Pitt Jazz Composers Concert
Dr. Aaron Johnson, Director

featuring

The Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra

Sunday, March 18, 2018, 2 p.m.
Bellefield Hall Auditorium

The Pitt Jazz Composers Concert is sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of Research, Office of Residence Life, Humanities Center, and Department of Music.

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Program order will be announced from the stage.

Ben Barson  These are Soulful Days

Benjamin Barson is a composer, baritone saxophonist, historian, and political activist. He was mentored by the Guggenheim recipient Fred Ho in baritone saxophone technique and composition, and partnered with him to produce several mixed media musical projects just shortly before Ho’s passing in April 2014. He is the recipient of three composition awards from ASCAP including the Johnny Mandel Prize (2018), the Herb Albert Young Jazz Composer Award (2018), and the ASCAP Foundation Fred Ho Composer’s Award.

A resident of Pittsburgh, Barson and his wife Gizelxanath Rodriguez run the Afro Yaqui Music Collective, an ensemble combining Ho’s Afro-Asian political and musical influences, and the music of the Yaqui of northern Mexico. Barson is a PhD candidate at the University of Pittsburgh’s Jazz Studies program, where he carries out investigative research relating to Black Atlantic movements to abolish slavery and the development of Jazz. More info on Barson can be found at benbarsonmusic.com.

Jason Belcher  Lawrenceville

Jason Belcher (b.1987) is a composer and improvisor whose music is concerned with varying degrees of performer agency. He can be heard in various D.I.Y contexts throughout the Northeastern United States and is a member of the VT-based ensemble Brass Balagan. In recent years he has worked with Musicians such as Anthony Coleman, Joe Morris, John Zorn, and was involved in the making of Voyage in a White Building I, a 2013 release of music by Burr Van Nostrand. Currently a PhD candidate at the University of Pittsburgh, Belcher previously attended the New England Conservatory where he studied with Frank Carlberg, Robert Cogan, John Mallia, and the poet Ruth Lepson.
Samuel Boateng

Samuel Boateng is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, teacher, and researcher from Ghana. In 2016, he received an MA in Ethnomusicology from Kent State University with a research focus on gender representation in Ghanaian popular music. Samuel is currently a PhD student in the Jazz Studies program at University of Pittsburgh where he serves as a Teaching Fellow and researches the indigenization of diasporic sounds such as jazz and calypso in Ghana. His work has been premiered by ensembles including: Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Kent State University Jazz Orchestra, Kent State Orchestra, and the IonSound Project at University of Pittsburgh.

Notes
Kutawonsa loosely translates to “hold your hand,” and in other contexts “hold it well in your hand.” It is the name assigned to the seventh installation of forty-day cycles that make up the annual calendar of the Akan people of Ghana, and it is commonly associated with July. “Kutawonsa” is considered to be a difficult period for families, communities and societies since resources often run out during the first half of the year. On one hand, the word expresses a shared sense of empathy and encourages community members to hold on well to their resources through the mid-year strife, and on the other hand it preaches a message of hope in anticipation of good fortune. My piece celebrates the grace required to “hold on well,” and it evokes West African music styles such as azonto, afro-beat, and highlife.

Marco Giusto

Marco Giusto is a PhD student in Composition and Theory at The University of Pittsburgh. Previously, he graduated in Composition at the S. Cecilia Conservatory of Music of Rome, Italy, and received a Master of Music in Composition at the Syracuse University, NY. His studied fundamentals of jazz piano with Alessandro Gwiss, member of the “Aires Tango”, and Jazz arrangement with Dr. Aaron Johnson, at the University of Pittsburgh. His music has been performed in England, Italy, and the USA. He is also recipient of the Brian Israel Award and the 2015 Master Prize Award at Syracuse University.

Notes
The piece is a re-composition of “Fly Me to the Moon,” if you read from the back to the top Moontheto Mefly (the title) the reference is clear. I used the term re-composition, because it actually develops several original ideas and the old tune is used within a separate compositional context that
evokes latin rhythms, which lead to another famous tune quotation. A sort of rhapsodic movement that blends several contexts and creates an eclectic environment. The technical aspect of orchestrating/arranging has been inspired by several listenings and notions I had the chance to learn in the Jazz Arrangement class in 2017, held by Dr. Aaron Johnson, and, of course, my classical formation.

Billy Strayhorn, arr. Ralph Guzzi

Mr. Guzzi is the music director and arranger for the PBS My Music series, music director and arranger for the Latshaw Pops Orchestra, arranger for Jimmy Beaumont and the Skylines, Jackie Evancho. Arranger for the Washington PA, Wheeling, & McKeesport Symphonies, arranger for the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater production American Rhythms. He is the regional music contractor for the Temptations and Four Tops, director of the University of Pittsburgh Jazz Ensemble, director of the Pittsburgh Public Schools All City Jazz Ensemble, and arranger and member of the Balcony Big Band. Guzzi is also musical director/conductor and arranger for Bo Wager’s tribute to Sinatra Show. He is the musical/conductor arranger for New York-based vocal group Tre Bella and on the music faculty at both University of Pittsburgh and California University of Pennsylvania.

Composition Notes:
UMMG aka Upper Manhattan Medical Group was composed by Billy Strayhorn and arranged by Ralph Guzzi. Ralph wrote this arrangement of Billy Strayhorn’s composition in 2015 as a tribute to him as part of his centennial year celebration.

Colter Harper

Colter Harper is a guitarist from the North Country of New York. In 2011, Colter completed a PhD in Music (Ethnomusicology) at the University of Pittsburgh, where his research focused on the city’s vibrant jazz history. Colter’s own music owes a great deal to Pittsburgh’s musical community as well as his experiences traveling, performing, and studying in West Africa, Brazil, and Europe. In 2007, Colter joined the multi-platinum selling, world music influenced rock band Rusted Root as a guitarist, percussionist, and vocalist. He recorded on the band’s latest albums; Stereo Rodeo and The Movement, and performed with the band nationally until the summer of 2013. From 2013 to 2015, Colter returned to Ghana as a visiting lecturer in music at the University of Ghana.
Notes
Repetition in music mirrors those cycles that make up our lives. Yearly seasons are both a return and a development as we mark our time on a larger continuum.

I wrote New Seasons in 2006 for quartet and returned to it recently to explore its potentials as a full jazz orchestra arrangement. The composition grew from a melodic figure that I wrote while developing ways to bridge West African time line sensibilities and modern jazz. The result was a repeating musical idea in an odd time signature that was challenging to improvise on yet allowed for the experience of “simultaneous multidimensionality” central to West African music. I use this section as a source of tension against and resolution into the composition’s main melody.

New Seasons was recorded on the album Fool’s Resolution (2013) with myself (guitar), Michael Murray (piano), Tony DePaolis (bass), and Tom Wendt (drums) as well as the album Tribute (2016) with Bill Purse (guitar), Jeremiah Gregg (keyboard), Ben Rossman (bass), and Cory Caruso (drums).

Dr. Aaron Johnson  Little Red’s Fantasy (Woody Shaw, arr. Johnson)  Tolliver’s Travels

A native of Washington, DC, AJ Johnson is an Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Pittsburgh where he studies and teaches jazz, African American popular music, film music, and music, and technology. His research and teaching interests are closely aligned and concern the interaction between music makers and decisions – makers as mediated through structural elements such as social and organizational practices, markets, and technology. He has published articles and reviews in Musical Quarterly, Current Musicology, and the journal American Studies. He is currently at work on Jazz Radio America: from Commercial to Non-Commercial, a history of post-WWII jazz radio and the corporations, communities, and institutions that create it, AJ received a BSEE from Carnegie Mellon University in Electrical Engineering and Economics and an MS in Electrical Engineering from Georgia Tech. He spent many years contributing to research and development of optical communications networks, access networks, digital video, and xDSL technology before earning a PhD in Music from Columbia University. A trombonist since before Apollo 11 reached the moon, he performs regularly with Charles Tolliver, Oliver Lake, Steve Turre, and many others. He has performed or recorded as well with Fred Ho, Anthony Braxton, Frank Foster, Jimmy Heath, Wynton Marsalis, Wallace Roney, Abdullah Ibrahim, Aretha Franklin,
Gladys Knight (with and without the Pips), and Jay-Z on trombone, bass trombone, tuba, bass clarinet, and conch shells. His 2009 CD Songs of Our Fathers features a number of his original compositions.

**Notes**

*Little Red’s Fantasy* was composed by the great trumpeter Woody Shaw. Shaw’s late 1970s quintet was influential for a generation of young jazz musicians. This composition features the contrast of relatively brooding bridge centered among the cheery outer sections of its chorus structure.

*Tolliver’s Travels* was composed by A J Johnson as an homage to Charles Tolliver, whose hard-nosed and no nonsense composition style matches his trumpet playing. I first heard Tolliver’s music on the radio in 1976; his blistering New York big band Music Incorporated seemed to me a missing link in the evolution of the jazz orchestra. Over the years, I have developed a close and rewarding relationship with CT and this composition and arrangement is a partial payback for all he has taught me.

**Joseph Lagnese**

I am a retired engineer and former adjunct professor in Pitt’s School of Engineering who has returned to my interest in music, both performing and arranging/composing, more seriously the past twelve years or so. As regards arranging/composing, I had the benefit of studying with John Wilson who I still rely on as I continue to write both for a band I formed, Swingtet 8, a jazz octet, and for local big bands, most of the rehearsal type.

**Notes**

The inspiration for the melody line for *Cookin’* resulted from a riff that found its way into a warming up pattern that mindlessly came from my horn (alto sax) in preparing to perform. With some adjustment to fit an intro, bridge and ending, a complete song resulted. As with many of my charts, the initial arrangement was for the octet, followed by a big band arrangement submitted for this competition.

**Stephen Sondheim, arr. Ryan McMasters**

*Not While I’m Around*

Ryan McMasters is a music maker in Pittsburgh whose work focuses on the relationship between performer, sound object, and audience. Recent commissions include pieces for percussionist Jan Williams, Kamratōn, So Much Hot Air, and Real Loud. He is a founding member of WOLFTRAP, a band that focuses on the history and development of oral traditions in new music making. Ryan is currently an Andrew Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellow at
the University of Pittsburgh where he studies music composition and theory and his research focuses on the use of timbre, distortion, and noise as both a musical element and a means of societal agency.

Notes

Sondheim’s ‘Not While I’m Around’ (from *Sweeney Todd*), has always been a favorite tune of mine, but has taken on special significance over the past year. As a song about protecting that which is most dear to you in the face of troubling times, this arrangement is dedicated to my daughter, Betty.

**Rick Nowlin**

Rick Nowlin (CGS 1997), a former general columnist for The Pitt News, the longtime jazz critic for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the son of the late bassist Al “Sonie” Nowlin (Ed 1973G), began writing original music at age 7 and completed his first big-band arrangement in 1986 for the Homewood Jazz Workshop. Self-taught as a composer/arranger and primarily known instrumentally as a baritone saxophonist, he claims such disparate influences as the bands Chicago and Tower of Power and composers/arrangers Sammy Nestico, Bob Mintzer and Maria Schneider.

Notes

While the arrangement of Summit in the Snow, with its liberal use of flugelhorns, muted brass, clarinets and flutes was influenced by the impressionism of Maria Schneider, due to its straightforward theme it stops short of that.

The original tune was inspired by, and composed shortly afterwards, a heart-to-heart talk in early March of 1986 in Mellon Park with a then-student at nearby Chatham University who was trying to “let him down easy.” He originally arranged it in 2011 for Frank Podroskey & Pittsburgh Big Band Legends with whom he has played since the band’s 2007 inception.

**John Petrucelli**

John Petrucelli is an award winning saxophonist, composer and teaching fellow from New Jersey. Currently a PhD candidate in the University of Pittsburgh’s Jazz Studies program, he is working on his dissertation entitled *Beyond the Sound Barrier; Improvisation, Repertoire and Narrativity in the Wayne Shorter Quartet, 2005-2015*. He studied previously at Rutgers University, receiving an MM in Jazz performance and an MA in Jazz history and Research under the advisement of Ralph Bowen and Lewis Porter. As
a saxophonist, John has performed with internationally renowned artists such as Terence Blanchard, Geri Allen, Victor Lewis, Delfeayo Marsalis and Charles Tolliver.

Laura Schwartz

Laura Schwartz is a PhD student in the Music Composition and Theory at the University of Pittsburgh, studying with Mathew Rosenblum. The music Laura writes explores indeterminacy as vulnerability, noise floors, electric fans, and egg shakers. Beyond composition, Laura is an active scholar in music theory and musicology. Her primary research areas include: verbally notated scores, technologies of self, listening, and Pauline Oliveros. Laura’s dissertation research is on self-formation in verbally notated music. For more information visit lauraroseschwartz.com

Notes

Listening to fractured memories.

The Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra

Trumpets
JD Chaisson
Ron Horton
Adam Loudin
Joe Badaczewski

Trombones
Jeff Bush
(Jim Weltman for 3/17’s rehearsal)
Reggie Watkins
Emmett Goods
Glenn Wayland

Reeds
Kenny Powell
Curtis Johnson
Eric DeFade
Jason Kush
Rick Matt

Rhythm
Max Leake, piano
Tony DePaolis, bass
Thomas Wendt, drums

More from Music at Pitt

Pitt Jazz Ensemble Spring Concert
Thursday, April 19, 8 p.m.
Bellefield Hall Auditorium
General admission, $10; student $5. Cash at the door only.