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Daily Hampshire Gazette Est. 1786

Staying busy in summer: Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares stages new concert series in July



Northampton saxophonist and composer Sarah Manning and her trio kick off a summer series of shows in Easthampton produced by Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares. Manning performs July 5. Image courtesy Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares

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Published: 06-21-2024 10:33 AM

Fresh on the heels of Django in June, Northampton's annual celebration of *jazz manouche* and Django Reinhardt, [Pioneer Valley Jazz Shares](#) has organized its own summer jazz series for July, both to say "thank you" to supporters and to give local musicians a chance to shine.

It's a first for the member-supported jazz program, which has just wrapped up its official 2023-2024 season, its 13th year overall.

Glenn Siegel, co-founder of PVJS, said summers have traditionally been used to seek sponsors for the next year of concerts, encourage members to re-up, and to plan the new shows, while hosting one summer concert and a meal to thank members for their support and to discuss the past season.

But in a recent phone call, Siegel said PVJS had received grant funding from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts to stage some additional summer concerts. That in turn gave him and his wife, PVJS co-founder Priscilla Maria Page, the chance to hire area musicians for those gigs.

"Jazz Shares has always been dedicated to national and some international artists," said Siegel. "We've gotten a lot of requests from local musicians to be part of [the series], but we usually have to decline, which I feel bad about."

But now, PVJS has scheduled four Friday evening concerts in July, to take place at Easthampton Media, that are dedicated to area players and which will offer a range of sounds, in some cases going beyond jazz, including international music and percussion-dominated works.

"This is a way of recognizing some of the really talented musicians in our area and giving back to the community," Siegel said. "I've known some of them for a long time, and in some cases this is my first opportunity to work with them."

Siegel also noted that PVJS has not previously staged any shows at Easthampton Media, located in Eastworks, though he was interviewed there about Jazz Shares and knows Jeff Mastroianni, the executive director, from Mastroianni's previous stint at Amherst Media.

"It's a good space for us, sits about 50 to 60 people, which should be just right for the shows," Siegel noted.

He said Easthamptom Media will also record the four concerts for broadcast on its TV channel and YouTube channel. Siegel also plans to conduct short, recorded interviews with the leader of each ensemble.

A varied program

The series begins July 5 (all concerts start at 7:30 p.m.) with the Sarah Manning Trio, an ensemble led by Northampton saxophonist and composer Sarah Manning and including Magdalena Abrego on electric guitar and Kirin McElwain on cello and electronics.

Siegel said he actually presented Manning in a PVJS show a couple years ago with a different lineup. She's a composer and band leader, he notes, who's played in venues across the country, recorded a number of albums, and has lived in New York and on the West Coast.

"Sarah comes out of the jazz tradition, but her palette has expanded in more recent years," he said, as she's experimented with different sounds and themes.

In fact, after previously studying music at William Patterson University in New Jersey, Manning transferred to Smith College to get a degree in women's studies. (She also studied music with Yusef Lateef during that time.)

According to a number of interviews, she's used that background at Smith to compose music that in part looks at the struggles women musicians can face in the male-dominated world of jazz.

On July 12, The Talamana Trio comes to Easthamptom Media, an ensemble of Laila Salins on vocals, guitar, and Shruti (an Indian version of the harmonium); Jim Matus on vocals and laoutar (a lute-guitar hybrid); and Richie Barshay on percussion.

Salins and Matus have also performed with sitar player Robert Markey, and the group has blended Indian and Middle Eastern music with Western jazz and folk.

"I'm not sure exactly what they'll be doing at our show," said Siegel. "But I think having a drummer as versatile as Richie Barshay with them should make for a really interesting evening."

On July 19, Tony Vacca and Fusion Nomads bring their eclectic sound to Easthampton, one that's based around Vacca's background as a jazz and world music drummer/percussionist and adds in the jazz saxophone of Chuck Langford, the varied guitar work of John Sheldon, and the bass and percussion of Joe Sallins.

"I've known Tony for years and really admired him," said Siegel. "I've always wanted to work with him, and now it's finally happening."

The series concludes July 26 with a performance by the Anders Griffen Quartet, an ensemble led by Northampton drummer, sometimes trumpet player, and composer Anders Griffen. The group includes musicians from out of town: Matt Lavelle on trumpet, Chad Fowler on saxophone, and Ken Filliano on bass.

Siegel says he's worked with Griffen a few times before, with different musicians, and first got to know him through the writing he's done for publications such as The New York City Jazz Record.

"He's a really versatile player who's worked with a lot of different musicians," Siegel noted. According to Griffen's website, he's gigged or recorded not just with many jazz players but with artists here in the Valley such as singer-songwriter Mark Mulcahy, indie rockers Winterpills, and Celtic fiddler Zoë Darrow.

"The group Anders has pulled together for this show is a new one, so I imagine they'll be pretty adventurous, with some compositions but probably a lot of improvisation," said Siegel.

Tickets for the July concerts are on a sliding scale: There's actually no price listed, and audience members are invited to contribute what they can.

And if staging these concerts leaves Siegel and Page with less time than usual to reach out to local sponsors for support for the 2024-2025 season, that's OK, said Siegel.

"This really is a great opportunity for us to say 'thank you' to the community," he said.

More information on the July concerts is available at jazzshares.org.

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