

Coming in April: re-energized scene, crowd-source funded?

Trombonist launches Philly jazz fest, Kickstarter-willing

Jan 27th, 2012 | By [David R. Adler](#)



Trombonist Ernest Stuart has founded the [Center City Jazz Festival](#) and launched a [Kickstarter site](#) to fund its inaugural run in Philadelphia on April 28, 2012. His goal is to reenergize the Philly scene, showcase emerging players and build relationships with local venues that are new to jazz.

With the closing of Zanzibar Blue in 2007, Ortlieb's Jazzhaus in 2010 and even the jazz-friendly rock club Tritone in 2012, Philadelphia faces the reality of having only one full-time jazz space: Chris's Jazz Café. The scarcity is ironic. After all, Philadelphia is where John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Lee Morgan, the Heath Brothers and countless others launched their careers.

The CCJF hopes to redress this. Set to last an entire afternoon and into the evening, the event will feature roughly 16 bands in several clubs or bar/restaurants in the Broad Street vicinity — following the model of New York's Undead and Winter Jazz Fests. "I decided that [limiting it to] one day would be the most manageable and the most impactful, at least for the first year," says Stuart. "One day with a lot of great bands, mainly original music, a lot of personalities."

The CCJF seeks to raise \$16,500 in pledges through its Kickstarter initiative by February 22, 2012 — pledges of donations are not binding unless that goal is reached. Donors at different levels receive such premiums as VIP tickets to the fest, autographed festival posters, dinner with the fest organizers, and (for \$5000) a private concert by Stuart's quartet.

Is crowd-funding of festivals a harbinger of what's to come for local music scenes? Stuart was not aware of similar pushes in other locales, but he mused on how the CCJF example could spread. "Not only could it encourage other musicians in Philadelphia to go after their own personal projects, I think it can inspire other cities and communities to support the arts in this way. Man, that would be beautiful."



The festival's Kickstarter video includes interview clips with bassist and Philly eminence Mike Boone, as well as Stuart and his peers: tenor saxophonist Korey Riker, alto saxophonist Wade Fulton Dean, trumpeter Leon Jordan, Jr., bassist Alex Claffy, drummers Anwar Marshall and Joe Truglio. These artists and others can be expected to hit the bandstands on April 28. "It's going to be a bit younger, fresher, also very relevant to what's going on in music today," says Riker in the video.

All these artists are heirs, in some way, to the famed "Philly sound" typified by hardbop legends like Lee Morgan or organ greats like Trudy Pitts and Shirley Scott. Commenting on this legacy and its manifestations today, Stuart offers: "There's something somewhere in the middle, that's not heavily traditional and not extremely experimental. It's just honest music. It might come from a place where we all play a lot of R&B or neo-soul, and that makes its way into our jazz. It's our influences coming through in our music. I think you'll hear a lot of that in the festival. I'm interested in people expressing that, doing it in a way that's not overly esoteric or overly traditional."

Apart from any nascent club scene, Philadelphia has its bigger theaters at the Kimmel Center and the Annenberg Center. There's the eclectic Painted Bride, as well as the Friday "Art After 5" series at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. There's also what could be called a "loft scene," kept alive by the vibrant Ars Nova Workshop and other avant-garde presenters such as Bowerbird and the Highwire Gallery. Jazz-related events also crop up at the Ethical Society, Plays and Players Theater, the Rosenbach Museum and Library and other unique rooms. That's the silver lining: the lack of clubs has pushed the music into some charming and hidden-away spaces.

The West Oak Lane Jazz and Arts Festival, in the suburb of Mt. Airy, balances local jazz and high-profile R&B acts in a three-day event every June. But the CCJF seeks to raise jazz's profile in the heart of the city, where, in earlier days, the Mellon Jazz Festival, the PECO Energy Jazz Festival and the Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival used to hold sway.

Like all rising players, Stuart and his colleagues require accessible year-round gigs and infrastructure to hone their creative voices. The Center City Jazz Festival might be the first step toward willing that infrastructure into existence. Its DIY origins do not rule out corporate sponsorship in the future, and Stuart is actively seeking support from city government as well. "[But] I can't sit around idly for [others] to take the risk," he insists. "I'd rather put myself on the line and get the idea out there, and garner enough steam from people, from listeners."

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January 27, 2012 at 9:32 pm

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