

BY STEVE MONROE

February Highlights:

Azar Lawrence, Feb. 8, Blues Alley; Thad Wilson, Valentine's Big Band Celebration, Feb. 12, Westminster Church; Janelle Gill, Feb. 19, Westminster Church; Stan Killian, Benito Gonzalez, Feb. 19-20, Twins Jazz; Chico Hamilton, Feb. 19-20, Bohemian Caverns; Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival, Feb. 19-20, Hilton Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, Rockville; Buster Williams, Feb. 25-28, Blues Alley; J.D. Allen, Feb. 26-27, Bohemian Caverns; Carl Allen, Rodney Whitaker, Feb. 27, Kennedy Center.

February Birthdays:

James P. Johnson, Joshua Redman 1; Sonny Stitt, Stan Getz 2; Eubie Black 7; Chick Webb 10; Machito 16; Stan Kenton, David Murray 19; Nancy Wilson 20; Tadd Dameron 21; James Moody 26; Mildred Bailey, Dexter Gordon 27.

Appreciating the history/the future

On a 30-ish degree night in late January, a near capacity crowd had filed into HR-57 on 14th Street Northwest to hear Antonio Parker's group play its Friday night sets of hard-core jazz to an appreciative crowd of mostly young listeners.

"Thank you, thank you," said Parker, as the crowd applauded. "We opened with Joe Henderson's 'Recorda Me' and then 'Softly As In a Morning Sunrise.' Thank you for coming out ... now, 'In Your Own Sweet Way.'" And Parker rose the alto sax to his mouth and began the Dave Brubeck tune with a melancholy refrain, with bandmates Darius Scott on piano, Cheyney Thomas on bass and Keith Kilgo on drums then joining in.

This February marks another African-American history month, and one important part of our heritage, the genre of music called jazz, still has a vital following despite occasional worries that the music is not as popular as many wish it would be, or should be. When social observers lament that jazz is only followed by the old heads, the baby boomers, and when they pass away, jazz will only be found in the history books, a visit to HR-57 disrupts that kind of thinking.

Tony Puesan's establishment, with its down to earth raw-brick interior and posters of John Coltrane and Charlie Parker and Abbey Lincoln and Louis Armstrong on the walls, has consistently drawn flocks of young people over the years to hear traditional jazz, real jazz, proving that the music's popularity will last into the future. There in the heart of DC, fresh-faced 20-something couples and singles stream into HR-57, pay their \$12 cover charge, some bringing their own bottles of wine,

and sit back and enjoy.

One highlight that night was Parker's opening to "Giant Steps," a free-form, exploratory, a capella journey of its own, before he segued into the Coltrane standard's melody, the rest of the band then coming along for a ripping, romping jam.

"The atmosphere in this place is awesome," said the veteran bassist Thomas, later, during a break, wiping perspiration from his forehead as he sat down. "The people in the room here, they come to listen to the music, and it's all kinds of people. You walk through here, you hear four or five different languages. It's like a cabaret atmosphere here, just like old school."

Not actually a "club," Puesan will remind you, it is more than that. It is history honoring a heritage, its full name being HR-57 Center for the Preservation of Jazz and Blues, with its name taken from a 1987 US House of Representatives resolution designating jazz as "a rare and valuable national American treasure."

As Puesan says of HR-57, "Our mission is to educate, provide experiences, opportunities and information that traverse the full spectrum of the jazz and blues experience."

Mid-Atlantic Jazz Fest debuts

Speaking of the younger generation, Paul Carr has devoted much of his career as a musician and teacher to educating those about our jazz heritage with his Jazz Academy of Music, an organization he established in 2002 with the goal of advancing and preserving jazz through education. The organization makes instructional opportunities available to children and adults who have an interest in developing their talent and knowledge about music.



Saxophonist and educator Paul Carr and his Jazz Academy of Music debuts the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival in February.

Carr is taking that devotion a giant step further this year by having the academy produce the debut of the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival, Feb. 19-20, in Rockville.

According to its website, "The Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival ... is presented in the true spirit and intent of the former East Coast Jazz Festival. Founded in 1992 by vocalist/vocal educator Ronnie Wells, for the next 15 years the ECJF was produced by Wells and benefited The Fish Middleton Jazz Scholarship Fund Inc. ECJF was originally created in honor of Elmore 'Fish' Middleton, a Washington, DC, jazz radio programmer, whose commitment to promoting jazz music and supporting emerging jazz artists became the guiding principle behind the festival."

While the festival features seasoned performers like the Paul Carr Quintet, Janine Carter, Eric Byrd, Bobby Watson and Fred Foss, the "next" generation of leading lights of the music are also featured, including Marc Cary, the Anderson Twins and the Jolley Twins. For more information, see midatlanticjazzfestival.org. ★