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The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) Celebrates International Jazz Day with Free Performances by 100+ Student Musicians, Mayor Baraka, and More

Christian Wissmuller • March 29, 2022



The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) today announced a free musical celebration in honor of International Jazz Day 4/30 featuring performances by 100+ young New Jersey musicians with special guest Newark Mayor Ras Baraka. Co-produced by NJPAC, City Verses, and Jazz House Kids, this popular concert unites youth musicians from NJPAC’s City Verses jazz and poetry initiative, NJPAC’s Jazz for Teens ensembles featuring James Moody Jazz Orchestra and The George Wein Scholars Ensemble, JAZZ HOUSE Big Band, and local high schools. Hosted by WBGO Radio’s Sheila Anderson aka “Queen of the Hang”, International Jazz Day in Newark highlights the power of jazz as a force for freedom and creativity, promotes intercultural dialogue through respect and understanding, and unites people from all corners of the globe.

“This marks NJPAC’s largest International Jazz Day celebration to date,” explains Mark Gross, Director of Jazz instruction and Artistic Director of Jazz for City Verses at NJPAC. “After two years of performing virtually, we are all ready to celebrate jazz together live and in person on the NJPAC stage. It is thrilling to provide a platform for community to join hands and support the next generation of jazz stars from the Greater Newark area.” (Complete artist bios and schedule are below.)

Where: New Jersey Performing Arts Center at 1 Center Street, Newark, New Jersey;
a short walk from the Newark Penn Station stop by Newark-bound PATH Train or Amtrak.

When: Saturday, April 30, 2022 @ 5:00 p.m.

Tickets: Free. Reservations are required. Limited capacity. Reserve by contacting NJPAC at 1.888.GO.NJPAC/1.888.466.5722 or visit NJPAC.org.

Health + Safety Protocols: NJPAC regularly updates its COVID protocols and procedures based on CDC, federal, state, city, and other scientific data.

Visit NJPAC.org for the most updated guidelines.

Artists and schedules are subject to change

4.30 International Jazz Day @ NJPAC

program subject to change

5:00 p.m. Opening Remarks by WBGO Radio Host Sheila Anderson

5:05 p.m. Science Park High Big Band

Under the direction of band director Mario Banks, the Science Park High School Big Band is a well-established ensemble that helps create a culture of excellence in a city deeply rooted in the history of jazz. The band welcomes talented students from high schools across Newark.

5:25 p.m. JAZZ HOUSE Big Band

The JAZZ HOUSE Big Band directed by Nathan Eklund is part of the JAZZ HOUSE Pre-College Academy, an award-winning flagship training program providing expansive instruction for advanced students from across the region. The Academy is held on Sunday afternoons throughout the school year, and helps students take their musicianship to the next level. Many Big Band alums go on to attend world-class conservatories and prestigious academic institutions with significant merit-based music scholarships and are recognized on today's jazz scene as tomorrow's rising stars.

5:45 p.m. NJPAC's City Verses Jazz and Poetry Ensembles

In this one-of-a-kind joint initiative of NJPAC and Rutgers University-Newark, youth and adults explore the intersection of jazz and poetry. Through a wide range of community events, educational programs and public performances, City Verses expands on the rich historical connection between jazz and poetry, especially in Newark. NJPAC's free or low-cost City Verses programs provide a forum for novices and professionals alike to amplify their voices through these critical art forms, forming connections with each other and the community. Participants read their work aloud at one of City Verses's community poetry shares and/or perform with jazz artists from Newark and beyond both live and in NJPAC's digital archive. City Verses is conducted in partnership with Rutgers University-Newark. Support for this program was provided by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Additional support provided by TD Charitable Foundation and Women@NJPAC.

6:05 p.m. NJPAC's Wells Fargo Jazz for Teens Ensembles: James Moody Jazz Orchestra and The George Wein Scholars Ensemble

This popular NJPAC program celebrates its 25th anniversary in Fall 2022. Jazz for Teens is a comprehensive and sequential jazz education program that develops well-rounded young performers through access to life-changing experiences. Students are provided access to top-notch musical training and study with world-class working artists, opportunities for artistic exchange within the community, and college and career exploration. Through this unique program, students become more than musicians—they grow into exceptional people ready to take on the world. Some of today's leading artists are alumni including MacArthur Fellowship "Genius" Tyshawn Sorey. Mark Gross serves as the director and provides private instruction upon availability. Classes include jazz history, theory/composition, technique, ensembles, and more. Program is open to students ages 13-18.

6:40 p.m. Mayor Ras Baraka (backed by Mark Gross Quartet)

Ras (sounds like 'jazz') Baraka is a Newark, New Jersey, native and the son of revered poet-activists Amina and Amiri Baraka whose family has lived in Newark for over 70 years.

Ras studied at Howard University and was at the forefront of campus political and social activism. Baraka independently released his debut spoken word CD entitled *Shorty for Mayor* in 1998. His single *Hot Beverage in Winter* featured Grammy Award-winning artist Lauryn Hill. The CD received attention from publications worldwide. He has appeared on Russell Simmons' Def Poetry on HBO.

The Mark Gross Quartet is led by Gross, the Director of Jazz Instruction at NJPAC. As a saxophonist, he has toured the world for over 30 years with Delfeayo Marsalis, Dave Holland, Mulgrew Miller, Nicholas Payton, Buster Williams, Duke Ellington Orchestra, Dizzy Gillespie Big Band, James Moody, Nancy Wilson, Freddie Hubbard, Jimmy Heath, John Lee, Village Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Charles Mingus Big Band, Cyrus Chestnut, Regina Carter, Lionel Hampton, Jimmy Cobb, and many others.

7:15 p.m. Arts High Afro-Latin Big Band

As the artistic flagship of the Newark Public Schools, today's Arts High offers a rigorous program for grades 9-12 in dance, drama, music, TV production and more.

7:35 p.m. Finale with All Student Ensembles

About International Jazz Day

In November 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) officially designated April 30 as International Jazz Day in order to highlight jazz and its diplomatic role of uniting people in all corners of the globe. International Jazz Day is chaired and led by UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay and legendary jazz pianist and composer Herbie Hancock, who serves as a UNESCO Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue and Chairman of the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz.