

# The 10 Best Jazz Shows in NYC This Month, May 2014

by DAVID R. ADLER  
May 1, 2014



Marc Ribot

SHERVIN LAINEZ

These are the best jazz shows in NYC in May.

## Undead Music

Guitarist [Marc Ribot](#) has much to celebrate as he turns 60 (on May 21), so he'll be the main focus of the fifth annual Undead Music series. There'll be shows by Son Lux with Rafiq Bhatia, Daedelus & Shigeto and a May 14 Improvised Round-Robin Duets blowout at Town Hall (featuring Ribot among many others). Of the four dedicated Ribot nights, the most buzzworthy is his record release show for *Live at the Village Vanguard* (Pi) with Henry Grimes on bass and Chad Taylor on drums, May 12 at (Le) Poisson Rouge. This hair-raising trio juxtaposes Albert Ayler and late-era Coltrane with distinctively fractured renderings of things like "I'm Confessin'" and "Old Man River." It's music that fries brains while also expanding and uplifting.

## Brad Mehldau Trio

An unstoppable force on piano since his emergence in the mid-'90s, [Brad Mehldau](#) has raised the bar for instrumentalists across the board, collaborating with the likes of Jon Brion, Pat Metheny, Chris Thile and most recently drummer Mark Guiliana on the electronic jazz feast *Taming the Dragon* (Nonesuch). At the Village Vanguard (May 6-11) Mehldau returns to the source of it all with his acoustic trio featuring bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Jeff Ballard. The band's 2012 Nonesuch efforts *Ode* and *Where Do You Start*, focusing on originals and covers respectively, spill over with harmonic invention and interpretive finesse.

## Harlem Jazz Shrines Festival

[This multi-venue event](#) (starting May 4) pays homage to legendary Harlem venues past and present such as Minton's, Monroe's Uptown House, Small's Paradise and the Apollo Theater. There'll be jam sessions hosted by Christian Sands and Antonio Hart, discussions of the legacies of Charlie Parker and James Baldwin, big bands led by Cecil Bridgewater, Bobby Sanabria and Arturo O'Farrill, and a free (yes, free) concert by the Vijay Iyer Trio at Aaron Davis Hall (May 9). The Harlem Stage Gatehouse also promises two intriguing nights with pianists Aruán Ortiz and Manuel Valera (May 7) and trumpeter Christian aTunde Adjuah (May 8).

## Eric Reed Quartet

Pianist [Eric Reed](#) came to prominence in the early '90s as a member of the Wynton Marsalis Septet, filling the shoes of Kenny Kirkland and Marcus Roberts. Though he's recorded prolifically as a leader, displaying a high level of mastery at age 43, he hasn't been given his full due. His two duet records with trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, *We* and *We, Vol. 2*, are simply outstanding, and his Savant trilogy *The Dancing Monk*, *The Baddest Monk* and *The Adventurous Monk* has set a new standard for Thelonious Monk interpretation in our day. It's safe to assume Reed will draw on that repertoire at Smoke Jazz and Supper Club on May 9-10. With him will be tenor saxophonist Seamus Blake, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Rodney Green.

## Ryan Truesdell's Gil Evans Project

Apart from Fred Hersch's always essential annual week of duos (May 6-11), the must-see at Jazz Standard is May 13-18, when [Ryan Truesdell's Gil Evans Project](#) will record its next CD, a fan-funded affair aptly to be titled *LIVE at the Jazz Standard* (Blue Note/ArtistShare). The follow-up to 2012's absorbing *Centennial: Newly Discovered Works of Gil Evans*, this effort finds scholar-conductor Truesdell and 20-piece ensemble (with Wendy Gilles, vocals) immersed in a treasure bath of further Evans rarities and acknowledged classics. For the first three nights it's "Music for Claude Thornhill"; for the latter three it's "New Bottle Old Wine and Individualism of Gil Evans" (referencing Gil's classic albums of '58 and '64, respectively).



John Ellis

EMRA ISLEK

## John Ellis & Andy Bragen's MOBRO

North Carolina-bred tenor/soprano saxophonist and bass clarinetist [John Ellis](#) has elevated the New York scene for a good 15 years, playing with the likes of Kendrick Scott and Darcy James Argue while maintaining an impressive profile as a leader. Lately he's been venturing extended works such as "The Ice Siren" and *MOBRO* (Parade Light), a "narrative chamber piece" co-created with librettist Andy Bragen. With the remarkable singers Johnaye Kendrick, Miles Griffith, Becca Stevens and Sachal Vasandani out in front, Ellis and his colleagues return to the Jazz Gallery on May 30-31 to celebrate the new release — a poetic, funny, tormented musical response to the lonely journey of the garbage barge Mobro 4000.

## Jeff Davis

Outwardly turbulent and free but tight and methodical, [Jeff Davis's](#) drumming has proved indispensable to fellow bandleaders such as Jesse Stacken, Jon Irabagon and Michael Bates. Since 2010 he's been tilling the fields as a leader, first with *We Sleep Outside* (Loyal Label) and then *Leaf House* (Fresh Sound), a venturesome 2012 trio date featuring pianist Russ Lossing and bassist Eivind Opsvik. On the new *Dragon Father* the trio expands to a quintet featuring Kirk Knuffke on cornet and Oscar Noriega on alto saxophone/clarinet. Recorded live last year at Cornelia Street Café, *Dragon Father* now occasions a reunion in the same venue on May 17. (Davis's fellow drummer Ches Smith leads a quartet at Cornelia as well, May 14.)

## New York Hot Jazz Festival

There's such vitality and aesthetic brilliance in jazz of the '20s and '30s, and [this one-day marathon festival](#) at the Players Club (May 18) puts it squarely in our face. Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks, the kings of vintage repertory, will team with the mesmerizing and unfailingly swinging Catherine Russell on vocals, but that's one of over a dozen offerings sandwiched between the hours of 1pm and 1am. You'll also want to take in banjoist Cynthia Sayer, young Canadian trumpeter Bria Skonberg (also at Iridium May 13), guitarist Frank Vignola, clarinetist Ken Peplowski, tuba player David Ostwald and his Louis Armstrong Eternity Band and more, all impeccably versed in a language of another time. Hearing this music close-up, without the hiss and pop of old 78-rpm records, can be a revelation.

## Steve Grossman Quartet

Steve Grossman's saxophone playing with Miles Davis — on *Live-Evil*, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*, *Big Fun* and the new historical release *Miles at the Fillmore: The Bootleg Series Vol. 5* (Legacy) — [has been studied and fetishized](#), though in a recent interview Grossman recalled feeling utterly lost in Miles's band. (He spoke more glowingly of his stint with Elvin Jones.) Ever since, Grossman's focus has been fiery straightahead jazz in a post-Coltrane mold. A longtime resident of Italy, he became elusive, though he maintained and refined his chops all the while — he proved it many times over at the Jazz Standard in 2009. This time he'll be at Kitano (May 23-24) to dominate the tenor sax alongside George Cables on piano, Joseph Lepore on bass and Jason Brown on drums.

## Justin Morell Dectet

There's something immediately gripping about *Subjects and Complements* (Sonic Frenzy), the latest from guitarist and composer [Justin Morell](#). Fronting a 10-piece band with the likes of saxophonist Ben Wendel, trumpeter John Daversa, trombonist Alan Ferber and electric bassist Damian Erskine, Morell generates a sound rooted in jazz but informed by techniques of classical composition, in which he's also highly accomplished. "Fugue in E-flat, in Five Voices": five out of 12 tracks carry titles like this. But hybrid jazz/classical efforts don't always have the seamless sense of groove, color and imagination that Morell brings to bear. A longtime West Coaster now teaching in Pennsylvania, Morell comes to ShapeShifter Lab with his intimidating crew on May 30. The John Daversa Progressive Big Band leads off at 8pm.

[Ten \(More\) Jazz Albums to Hear Before You Die](#)

[Ten Jazz Albums to Hear Before You Die](#)

[Ten Free Jazz Albums to Hear Before You Die](#)

MORE: [JAZZ](#)

## HIGHLIGHTS



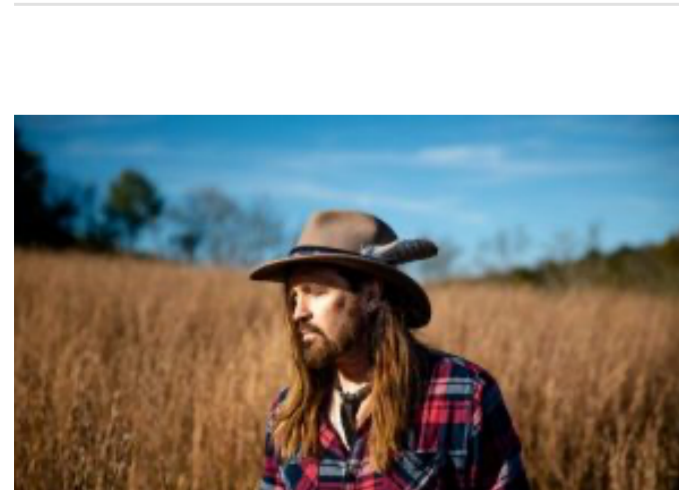
NEWS 2021

### Crowded Field of Mayoral Candidates Zooming Toward Primary Day

*For campaigns, TV advertising is the least efficient but most effective way of reaching a broad swath of voters when pressing the flesh isn't an option*

by ROSS BARKAN

March 18, 2021



MUSIC 2021

### Billy Ray Cyrus Blends His Roots with Rap

*"I felt like he was being a little bit mistreated in some circles and I asked myself, what would Johnny Cash do? He would step up for this young man."*

by BRETT CALLWOOD

March 19, 2021



ART 2021

### Decades of Drawing Reveal a Quieter David Hockney

*Hanging over the works is the question of whether Hockney will ever get to draw, or even see, his subjects again*

by DANIEL FELSENTHAL

March 16, 2021



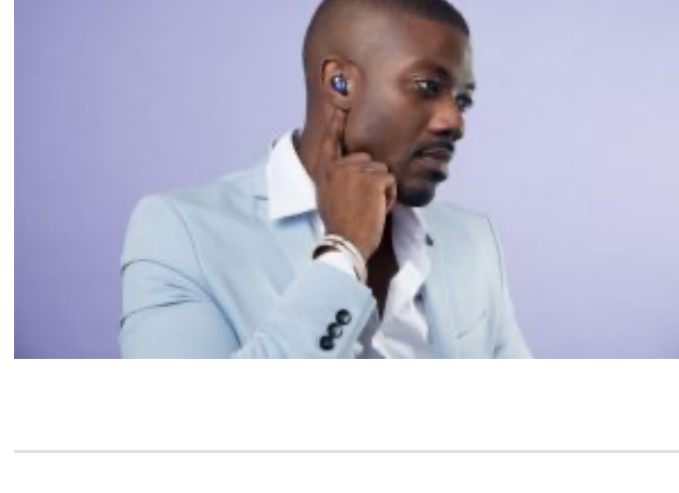
EQUALITY ARCHIVES

### Women on the March: "We're a Movement Now!"

*"They were amazed, those young women who had been meeting in small groups or taking part in small actions for months. No one of them would have dared to say before that evening that the women's liberation movement had 20,000 members in New York City alone."*

by MARY BREASTED

Originally published September 3, 1970



MORE HUSTLE

### Tuning Into The Heart Of The Hustle With Ray J

*No matter how successful he's become in his own right, he always credits his family*

by TARA FINLEY

March 16, 2021



ART 2021

### The 'Truth In Photography' Project is Asking Big Questions

*"Photographs are inherently subjective in the ways in which they are made and perceived. There is no absolute truth in the photographic image."*

by SHANA NYS DAMBROT

March 11, 2021