

# STRAIGHT AHEAD



## A Place Called Center Street

The Center Street neighborhood was the heart of a small black community north of downtown Des Moines. Like most African American enclaves, Center Street was located on the wrong side of town, in an area regularly flooded by a small waterway known as Calamity Creek. But the city of Des Moines tamed the creek in the early 1900s, and African American businesses flourished.

By 1919, entertainment hot spots began to show up. Dreamland Hall on 12th and Crocker became a popular dance hall, while the Lincoln Theatre and the Shelburn Gardens, which later combined to become the Billiken, began

advertising by 1921. But it was during World War II that Center Street reached its prime.

National touring acts would come to Des Moines to play for white audiences elsewhere in the city and then head to Center Street clubs to play jam sessions before retiring to the area's segregated hotels. World War II also brought an influx of young people to Des Moines, as the city was home to the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAC) and a staging ground for the United Service Organization (USO). African American WACs and USO troops stayed in the Watkins Hotel and in boardinghouses on Center Street and availed themselves on the neighborhood's thriving club scene.

Further fueling the party on Center Street was a unique system that enabled some establishments to operate long past legal closing time for bars and clubs. The Billiken and the Sepia were

"key clubs," in which patrons who joined would receive keys to a locker where they could keep booze. A thirsty member would present his key to the bartender, who would retrieve his bottle and pour him a drink. Because key clubs were not bars or taverns, they were not required to close at two a.m. It wasn't until 1962, when liquor was legalized by the drink, was closing time enforced at key clubs.

### Center Street In Its Heyday

During the post-World War II era, Center Street started at the corner of Keosauqua Way (Keo) and Center and reached all the way up to 15th Street. Off to the side, 12th Street also offered diversions. In fact, 12th and Center probably rivaled Kansas City's 12th Street and Vine as a popular destination. From the mighty Billiken Ballroom, located at 790 12th Street, just across

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*Jazz at the Billiken Club*

# Editor's Solo Spot

**On October 24, 2006, CJC sponsored its annual Hall of Fame induction ceremony and concert.** The evening was a huge success. Congratulations to our honorees: Ed "Turk" Darlington, Jim Bowermaster, Harry (Dale) Convey and Frank Tribble. Special recognition awards went to Janey Hooper, Don Jaques, and Java Joe's. The Bobby Dawson award was presented to Patrick Noonan. Thanks to John Krantz, Abe Goldstien, Stu Calhoon, and Scott Davis for organizing a spectacular event. CJC would also like to thank Linda Diment for doing the photos for our Hall of Fame. She does a wonderful job and you can see them on our website. A special thank you to the following businesses for their support of the Hall of Fame: Adventuerland Inn and Park, Des Moines Music Coalition, Reiman Music, Trilix Marketing Group, WOI Radio, *The Des Moines Register*, *Datebook*, *Juice*, and *CityView*.

**Todd Woodard took over as the coordinator of CJC's annual Junior High Jazz Festival.** He did a wonderful job. We had a great turnout. This year's clinicians included Wayne Page (saxophone), Rene Bernard (trumpet), Charlie Vetter (trombone), Susie Miget and Jim Eklof (rhythm section)

and David Sharp (Big Band clinician). These professionals did a terrific job, offering our youngest students a valuable jazz experience. Once again, CJC would like to thank Wayne Page for his 15 years of coordinating this event and helping Todd through his first year.

**Chris Crandell and Phil DeLong of Indianola High School planned and coordinated the CJC Jazz Honor Bands this year.** They did a fabulous job of managing every detail of the event. The bands, this year, were very good. The directors, Chris Merz from the University of Northern Iowa and Dave Camwell from Simpson College, commented that the students were very well prepared. Indianola High School was a great place to hold the event. CJC would like to thank Myron Peterson for his four years of coordinating the program for CJC and helping Chris and Phil this year.

**John Krantz continues to maintain and update the Website that he created for CJC.** This has certainly added a much needed source of information and educational resources for our jazz community. We have been getting very good feedback from our email followers. The web address can be found elsewhere in this publication.

**CJC continues to sponsor student Jam sessions on the first Sunday of every month.** Java Joe's is very gracious in providing the venue for these sessions. The February jam featured many younger (Middle School) students as well as some very talented High School Students. As many of you know, CJC sponsors a high school combo made up of students who regularly attend the jam sessions. It was exciting to see the possibility of a Middle School Combo as well. Throughout the spring, various school groups will be featured in the "spotlite" for the first half hour of the jam. These groups include a combo from Valley High School, students from the North High band, Jason Danielson and friends/family, and a combo from Ankeny High School. Chris Merz will be the emcee in May. If you would like to sponsor a jam, contact Phyllis Leaverton at 276-0777.

The spring promises to be a busy time for our student "jazzers". Support live jazz in Des Moines. We have so many talented professionals as well as enthusiastic students. It is an exciting time to be involved with CJC. Happy listening.

**Joel Poppen**  
Instrumental Music and Jazz Studies  
Ankeny High School

## What's New Is Old!

It appears that more and more jazz musicians are looking at older music for inspiration. Enjoy!



**Nels Cline  
New Monastery  
(Cryptogramophone 130)**

The always ahead of its time music of pianist Andrew Hill gets an ahead of its time interpretation by guitarist Nels Cline, clarinetist Ben Goldberg, Bobby Bradford on trumpet and others.



**Steve Kuhn  
Pavanne For A Princess  
(Venus 0608)**

Pianist Steve Kuhn and trio turn some piano classics (and I mean classics) into true jazz classics. The music of Chopin, Debussy, Grieg and Tchaikovsky never swung harder.



**George Cables  
A Letter To Dexter  
(Kind of Blue 10006)**

Pianist George Cables, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Victor Lewis play the tunes associated with their former band leader — saxophonist Dexter Gordon.



**Ben Riley  
Memories of T  
(Concord 30095)**

Drummer Ben Riley worked with Thelonius Monk for five years. Now he works with a septet (without piano) to capture the beauty and humor of eleven Thelonius Monk classics.



**Paul Motian  
On Broadway, Vol. 4  
(Winter & Winter 125)**

Saxophonist Chris Potter and vocalist Rebecca Martin share the spotlight in this latest recording from Paul Motian. Timeless Broadway tunes played with the "timeless" Motian edge.

# Jazz Thrived On Center Street (continued from front)

from the Elks Club, it was an easy walk to the Sepia Club.

At its peak, Center Street was a whirl of activity. The Billiken Ballroom and the Sepia Club shared top billing as the hot spots of the city. A parallel social scene developed on the sidewalk as young parents gathered with their children to visit with friends and watch well-dressed couples strolling from club to club. In fact, the most prized gathering place may have been the island between Center and Keo, which was conveniently located in front of the Sepia Club.

Musicians also prowled the streets at night. Gene Jackson, drummer for the Soul Brothers and many other bands recalls. "The clubs were always jammed and people would go from club to club, When we got a break we would walk into a club and watch some entertainers."

## **Sepia Club**

During the 1940s the Sepia Club drew some of the country's hottest acts. Established as an African American dance venue called the Harlem Club of Polk County in 1939, the club was bought by Howard and Seymour Gray, who named it the Sepia Club and built it into one of Des Moines' prime attractions. The Sepia boasted not only hot music, but also good food created by the Grays' sister Gladys Bates (Carter).

Although nationally known African American musicians played regularly at the club, the local house band developed a following, too. Led by Howard Gray on tenor sax, his brother Seymour on bass, and the legendary Rufus Spates on alto sax, the Gray Brothers Orchestra was the top band in town, and lines would form outside the club even on nights when no headliner was playing.

The Gray Brothers hired local favorites to play at the Sepia. One of the most popular piano players in the



*The Irene Myles Band at the Sepia Club*

city was the great Ernest "Speck" Redd. Redd built a career as a composer, writing and arranging music for George Dewey Washington and Earl Hines before coming to Des Moines in 1943.

By 1965, Howard and Seymour Gray closed the Sepia. The club reopened under the management of Willard Saunders and Tip Collins and the name of the Collins Club but closed for good in 1966. In 1969, the building was demolished due to urban renewal.

## **Billiken Ballroom**

The Sepia was not the only hot spot in town. Located a few blocks away, at 790 12th, was the Billiken Ballroom. The ballroom opened for business in 1921, when it was known as the Shelburn Gardens and Lincoln Theatre. The Billiken's roster of performers was once as stellar as that of its neighboring Sepia Club. The highlight at the Billiken came in 1939 when the legendary Josephine Baker performed at the ballroom. Just as at the Sepia, local jazz musicians played alongside national acts.

The Billiken was actually comprised of two clubs. The upstairs club, called the Paradise Room or the Empire Room, featured the main ballroom. The downstairs club, the Hole, offered a more intimate setting. Mel Harper, longtime owner of the Hole, eventually rented the whole building and called it



*The Gray Brothers Orchestra*

the 790 Club. Harper booked smaller acts for the Hole and saved the Paradise Club for bigger acts.

As soon as Harper first leased the basement of the Billiken in 1956, he immediately established a house band, first by hiring away Rufus Spates from the Sepia Club. Later, other notables joined the band, including Lincoln Berry on organ, Curly Morgan on drums and Terry Bennett on guitar.

## **The End Of An Era On Center Street**

By 1969 most of Center Street had withered away. Urban renewal had taken the neighborhood piece by piece. Furthermore, the construction of Interstate 235 had divided the neighborhood in two, depriving businessmen on Center Street of many of their customers. As Center Street died, many of the bands and performers moved on or found new gigs.

Today, the Community Jazz Center of Des Moines and the Iowa Blues Society honors many of the musicians that helped shape the Center Street scene and the future of African American music in Des Moines.

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[Editor's Note: These excerpts were taken from a article that appeared in a recent issue of *Living Blues*. We thank the author, Tom Gary, a founding member of the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame, for his permission to share this information about Des Moines' early jazz scene.]

# One woman. One piano. One incredible afternoon of jazz.

**JESSICA WILLIAMS • LIVE AT CASPE TERRACE, WAUKEE • APRIL 22, 2007**

**In early October 2006, local jazz enthusiast, Abe Goldstien, introduced many of you to the sounds of avant garde jazz in the intimate setting of Bucksbaum Theatre at Caspe Terrace. On April 22, Goldstien presents his second in a series of Jazz at Caspe Terrace concerts, this time featuring a solo performance from world-class jazz pianist Jessica Williams.**

Recognized as one of today's most original solo pianists, Ms. Williams will play an afternoon recital of jazz classics and original compositions in a style that is all her own. Her solo performances move from ballads to stride piano, blues to bebop, contemplation to excitement, and it all unfolds right before your eyes. "I've never heard her play the same tune the same way twice," says Goldstien, who has been a fan of Ms. Williams since the late 1980s; so much so that he invited her to Des Moines in 2001 to play a 50th birthday concert for he and his friends. This time around, he is pleased to share this incredible talent with the community.

**"One Woman/One Piano/One Incredible Afternoon of Jazz,"** is how Goldstien is promoting this performance. "You have never heard or seen a piano player quite like Jessica Williams," comments Goldstien. "She is truly one-of-a-kind in the way she approaches each tune, dominates the



piano and holds a crowd's attention every note along the way." "The atmosphere of Caspe Terrace and the wonderful Steinway piano is sure to please Ms. Williams and I guarantee she'll have the same impact on the audience," he concludes.

The concert, which is being co-hosted by the Waukee Area Arts Council, will start at 2:00 p.m. on April 22. **Tickets will be limited to the capacity of the theatre, so if you are interested in attending, call Abe at 515-279-6452 soon. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$20 for students.**

Caspe Terrace, which serves as the cultural and social center for Des Moines' Jewish community, is one-quarter mile south off the I-80 Waukee/Booneville exit (#117), just 15 minutes west of Des Moines.

To learn more about Jessica Williams, watch videos of her in performance and download samples of her music, visit [www.jessicawilliams.com](http://www.jessicawilliams.com).

Based on the response to the Trio-X concert in October and the anticipated success of the Jessica Williams recital, Goldstien hopes to continue sponsoring Jazz at Caspe Terrace concerts.

## Jazz Is On The Menu At These New Venues

One of the "perks" of being a member of CJC is receiving a weekly listing of who's playing where in Des Moines. Thanks to a growing number of club owners, that list gets longer each and every week. So go out and support the following clubs who are among the newest venues for your favorite music.

**Vertigo Rock Bar** — This new addition to the scene, at 37th and Ingersoll, features an open jam session every Wednesday, 9 to 1 a.m. with the John Kizilermut Quartet.

**Lloyd's Wine & Tobacco** — Watch for the Janey Hooper/Susie Miget Project appearing at this intimate

room on Friday nights at 4th and Maple in Valley Junction

**Tini's** — Someone's always cookin' at Tini's Jazz Bar, 5500 Merle Hay Road in Johnston. Check the *Datebook* or call for schedules.

**The Continental** — This East Village club features live jazz on the weekends and

great prerecorded jazz all week long.

**Old Favorites** — Be sure to hit some of these longstanding jazz venues, too — Sam & Gabes, Fratellos, Court Avenue Brewing, The Suites at 800, Gateway Center in Ames, and Monday nights with the Big Band at Adventureland Inn.

# CJC Volunteer Profiles

**It takes many generous volunteers to help CJC accomplish its mission. We are pleased to introduce you to some of those hard-working CJC volunteers. Watch for more Volunteer Profiles in future issues of *Straight Ahead*.**



**CHERIE MORTICE**

One day Cherie Mortice's son, Zach, came lumbering into the house with a guitar case that was as big as he was. His music teacher, Scott Davis, was starting a jazz band and wanted him to try the bass guitar. Scott also told Zach about CJC jam sessions.

Cherie met Phyllis Leaverton at the first jam session her son attended at Java Joe's. Cherie was astonished that Des Moines was offering a 12-year-old the opportunity to play with the real jazz pros in town. As a teacher, Cherie saw the importance of CJC in providing authentic musical experiences to young people.

Cherie's first job with CJC came when Phyllis asked if she would make announcements during the jam sessions. Later she was asked to serve on the Executive Board. Cherie never underestimates the value that CJC brings to her and to the city. As Cherie explains, "Jazz brings people together in a bond of love for an art form that uniquely expresses our inner spirit and joy."



**MICHELLE MORRIS**

Michelle Morris first became involved with CJC back in the middle 1990s when Cherie Mortice asked her to come to a jam session at Java Joe's. There, she saw some of her students jamming. From being there that one time, Morris realized that the jam sessions were another way to reach these students and many of others in her classes who had a love for music, particularly jazz.

By being involved with CJC Morris can take care of two of her passions — teaching and music. Volunteering has enabled her to remain involved with the music community and talented young people entering the field of music. Best of all, as Morris puts it, "I simply enjoy the positive energy generated around wonderful music and the people who create it."



**RON RUBECK**

Ron Rubeck's interest in jazz was instilled in him as a youth by his dad, a jazz drummer in the 1920s. The interest in jazz continued with him in high school, UNI, and still today. His two favorite bands as a youth were Stan Kenton and Benny Goodman. In later life, Ron listened to a lot of Maynard Ferguson. "He was a real hoot!"

Rubek became treasurer of CJC in 2005. What does Ron like about CJC? Just about everything. "CJC has wonderful programs for youth with our monthly jams and bands program," explains Ron. An avid big band fan, Ron also enjoys listening to CJC Adult Big Band at Java Joe's. "They get better each time I hear them!"

Ron loves to be part of CJC and hopes to be just a small part of helping to keep jazz a part of our culture forever.



**MYRON PETERSON**

Myron Peterson is currently in his ninth year as a director of bands at Urbandale High School. He previously taught in Oskaloosa.

Peterson received his bachelor of music education in 1995 from UNI, where he studied trombone. He performs with the Tony Valdez Large Band, the Brix Big Band, and as a freelance trombonist in various chamber settings. He remains active as an adjudicator and clinician at music festivals across Iowa.

Peterson is affiliated with the Iowa Bandmaster's Association, South Central Iowa Bandmaster's Association, International Association of Jazz Educators-Iowa Unit, and the Des Moines Community Jazz Center; serving as the chair of the Honor Band Committee from 2002-2006.

## STRAIGHT AHEAD

*Straight Ahead* is published quarterly by the Greater Des Moines Community Jazz Center. We welcome any and all contributions to this newsletter, including book, concert and CD reviews, editorials, concert news and any other information that would be of interest to CJC members. Please send your articles and information to Abe Goldstien, c/o Trilix Marketing Group, 4000 114th St., Urbandale, IA 50322. Materials can also be e-mailed to [abe@trilixgroup.com](mailto:abe@trilixgroup.com). For information about advertising in *Straight Ahead* or to receive future copies of the publication, contact Phyllis Leaverton at 515-276-0777.

## Remembering Des Moines Jazz Musicians

### Rose Marie Webster

Des Moines lost an important talent who touched many music fans over the years when Rose Marie Webster passed away after several years of health complications. Webster was inducted into the Iowa Blues Hall Of Fame in 2000 and the CJC Jazz Hall of Fame in 2002. She will be remembered fondly and missed by scores of people that she touched with her soulful singing.

Webster gave fifty years of unique musical presentations to audiences throughout Des Moines and Iowa. She was born in Kansas City, Kansas, to the late Reverend Ernest and Madge Gaiters and acquired a strong gospel style singing at a very early age.

Dinah Washington was a major inspiration and Webster decided, while in her early 20's, to pursue performing blues and jazz. She appeared at many nightclubs around Des Moines over the years, working for 15 years with the late Seymour Gray.

Local jazz fans will remember Webster from years of performing at venues such as The Sepia Club, the White Shutter Inn, Tony's Lounge, Hotel Fort Des Moines, Wakonda Club, Basin Street, Duck's and Company and Ernie's Urban Lounge to name a few. She also participated in Jazz In July, the Women of Jazz, and numerous other community events. In addition to her jazz and blues musical legacy, Webster accompanied the chorus at the Corinthian Baptist Church for 28 years.

### Murray Lipsman

Murray Ira Lipsman, 49, died in early February at his home in Minneapolis. Last April, Lipsman received a diagnosis of neuro-endocrine cancer, and he battled that disease with great courage and with the wisdom and joy with which he lived his entire life.

Lipsman was born on June 2, 1957, in Minneapolis, and he grew up in Des Moines. He attended Clive School and Stilwell Junior High School, and he graduated from Valley High School with the class of 1975. In 1978, he received his B.A. in Russian Studies from the University of Iowa, where he also studied music.

In 1982, Lipsman received a degree in law from the University of Iowa, but primarily made his living as a musician and piano technician in Des Moines and Minneapolis.

Lipsman was a gifted musician who began to play the piano when he was a child and he could be found in the midst of a crowd around the piano for the rest of his life. He founded the band Mr. Moto, and also played for many years with the Tony Valdez Group. Over the years, Lipsman had long-standing and popular engagements at the Metropolitan Club, the Eighth Street Seafood Bar and Grill, and Jimmy's American Café. He played with just about every working musician in the area.

Lipsman was a gentle citizen of the earth, supporting environmental causes and animal rights, and providing loving care to a succession of cats, birds, and the lucky creatures who inhabited his extraordinary garden.

## *Jam Session Profile:* Jonathan Emehiser

On the first Sunday of every month, young jazz musicians gather at Java Joe's for the CJC jam sessions. We're proud to introduce you to one of these "young lions" — Jonathan Emehiser. A Johnston High junior, Emehiser, has been playing reed instruments for the past five years.

### How did you get interested in jazz?

My parents listen to a lot of jazz around the house which is one of the reasons I got so interested in this music.

### Favorite Musicians:

John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, David "Fathead" Newman, Gordon Goodwin, Charlie Parker, and many more.

### Favorite Musicians To Jam With:

Susie Miget and the combo I am in as well as the Java Joe's CJC regulars.

### What I Like About Jamming:

I think it is good experience to play with different levels of musicians. I like the ability to improve at the jam sessions.

### Advice For Younger Musicians:

Practice a lot and continue taking lessons.

**Educational Goal:** Major in music at college.

# JAZZ UP SUNDAYS!

Head to Java Joe's the first Sunday  
of every month for CJC Jam Sessions  
and stop back on the third Sunday  
of the month for the CJC Big Band.

Check us out online:

[www.myspace.com/communityjazzcenter](http://www.myspace.com/communityjazzcenter)

# Notes & Tones

## From Wanda Darlington: A Hall Of Fame Thanks

I want to thank CJC so much for the wonderful October evening when the new inductees of the Des Moines Jazz Hall of Fame were introduced. October 22, 2006, was a grand evening and I suspect that Toad, Wayne and Ed were "taking fours" in celebration!

It was a very special event for the Darlingtons. The video was nicely done. And, of course Ed playing behind his part was very special to us. We also saw the video featuring each inductee on television. Two people have written me that they saw it on a local station. What a nice thing to do.

## From CJC: Thanks To These Members And Friends

Thanks to these CJC patrons for their support:

- Roslyn Ansher
- Ron and Kathie Danielson
- Lois and Jean Davis
- Gary Dettloff
- Lloyd Miller
- Penny Furgerson

Thanks to these friends of CJC for contribution to jam sessions and the big band:

- Terri Dermody and Davis Sanders

Thanks to these supporters of the CJC Hall of Fame event:

- Jack Hauser
- John Krantz
- Curtis and Evelina Leaverton
- Robert Leaverton

## From Dave Dickey: Remembering Maynard

Walter "Maynard" Ferguson was one of the most influential musicians and band leaders in the history of jazz. Not only was Maynard a great musician, but also a great educator. He spent many hours/days/years educating musicians of all ages about jazz music. I contacted musician friends of mine that have played with Maynard and asked them how they felt about Maynard and performing with him.

### **Nick Lane, trombone:**

Maynard was always one to encourage others, but he also liked to push the envelope — try something different. With that came my opportunity to bring charts into the band, work them out on the road, and then record them. When I think of all the young musicians he inspired over the years, it leaves a void that will be difficult to fill. There just aren't the same opportunities for young musicians to travel and play every night any more.

### **Dennis Diblasio, baritone sax:**

I've known Maynard for practically half of my life. I had a great fun relationship with him, kind of a big brother/uncle kind of thing. I was out with Maynard over 25 years. He brought out the best you had. You always flipped into another gear when you were around him, especially on stage. Thanks to Maynard, I know what it's like to work for a great boss.

### **Chip McNeil, saxophone:**

Maynard loved playing with the musicians in his band, whoever they

were at any given time. He encouraged musicians to write for the band at all times. He also motivated you to take chances as an improviser and not be afraid to try anything no matter how outrageous it might seem!

### **Dennis Noday, trumpet:**

Someone called Maynard Ferguson a wizard. He ignited a frenzy of excitement in music. Trumpet players adored his ability to reach into the stratosphere. His hard hitting, take no prisoners approach was inspirational. He made it look easy, but it wasn't!

### **Stockton Helbing, drums:**

Not many people get the opportunity to live their dreams. I am one of those blessed people who do. I first heard Maynard play when my 7th grade band director played "La Fiesta" for the class. I remember thinking that I'd never heard anything sound that great before. I loved it! I became a huge Maynard Ferguson fan. I would stay up all night listening to his CDs, dreaming that someday I might get the opportunity to play with him. That day came, in the fall of 2003. I had the distinct privilege of taking the stage with Maynard night after night, and hearing his amazing playing and witnessing his even more amazing attitude and presence.

### **Wayne Bergeron, trumpet:**

To say I will miss him is an understatement. The awe of meeting Maynard in person was something I remember as if it was yesterday. Ironically as the years passed, the awe never went away. There is a big pair of shoes in the music world that will NEVER be filled.

Community Jazz Center  
2921 Patricia Drive  
Urbandale, Iowa 50322-6863

# CJC Membership Form

School [\$35]       Patron [\$30]       Adult [\$20]       Student [\$10]

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Interests/Skills \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to: CJC Membership Chair, 2921 Patricia Drive, Urbandale, Iowa 50322-6863**