

Great Jazz on the Great Hill Performers
Saturday, July 10, 2010, 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm
On Central Park's Great Hill (enter at West 106th Street)



Jimmy Heath

Jimmy Heath has long been recognized as a brilliant instrumentalist and a magnificent composer and arranger.

Heath is the middle brother of the legendary Heath Brothers (Percy Heath/bass and Tootie Heath/drums). He has performed with nearly all the jazz greats of the last fifty years, from Howard McGhee, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis to Wynton Marsalis. One of Heath's earliest big bands in Philadelphia included John Coltrane, Benny Golson, Specs Wright, Cal Massey, Johnny Coles, Ray Bryant, and Nelson Boyd (1947-1948). Charlie Parker and Max Roach sat in on one occasion.

During his career, Heath has performed on more than 100 record albums, including seven with The Heath Brothers and twelve as a leader. Heath has also written more than 125 compositions, many of which have become jazz standards and have been recorded by other artists including Art Farmer, Cannonball Adderley, Clark Terry, Chet Baker, Miles Davis, James Moody, Milt Jackson, Ahmad Jamal, Ray Charles, Dizzy Gillespie, J.J. Johnson and Dexter Gordon. Heath has also composed extended works – seven suites and two string quartets. Having just concluded eleven years as Professor of Music at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College, Heath maintains an extensive performance schedule and continues to conduct workshops and clinics throughout the United States, Europe, and Canada. He has also taught jazz studies at Jazzmobile, Housatonic College, City College of New York, and The New School for Social Research.



Ray Mantilla

Ray Mantilla, an internationally acclaimed local percussionist, describes his music as "Latin Jazz with authentic Latino rhythms." Mantilla was born in the South Bronx and has toured nationally and in Europe and Japan with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. In 1977, Ray Mantilla became the first North American Latin musician to play in Cuba since the Cuban Revolution when he appeared there as an essential member of the historic goodwill ensemble led by Dizzy Gillespie. He has recorded and performed with almost every major figure in jazz including singers Eartha Kitt and Josephine Baker.

Mantilla's career has included membership in many legendary Jazz and Latin Jazz ensembles. A short list of Mantilla's credits includes, Max Roach, Charles Mingus, Ray Barretto, Gato Barbieri, Sonny Stitt, Bobby Watson, Herbie Mann, Tito Puente, Cedar Walton, and Freddie Hubbard. Prolific in the studio, Mantilla can be heard on more than 200 albums. Ray Mantilla appeared on the great recording, "Fifty Years of Mambo", recorded live at Town Hall, New York, which received a Grammy nomination. He has appeared in all major clubs in New York City – the Apollo Theater, Palladium, Blue Note, SOB's, Birdland, Fat Tuesday's, Village Gate and the Village Vanguard, in addition to many major international jazz festivals such as Sanremo, the Pori Jazz Festival, JVC Jazz Festival, Montreaux Jazz Festival and the Grande Parade du Jazz. He has been voted Percussionist of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association as well as by major jazz periodicals from around the world – including Jazz Times (USA), Jazz Magazine (Italy), JazzThek (Germany) and others.



Dion Parson/21st Century Band with special guest Michael

Dion Parson, one of New York's finest young drummers, unites different musicians, people, influences and cultures through his career as a performer, educator, and life-long student. Born in St. Thomas, Parson's musical foundation ranges from classical, reggae, calypso, jazz, African, and pop music.

Parson is an integral part of New York City's jazz scene and has played with such greats as the late Milt Jackson, Monty Alexander, Jon Faddis, Steve Grossman, Gary Bartz, Terence Blanchard, Geri Allen, Donald Harrison, Don Byron, David Sanchez, Ray Anderson, Stephen Scott, Marc Cary, Lee Konitz, Ernest Ranglin, Ron Blake, Terell Stafford, Cyrus Chestnut, Wycliffe Gordon, Babatunde Olatunji, Baaba Maal, Joanne Brackeen, Dianne Reeves, Bill Salter, Bill Saxton, and Steve Turre. His association with these musicians has taken him well beyond U.S. borders on tours to such places as Japan, Europe, Canada, the West Indies, Africa, and the Middle East. Parson has recorded for several major labels, including Columbia, Sony, Gramavision, Arabesque, Blue Note, Verve, Enja, Koch Records, Concord Records, and Tahmun Records, which he helped found. Parson has played with the Broadway show *The Color Purple*.

Parson holds a B.M. in Music Education from Rutgers University, where he has also taught music as an adjunct professor. Parson teaches music education and theory in schools, at workshops, and through private sessions in the New York City area and around the world while touring. In 2007, Parson became the creative director of the international music organization United Jazz International. He maintains study with master drummer Michael Carvin.



Michael Varekamp

Michael Varekamp's trumpet music is influenced by his Trinidadian heritage, his European upbringing, and his extensive experience performing around the world with several groups including the Surinam band Fra Fra Sound, a band whose music connects jazz with Caribbean and African roots. He has performed at festivals, clubs and concerts in Australia, South Africa, Great Britain, Cuba, Tunisia, Malta, United States, Israel, Mali, Burkina Faso, the Baltics, and all over Europe.

During his career, Varekamp has performed with great musicians including Lalo Shifrin, Scott Hamilton, David Murray, Lester Bowie, Dee Daniels, Philip Harper, Harry Emmerly, Ralph Peterson, Pete & Conte Candoli, Wendell Brunious, Joris Teepe, John Engels, Benjamin Herman, Andy Ninvalle, Denise Jannah, Frits Landesbergen, Jarmo Hoogendijk, Peter Beets, Trijntje Oosterhuis, Deborah Brown, Deborah J. Carter, Fra Fra Sound & Big Band, Michiel Borstlap and Brian Lynch.

In October 2001, Varekamp received the Kobe Award in Japan for outstanding young talent, and in 2006 and 2007 he composed two ballet scores on commission for Theater aan het Spui in The Hague. Varekamp often does special tribute projects for Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis, and is currently working as a bandleader with The Cosmic Scene, and co-leads groups including the Amsterdam Jazz Club and The Trumpack with Philip Harper.

Varekamp not only plays the trumpet – while touring, he regularly gives workshops and guest lectures, and contributes to film, radio and television productions. He sings and composes for many bands and developed the music education program Little Louis for kids. Since 2006, Varekamp has served as Artistic Director of the organization Pure Jazz, which includes an annual festival and about 30 concerts during the season.



Brianna Thomas (Jazzmobile's 2009 Jazz Vocal Competition Winner)

Born in Peoria, Illinois and raised by her father, vocalist and percussionist Charlie Thomas, Brianna Thomas grew up surrounded by music. Thomas' vocal talents were discovered by distinguished jazz educator Mary Jo Papich just shy of her teenage years, and soon after, she launched her career on a tour of Europe with the Peoria Jazz All-Stars, a big band under Ms. Papich's direction.

Thomas' talents have propelled her to many successes, including performances at the Montreux, North Sea, and Umbria Jazz Festivals, and in venues ranging from the Bahamas to Geneva, Switzerland. She was a resident in both the 2001 and 2002 Betty Carter Jazz Ahead Programs – an international artist-in-residence program that assembles a select group of jazz musicians to perform their original compositions at the Kennedy Center. At "Jazz Ahead," Thomas worked with a host of premier jazz educators and performers including renowned vocalist Carmen Lundy, drummer Winard Harper and saxophonist Nathan Davis. Thomas' extensive list of stateside performances includes appearances with Fred Anderson and Houston Person.

In 2001, Thomas was awarded "High School Jazz Vocalist of the Year" by Down Beat magazine. Notably, Thomas is the youngest person ever to be inducted into Peoria Illinois' African-American Hall of Fame (1996). In 2006, Thomas had her debut New York City performance at the Women in Jazz Festival held in Dizzy's Club at Lincoln Center, and made a guest appearance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. with the Barber Brothers.

Thomas moved to New York City in 2007 to attend college at The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music. She now regularly performs and has professionally recorded with pianist Gordon Webster in venues ranging from New York and California to Canada and Korea. In 2009, Thomas won New York's Jazzmobile Vocal Competition, a prestigious competition judged by such jazz greats and legends as pianist and educator Billy Taylor, percussionist and vocalist Grady Tate, vocalist Gloria Lynn, and vocalist Charanee Wade.