



Billy Taylor

Three decades is a long time to achieve excellence year after year, but that is exactly what Jazz in July at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst has attained.

This summer marks the 30th anniversary of one of America's unique jazz instructional summer schools.

Started in 1981 by a group of jazz artists and educators, under the direction of Dr. Frederick Tillis, Jazz in July is an intensive summer school dedicated to the study of jazz improvisation, focusing on instrumental ensembles, and vocal soloists with trios. It accepts high school and college students as well as adult musicians into a high-powered curriculum of lectures, workshops, master classes, jam sessions and performances.

The program's uniqueness lies in the caliber of jazz artists who commit themselves to teaching. Two of the earliest organizers were the late pianist Dr. Billy Taylor and drummer Max Roche,

who set the standard which continues today.

Over the years jazz greats like Slide Hampton, Jackie McLean, Ted Dunbar, Yusef Lateef and Buddy Powell taught here. Another influential teacher was vocalist Sheila Jordan, the 2012 NEA Jazz Master award-winner.

Jazz singer Lisa Thorson spent three summers at Jazz in July and recalls, "That's where I met Sheila Jordan, and she completely changed my life. I learned to listen, be open, explore and be generous, just like Sheila and Max Roach were in the program."

The list of participants in Jazz in July is impressive: vocalists Nnenna Freelon, Tierney Sutton and Paula Cole, Tony-nominated actress and singer Tsidii LeLoka, guitarist Trey Ahastasio and many others. Jazz guitarist Freddie Bryant attended Jazz in July as a college student,

became assistant to guitar master Ted Dunbar, and finally taught there.

"So many people have passed through and blessed us with their music," says Bryant, who is teaching at Berklee in the fall. "The future of jazz needs places like Jazz in July to help continue the tradition and inspire new talent."

Frank Newton, director of Jazz in July, says that "approximately 2,000 students have come through our program."

He said most of them come mainly from Massachusetts and Connecticut, and also from New York City, New Jersey, Vermont and New Hampshire.

"In recent years we have had some students come from Nevada, Washington and California. Every year we usually get a sprinkling

Arturo O'Farrill



of international students. In my short time as director I have seen students from Japan, Germany, England, and Africa," Newton says

This year's Jazz in July runs from July 11-22, and features an impressive faculty. Instructors include Arturo O'Farrill and Steve Kuhn, piano; Saunders Sermons, trombone; Bruce Diehl, Willie Hill and Felipe Salles, saxophone; Steve Johns and Winard Harper drums; Bob Ferrier guitar; Jeff Holmes trumpet/piano; Avery Sharpe and Rodney Whitaker, bass; Sheila Jordan, Marion Cowings and Dr. Catherine Jensen-Hole, vocals; and Derrick Gardner trumpet.

On July 20 the school is paying a special tribute to Dr. Billy Taylor, (one of the founders of Jazz in July) at The Marriot Center, Top of the Campus Center. The event features guest artist Christian Sands, and a chance to mingle with Jazz in July faculty.

In a broad context, it's interesting to note that Jazz in July is also

part of a glorious jazz tradition in Western Massachusetts dating back to the 1950s, when the Music Inn in Lenox run by Phil and Stephanie Barber essential created the nation's first summer school of jazz, leading to the Tanglewood Jazz Festival and more recently the Pittsfield Jazz Festival.

What is it about this region that spawns so much jazz?

"I believe Western Massachusetts is fertile ground for all of the arts," Newton says. "I feel we have gained a reputation as a community that appreciates jazz not only for its aesthetic value, but also for its cultural, creative and artistic value. Jazz artists appreciate playing for an educated audience and they can easily find that here."

Jazz in July
Summer Music Programs
University of Massachusetts
Amherst
100 Hicks Way
Amherst, MA 01003
413 545-3530
jazzinjuly.com

Yusef Lateef

- by Michael P. Quinlin



Tia Fuller

Jazz@THEFAC

In addition to its successful Jazz in July program, UMass/Amherst has a significant concert series in the 2011/12 school year that features great jazz artists in concert at the Fine Arts Center on Campus.

The series kicks off on September 24 with James Farm, featuring Joshua Redman, Aaron Parks, Matt Perman and Eric Harland at Bowker Auditorium and ends on April 26, 2012 with Steve Coleman and Five Elements at the Bezanson Recital Hall. Other highlights of the year include the Tia Fuller Quartet, SFJazz Collective and Ravi Coltrane Quartet.

FineArtsCenter.com

