

In Memoriam: Gary Schunk 1953–2021

BY LARS BJORN AND PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

The jazz world was shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of pianist, composer and arranger Gary Schunk on April 2 at age 67. Schunk had developed a wider-ranging career as a versatile pianist who could fit well into any context, from church music to Motown groups, the pit bands for traveling theatre shows, the Detroit Symphony, and of course the top jazz clubs in the area, from Baker's Keyboard Lounge or the Dirty Dog Jazz Café to the old Bird of Paradise. Gary Elwin Schunk belongs in the long line of Detroit keyboard virtuosos from Willie Anderson to Hank Jones, Tommy Flanagan, Johnnie Allen, Bess Bonnier, Roland Hanna, Harold McKinney, Kenny Cox, and Geri Allen.

Schunk began his musical life as a classical pianist who also studied the organ, with a 1975 degree from Michigan State University followed by private lessons from the renowned Gyorgi Sandor, a student of Bela Bartok's, who was then teaching at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Other classical music students who knew him at the time were in awe of his talents and thought that he would carve out a career in classical music, but during the seventies he moved into playing jazz and was able to apply his prodigious piano technique to that end.

He quickly carved out a multifaceted career as a studio and performance musician and became one of the top pianists in the area. His ability to play various electric keyboards and organ allowed him to fit into many different contexts and in jazz he was able to work in mainstream as well as fusion groups. He was much in demand by band leaders and in jazz clubs, where he was called upon to accompany visitors such as Sonny Stitt, Pepper Adams, Anita O'Day, or Mark Murphy. Schunk was a regular accompanist whenever former Detroit baritone saxophonist Pepper Adams came to town from New York. They played together at Baker's for a week in 1980 (with Ken Kellett on bass and Pistol Allen on drums) and another week in 1982 (with Tony Pia on drums). The same group gathered for the Montreux- Detroit Jazz Festival

in 1982 and the Frog Island Festival in June of 1983 (recorded by WEMU-FM). He appeared on the 1983 Grammy nominated *Mark Murphy Sings the Nat King Cole Songbook* in heavy company alongside guitarist Joe LoDuca and bassist Bob Magnusson. In 1995 the first album under his own name, the trio date *The Key Players* with Jack Dryden on bass and Tom Starr on drums appeared. He often played with trumpeter Marcus Belgrave, a relationship documented on *Live at Kerrytown Concert House* with Tommy Flanagan, Geri Allen, Gary Schunk. The trumpeter very much appreciated his art and skill, summing it up as "Gary Schunk is probably one of the greatest pianists around, because he can do it all. He's really studied the music and every aspect of it; he doesn't shirk any responsibilities of the music...he keeps me on my toes."

His busy schedule never let up, even after a car accident sidelined his for a few months. He kept up his performance and recording duties, appearing on, among others Douglas Halladay's *Serenity* in 2015 and working regularly with Vincent York's JAZZistry. His Detroit Music Factory CD *Kayak* in 2014 is probably his major artistic statement. It is a trio date with bassist Ray Parker and world-renowned drummer Peter Erskine. The trio had performed at the Michigan Jazz Festival a year earlier and they really jelled on this recording. The collective nature of the enterprise is also seen in the repertoire: three originals by Schunk, two by Erskine, one by Parker and two credited to all three. Schunk shines throughout, but particularly on the opening standard, "I'll Take Romance" which is a hard swinger where Schunk's lyricism is in full bloom. It is sometimes said that lyricism is one characteristic of Detroit piano players.

Gary Schunk leaves behind a daughter, Natalie. A memorial mass will be held at St. Bonaventure on Mt. Elliott in Detroit on Saturday, June 19 at 11:00 a.m. Donations in his name can be made to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen.



Vincent York Award Celebration

A year ago SEMJA announced that Vincent York had been chosen as the 2020 winner of the Aron Brooks Award, but the pandemic intervened. You can enjoy Vincent York's Trio in a live-streamed celebration of International Jazz Day from the Kerrytown Concert House on April 30 at 7:30 p.m. and, in connection with this, an award ceremony in which York receives the SEMJA Award from Lars Bjorn, President of SEMJA. To hear the music and see the ceremony please go to the KCH webpage (kerrytownconcerthouse.com/live-at-the-415).

Noah Jackson in New Job at Cliff Bell's

Bassist Noah Jackson relocated from New York to his hometown Detroit less than a year ago to continue his musical career. He still performs with his own group Full Circle and has recently taken a job as Music Director at Cliff Bell's in Detroit, where he replaces another great Detroit musician, drummer RJ Spangler. Cliff Bell's has restarted its music offerings this month and Jackson hopes to introduce dancing at the club.

Jackson is a powerful bassist and has played with many big names in the Big Apple, like Abdullah Ibrahim and Branford Marsalis. In a recent interview with Veronica Johnson of *Metro Times*, Jackson says that "I've always felt that Detroit was going to be a major factor in my life one way or the other, and that it was a major component towards my personal artistic identity."

New Live Music Venue in Canton

Silvio's Trattoria e Pizzeria, recently relocated in Canton, Michigan, is announcing the start-up of an ambitious live music program. Silvio Medoro, the restaurant's owner, chef and true patron of the arts, provided a welcoming space for many local players and listeners during his initial decade in Ann Arbor.

The silence will end on Sunday, April 25, starting at 4:00 p.m., in Silvio's new outdoor patio area where patrons can dine, imbibe and listen in socially distanced comfort. This will be the kickoff of a projected series featuring the finest musicians in the Metro Detroit area. The inaugural headliner will be six-time Detroit Music Award winner Paul Vornhagen on vocals, flute and saxophone, leading an All-Star quartet with Cliff Monear on keyboards, Paul Keller on bass and Pete Siers on drums.

Mr B's Blues and Boogie Piano Celebration

For 24 years, Mr B (Mark Braun) has presented a celebration of blues and boogie pianists from at the Ark in Ann Arbor. This year his celebration goes virtual in a live stream from the Ark Stage on April 24 at 7:30 p.m. You can enjoy Ann Arbor's Rick Roe and Detroit's Elder Robert Moore, plus of course Mr B himself. This is part of the Ark's Family Room Series which you can enjoy via the Ark's Facebook page.

The public is invited to enjoy this special performance, along with Silvio's exceptional Italian cuisine and beverages, with no admission charge. In addition to limited outdoor seating with table service and a view of the performers, patrons will be able to dine indoors where the music will be audible, all subject to current COVID related guidelines and limitations.

Silvio's is located at 225 South Canton Center Rd., Near Cherry Hill Rd., in Canton.

For updates or rescheduling please go to Silvio's Trattoria e Pizzeria Facebook page or silviostrattoria.com. Please call ahead to 734-214-6666 to reserve seating and confirm current CDC Public Health policies.

Pete Siers Jazz Chats

Drummer Pete Siers continues his Jazz Chats with Cool Cats on the Kerrytown Concert House website on April 29 at 5:30 p.m. when he converses with Don Chisholm, one of the founders of SEMJA and the inspiration of Don Chisholm Friends of Jazz at KCH.

Pete's next chat is with bassist and University of Michigan Music Professor Robert Hurst on May 13 at 5:30 p.m. Please enjoy this at kerrytownconcerthouse.com.

Dee Dee and Herbie Headline DJF 2021

Dee Dee Bridgewater (right) and Herbie Hancock were announced as the headliners for this year's Detroit Jazz Festival to be held on Labor Day weekend. It is yet to be determined how much if any of the festival will be live downtown Detroit or if there will be a repeat of last year's successful virtual version. Final word on the format will come this summer; no matter, Bridgewater (who hails from Flint) will be the Artist in Residence and share opening night with Hancock. She will also appear at the festival with her own trio and an all-women group she calls The Woodshed Network. The announcement was part of a live-streamed presentation by the festival, replacing the traditional press conference.



The rest of the lineup includes the following.

Saturday will feature piano veteran and former Detroiter Kenny Barron, tenorist Jerry Bergonzi, Omar Sosa and the Detroit-Havana Jazz Project with Chris Collins and trumpeter Etienne Charles, vocals from Kurt Elling, and the Manhattan Transfer.

Sunday will feature Abdullah Ibrahim, Dee Dee paired with pianist Bill Charlap, vocalist Gregory Porter, altoist Kenny Garrett with a new ensemble, a tribute to Dave Brubeck on his 100th birthday, Dave Holland, and Chris Potter.

Labor Day we will enjoy Abdullah Ibrahim and his Ekaya group, Bridgewater with her all female big band, former University of Michigan piano student Bob James and clarinetist Eddie Daniels.

Please stay tuned for more details in a month or two.

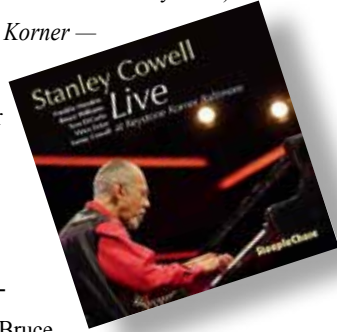
Gretchen Valade Jazz Center

One part of the DJF 21 announcement was a brief introduction to the Gretchen Valade Jazz Center under construction in the former Hillberry Theater. Festival director Chris Collins took the viewers down the stairs to the planned jazz club named Dee Dee Bridgewater's and at the same time introduced Bridgewater to the space. It was an event made for live TV. Bridgewater also performed in the space with the group that will back her at the Festival this year: a trio with young Washington DC pianist Sequoia Snyder plus Detroiters Marion Hayden on bass and Gayelynn McKinney on drums. It was not only great TV drama, but also tasty preview of Bridgewater's performance at the jazz festival. She romped through "Basin Street Blues" and "Save Your Love for Me" (an homage to Nancy Wilson).

Recent Recordings by Area Jazz Artists

BY MICHAEL G NASTOS

The late Stanley Cowell (see SEMJA UPDATE obit - January 2021) has this, his last recording *Live at Keystone Korner* — *Baltimore* (SteepleChase) and showcases what a brilliant pianist/composer/bandleader he was even at an advanced age. Famous compositions “Cal Massey,” “Equipoise,” “Banana Pudding,” and “No Illusions” are played very well by this quintet led by trumpeter Freddie Hendrix and alto saxophonist Bruce Williams. The great Max Roach piece “It’s Time” as well as a tribute to his hometown “Montage for Toledo” are timely markers for Cowell’s career. Daughter Sunny sings on “Equipoise.”

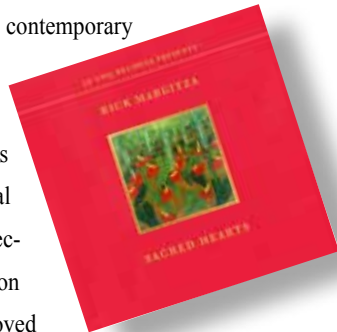


A five-star recording with no reservations.

Tidbits: Tenor saxophonist Salim Washington was born in Memphis but spent considerable time in Detroit before moving out East. He has made many appearances in Metro Detroit. *Dogon Revisited* (Passin’ Thru) in title alone reminds one of *Dogon A.D.*, a famous Julius Hemphill title from the World Saxophone Quartet, of which Passin’ Thru label CEO Oliver Lake was also a member. Washington’s effort is a quartet with all originals and pieces by Hemphill, Thelonious Monk and liner notes by the late Amiri Baraka. Washington also plays a little flute and oboe.



Ex-Detroit Rick Margitza has a new CD on the fledgling Le Coq label. *Sacred Hearts* comprises an all-original contemporary jazz program featuring the uncompromising tenor and soprano sax of Margitza with a hand-picked band of lesser-known musicians save percussionist Alex Acuna, an occasional vocalist, and a tandem guitarist on most selections. Since his time with the Moutin Reunion Quartet some twenty years ago and far removed from his time in Detroit with trumpeter Walter White and their Hennessy award winning quintet, Margitza has forged an identity that is all his own and bereft of cliches.



Michael G. Nastos is Vice President Emeritus of SEMJA, Board member of the Michigan Jazz Festival, writer for Hot House Magazine/NYC, and radio broadcaster for WCBN 88.3 FM, wcbn.org

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Schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5						JAZZ24	JAZZ24
6							PIANO JAZZ
7						NEW JAZZ ARCHIVE	REVEAL
8						WEEKEND EDITION Scott Simon	WEEKEND EDITION Rachel Martin
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National Public Radio
Eastern Michigan University

Straight Ahead at the Blue Llama

BY MICHAEL G. NASTOS

Live music is not entirely back but Saturday night April 3 gave a strong indication that the path is clearing. Straight Ahead played two rousing sets at the Blue Llama in Ann Arbor for a socially distanced crowd that ate, drank and enjoyed the veteran contemporary jazz quartet that enthusiastically was pleased to play to a live and streamed audience.

Bassist Marion Hayden, pianist Alina Morr, drummer GayeLynn McKinney and guest Leslie DeShazor on the electric viola played their mix of Latin music, originals and the jazz that not only identifies their sound, but harkens back to their origins when Regina Carter was a founding member.

The kicker was the Larry Willis classic “To Wisdom the Prize” — a marvelous piece that stands the test of time as a memorable modal melody and rhythm. Nat Adderley’s “Azul Serape” followed in much the same stance for its historical importance and the authenticity that Straight

Ahead interprets it. A Pete

Escovedo Latin cha cha cooker loosely titled “A Bailar” has infectious rhythms — really a showcase for the immense and underappreciated (similar to Charles Boles and the late Gary Schunk) talents of Morr. She digs in, adding supportive chords, has wit and wisdom wrapped in a calm demeanor, and supports the band with every phrase for sure in each measure. Pat Metheny’s “Minuano” (in 6/8 time signature) is unique in the wordless vocal treatment via McKinney in that DeShazor is upfront but does not sing. Believe me in my personal experience singing while drumming is tricky at best but GayeLynn pulls it off. The Eddie Harris evergreen “Listen Here” identified the set in familiar funky style — exclamation point.

In set number 2 the band did a unique version of “Li’l Liza Jane” in New Orleans Second Line fashion. The funky and at times swinging tune sports an arrangement by trumpeter Nicholas Payton — very enjoyable universally and so much fun. Montuno King Eddie Palmieri contributed “Hey Que Rico,” a song allowing Morr to dig in where she is expert in the repetitive phrases. Hayden’s “Joy” is another signature staple coming from one of her albums as a leader. Of course she’s solid as a rock and exceptionally consistent as a player and ostensible leader.

A Brazilian bossa/samba “Barumba” was lacking nothing as far as energy or authenticity with the drumming of McKinney driving the band. The finale was a funky version of Michael Jackson’s “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough,” which in essence was the overall mood of the band and patrons. In fact, the two hours of music was just enough.

At the end of the night all were full of great food courtesy of Chef Louis, music and good vibes thanks to the Blue Llama staff and host Dave Sharp.

GayeLynn McKinney and the McKinney Zone appears at the Blue Llama Saturday, May 8 for two shows.

SEMJA Review

Around Town



James Carter’s Organ Trio at Cliff Bell’s April 10. Gerard Gibbs on the Hammond B-3 and Alex White on drums. According to our roving correspondent, Jim Gallert, Carter played with his usual abandon no matter what saxophone he held — here an alto sax.

photo by Jim Gallert

TLC NEA Jazz Master

Drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, the Carr Center’s Artistic Director, has been chosen as an NEA Jazz Master for 2021. There will be a streaming Tribute Concert to honor her along with the other Jazz Masters (Al Heath, Henry Threadgill and jazz radio guy Phil Schaap). The concert has a great lineup with Wynton Marsalis, Joe Lovano, Dianne Reeves and others. You can enjoy it online at arts.gov or sfjazz.org on April 22 at 8:00 p.m.

Upcoming Jazz Events

MAY

1	Paxton/Spangler Band • Shield’s Pizza, Southfield
2	RJ Spangler Band, Louis Jordan CD release • Cadieux Café Outdoors, Detroit
5, 12, 19	Noah Jackson & Full Circle • Cliff Bells, Detroit
5-8	Alvin Waddles • Dirty Dog, Grosse Pointe Farms
7-8	Wendell Harrison & Tribe • Cliff Bells, Detroit
13-15	Marion Hayden & Straight Ahead • Cliff Bells, Detroit
20-22	Rodney Whitaker Quartet • Cliff Bells, Detroit
29	Steve Wood – with Cary Kocher • Shield’s, Southfield

JUNE

5	Johnny Trudell Quintet • Shield’s, Southfield
19	Dave Tatrow Quartet – with Barbara Ware • Shield’s, Southfield
20	Michigan Jazz Festival Father’s Day Virtual Fundraiser – with RJ Spangler & Tbone Paxton

JULY

3	Pete Siers Trio – featuring Dave Bennett, Cliff Monear • Shield’s, Southfield
17	Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins and others • Shield’s, Southfield
18	Michigan Jazz Festival: 7 Virtual Stages

April



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4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
25	26	27	28	29	30			

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners

Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
712 East Ann St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1502
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at www.semja.org/submit

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.



Baker's Keyboard Lounge

20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

- Fri 7:00 Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Gaylynnne McKinney
- Sat 7:00 Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Gaylynnne McKinney

Basil Pizza and Wine Bar

3145 Hollister Ln.
PERRYSBURG OH 419-873-6218

APRIL

- 28 11:00 Dave Kozyma & Jimmy Park

Blue LLama Jazz Club

314 South Main St
ANN ARBOR

APRIL

- 16 7:00 Brendon Davis Trio with Brandon Rose, David Alvarez III
- 17 7:00 Kris Kurzawa, Dale Grisa,
8:30 Brandon Rose, Jesse Kramer,
plus seven-course dinner



Dirty Dog Jazz Café

97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

APRIL

- 14–17 6:00 David McMurray
8:00
- 21–24 6:00 Alexander Zonjic
8:00
- 28–30 6:30 Keller Kocher Quintet
9:00 (Matt LoRusso, Adam Mosley,
David Alvarez)

MAY

- 1 6:30 Kerry Kocher Quintet
9:00

Shield's

25101 Telegraph Rd.
SOUTHFIELD 248-476-2674

APRIL

- 17 1:00 Ray Heitger's Cakewalkin' Jass Band

(You must reserve seats in advance by e-mailing sally@greaterdetroitjazzsociety.com)



The Corona/Covid-19 Blues

Michigan is still in the grips of the pandemic — in fact the state is leading the nation by some measures. Under an extended epidemic order from the State of Michigan (lasting through May 19) restaurants and bars will be allowed to offer indoor dining at 50% capacity with up to 100 people, and they must close by 11 p.m. each night. Tables must also be six feet apart with no more than six people per table. Indoor entertainment venues are allowed at 50% capacity with a ceiling of 300 people in attendance while outdoors the ceiling is 1,000.

Lately there has been some movement to open up more venues. Jazz at Shields / Greater Detroit Jazz Society have opened up for a number of concerts as has the Dirty Dog Jazz Café in Grosse Pointe. The Blue LLama in Ann Arbor has started with a few events combining music and bountiful dinner menus and prices to match. Cliff Bells in downtown Detroit is open and Baker's in Detroit just announced that they will have music on Friday and Saturday with the Ralphe Armstrong Trio (please see Ongoing).

So the immediate future looks better than a month ago much thanks to increased vaccinations. Fortunately, many venues have put resources in beefing up their digital presence. The Kerrytown Concert House and UMS in Ann Arbor and the Dirty Dog and Orchestra Hall in Detroit are some of the relatively lucky ones, and we hope and pray that the less fortunate venues will survive this rolling disaster. But the end result for musicians who rely on live music is still very difficult; so please, when you consume their art online, please be as generous as possible with your donations.



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The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA, 712 East Ann St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1502
For phone messages call: 734.668.7470
email: semja@semja.org

Publication

The *SEMJA Update* is published monthly and sent to members at no cost. It is edited by Lars Bjorn and Piotr Michalowski with additional assistance from Barton Polot (production editor), Margot Campos (layout), Jeff Gaynor, and Marcel Niemiec

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets monthly on the third Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. The April 20 meeting will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars Bjorn at 734-668-7470 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
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SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 712 East Ann St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1502

- New Member
- Renewal

Membership Levels

- Basic \$30
- Student \$20
- Couple \$40
- Patron \$60
- Nonprofit Corp. \$50
- Corporate \$250
- Lifetime \$500

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

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