

Having released his first leader date in 1981, you might say that **Joe Fonda** has been at it for a very long time. And given that he's recorded and toured with some of the giants of the *avant garde*—Billy Bang, Wadada Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton—the young, hip crowd at Brooklyn's Bar Lunático presumably had no idea what to expect. When the band—Fonda (bass), Sam Bardfeld (violin), Kenny Wessel (guitar) and Rob Garcia (drums)—launched into some of the groovin'est otherworldly space funk you might ever hear, the audience noticeably received it just fine. "Hey man, I'm 69 years old. I grew up on Mahavishnu, funk, the Allman Brothers," the leader said, laughing. And, in fact, the set combined all those elements. His original "Brown Baggin' It" toggled dynamically between a free groove and heavy, fast swinging 12/8, with Bardfeld turning in an especially fiery solo. Fonda dedicated his beautiful ballad "Gone Too Soon" to former collaborator Thomas Chapin, the great alto saxophonist/flute player who helped build the downtown experimental scene before passing away at age 40 in 1998. Wessel's solo, with Bardfeld gently in the background, was simultaneously simple and dark, yet hopeful. On "Syndicate", the bassist set a jagged funk groove over backing guitar before the violinist's initial spiky lines morphed into long, melodic statements locked together with Wessel. It was a great night of music and the venue's proprietor, bassist Arthur Kell (also a former Chapin collaborator) made sure his patrons understood the respect these musicians have earned and continue to deserve.

— Keith Hoffman

Celebrating the release of his new recording, *Manifest Dream*, at the Blue Note (Jul. 8), trumpeter **Theo Croker** proved himself to be a genuine original—a revolutionary modernist master of hybridized jazz—before even touching his horn. Utilizing a "nothing fancy" analog electronics setup, he laid down a symphonic overture that expansively blended a vast array of samples of reverberating trumpet, Afro-Cuban percussion, vocal chants and the spoken words of Saul Williams, Malcolm X, Jill Scott and Bob Marley, underpinned by Miguel Russell's sprawling, hard-hitting drumming. The band—also with Idris Frederick (piano, keyboards) and Eric Wheeler (bass)—then launched into a medley of three of Croker's older songs, "4Knowledge", "To Be We" and "Hero Stomp". Speaking in his "NPR voice," he entertainingly introduced his colleague Kassa Overall's ballad "One Pillow", a soulful love song that he opened by reciting its lyric, before playing horn in narrative storytelling cadences, along with Frederick's beautiful romantic rhapsodic piano and Wheeler and Russell's slow easy grooves. The evening's special guest, Theophilus London, rapped potently on "Crystal Waterfalls", a funky Croker composition from the new album, and Sam Rivers' spiraling freebop composition "Cyclic Episode". The energized set concluded tranquilly, with Croker introducing the band to the wildly enthusiastic crowd over his "Amen Waters", then exiting the stage, leaving the band to finish.

— Russ Musto



Joe Fonda @Bar Lunático



Theo Croker @Blue Note

There's a new Harlem Renaissance afoot in small jazz eateries uptown. At Patrick's Place (on Frederick Douglass Blvd.), Patience Higgins, of St. Nick's Pub fame, holds court every Friday night. The Red Rooster (on Lenox Ave./ Malcolm X Blvd.) is swinging Sundays through Fridays. Minton's Playhouse (on 118th St.), where bebop was birthed, has returned. And a few steps on the other side of St. Nicholas Ave. is Room 623 (on 119th St.), managed and emceed by vocalist Marcus Goldhaber, which brings great music to those lucky enough to find the hidden speakeasy gem beneath the B2 Harlem Restaurant. Last month (Jul. 5) baritone saxophone master **Jason Marshall** brought his technical prowess and beautiful melody-based solo construction to the club, with Andrew Latona (guitar), Michael Topping (bass) and Eric Halvorson (drums). Marshall opened with his favorite tune, Paul Mitchell's "Hard Times", a big, soulful churchy romp played most famously by David "Fathead" Newman on his Ray Charles-produced album *Fathead*. Quincy Jones penned the blues-infused ballad "Fallen Feathers" after Charlie Parker's death; Marshall included it on his impressive *New Beginnings* (2022), and gave a particularly touching live performance, topped with a moving cadenza. The quartet cranked it up for a sizzling "I'll Remember April" (Johnston, Raye). Nothing sets a groove quite like a solo baritone intro (think of Mingus' "Moanin'", a piece Marshall routinely opens with for the Mingus Big Band): his earthy opening of Joe Henderson's clave stomp "Recorda Me" was particularly effective.

(KH)

A breezy night finish to a hot summer day (Jul. 10) brought a large crowd uptown to Grant's Tomb, the site of Jazzmobile's weekly Wednesday evening Summerfest shows, to hear **The Jimmy Heath Big Band with Antonio Hart**, filling the landmark's plaza. Speaking endearingly of his 30-year-long mentorship under the late NEA Jazz Master saxophonist, composer, arranger and educator, Hart said that although the man is sorely missed, his spirit lives on, not only in his own music, but also in that of his students, many of whom were in the band. Each member of the 16-man ensemble flawlessly played his part, giving Heath's urbane compositions and arrangements the rich orchestral sound for which they are known. With Hart directing the band and long-time Heath Brothers band member Jeb Patton (piano) out front in the rhythm section, driven by Mike Migliore (bass) and Jerome Jennings (drums), the horn players—Frank Greene, Freddie Hendrix, Scott Wendholt, Shawn Edmonds (trumpets); Mark Gross, Cleave Guyton, Jonathan Beshay, Sam Wilson, Frank Basile (saxes); and Jason Jackson, James Burton, Barry Cooper, Douglas Purviance (trombones)—always knew where they were and where they were headed. Highlights included Gross and Guyton's twin flutes on "Gemini", Hart's passionate alto on "Stars Fell on Alabama", and the horn sections' fiery round robin soloing on Heath original "Gingerbread Boy".

(RM)

## WHAT'S NEWS

Music Masters Collective presents the **Alternative Guitar Summit Summer Camp** (co-produced by this month's Interview Feature, guitarist and AGS founder Joel Harrison) on Aug. 19-23 at Full Moon Resort on a 100-acre wilderness retreat in Big Indian, NY (120 miles northwest of NYC, just due west of Woodstock). Experience "the most unusual, forward-thinking, open-minded guitar camp on the planet" (as its website states) with master classes, workshops and jam sessions with the likes of Kurt Rosenwinkel, John Scofield, Nels Cline, Mike and Leni Stern, Wolfgang Muthspiel, Gilad Hekselman, Camila Meza, Rodney Jones and Harrison. To register and find out more info visit [alternativeguitarsummitcamp.com](http://alternativeguitarsummitcamp.com).

The **Brooklyn Conservatory of Music (BKCM)** recently announced its 2024-25 Jazz Leaders Fellows, a program now in its fourth year and developed by the Jazz Leaders Fellowship Committee, which is led by vocalist Fay Victor (also a past Fellowship recipient). This year's two Fellows are each Brooklyn-born musicians: Haitian-American pianist, composer, vocalist, dancer, writer and arranger Goussy Célestin and guitarist, composer and producer Keyanna "Key" Hutchinson. The Fellowship program helps to provide resources to Black women and Black non-binary musicians to help further their craft and comes with an unrestricted \$12,500 award for their musical endeavors, in addition to free rehearsal space, performance and curatorial opportunities. Past Fellows include Melvis Santa, Charenée Wade, Lezlie Harrison, Marika Hughes, LaFrae Sci and Melanie Charles (curator of BKCM's Midsummer Nights Series). For more info visit [bkcm.org/jff](http://bkcm.org/jff).

The **Louis Armstrong House Museum (LAHM)** announced its 2024 Armstrong Now Artists-in-Residence: tap dancer-choreographer Lisa La Touche, saxophonists Immanuel Wilkins and Steven Salcedo, as well as the Soul Science Lab duo. Each will create a new work based on content drawn from the Armstrong Archives at the Museum, where they will also present a public performance at the end of their residency. (Past Artists-in-Residence include esperanza spalding and Amyra León.) Located in Corona, Queens, LAHM was home to Armstrong and his wife Lucille from the early '40s, when they first purchased the house, until his death in 1971. It is a cultural center of Kupferberg Center for the Arts at Queens College, CUNY and has become a National Historic Landmark and NYC landmark, housing the world's largest research archives for any jazz musician. For more info visit [louisarmstronghouse.org](http://louisarmstronghouse.org).

A recent tribute portal has been set up in dedication to late soprano saxophone master **Steve Lacy**, who passed away 20 years ago, just shy of his 70th birthday. Mauro Stocco, a longtime Lacy fan who set up the non-profit website, says: "After having dedicated many years to collecting records, books and magazines about Steve, having met him several times and organized gigs for him in solo, trio, sextet and with Musica Elettronica Viva, I decided it was the time to create a simple, but heartfelt, tribute. Lacy was a genius of our time, a sort of Leonardo Da Vinci, capable of interacting with Dixieland, Monk, Ellington, free, Indian music, MEV, Giuseppe Chiari, dance, painting, sculpture, cinema, poetry, living theatre, philosophy, Tao, codifying the role of the modern soprano saxophone." Currently there are contributions and testimonials from many past collaborators, admirers and friends, including Alvin Curran, Gianni Mimmo, Zlatko Kaučić, Andrea Centazzo and others. To view testimonials, contribute memories and for more info visit [stevelaymemorialscrapbook.org](http://stevelaymemorialscrapbook.org).

The long-running Canadian jazz, blues and gospel label **Justin Time Records**, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, has announced the departure of its founder Jim West. Its operations will reportedly be taken over by Netzwerk Music Group, which will help to continue the label's legacy. Justin Time's first two releases were the 1982 debut and 1983 sophomore follow-up by the now-legendary, soon-to-be nonagenarian Canadian pianist Oliver Jones; it has since put out many other albums by Jones as well by the country's two other most famed pianists, Oscar Peterson and Paul Bley. The label has also documented the likes of Ray Anderson, Billy Bang, Hamiet Bluiett, Dizzy Gillespie, Abdullah Ibrahim, Ingrid Jensen, Diana Krall, Ranee Lee, David Murray, Ed Thigpen, World Saxophone Quartet plus many others in its catalogue of nearly 500 titles. For more info visit [justin-time.com](http://justin-time.com).

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