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QuickTakes!

Free Concert on the Jersey City Waterfront Celebrates the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band and the Jersey City Community

September 5, 2018



Paquito D'Rivera on Jersey City's waterfront in preparation for the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Concert

The NJCU Center for the Arts presents the annual **NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Concert** on Friday, September 14 at 6 p.m. on the J. Owen Grundy Pier, Exchange Place, in Jersey City. Conducted by retired NJCU Professor Richard Lowenthal, this free concert will feature GRAMMY Award-winning guest artist Paquito D'Rivera in a tribute to WBGO Newark, the world's flagship jazz radio station, and the 80th anniversary of the Benny Goodman Orchestra's landmark performance at Carnegie Hall.

Each September since 2013, the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band has brought together the university's professional graduates with high-profile guests for a

waterfront concert at Exchange Place. "This concert showcases the quality of NJCU degree programs in jazz, and is a way for us to share this talent with the Jersey City community," explained President Sue Henderson. "Just as Benny Goodman inspired Paquito D'Rivera, we see NJCU as a source of inspiration and learning for current and future generations of jazz musicians and audiences."

The musical selections on this year's program celebrate two anniversaries that are significant to the evolution of jazz as a quintessential part of American culture. In 1938, 80 years ago, the Benny Goodman Orchestra performed at Carnegie Hall, making a powerful statement with a racially integrated band on stage, and forever moving jazz from the dance floor to the concert hall. Radio station WBGO first aired in 1948 as the voice of the Newark Board of Education, and became a dedicated jazz outlet in 1979, 40 years ago. Since then,

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WBGO has become a seminal champion for jazz, creating an international platform for high-quality programming that encompasses a variety of styles and eras.

“There are many artists who would be an appropriate choice to salute WBGO,” said Amy Niles, CEO and President of the radio station, “but there isn’t anyone better than long-time Hudson County resident Paquito D’Rivera. He exemplifies the spirit of WBGO with his outgoing joyful personality, his constant desire to improve, his quest to expand the boundaries of his music, and his passion for humanity. We are honored that NJCU has chosen to salute WBGO and our jazz family and has invited Paquito to participate.” Born in Cuba, jazz legend Paquito D’Rivera grew up listening to Benny Goodman recordings – in fact, it was these records that inspired his childhood dream of becoming a jazz musician in New York City. The winner of 14 GRAMMY Awards, D’Rivera has had an extraordinary career that spans jazz, Latin jazz and classical music. He is the recipient of the Living Jazz Legend Award from The Kennedy Center, the National Medal of the Arts from the United States, a Lifetime Achievement Award from Carnegie Hall, and an NEA Jazz Master from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band features accomplished musicians who studied at the school as far back as the 1960s, when Professor Lowenthal started the jazz program. Performing this year will be drummer Rich DeRosa (who also arranged some of the band’s charts); sax players Mark Friedman, Noelle Rueschman, Bob Magnusson, Dave Noland, and John DiSanto; trumpeters Freddie Hendrix, Nate Eklund, Marcell Bellinger, and Vinnie Cutro; trombonists Rob Edwards, Mike Modero, Danny Hall and Conrad Zulauf; and faculty members Andy Eulau on bass and Alan Farnham on piano. Vocalist and NJCU graduate Vanessa Perea will join the band for several tunes associated with Sarah Vaughn and Benny Goodman.

The band brings together an impressive group of musicians and shares their talents with the Jersey City community. NJCU jazz alumni have credits in Broadway, television, recording industry, and symphony orchestras, and have worked with some of the most legendary artists of all time, including Gerry Mulligan, Ray Charles, Buddy Rich, Maynard Ferguson, Lionel Hampton, Johnny Mathis, Nancy Wilson, Cher, Mel Torme, and Tony Bennett.

This is the sixth year the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band will present a waterfront concert on the J. Owen Grundy Pier. Previous concerts have been *100th Birthday Salute to Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Buddy Rich, and Thelonious Monk*, with guest artists Jon Faddis and Cyrille Aimee; *A Tribute to Lew Soloff of Blood Sweat & Tears* with Randy Brecker; *A Tribute to Clark Terry* with special guest Wynton Marsalis; *A Salute to the Other Jersey Boys* with John Pizzarelli, Bucky Pizzarelli and Ed Laub; and *A Celebration of the Inauguration of President Sue Henderson* with trumpeter Jon Faddis.

These annual concerts are conducted by Professor Richard Lowenthal, who retired in 2017 after 50 years at the university. Mr. Lowenthal founded the Jazz Program at NJCU, then Jersey City State College, in 1969. Under Professor Lowenthal’s leadership and continuing

with Professors Ed Joffe, Walt Weiskopt, and Gabriel Alegria, NJCU boasts a strong jazz program on both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

The NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Concert with Paquito D’Rivera is free and open to the public, and will take place on the J. Owen Grundy Pier at Exchange Place. Food trucks will be on site and seating is on a first-come, first served basis. In event of rain, the concert will be held in the Harborside Atrium, Harborside 2 and 3 at 34 Exchange Place. The J. Owen Grundy Pier is located near public transportation and there are numerous parking lots in the area. For more information, visit www.njcu.edu/arts.

The sponsors for this free concert include the NJCU Foundation, Hampshire Companies, the City of Jersey City, Arch Insurance, Claremont Companies, Inserra Supermarkets, NJTV, RBC Capital Markets, NJM Insurance Group, Dresdner Robin, the Hudson County Office of Culture and Tourism, Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs, Del-Sano Contracting, Palisades Medical Center, Connell Foley, PRC Group, BCB Community Bank, Hyatt House, Hyatt Regency Jersey City, New Jersey Broadcasters Association, New Jersey Jazz Society, Hot House Jazz Guide, Exchange Place Business Alliance, and WBGO.