple Leaf Rag." Although billed on the program as a stride pianist, Christian proved that's not the only vocabulary he plays, with an evocative "Nature Boy" and the beautiful "Laura." As a fun finale, he took rapper Drake's "Hotline Bling" and played it in the style of Fats Waller, an impressive feat. Christian has new albums, available on his website: *Take One — Live at Montmartre* and *Sands Trio — Live at the Village Vanguard*.

Vocalists Michael Mwenso and Brianna Thomas presented an energetic and exciting set of

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Clarinet Road included Evan Christopher, Jacob Webb, Hilary Gardner and Brian Seeger.



Ella and Louis? Brianna Thomas, Alexander Claffy, Michael Mwenso and Joe Saylor.



Trumpeter Alphonso Horne mingles with the audience during his performance of "King Porter Stomp" at the Greenwich Home Music School.

WINTER JAZZFEST

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Ella and Louis duets, backed by Alphonso Horne on trumpet, Mathis Picard on piano, Alexander Claffy on bass and Joe Saylor on drums. Michael is a force to be reckoned with, a winner of many music awards and previously ran the jam sessions at London's Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club until Wynton Marsalis asked him to join the programming team at Jazz at Lincoln Center and head the After-Hours program at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola. Brianna is a highly accomplished straight-ahead jazz vocalist, composer and arranger, has collaborated with world-renowned artists, and performed almost everywhere — from Jazz at Lincoln Center to the prestigious Montreux, Umbria and Sochi jazz festivals. Swing and Lindy hop dancers all over the world know her work with pianist Gordon Webster. "They Can't Take That Away from Me" gave a hint of the wonderful musical interplay Brianna and Michael share, and "Makin' Whoopee" clarified it. After a couple of numbers, Alphonso Horne took a stride into the packed-to-capacity and very enthusiastic crowd with "King Porter Stomp" and they closed their set with a well-appreciated version of "Cheek to Cheek."

The acoustic jazz group Rhythm Future Quartet (named after the Django Reinhardt composition "Rhythm Futur") continues its passionate mission to keep Gypsy jazz firmly in the forefront. Chief soloists Jason Anick on violin and



Sidney Bechet's haunting ballad "Petite Fleur" was played to perfection by Oran Etkin. Photo by Lynn Redmile.

Olli Soikkeli on guitar, together with second guitarist Max O'Rourke and left-handed bassist Greg Loughman, are simply awe-inspiring — Jason, also an award-winning composer, is one of the youngest instructors at Boston's Berklee College of Music, and is named one of the best jazz violinists of his generation. Olli, the "Finnish Boy Wonder" has astonishing dexterity and speed with pure soul — it needs to be seen! Determined to not simply add their voice to Gypsy jazz standards, their original compositions bring new light to the genre. The band opened with "Iberian Sunrise," a beautiful composition by Greg, followed by "Made for



Grand Street Stompers: Tamar Korn, Rob Adkins, Gordon Au, Nick Russo, Kevin Dorn, Dennis Lichtman and Jake Handelman. Photo by Lytnn Redmile.

Wesley." "Best Things in Life are Free" was followed by Jason's Balkan-influenced composition "Vessela," which means "happy" in Bulgarian. Other pieces included an arrangement of John Lennon's "Come Together," their arrangement of "Limehouse Blues" (a personal favorite), and the perfectly presented set culminated with Olli's composition "Bushwick Stomp," celebrating his Brooklyn home. Their second album *Travels*, newly released through Magic Fiddle Music, features original compositions reflecting the influence world travel has had on the band and its rhythmic and harmonic stylings.

Tatiana Eva-Marie and The Avalon Jazz Band were up next, featuring Tatiana on vocals, Adrien Chevalier on violin, Olli Soikkeli and Michael Valeanu on guitar, Julian Smith on bass and special guest Oran Etkin on clarinet and bass clarinet. The New York-based Avalon Jazz Band, created by Tatiana and Adrien in 2012, has performed extensively, locally and internationally, playing Gypsy influenced French hot jazz, and representing the Parisian and Golden Age swing spirit. Opening with a beautiful rendition of Irving Berlin's "Russian Lullaby," and following with "Caravan," the scene was set for a concert showcasing the eastern and Gypsy influences on jazz. "Fleur de Lavande" by Manouche composer Fapy Lafertin was a beautiful lead-in to "Golden Earrings," made famous by Marlene Dietrich in the film of the same name, followed by "Joseph Joseph," each piece allowing Tatiana's Gypsy-styled energy to create perfect balance with sensitive French jazz. After a fun audience participation version of "C'est Si Bon," special guest Oran Etkin was mesmerizing on "Songe d'Automne." Sidney Bechet's "Petite Fleur" was the perfect precursor to "Bei Mir Bist du Schoen," which had many audience members singing along! *Do you Zazou?*, the Avalon Jazz Band's tribute CD to Parisian swing kids, is soon available.

The last group to perform on the Greenwich House Music School stage was Gordon's Au's Grand Street Stompers, featuring Gordon on trumpet, Dennis Lichtman on clarinet, Jake Handelman on trombone, Nick Russo on guitar, Rob Adkins on bass, and Kevin Dorn on drums, with crowd favorite Tamar Korn on vocals. They opened with a lively "Do the New York," followed by "That Eccentric Rag" by J. Russel Robinson. A couple of James Monaco compositions ("While They Were Dancing Around" and "On the Sentimental Side") balanced a few of Gordon's original compositions: "Saratoga Serenade," "Pavonis" (which he wrote in response to Duke Ellington's "Azalea") and "Somehow the World Has Turned Upside-Down," with Tamar's lyrical styling highlighting the heartfelt sentiments. Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" proved a worthy finale to this fantastic offering of jazz, receiving a standing ovation for the Grand Street Stompers. Their third CD is being recorded soon — check their website for more details.

Although this Winter Jazzfest is sadly over, the New York Hot Jazz Festival is coming in spring. Be sure to join their mailing list on NYHotJazzFest.com to stay informed. Let the jazz continue!

