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Seattle Jazz 1961 – 2024: Profit or Non-Profit?

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Arts Ecosystem Research Project

Seattle University

June 2024

Jazz started as a popular commercial music, but during the last three decades, it has come to be seen as an art form supported by the non-profit arts sector and schools. In Seattle, beginning in the 1960s, both the commercial and non-profit sectors nurtured the music. A granular look at this dual stewardship by commercial and non-profit sectors offers a fresh take on an important storyline in Seattle's rich cultural history.

Abstract

Jazz started as a popular commercial music, but during the last three decades, it has come to be seen as an art form supported by the non-profit arts sector and schools. In Seattle, beginning in the 1960s, both the commercial and non-profit sectors nurtured the music.

In the mid-1960s, the Penthouse nightclub operated commercially in Pioneer Square, while bassist/pianist Jerry Heldman's alternative coffeehouse, the Llanghaelhyn Café, a business, operated as more of a labor of love than money. At the same time, saxophonist Joe Brazil's non-profit Brazil Academy of Music taught musicians of color to play jazz in the Central District. In the late '60s, the Seattle Jazz Society operated a non-profit night club, the Jazz Gallery, and the Seattle Parks Department presented jazz concerts. In 1972, two commercial jazz clubs, the Gallery Tavern and the Fresh Air Tavern, attempted to buck the prevailing trend of rock music, but failed. From 1973-77, the Pioneer Banque reflected the renewed commercial viability of jazz, even as Franklin High School trained a remarkable class of jazz musicians that included Kenny G. In the late '70s, Parnell's jazz club, a commercial enterprise, enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the faculty of another school, Cornish College of the Arts. And in the 1980s, Jazz Alley, a for-profit club, formed its own non-profit, the Pacific Jazz Institute. The non-profit Earshot Jazz was formed to support avant-garde music and an annual festival.

A granular look at this dual stewardship by commercial and non-profit sectors offers a fresh take on an important storyline in Seattle's rich cultural history. Today, both for-profit and non-profit institutions continue to support jazz in Seattle. All indications suggest that as long as there is an audience for the music, both types of institutions will remain central to its health.

SEATTLE JAZZ, 1961-2024: PROFIT OR NON-PROFIT?

Seattle's Eastlake Avenue East runs three miles on a north-south axis, from downtown to the University District. In 1972, serious jazz fans probably spent time at both extremities. Near the north end, at 5420 Eastlake Ave. E. across from the University Bridge, the non-profit Jazz Gallery operated in the basement of a building with a fairy tale steeple. At the downtown end, at 101 Eastlake Ave. E., a commercial jazz club, the Gallery Tavern also hosted jazz.

Despite similar names, these two venues were quite different. The Jazz Gallery had a cozy fireplace but was a plain, humble affair down a flight of cement steps. Operated by the Seattle Jazz Society, the venue was supported by admission fees but also by public grants. It accommodated about 100 Jazz Society members and their friends, who sat on folding chairs or a few scattered couches. The musicians were mostly local. Bassist Pete Leinonen's band, Mirage played opening night. Touring acts occasionally appeared, such as California vibraphonist Cal Tjader. No alcohol was served. Cookies and coffee were free. By contrast, the Gallery Tavern was a for-profit night club selling beer and wine. It could accommodate 150-200 patrons and opened with pianist Herbie Hancock, who played for 10 nights. (Hancock's sextet featured trombone player Julian Priester, who would later make Seattle his home.) A room like that sank or swam depending on how many fans came through the door and how much alcohol they drank.

The model of the Gallery Tavern - music supported by ticket sales and alcohol – is the one that prevailed when jazz began as popular entertainment in the early 1900s. In Seattle, as in many other American cities, the music flourished as the soundtrack for a robust social life in segregated Black neighborhoods. In New York, it was Harlem; in Los Angeles, South Central; in Seattle, the Chinatown International District and Central District, particularly around the hub of Twelfth Avenue South and South Jackson Street, and along a few blocks of East Madison Street.

Neighborhood jazz in the Emerald City was supported by three unsavory pillars: segregated musicians unions, which tacitly enforced separate “turf” for white and non-white musicians; the illicit sale of hard liquor by the drink during the State of Washington’s prolonged Prohibition Era; and by the “tolerance policy” which supported a corrupt police department that accepted bribes to look the other way, not only at bootleg liquor, but gambling and prostitution. Over a period of 20 years, those pillars collapsed. Hard liquor by the drink was legalized in Washington State in 1949, the Seattle musicians’ unions integrated in 1956, and two federal grand juries exposed and eliminated the county-based “tolerance policy” in 1969.

With the collapse of those pillars, neighborhood jazz disappeared and the modern jazz club rose in its place: an integrated space, on stage and off, usually downtown, with a slightly bohemian air, patronized by intellectuals and artists, hipsters and college students. The focus was on the music as an art form rather than a backdrop for social gathering. During this period, jazz also lost its status as a dance music at the center of popular culture – as it was in the swing era of the 1930s and early ’40s – and became a niche art music played in nightclubs. Though it held its own after WWII, by the mid-1960s it was displaced by rock as the music of choice for young people. With this commercial decline came a pivot to the non-profit support system that had been in place for decades for classical music and the other “fine arts.”

With the rise of organizations such as Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York, SFJazz in San Francisco, and Earshot Jazz in Seattle, that trend has been more visible in the last 30 years. But non-profits, schools and alternative institutions played an important role in Seattle jazz long before that, starting in the 1960s. A granular look at the interactions – or dance, if you will – of several commercial and non-profit jazz institutions in Seattle over the past 60 years offers a fresh take on an important storyline in the city’s rich cultural history. What follows is in no way a comprehensive history of Seattle jazz. Many important institutions, such as the Bellevue Jazz Festival and the Seattle Improvised Music Festival and clubs like Café Racer, Gallery 1412, the Door, House of Entertainment, the Black and Tan, Heritage House, and the No Place are not considered. On the contrary, this is a surgical selection of clusters of institutions whose activities illustrate a particular point relevant to a particular time.

During five distinct periods since 1961, commercial and non-profit, alternative or educational spaces have thrived side by side, sometimes intersecting in surprising ways. The co-existence of the Jazz Gallery and the Gallery Tavern in 1972 is one good example. But there are others. While the Penthouse night club (1961-68) was operating successfully in the commercial realm, saxophonist Joe Brazil was offering jazz education to Black and Asian musicians in Seattle's Central District and the Llahngaelhyn Café was nurturing a local avant-garde. The restaurant and jazz club, the Pioneer Banque (1973-77) succeeded the Penthouse as the city's main commercial jazz outlet at the same time that Franklin High School music teacher Chuck Chinn was coaching saxophonist Kenny Gorelick, later known as Kenny G. In the late '70s, Cornish College of the Arts and Parnell's jazz club enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. In the 1980s, Jazz Alley actually doubled as a non-profit while also co-dominating Seattle jazz with another non-profit, Earshot Jazz.

The mid-'60s: The Penthouse, the Llahngaelhyn, and the Brazil Academy of Music

The 1960s was the first decade when the non-profit and for-profit actors both played significant roles in Seattle jazz. On the commercial side were the modern jazz clubs, Pete's Poop Deck and Charlie Puzzo's Penthouse. Both benefited from the Century 21 Exposition, commonly known as the Seattle World's Fair, which opened a six-month run in April, 1962. The Fair not only attracted visitors from out of town, it heightened local awareness of the arts. Entrepreneur

Pete Barbas had anticipated the bump the Fair would bring, opening Pete's Poop Deck in Pioneer Square in 1957. The Penthouse, which opened around the corner in November, 1961, was a more ambitious undertaking. For seven years, the Penthouse featured a steady stream of national acts including most of the major figures in jazz: trumpeter Miles Davis, saxophonist Stan Getz, guitarist Wes Montgomery, saxophonists John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon, pianists Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson, and vocalist Carmen McRae. Other smaller jazz clubs such the Door and the No Place popped up during this fertile period, as well.

The Penthouse was a commercial enterprise that depended on the sale of beer and wine as well as box office receipts. Though it was located on the ground floor of the dilapidated Kenneth Hotel on First Avenue near Cherry Street (now a parking structure), the club took its oxymoronic name from a popular men's magazine, a choice that reflected the public association of jazz in the '60s with the freewheeling "playboy" lifestyle and conspicuous consumerism. Female servers wore tight leotards; pillars were sculpted as elongated bunnies with big ears and bow ties. Thanks to DJ Jim Wilke, who broadcast (and recorded) a live set from the club on KING-FM radio, fans could sample the music on the air. Many recordings from the club have been released, notably John Coltrane's 1965 album, *Live at the Penthouse*.

Though the Penthouse specialized in national touring acts, Puzzo set aside Saturday afternoons for Seattle bands, often led by bassist Chuck Metcalf or saxophonist Joe Brazil. These local showcases gave young, developing players the chance to grow in front of a discerning audience and interact with the masters passing through town. This kind of access is essential to jazz, an oral tradition passed down from player to player. The interaction between Coltrane and one Seattle local, alto saxophonist Carlos Ward, illustrates how this process could play out.

Born in Panama, in 1940, Ward moved to Seattle with his family in 1953. As a teenager, he played in rock'n'roll bands but also paid close attention to the avant-garde music of Ornette Coleman. During a subsequent stint in the military, he came under the direct influence of avant-garde saxophonist/flutist Eric Dolphy and trumpeter Don Cherry, with whom he played in Sweden. Returning to Seattle in 1965, Ward played with Joe Brazil at the Penthouse, but also could be found jamming at an alternative coffee house called the Llahngaelhyn.

"The Llahngaelhyn had a very great influence on the music in this place," recalled café regular, bassist David Friesen. Located at the north end of Eastlake Ave. E. near the University Bridge, it was launched in 1965 by bassist and pianist Jerry Heldman, who embraced the experimentalism of "free jazz." The café became famous for its all-night jam sessions, often patronized by famous musicians playing commercial clubs downtown. Pianist McCoy Tyner, saxophonist John Handy, and trumpeter Freddie Hubbard came by to jam.

A local who regularly played at the Penthouse, Joe Brazil had an outsized influence on Seattle jazz. Originally from Detroit, where he had befriended Coltrane, Brazil was an electrical engineer by trade and had come to Seattle in 1961 to take a job at Boeing. Around 1966 or 1967 (he was vague in interviews about the date), Brazil formed an ad hoc organization called the Black Academy of Music (BAM) to mentor young players in the Central District. Brazil incorporated the Black Academy of Music as a non-profit in 1971, later changing the name to the Brazil Academy of Music, but from the beginning it was a labor of love, not commerce. A generation of Black jazz musicians, among them Ward, trumpeter Ed Lee, tenor saxophonist Omar Brown, bassist Rufus Reid, and guitarist George Hurst clustered around the Academy. Through an unusual coincidence, Ward's association with Brazil and his experiences at the Llahngaelhyn wound up having a huge influence on his career.

Brazil often taped performances on a reel-to-reel recorder and, as luck would have it, his machine was running at the Penthouse the afternoon and evening of October 2, 1965, when Ward played a set with Brazil, then sat in with Coltrane. Brazil's tape was unknown to the public until it was discovered more than 50 years later by Seattle saxophonist and Brazil biographer Steve Griggs, who, to his astonishment, realized that Coltrane's band had played the saxophonist's masterpiece, "A Love Supreme" at the club, one of only two known instances of him playing the composition live. Impulse! Records released the recording in 2021 as *A Love Supreme: Live in Seattle*. On the section called "Resolution", Ward plays a wild, wonderful solo infused with the "free jazz" spirit of his Llahngaelhyn jam sessions. That solo impressed Coltrane so much he advised Ward to come to New York. Ward went on to an illustrious career there, playing occasionally with Coltrane and working with Don Cherry, avant-garde pianist Cecil Taylor and later, playing lead alto in Ekaya, the world jazz octet led by South African pianist, Abdullah Ibrahim. Ward's story illustrates nicely how two eccentric alternative spaces – Brazil's Black Academy and Heldman's Llahnghaelhyn Café – intersected with a mainstream commercial outlet like the Penthouse to create an unusual opportunity for a local musician as well as an historic moment in jazz.

The Brazil Academy of Music continued to offer classes through the 1970s. Brazil also taught a storied jazz history class at the University of Washington, though his failure to get tenure in 1974 provoked fervent campus demonstrations and a lawsuit, which he lost. By the late '80s, he had retreated from the jazz scene and taken a government job in Olympia. Heldman also left the jazz life. Suffering from mental illness and paranoia, he found solace as a born-again Christian, and moved to Yacolt, Washington, where he raised a family and played music recreationally.

The Jazz Drought and the “Boeing Bust”

In 1968, both the Llahngaelhyn and the Penthouse went dark, ending a rich era of Seattle jazz that had been sparked by the World’s Fair. After ’68, the Doubletree Inn regularly hosted jazz on weekends and two other clubs – the Gallery Tavern (mentioned above) and the Fresh Air Tavern – briefly tried to present jazz. But it would be five years before a sustainable commercial jazz club again operated in the Emerald City. The “jazz drought,” as it was sometimes called, was not unique to Seattle. With the rise of the Beatles and Bob Dylan, rock had displaced jazz as the music of choice for hip young people. Jazz clubs closed all over the country, jazz radio and jazz record sales plummeted. In Seattle, the situation was exacerbated by an economic downtown brought on by the shuttering of Boeing’s Supersonic Transport project in 1971. Thousands of people lost their jobs, housing prices nosedived, and many families fled the city. Famously, a billboard went up along the Interstate 5 freeway that read: “Will the last person to leave Seattle please turn out the lights?” To fill in the musical gap, Seattle fans organized the Seattle Jazz Society, a non-profit membership organization.

Late ‘60s: The Seattle Jazz Society, Jazz in the Parks and the Jazz Gallery

Since the 1950s, bassist Chuck Metcalf and his wife, pianist and singer Joni Metcalf had opened their home as a sort of jazz clubhouse where local musicians came to jam, eat and drink, often with famous artists dropping in after downtown gigs. It wasn’t uncommon for locals such as pianist Jerome Gray or saxophonist Bob Winn to find themselves jamming at the Metcalfs’ with a side player from the Stan Kenton Orchestra. When the couple started hosting sessions in their spacious Craftsman house in Madrona in 1966, the gathering became an institution.

“Sessions usually wound down around four a.m.,” recalled Joni Metcalf, “but the last holdouts often stayed until six.”

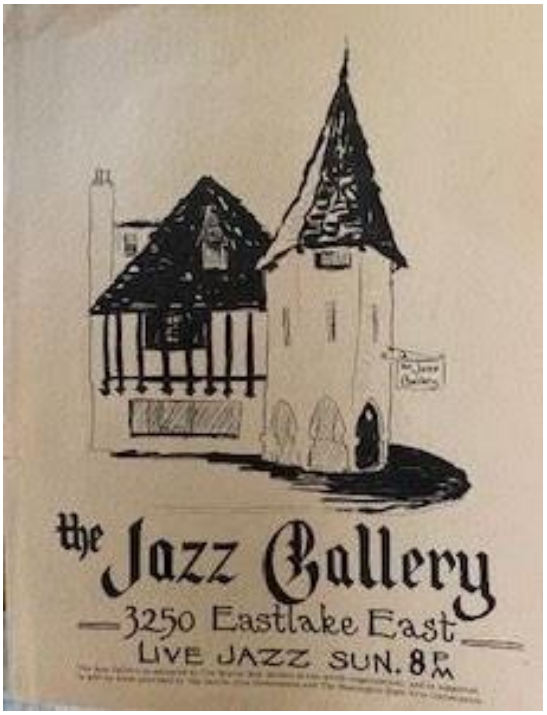
Jam sessions brought the community together but they didn’t pay wages, so the logical next step was to form a presenting organization. Metcalf and DJs Jim Wilke and Sonny Buxton, plus several other musicians and fans joined forces on April 1, 1966, to found a bona fide non-profit corporation, which could raise money through public grants to pay artists. Thanks to the Kennedy administration, federal funding for the arts had begun in America. Though the Seattle Arts Commission would not be established until 1971 (sparking the Northwest Folklife Festival and the citywide arts festival, Bumbershoot), the Seattle Parks Department formed a Cultural Art Unit in 1966 and hired the Seattle Jazz Society (SJS) to book jazz concerts in the parks. Fans of a certain age fondly recall the 1968 concert in Seward Park featuring saxophonist Charles Lloyd, who attracted a crowd of more than 5,000. Joe Brazil’s band opened for Lloyd. For years to come, the parks concerts were a steady source of income for Seattle jazz musicians.

“That concert changed my life,” recalled presenter and bass player Terry Morgan, who would go on to a productive career as a concert presenter at the Showbox Theater, the Golden Crown night club, Volunteer Park, and Carnation Farms, among other venues.

Flush with success, the Seattle Jazz Society, with sponsorship from Rainier Beer, produced an ambitious jazz festival on October 3-4, 1970. With Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Joe Zawinul, Cannonball Adderley, Roberta Flack and Don Ellis, the 1970 Jazz Spectacular as it was called, was the most star-studded jazz celebration the city had seen since Jazz at the Philharmonic had come through town in the 1950s. Held at Seattle Center over two days, the event donated its profits to the Seattle Indian Center, Black Arts West and other non-profits. A month after the festival, on November 7, SJS opened its own venue, the Jazz Gallery, in the space formerly occupied by the Llahngaelhyn Café. The following year, the jazz society began to offer jazz cruises on the old sternwheeler, the Virginia V (and later, the

Goodtime II), featuring among others, saxophonists Gerald Brashear and Jabo Ward, trumpeters Floyd Standifer and Jim Knapp, and drummer Dave Coleman.

The Jazz Spectacular undoubtedly gave a lift to jazz fans, who wouldn't see another festival like it until 1982, when George Wein brought the Kool Jazz Festival to town. But for the health of the local scene, the Jazz Gallery had a more lasting effect. Over the three years it was open, the Gallery presented concerts by Brazil, Friesen, Metcalf, bassist Gary Peacock, saxophonists Paul Moen (who later worked with Buddy Rich and Lionel Hampton), Bill Ramsay (who played with Count Basie), Jim Pepper (a Portland Native American player who had a huge hit with "Witchi-Tai-To"), Jabo Ward and Danny Ward; trumpeter/saxophonist Jay Thomas; pianists Eddie Creed and Mike Nock (who recorded with John Handy), and trumpeter Ron Soderstrom, among many others. The venue served as an impromptu site for jam sessions as well as jazz society meetings. During this period, the SJS also mounted an annual jazz stage at Bumbershoot. Without SJS, it is hard to imagine where Seattle jazz musicians might have found work during this period.



Drawing of the building that housed the Jazz Gallery, from the Seattle Jazz Society newsletter (n.d.). Courtesy of Jim Wilke, Seattle Jazz Society.

1972: The Gallery Tavern and the Fresh Air Tavern

While the Seattle Jazz Society almost single-handedly supported local jazz, a couple of commercial outlets also tried their luck, one of which tried to at least casually collaborate with SJS. On August 21, 1972, Ed Lorenz opened the Gallery Tavern at 101 Eastlake Ave. E., a room he had previously operated with a partner as the A Go Go, which had featured girls dancing in cages. (Much later, as the Off Ramp, it presented Nirvana.) Seating about 150-200, it was situated on an uninviting urban corner under the shadow of the Interstate 5 freeway. Ambitiously, the Gallery Tavern opened with a 10-night stand by the Herbie Hancock sextet, followed by other well-known acts such as guitarist George Benson, trumpeters Chuck Mangione and Freddie

Hubbard, and a string of funky organists that included Jack McDuff and Richard “Groove” Holmes. (An album drawn from material recorded there by McDuff was recently released.)

But the large crowds needed to support a club booking name artists apparently did not materialize, even from the ranks of the Seattle Jazz Society, which had negotiated a discount for its members. The society’s September newsletter ran a notice saying, “The management of the Gallery Tavern has been very disappointed in the turnout of SJS members on their discount nights and advises that unless attendance improves the discount will be discontinued.” That this warning arrived only a month after the club opened suggests that business didn’t measure up to expectations, even from the start. (It also suggests friction between SJS and the Gallery Tavern – not surprising, since Lorenz, oddly, had given it such a similar name to SJS’s own venue.) Things got worse in a hurry. In early 1973, McCoy Tyner and Grover Washington, Jr. were advertised, then cancelled. The club turned to booking local funk bands; by 1974 it had disappeared.

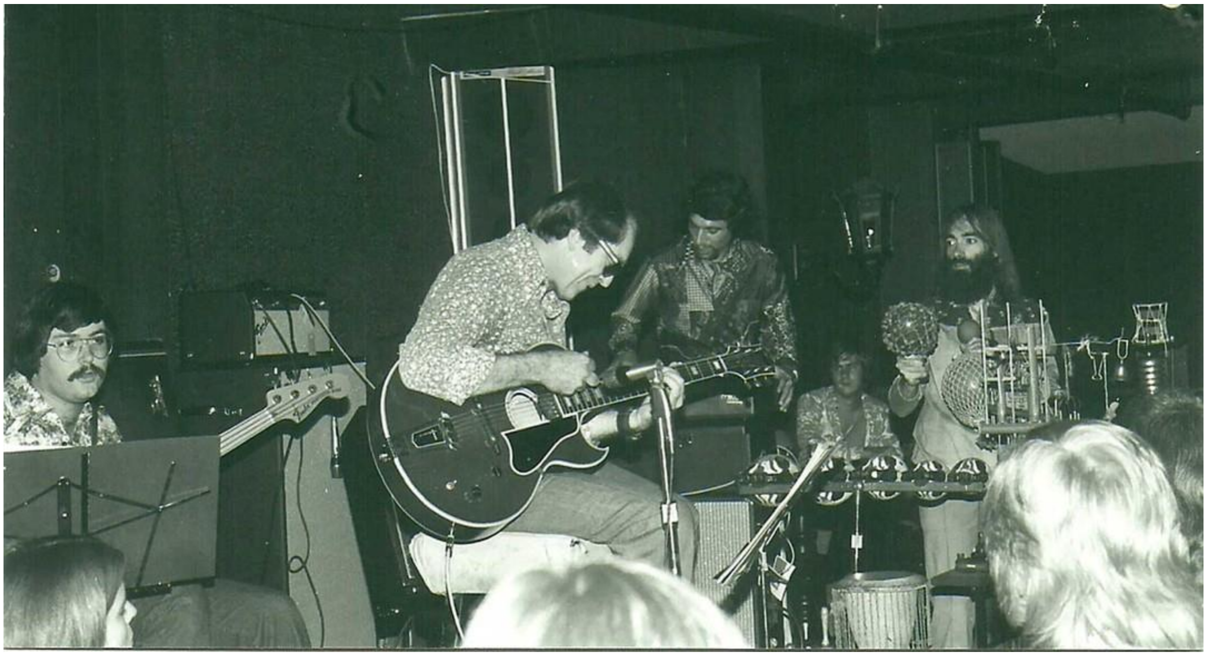
The same year the Gallery Tavern opened, the Fresh Air Tavern opened on Capitol Hill at 1509 Broadway, dropping stellar jazz acts into a regular lineup of marquee blues artists. Thelonious Monk, Larry Coryell (a hometown hero returned), and Charles Lloyd shared a schedule that also included Muddy Waters, Freddie King, and Elvin Bishop. But the Fresh Air lasted no longer than the Gallery Tavern, which further underlined that during hard times, the non-profit model, supported by grants and an enthusiastic membership, was more resilient than the commercial one.

In 1973, the Seattle Jazz Society lost its lease on the Jazz Gallery but continued to present at other clubs, including the Bombay Bicycle Shop in Pioneer Square, as well as providing the annual jazz lineup for Bumbershoot. With its concerts, cruises, jam sessions, music in the Parks, Jazz Spectacular, and regular bookings of Seattle musicians (including a second "Spectacular" featuring local players), the Seattle Jazz Society stepped up when the commercial market failed.

1973-1977: The Pioneer Banque and the Franklin High School Jazz Lab Band

Wilke always said that the real sign of success for the Seattle Jazz Society would be for it to become "obsolete" when the commercial marketplace for jazz recovered. In 1974, that began to happen. On November 3, 1973, Greek restauranteur Gus Boutsinis opened an upscale French restaurant on the corner of South Yesler Way and First Avenue South called the Pioneer Banque. Boutsinis hired his younger half-brother, an aspiring drummer named John Dimitriou, to book jazz, which started the following year. Boutsinis and Dimitriou had worked together at a Las Vegas-style venture in Ocean Shores and were part of the same Greek family as Pete Barbas, who had run Pete's Poop Deck. Restaurants ran in the family. With Dimitriou later opening Jazz Alley, in 1980, it's fair to say that the commercial side of jazz has been dominated in Seattle by the same Greek family for more than half a century.

Starting in March, 1974, the Pioneer Banque offered Seattle a two-year musical as well as culinary banquet that included saxophonists Stan Getz, Grover Washington, Jr., Joe Henderson, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk; pianists/keyboardists Bill Evans, Les McCann, and Ahmad Jamal; organist Jimmy Smith; blues singer/pianist Mose Allison; guitarists Charlie Byrd, Herb Ellis, George Benson and Barney Kessel; trumpeters Freddie Hubbard and Dizzy Gillespie; vibraphonists Roy Ayers, Bobby Hutcherson and Cal Tjader; bassist/bandleader Charles Mingus and drummer/bandleader Art Blakey; vocalist Gil Scott-Heron; the L.A. Four (Ray Brown, Bud Shank, Laurindo Almeida, Shelley Manne); the Heath Brothers (Jimmy, Tootie, Percy); and violinists Stephane Grappelli and Joe Venuti. Not since the Penthouse had Seattle jazz fans enjoyed such a feast.

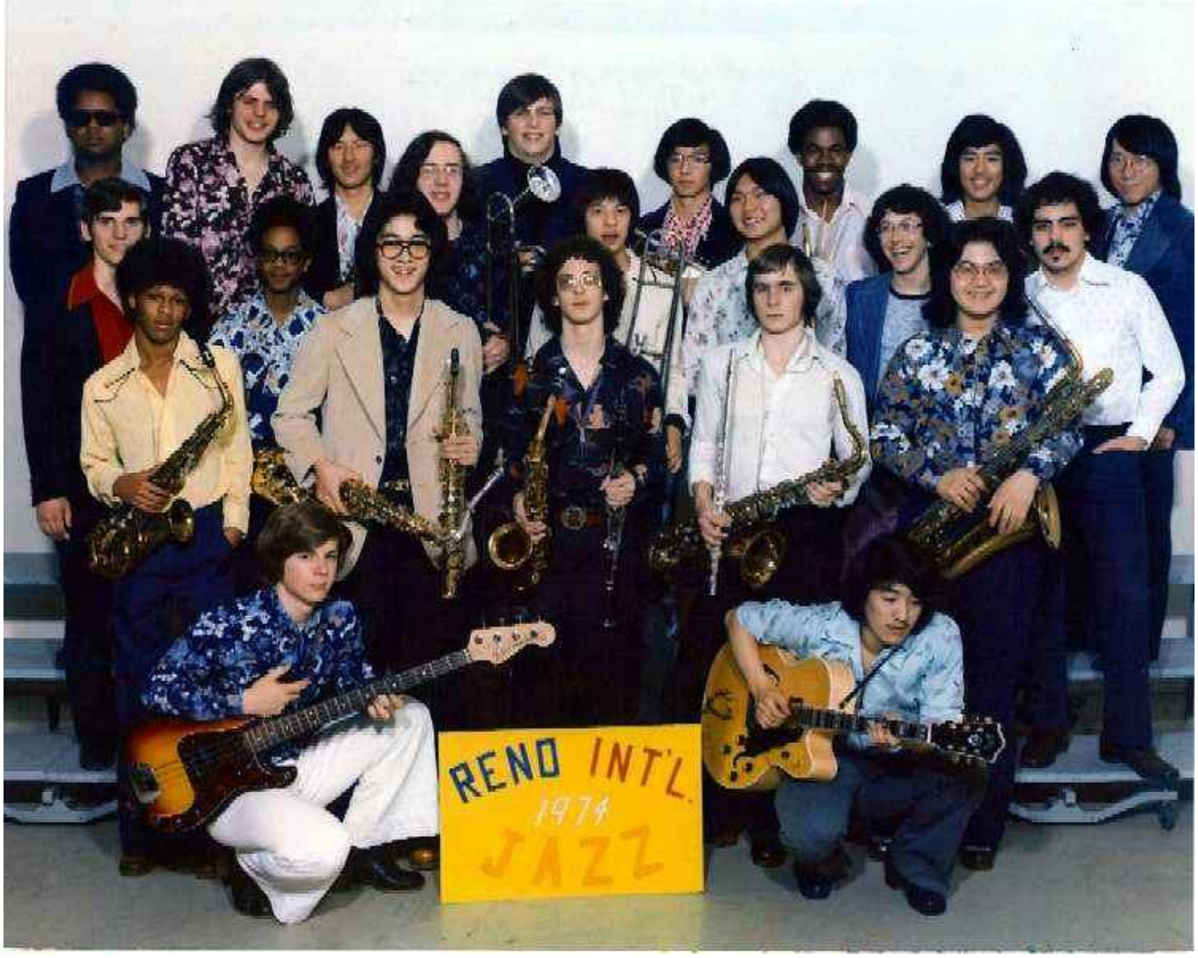


The Pioneer Banque, 1973. Left to right: Dan Dean (electric bass), Howard Roberts (guitar), Stu Goldberg (keyboards), Luis Peralta (percussion). Not shown: Dean Hodges (drums) and Charlie Keagle (saxophone). Photo courtesy of Dan Dean.

During this period, the Seattle Jazz Society continued to produce concerts and to support the local scene, but something else was going on in the non-commercial sector that would have an even more significant effect on jazz – and not just locally. It was happening in the schools. The roots of Seattle's extraordinary high school jazz programs, now known all over the world, can be traced back to 1960, when Ralph Mutchler started teaching at Olympic College in Bremerton, and Waldo King started at Garfield High School (later moving to Franklin High School and Roosevelt High School). Mutchler started a jazz festival and competition for high school jazz bands at Olympic College that gave band directors like King, Hal Sherman at Kent-Meridian High School, and John Moawad at Nathan Hale High School, an opportunity to compete at the highest level and to be critiqued by professionals such as Quincy Jones and critic

Leonard Feather. In 1966, Feather noticed the teenaged trumpeter Jay Thomas at the Bremerton competition and named him a "talent deserving wider recognition" in DownBeat magazine. As Seattle jazz afficionados are well aware, Seattle area high school jazz really hit its stride nationally in the 1990s at Garfield and Roosevelt, under the direction of Clarence Acox and Scott Brown respectively, whose bands dominated Essentially Ellington, the high school jazz band competition presented by Jazz at Lincoln Center, for 20 years. They also established a youth jazz culture unparalleled in any other American city. A major corporation, Starbucks fully sponsors an annual concert of student jazz bands that draws 2500 fans. Students from Seattle's jazz programs, such as trumpeter Riley Mulherkar, trombonist Clark Gayton and drummer/emcee Kassa Overall, to name just three, have secured firm places in the world of international jazz.

For all the success of Garfield and Roosevelt however, another high school was the site of one of the most productive, if short and unheralded episodes in local jazz history. It started much earlier, in 1969, when Chuck Chinn began teaching music at Franklin High School. Chinn had a classical music background but was tasked with leading a jazz band, following the tradition started there by Waldo King. When a talented young musician named James Gardiner received a grant to serve as "composer in residence" for Seattle school jazz bands, Chinn appealed to Gardiner for help. Gardiner had played in King's Garfield band while also studying at Cornish College. He not only sent Franklin some crackerjack original arrangements, he relentlessly rehearsed Chinn's group, which came to be known as the Franklin High School Jazz Lab Band. Out of the blue, the band triumphed three years in a row with first place wins at the Reno Jazz Festival from 1974-76, and toured Europe, thanks to Gardiner's soulful, original arrangements. The Franklin band featured a gallery of often under-recognized Central Area talent, including trumpeter and bandleader James Rassmussen (who led the Jazz Police big band for years), saxophonist Dean Mochizuki and bassist Danny Benson. It also boasted a handful of players who would forge major national reputations: pianist Robert Damper, keyboardist Philip Woo, guitarist David Yamasaki and saxophonist Kenny Gorelick, later known as Kenny G.



The Franklin High School Jazz Lab Band, 1974. Back row: James Gardiner (left), James Rasmussen (center), Robert Damper (third from right), Chuck Chinn (right). Front row: Dean Mochizuki (second from left), Kenny Gorelick (center). Kneeling in front: Danny Benson (left), David Yamasaki (right). Courtesy of Danny Benson.

"We really loved Jim Gardiner," said Gorelick, in a 2021 HBO documentary film about the saxophonist's career, *Listening to Kenny G.* Gorelick, of course, went on to spearhead what was later called the “smooth jazz” movement, a popular R&B take on jazz that emphasized simple, repeated melodies and danceable beats. Damper often toured and recorded with Kenny G. Yamasaki became a nationally recognized clinician who teaches at the Stanford Jazz Workshop. Woo played with Gorelick in the Seattle funk band Cold, Bold and Together, then went on to a prolific career that included touring and recording with vibraphonist Roy Ayers, as well as recording with Gladys Knight, Patti La Belle, Cindy Lauper, and dozens of other name artists. Gardiner pursued a successful career in Oakland as a studio engineer, producer and educator, working with the likes of Beyoncé, Tupac Shakur and Ray Charles. The Franklin talent pool included keyboardist Deems Tsutakawa, who didn’t play in the Lab Band, but hung out in the band room and hosted jam sessions at his house.

The influence of the Franklin High School Jazz Lab Band has largely been overlooked, in part because its members played commercially successful music, often looked down upon by jazz aficionados as oversimplified, mercenary, or both. The irony however, is that in the ‘70s musical taste in the Black community migrated to precisely this music, starting with the funky fusions of Herbie Hancock, Ayers and Grover Washington, Jr., and continuing in the ‘90s with Kenny G, Bob James and the late David Sanborn, to name just a few. In a one sense, Tsutakawa, Gorelick, Woo, Damper and Yamasaki are the real heirs to the Jackson Street jazz scene that had flourished in the Central District decades earlier. That they were overlooked can be seen through the same racial lens that prevented Seattle’s Jackson Street heroes, such as Quincy Jones and Ray Charles, from being recognized during their time in Seattle.

Late ‘70s-Early ‘80s: Parnell’s and Cornish College of the Arts

In 1976, when a disgruntled faction rebelled against Wilke’s perceived domination of the Seattle Jazz Society, Wilke stepped aside and the organization dissolved a year later. However, as he had hoped, the society's work was largely done. Though the Pioneer Banque closed in 1977, another Pioneer Square club, Parnell's took up the torch. Its success would usher in an era of fertile symbiosis between the commercial and non-profit sectors of Seattle jazz. Parnell's, named after its owner, Roy Parnell, was part of a nationwide jazz renaissance that ended the long drought brought on by rock music, and sparked a grand florescence of Seattle jazz that continued into the 1990s. Around the same, trumpeter Jim Knapp, who had been teaching at Cornish College of the Arts since 1971, began to ramp up the school's jazz program. He established a jazz degree program and hired an extraordinary local staff that included reed player Denney Goodhew, guitarist Dave Peterson, bassist Chuck Deardorf, and pianists Dave Peck and Randy Halberstadt, augmented by nationally known players such as bassist Gary Peacock, trombonist Julian Priester, pianist Art Lande, vocalist Jay Clayton, saxophonist Hadley Caliman and drummer Jerry Granelli.

Leading the innovative Composers and Improvisors Orchestra, which included some of the best, most progressive musicians in town, Knapp brought in composers such as pianist Carla Bley, reed man Sam Rivers, bassist Dave Holland, and alto saxophonist Anthony Braxton to write for his band. He and other Cornish faculty led their own groups, and Cornish became a vibrant creative center. It also became a well of talent for Parnell, who recruited side players from the Cornish faculty such as Deardorf, Peck, and Halberstadt, and drummer Dean Hodges to back up the name artists he booked at his club, such as Art Pepper, Chet Baker and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis.

Deardorf succeeded Knapp as the director of the Cornish jazz department. In a 2004 interview, he reflected, "That was like graduate school. If I had moved to New York, I never would have gotten the opportunity to play with that caliber of people. It was the right place at the right time."

Seattle musicians unassociated with Cornish also had a chance to partake in the symbiosis between commercial and non-profit worlds, in part thanks to Chris Lunn, director of another non-profit organization, Victory Music, which specialized in folk music but also presented jazz. When Parnell called Lunn to see if he knew a pianist in town who could back up visiting players, Lunn directed him to Barney McClure, who became the go-to keyboard man at the club. (As mayor of Port Townsend, McClure would play a significant role in starting the Jazz Port Townsend festival.) Pianist Marc Seales, bassist Dean Johnson, drummers Moyes Lucas and Teo Sutton – also veterans of the Victory Music scene –appeared as side players. Priester, Peacock, Lande, Granelli, and vocalist Jane Lambert, accompanied by her husband, Dave Peck were booked as headliners. This happy symbiosis between a commercial night club and a robust local community, supported in part by non-profits, continued at Parnell's, albeit under different ownership, until 1983. By the time it closed, another jazz club had opened, Jazz Alley, which also called on local musicians as side players, at least for a while.

1980s: Jazz Alley, the Pacific Jazz Institute and Earshot Jazz

Jazz Alley, which opened in the University District in 1980, struggled in its early years. But after moving in 1985 to its present location at Lenora Street and Sixth Avenue (now kitty corner from the Amazon Spheres), owner John Dimitriou came up with a novel idea that helped turn the tide. The City of Seattle at that time levied a five percent admissions tax on entertainment venues. Non-profit entities were exempt. Why not form a non-profit to present the music, but continue to run the restaurant as a separate, for-profit entity? After all, Dimitriou argued, jazz was an art form, just like classical music. Why was the Seattle Symphony Orchestra exempt from the tax, but not a jazz club? He had a point, though it was a bold idea, considering both enterprises were in the same building and run by the same person, and the profits from Jazz Alley clearly came from alcohol and food, not music. (A rule of thumb for night clubs is that door receipts offset the cost of talent; profit comes from the bar.) But Dimitriou pulled it off. Recruiting high profile community members for an advisory board – including ex-governor John Spellman, *JazzTimes* founder Ira Sabin and pianist McClure – he founded the Pacific Jazz Institute (PJI) and convinced Seattle's Department of Revenue to exempt Jazz Alley from the tax.

Jazz Alley, 2023. Jeremy Pelt (trumpet), Jalen Baker (vibraphone), Alex Wintz (guitar), Leighton Mckinley-Harrell (bass), and Jared Spears (drums). Courtesy of Lisa Hagen Glynn.

Gradually cajoling the public to spend a little more than they might have in the past for A-list jazz and high-end food and drink, by the late '80s Dimitriou put Jazz Alley on a secure footing, where it remains to this day, without the help of the PJI which became unnecessary when the city revoked the admissions tax in 2009. Over the years, Jazz Alley fans have enjoyed vocalists Diana Krall and Harry Connick, Jr., pianists Oscar Peterson and McCoy Tyner, guitarists Pat Metheny and John Scofield, and vocalists Cecile McLorin Salvant and Karrin Allyson, as well as popular world music, blues, R&B and smooth jazz acts that help pay the bills.

One casualty of Dimitriou's upward trajectory, however – and it had begun to show even before the PJI – was local musicians. As the market for jazz became more robust, clubs found it financially feasible to engage whole groups again, rather than leaders with local sidemen. Local jazz began to suffer. In 1984, another jazz non-profit popped up: Earshot Jazz. This time however, it would not see its goal as obsolescence, as had the Seattle Jazz Society, but rather as a permanent platform for local jazz and the international avant-garde, both neglected by Jazz Alley.

Earshot Jazz began in 1984 as a modest newsletter, produced its first concerts in 1987, and inaugurated an annual festival in 1989, which continues today. In its early years, the organization focused on the regional scene, presenting a concert series of original music by locals at New City Theater and collaborating with Jazz Alley on a weekly concert at the club. Earshot also brought in figures from the Amsterdam, Chicago, London and New York avant-garde, players such as drummer Han Bennink, saxophonists Roscoe Mitchell, Evan Parker, and John Zorn, trumpeter Dave Douglas, and pianist Vijay Iyer. This created a healthy balance in the city's jazz offerings, a spectrum that took in local and national, mainstream and progressive artists. Over the years however, Earshot has come to focus almost exclusively on international artists and its annual festival.

With Jazz Alley and Earshot Jazz looking abroad for artists, other entities stepped in to present local musicians, such as Tula's jazz club in Belltown; Café Racer in the University District; the New Orleans Restaurant in Pioneer Square; Egan's in Ballard; and Boxley's in North Bend. The annual Ballard Jazz Festival offered a "jazz walk" featuring nearly all local musicians. The Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra is made up of locals. But the New Orleans closed in 2014, Tula's in 2019, Café Racer in 2024, and the Ballard Jazz Festival has been on hiatus since 2019. Seattle jazz musicians face yet another crisis.

The 21st Century

In keeping with six decades of tradition, new non-profits have formed to fill the gap. In 2011, pianist Danny Kolke formed JazzClubsNW, a non-profit entity that presents jazz in suburban Seattle communities: the North Bend Jazz Walk, the Edmonds Jazz Walk, and year-round music and education programs at Boxley's in North Bend. Composer and keyboardist Wayne Horvitz co-owns the Royal Room, a Columbia City neighborhood venue that presents jazz as well as a variety of other genres. In 2016, Horvitz formed the South Hudson Music Project to support innovative, cross-genre projects. Those include regular events at the Royal Room, such as "Piano Starts Here" and "New Music Mondays," as well as larger special events, such as a festival coming in the fall of 2024. More central to the needs of Seattle musicians, in 2021, trumpeter Thomas Marriott, a veteran of the Garfield High School jazz program, started the Seattle Jazz Fellowship which presents music every week in Pioneer Square. Marriott's goal is to create a space where the jazz tradition can be passed on from one generation to the next, much as it was in days gone by. In the meantime, on the commercial side, clubs have begun to recover from the Covid pandemic, with Egan's Ballard Jam House re-opening and the Triple Door, another multi-genre venue, resuming a modicum of jazz programming.

Will the Jazz Fellowship and other new jazz non-profits prosper? Will Earshot? Jazz Alley? All of this depends on continued interest in jazz generally, at the national level as well as local. Some indications warrant optimism. In 2016, jazz station KNKX-FM came into being after listeners ponied up $7 million to buy radio station KPLU, to prevent it from merging with the area's other National Public Radio outlet, KUOW. The station recently raised another $5.9 million to move into new digs at the Pike Place Market. Seattle is also the home of one of the strongest independent jazz record labels in the world, Origin, with regular releases by regional as well as national players. The Seattle jazz audience and support for jazz generally appears to be here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future.

But the balance between commercial and non-profit presenters will probably shift, with the bulk of the burden falling on the latter. A cursory look at the landscape suggests that this has already happened. While it's true that Seattle has supported at least one commercially viable jazz club every year since 1973 – more than half a century – it's also true that for half that time there has been just one, as there is today: Jazz Alley. Along with this club there is one other for-profit jazz institution, Origin Records. But there are six robust jazz non-profits: Earshot Jazz, KNKX, the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra, the Seattle Jazz Fellowship, the South Hudson Music Project and JazzClubsNW. And there are probably more to come. Unlike the '60s and '70s, when a non-profit like the Seattle Jazz Society emerged to fill the gap until the marketplace recovered, the commercial jazz marketplace will probably never return to the levels it enjoyed in the early 1960s. Like European classical music, it enjoys a market share of under three percent of recorded music worldwide, and many of its major presenters could not operate without government support and private donations. But as long as there is an enthusiastic audience for the music, both commercial and non-profit institutions will probably continue to support jazz in Seattle. The relationships they develop will no doubt continue to turn up unusual stories, such as the recorded session at the Penthouse that sent Carlos Ward to New York, or the golden age of coexistence between Parnell's and Cornish College of the Arts.

Note: This article was written in 2024 for the Arts Ecosystem Research Project by jazz journalist and historian Paul de Barros, through an initiative to commission perspectives by community scholars, journalists, and other voices that illuminate aspects of the Seattle region's creative ecosystem, with support from 4Culture. Paul de Barros has written about jazz for *The Seattle Times* and *DownBeat* magazine since 1982. He is the author of *Jackson Street After Hours: The Roots of Jazz in Seattle* and *Shall We Play That One Together: The Life and Art of Jazz Piano Legend Marian McPartland.* He is currently writing *Fertile Ground: Seattle Jazz in the Modern Era.* The author retains all copyrights. Claudia Bach and Susan Kunimatsu provided editing. Citations and references may not conform to APA standards.

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