

30 years of JAZZ at NEC

"Boston was radiating a vibe of creativity and hipness that made it all the way to tract houses in Arizona,"

says Allan Chase of the force that drew his attention to NEC in 1974 as a college freshman, and finally brought him to Boston to study six years later. From his current perspective as chair of NEC's jazz program, Chase sums up the era that he is now charged with carrying forward. **"In the world of creative, evolving new ideas and improvised music, NEC has been largely fuelling that whole scene over the past 30 years."**

Ten years into its existence, jazz study at NEC was hip. How remarkable that it had gotten off the ground at all!

It took Gunther Schuller to get it all started.

by Rob Schmieder

CARAVAN

where NEC
has taken jazz
in 30 years

Saxophonist Carl Atkins tells of a fateful meeting in early 1968 with NEC's new president, Gunther Schuller. Schuller had merged his love of jazz and classical music into a singular journey through musical worlds, something he called the "third stream." A horn player, he had recorded with Miles Davis in 1949, while playing in the

Metropolitan Opera orchestra. As a composer, he had written for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Atkins had recently come to Boston with a woodwind degree from Indiana University; he had already started making a place for himself in bands that would range from pianist Jaki Byard's quintet and Herb Pomeroy's orchestra to the Opera Company of Boston.

Schuller's first question was whether Atkins would be interested in teaching saxophone at NEC, which hadn't had a saxophone teacher since the days of its Popular Music department (see "When Jazz Was Popular," next page). "Aspiring saxophonists had been assigned to the clarinet major," Atkins recalls. Then Schuller got to the point: he was ready to introduce a jazz studies program at NEC, and wanted Atkins to head the program.

By the fall semester of 1968, Atkins was teaching saxophone and meeting with Schuller to plan curriculum and submit their unprecedented plan to the National Association of Schools of Music for accreditation. Atkins selected bass player Donald Pate and soon-to-be-legendary drummer Harvey Mason to form a trio with pianist





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Ron Fransen. With Atkins as saxophonist and coach, the trio toured jazz festivals as an aural advertisement for jazz study at NEC.

Atkins's first core jazz faculty was solid and durable. Composer George Russell conceived the Lydian Chromatic Concept that freed Miles Davis to explore new harmonic terrain in the late 1950s and in the 1990s was liberating the orchestral writing of Maria Schneider. Archetypal "jazz master" Jaki Byard was an eclectic encyclopedia of jazz piano (a tribute follows this story). Third Stream pianist Ran Blake would come along in a few years to head his own department, where students would explore sonic concepts outside the jazz tradition, with some bringing those sounds back into their work in jazz. As the history of jazz entered an era that would be marked by collisions between various fads and orthodoxies, NEC's only catechisms were designed to foster individuality and diversity.

Fall 1969: Atkins had a curriculum, faculty, students, and NASM accreditation for NEC's Department of Afro-American Music and Jazz Studies. He had already lost one student — Harvey Mason — drafted into George Shearing's band; but word of the new program — the first jazz studies program at a major classical conservatory — had gotten around, and he was enrolling such students as Stanton Davis and Ricky Ford.

"I'm probably one of the only saxophonists in the world who's 40," tenor Ricky Ford announced, with some hyperbole, to an interviewer a few years ago. "When I started, you had to be a dummy to play jazz. When I

started, jazz had died." Coming from a Roxbury music dynasty, Ford entered NEC from his junior year of high school, by way of the Elma Lewis School. He was recruited by Ran Blake, who has called him the "star student of those years." Ford fronted the house band at Wally's Cafe while playing in Jaki Byard's big band and Gunther Schuller's repertory band at the Conservatory. "My participation in the NEC jazz ensemble under Jaki's direction prepared me for entrée into the Ellington Orchestra," Ford recalls. "Jaki also

Clockwise from top: Carl Atkins conducts the 1970–71 edition of the NEC Jazz Orchestra; Gunther Schuller coaches the 1997–98 group in historic jazz charts; Allan Chase gives a masterclass on improvisation at Fall Orientation, 1999.

PAUL FOLEY



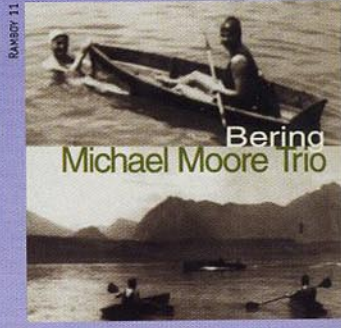
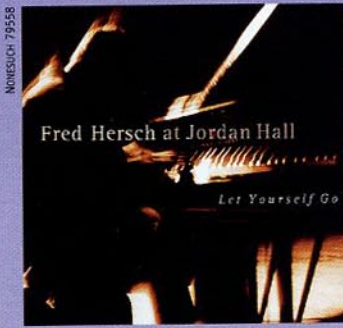
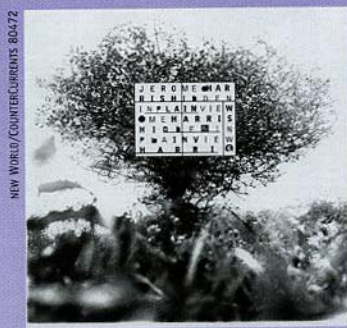
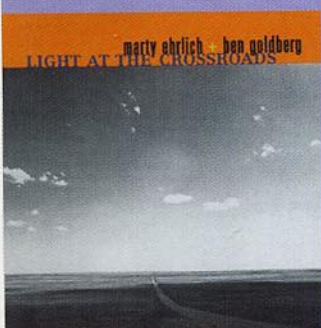
introduced me to Charles Mingus." Mercer Ellington recruited Ford for the first Ellington band following Duke's death in 1974. This is the band from which Mingus lifted Ford to join *his* last band, two years later.

Big band music, Ford's "first love," has led him through a stint with Lionel Hampton, 10 years as director of Brandeis University's jazz ensemble, and a big band of international players he currently runs from his

home base, Paris. But the big band has hardly been Ford's only format. Many have noted Ford's "extroverted and iconoclastic path," bypassing the Coltrane sound for the classic Sonny Rollins, while occasionally

1977: ROLL CALL

SONGLINES 561 1511



May 1977 brought Gunther Schuller's last commencement as president of New England Conservatory. Honorary doctorates went to jazz recording label legend John Hammond and to NEC's own jazz piano legend Cecil Taylor '51. And a bumper crop of graduates included a roll call of names that could define the middle generation of jazz artists today. "I don't know what it is about that year," says today's NEC jazz chair, Allan Chase, who came to Boston a few years later. "There was a critical mass of great students!"

Anthony Coleman graduated with a degree in composition and made a beeline for New York, where he fell in with the likes of Glenn Branca and John Zorn. He has become a perverse pillar of New York experimental, "downtown" music, weaving genres beyond the unraveling abilities of semanticists. Known both as a composer/improviser and as a keyboard player, "keyboard" can mean toy piano or sampler, clavinet or accordion, as easily as piano or organ.

A virtuoso on clarinets, saxophones, and flutes, **Marty Ehrlich** has made himself equally welcome as composer, arranger, bandleader, sideman, producer, expert. He has devoted a large space on his music stand to keeping the music of his mentor, Julius Hemphill, in the air; but you'll find some real surprises in his discography: the soundtrack to George Romero's vampire movie *Martin* (1978); bandleader for Anthony Davis's *Malcolm X* opera, *X* (1989); coproduction on Dave Douglas's classic Booker Little tribute, *In Our Lifetime* (1995). Ehrlich's growing recognition as a force in today's jazz world is underscored by his selection for an artist residency at Harvard University this semester.

One of Ehrlich's regular associates is guitarist/electric bassist **Jerome Harris**. Harris skipped over the Third Stream to Brian Eno's "Fourth World" in 1980. At least as eclectic in his associations as Ehrlich, he played with Sonny Rollins for more than a decade—but has also been in an experimental double trio with saxophonist Ned Rothenberg and percussionist Billy Martin, and in one of Jack DeJohnette's recent bands.

In the millennial rush of scorekeeping and canonization, *Down Beat* magazine notes the deaths in the past decade of some of the "last universally known giants of the music." Nonetheless, the next generation of giants is beginning to have its measure taken—like pianist **Fred Hersch**, called "a master who plays it his way" by the *New York Times*. A regular on Grammy nomination lists, he is one of Nonesuch Records' most prolific artists. One of the rare artists who can hold a New York club for a weeklong stand, he skips between solo and ensemble work—and, as a mainstay of NEC's jazz piano faculty over the past two decades, keeps his hand in as a mold of the next generation of pianists.

Alto saxophonist/clarinetist **Michael Moore**'s Available Jelly, originally the musical accompaniment to the Great Salt Lake Mime Troup, took him to Europe right after graduation; Moore settled permanently in Amsterdam in 1982. In 1986 he won the Netherlands' coveted jazz award, the Boy Edgar Prijs; and a few years later started the Ramboj record label, with more than a dozen releases in the last decade. In 1988 he formed the Clusone Trio (recently disbanded) with cellist Ernst Reijseger and rowdy drumming legend Han Bennink. With current plans to work with four different trans-

atlantic quartets, Moore draws his vitality from an eclecticism that is summed up in his description of Available Jelly's history: "The music evolved from program music and the odd jazz tune to a more 'vehicles for improvisation' kind of concept. We can still be a happy little jazz band but sometimes it turns horribly weird. We encourage diversity, as always. How else can we hold back the encroaching monoculture?"

Bostonians who know nothing about jazz still know who **Bo Winiker** is. The Winiker Swing Orchestras, led by trumpeter Bo and drummer Bill, have been New England's top bands for social functions for so many years that they were the obvious choice to play at President Clinton's inaugural ball. In many respects, Winiker's approach to repertoire and ensemble more closely resembles the ethos of the NEC Popular Music Studies era than anything else that has come out of the latter-day jazz program: an anomaly, but one with finesse.

Not every member of the Class of '77 was able to carry his vision to fruition. Hankus Netsky describes **Clyde Criner** as "an extraordinarily innovative pianist and synthesist who combined his deep roots in African-American keyboard traditions with a thorough understanding of cutting-edge technology. A remarkably warm and charismatic individual, he was surely headed for a stellar musical career when his life was cut short by AIDS in the mid-1980s." Criner had been making music with saxophonist Chico Freeman and bassist Avery Sharpe before his death. Himself personally affected by HIV, Criner's former duo partner Fred Hersch has become an outspoken advocate for awareness of this disease that has decimated so many of his generation's talents.

working in soundscapes far beyond either. After all, at NEC Joe Maneri taught him harmony à la Alban Berg.

Ford was a beneficiary of Carl Atkins's ideal for his department: "a program that black students who played jazz could feel comfortable coming to because we made it friendly." This was about more than skin color; it was a magic combination of access to genius with respect for the African origins

of jazz and the individual's need for self-expression. "Contemporary, avant-garde jazz was something that we did not disavow," Atkins recalls. "We made sure — as we still do now — that the traditional music is still very much alive in their playing, and that kids have an understanding of that tradition, but at the same time they need to be who they are, whatever that means to them at this point."

For Hankus Netsky in the mid-'70s, that didn't even mean enrolling in the jazz major. A classical composition major, Netsky

was then an oboist and saxophonist who played in one of the NEC big bands. Working under Jaki Byard, it was a short step to one of NEC's most successful off-campus classrooms. "The Apollo Stompers played at Michael's Pub on Gainsborough Street every Wednesday night. It was like Jaki led this extra band that he rehearsed at 10 o'clock on Wednesday nights."

By the time Netsky received his master's degree in 1978, Gunther Schuller was no longer president, Carl Atkins had turned over the direction of the jazz program to the first in a succession of short-lived caretakers, and NEC had graduated what would prove to be one of its most remarkable generations of improvisers (see "1977: Roll Call"). Netsky joined the faculty, and tried to ride

WHEN JAZZ WAS POPULAR

In 1942 jazz was the popular music of the day. The configuration of rhythm section, reeds, and brass that today constitutes a "jazz orchestra" then was simply a "dance band" — the people who made the music in the dance hall where you went for fun on Saturday night, or who played the arrangements of current hits and standards that you heard on the radio. The music was so pervasive as to be invisible — yet thousands of musicians made a living by playing in and arranging for popular orchestras.

It was a music that was at its most invisible in the classical conservatories. With one exception: in a scene that prefigures Gunther Schuller's meeting with Carl Atkins in 1968, NEC Director Quincy Porter invited a young Sam Marcus to create a curriculum for popular musicians. As head of the musician's union local at a time when it had thousands of members, most of them working in dance bands, Marcus knew that he had to prepare professional musicians to be expert sightreaders and transposers, ready for a wide spectrum of charts and tunes — it wasn't going to be one performance of "Eroica" after another. Marcus himself had to prepare radio bands — one of which broadcast from NEC.

Once students had his patented courses in "Practical Theory" and "Rhythm Physics" under their belts, says Marcus, "when they walked into a classical harmony class, they knocked the subject for a loop!" There were no exceptions to the rigorous training. "Our vocalists would sightread like a musician." Marcus, who had himself come to NEC to study saxophone but was put on clarinet, saw to it that students got the depth of knowledge of saxophone mechanics that would give them the versatility to play on anything from baritone to soprano, as he did, to meet the lucrative demands of commercial work, "which meant radio orchestras, dance halls, jazz. Why would you want to train for the Symphony?"

For the next 15 years or so, with many shifts in fortune, the Popular Music department was one of NEC's busiest — and today is perhaps its most forgotten. At its best, it filled the Jordan Hall stage with players and singers (a full choir!) for some of Boston's hottest shows. Students scalped their free tickets on the street for real money, says Marcus.

The solidity of the program is attested to by its graduates: Dick Johnson, for example, made the grade to take over the legendary and impeccable Artie Shaw Orchestra. The program also became a haven for some musicians who were serious about their music but not about Beethoven — such as pianist Cecil Taylor and saxophonist Andy McGhee.

By the end of the '40s, sensing dwindling support from the Conservatory administration, Marcus had taken his curriculum over to Newbury Street and founded the School of Contemporary Music, which kept going for another few decades. By the 1960s, the last vestige of NEC's program was gone. Jazz and improvisationally oriented students had to squeak through the classical regime — as Funkadelic keyboard wizard Bernie Worrell and jazz pianist Marilyn Crispell did in the mid-'60s — until Gunther Schuller and Carl Atkins came along at the end of the decade. "I don't know if it would ever have gotten started again if it wasn't for him," Marcus says of Schuller, "because he was the only progressive guy in that field."

out a "rough time" when no one was minding the store for very long, if at all.

To the administration, it was chaos. But "who cares who's chairman? It doesn't make any difference — there's music going on," says Netsky, pointing out that the opportunity to "work with your idols, hang out and make music together" was what mattered.



SAM MARCUS,
Saxophone

Played with Alan Roth and Alvin Ray, New York; with Charles Hathaway on the Colgate program; Lou Ricks (Blue Network); Larry Clinton, and Charles Baum at the St. Regis Hotel in New York. Designer of the Marcus mouthpiece for saxophone and clarinet. Has coached many professionals.

out a "rough time" when no one was minding the store for very long, if at all.

"The teachers looked at who you were and didn't mess with it. They gave you opportunities to do something as individuals — and individuals found their way." Netsky's contemporary and fellow reedman Marty Ehrlich remembers NEC being about "the energy between the students."

Atkins's last year as jazz chair at NEC

RAN
BLAKE
FILM NOIR



Keep on developing until you can't go any farther. And then go farther. — Bob Brookmeyer

Composition and improvisation should be one. — George Schuller

coincided with the emergence of an expression of student energy that threatened to tear the program apart. A group of primarily non-jazz majors, led by classical percussion major and arranger Pat Hollenbeck, started the Medium Rare Big Band as a dissident outfit—a repertory band in the Stan Kenton mold. “That tight, slick sound—it wasn’t about the individual,” says Netsky. “The

band was about the arranger.” This was aesthetically and pedagogically at odds with Atkins’s model for a jazz orchestra, drawn from the Ellington and Mingus traditions. “That’s not music that is wrapped neatly in a little package with a bow,” says Atkins. “But that music was always much more creative and much more interesting to me. People would say, ‘sometimes the ensemble doesn’t

sound quite as tight as it could be.’ Well, that’s the way it is, sometimes life ain’t too tight either. Was it music? Did it sound like music to you? ‘Oh, yeah.’ ”

While the genesis of Medium Rare did nothing to contribute to solidarity in the jazz program, the band drew tremendous attention through winning the Notre Dame college band competition over a period of 10 years, including a brief stretch during which Hollenbeck chaired the jazz department. This was great exposure for NEC as a jazz

1984: COLORS



Drummer **George Schuller** (son of former president Gunther Schuller) graduated from NEC in 1982. “Boston was a vital scene for jazz in the late ’70s and early ’80s, blossoming in the mid-’80s. There was the opportunity to hear so many different types of music, and the Conservatory was ripe because of the wide variety of music we were subjected to, starting with Third Stream, then jazz and classical. It wasn’t at all compartmentalized, we felt very welcomed to check it all out. That helps to understand the band’s mission of exploring different musics, whether the ethnic angle or compositional practice; we all got that spark early on, then it took another few years to pull these factors together.”

Schuller’s band is **Orange Then Blue**, formed with a core of six of his former classmates; debut gig at Cambridge club Ryles, September 1984. “We didn’t want it to be quite like a big band ... we didn’t want to make it too unwieldy. We settled on a 12-piece: enough instruments in each section to amplify our compositional wishes. That size is a challenging size.

“We always had a subversion to the large sound of big bands: we wanted to approach our music as if we were a quintet or sextet. We were not into the loud, brassy, high-trumpet sort of big band sound pervasive in that history. Mingus, Gil Evans, George Russell were influences; the name of the band is drawn from the band’s original anthem: Evans’s arrangement of Mingus’s ‘Orange Was the

Color of Her Dress Then Blue Silk.’ With Russell, we all took his class, were in his ensembles, played in his concerts; we had a hands-on concept of what we wanted to do because we did that every Friday at 10 a.m. in his ensemble. All seven of us were strong improvisers, with that challenge not to overwrite. We wanted to feature the improvisation in the chart and make it seamless. Composition and improvisation should be one.”

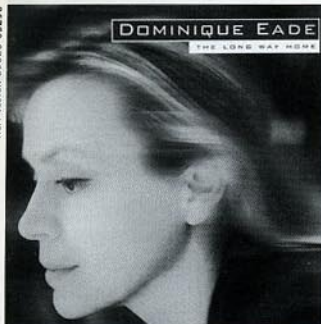
With this philosophy, OTB had an active decade of performing and recording, positioned simultaneously on the fringe of the big band world and dead center in the mix of traditional and extreme harmonies, multiethnic and blues source material that defines much of today’s jazz. *Down Beat* now calls the band “a postmodern underground big band institution.” A new CD preserves performances from OTB’s last big European tour. “The tour included musicians from New York and Boston, vegetarians and carnivores, straight-ahead and out musicians. I was proud I got those factions together to play some music.” The geographic and economic logistics of keeping any big band up and running have put OTB on hold for the moment; and though Schuller could envision a reunion performance, he currently focuses his efforts on a smaller ensemble, the Schulldogs, with his brother, bassist Ed Schuller.

As for the other OTB founders: pianist **Bruce Barth** leads classic trios and quintets. Saxophonist **Adam Kolker** has worked with latin percussionist Ray

Barretto, NEC jazz chair Allan Chase, and now his own quintet; he commutes from Brooklyn to teach at UMass/Amherst. Trumpeter **Roy Okutani** has moved to Sweden; and Swedish bassist **Bruno Råberg**, now teaching at Berklee, has been exploring his folk roots in his composing. Trombonist **David Harris** plays in the Shirim Klezmer Orchestra and its “progressive, post-klezmer” offshoot, Naftule’s Dream. Only Schuller and reed player **Matt Darriau** appear in the latest edition of OTB; the other colors have separated into a multicultural spectrum.

Also in 1984, a stealth missile named **Matthew Shipp** shot through the corridors of NEC. After one year of study with Ran Blake, Hankus Netsky, and Alan Bern, the pianist moved to New York to play with his idol, bassist William Parker. He has blazed bright ever since in the avant-garde firmament, and a recent discography lists dozens of recordings as bandleader and sideman. Last year he followed Parker and drummer Susie Ibarra onto saxophonist David S. Ware’s attention-grabbing major label debut, *Go See the World* (Columbia). Has persistence paid off for one who doesn’t play by the rules?





1994: VOICES

In 1984, shortly after vocalist **Dominique Eade** graduated from NEC, she returned to teach, and quickly became a magnet for singers at the Conservatory — by 1998, Provost Alan Fletcher had established her as full-time faculty. As a teacher sharing the wellspring of her artistic discipline, she is one of NEC's most outspoken exponents of the phi-

losophy of ear training: "It doesn't matter how much theory you know — if you can't hear it, you can't sing it."

An earlier provost, Peter Row, had urged her to enter the Artist Diploma program, and in 1989 she became the first improvisational musician to earn this elite diploma at NEC. In 1993 **Kris Adams** graduated from Eade's studio with a master's degree, followed in 1994 by an extraordinary trio: **Luciana Souza**, **Lisa Thorson**, and **Patrice Williamson**.

Souza, from a São Paulo household where Milton Nascimento and Hermeto Pascoal were family friends, has cut a path as a stylist who respects her roots without being choked by them. Thorson, who sings from a wheelchair and is a renowned disability activist, gets fan mail from the likes of Jane Alexander. The year she completed the Artist Diploma

program, Williamson received a coveted "Best of Boston" award from *Boston* magazine.

Now signed to RCA Victor, Eade is positioned to define a new generation of classic vocalists. Like a sommelier's recommendation, a *New York Daily News* review tells of her "sleek and supple voice, highly trained but earthy." In *Down Beat's* 1999 Critics Poll, Eade made her first entry into the league currently led by the likes of Cassandra Wilson and Abbey Lincoln. In a story on the "Vocal Jazz Explosion," she was winnowed further into an elite category of "artists with the guts to try something different, [who] have opened the door to a restive pop audience that hungers for melody and emotional substance."

In any given year, Eade and an assortment of her former students can be counted on to form the core of Boston Music Awards vocalist nominees. Thinking beyond categories, Eade says with pride that "our program for jazz vocalists is unique in that it really emphasizes well-rounded musicianship on every front. There isn't such a bold line separating jazz vocalists from jazz instrumentalists in the history of the music, and there certainly shouldn't be in education."

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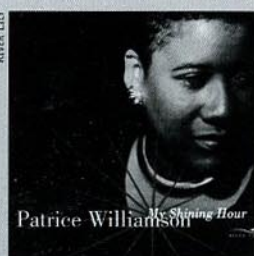
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RIVER LIDY



institution at a difficult time for jazz to get anyone's attention, anywhere. The jazz audience was changing, and the definition of what constituted jazz was being stretched in all directions.

In 1984, 15 years into the jazz program, dead center in its history, seven NEC musicians decided to form a big band called Orange Then Blue (see "1984: Colors"). Its models: Hollenbeck's Medium Rare, Byard's Apollo Stompers, and the music of George Russell (a centerpiece of every school year for the past 30 years) — along with the decidedly non-Kenton music Hollenbeck was now introducing to the NEC Big Band: Anthony Braxton, Gil Evans. Somehow, students were charting their own paths through the confusion; ingenuity and creativity survived. In addition to the Orange Then Blue crowd, students who thrived in the years between

Trumpeter Dave Douglas leads his quartet at the "jazz corner of the world," New York's Birdland, 1998.

JOSEPH A. ROSEN



JAZZ MASTERS MEET THE LOWE FOUNDATION

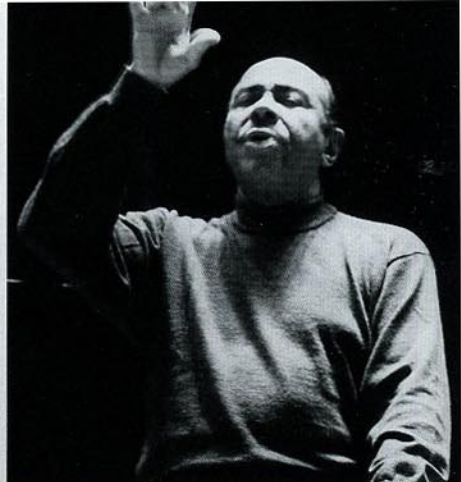
The ideal teachers of jazz traditions are the great artists who have shaped those traditions: the jazz masters. When the Conservatory ended a collaboration with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance last year, NEC Jazz Studies director Allan Chase was hoping to perpetuate something like the Monk program's Jazz Master residencies, but in a way that would benefit more than the six or seven students of that program.

That's when one of the best friends of jazz at NEC stepped in to help. The Florida-based Joe & Emily Lowe Foundation has been supporting jazz at NEC since 1996. Bruce Hauben, a local Lowe Foundation trustee, met with Chase and saw a good match between the Foundation's history of support and Chase's plan for week-long residencies: coachings and performances with several small ensembles of advanced players; master-classes and lectures that would be open to the public. The first Lowe Foundation

Jazz Master to visit NEC, in September 1999, was Benny Golson.

Renowned tenor saxophonist, coleader (with trumpeter Art Farmer) of the legendary Jazztet, Golson's immortality is ensured by his authorship of such standards as "Whisper Not." At NEC, student ensembles prepared this repertoire for a Jordan Hall concert. Student Javier Arau was left speechless by the experience of hearing Golson himself solo in Arau's audacious nonet arrangement of the master's "Killer Joe."

Hauben is concerned that "we lose the masters every year; fewer and fewer new people are coming along to continue the tradition." Allan Chase aims to redefine realms of mastery. Golson, in his quiet songwriter persona, is a step away from the lions' roar of soloists and bandleaders. This April, for the second Lowe Jazz Master, Chase plans to bring a rhythm section — perhaps a *young* rhythm section.



In a lecture on "The Value of the Ballad," Benny Golson reminds the hot-shots in the audience that "it's not how fast a person plays that shows what he's made of, but how slow. That's where there's nowhere to hide."

1974 and 1986 included some of today's fusion and "smooth jazz" stars — pianist Nelson Rangell, keyboardist Rachel Z, saxophonists Najee and Dave Mann — as well as some of the top creative musicians redefining jazz today: trumpeter Dave Douglas, Third Stream clarinetist Don Byron.

Looking back on these years, when he taught but did not follow the vagaries of the administration of the jazz program, Netsky notes the highlights in faculty hires. "Trumpeter John McNeil came here and started teaching undergrad required courses in jazz theory and repertoire. The Conservatory brought saxophonist Jimmy Giuffre, and got

drummer Bob Moses to move here from New York. Jaki was a thread that continued, along with Ran. Joe Allard, a big draw, taught saxophone and clarinet until around 1989. Then there were all these guitar teachers, like Gene Bertocini, Chuck Wayne, Jack Wilkins. Just like in the other parts of the school, people came for the studio teachers. That will continue to be the key to the program." In recent years, key faculty additions have included pianist Michael Cain, recruited by Robert Freeman, and guitarist John Abercrombie and trombonist/composer/arranger Bob Brookmeyer, brought in by Provost Alan Fletcher.

A current student sums up the accretion of talent on the faculty. "I was amazed to find out that NEC had Bergonzi, Garzone, Brookmeyer, George Russell — all at the same school. I mean, that's wrong, you know! That's like, too much wealth in one place, you know! But it's great, I'll take it!"

In 1986, President Laurence Lesser asked Hankus Netsky to take over a jazz program that by then was being managed by a graduate student, pianist Nancy Kennedy. His first move was to hire two magnet teachers — bassist Dave Holland and pianist Stanley Cowell — to ensure there would be a

1969



Saxophonist **Carl Atkins** forms Department of Afro-American Music and Jazz Studies with composer **George Russell** and pianist **Jaki Byard** on his faculty; first such program at a classical conservatory.

1974

Pianist **Jaki Byard**, trombonist **Phil Wilson**, and composer/arranger **Ernie Wilkins** chair jazz program while Carl Atkins completes master's degree in wind ensemble conducting.

Pianist **Ran Blake** forms Third Stream Department.

1978

Composer **William Thomas McKinley** hired as Jazz Studies chair.

1981

Percussionist/arranger **Pat Hollenbeck '78** hired as Jazz Studies chair.

1982

Pianist **Jack Reilly** serves as Jazz Studies chair for fall semester.

1983

Bassist **Miroslav Vitous** hired as Jazz Studies chair.

ANDY RYAN



We're trying to give students the tools to change music. — Allan Chase

strong rhythm section at the core of his program. Today, Cecil McBee and Danilo Pérez hold down those seats.

Performance opportunities for jazz majors had been limited to the occasional big band concert. "If you weren't in the big band, it was tough noogies for you," Netsky recalls. "I started the Keller Room series, I said each ensemble should perform every semester. When I was a student in the mid-'70s, ensembles didn't perform, they just rehearsed. And so of course sometimes people didn't show up." The Keller Jazz series has become one of Boston's favorite secret jazz clubs: early in the evening, two or three groups, coached by the likes of Moses or Bergonzi, display their wares in 50-minute sets. In 1986, this required a sea change in the jazz chair's commitment to administrative duties: today, Allan Chase estimates that he devotes two full weeks at the beginning of the school year to auditioning and assembling the Keller Room ensembles.

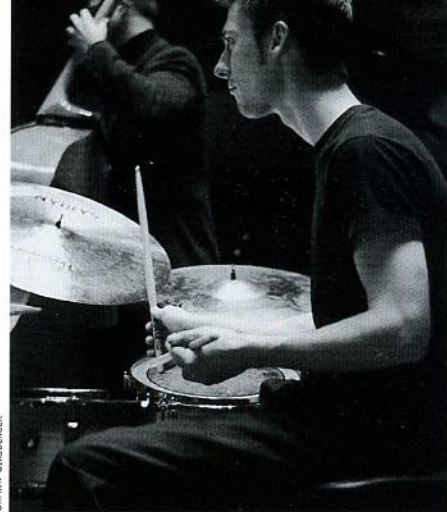
Jazz and Third Stream majors had always intermingled informally. As jazz chair, Netsky dove into the Third Stream as no one before him had, believing that improvisers of all stripes needed to come together. "Without Third Stream, it wouldn't have been the same kind of jazz department," Netsky says.

By the end of his administration, this was expressed in the Third Stream department's name change to Contemporary Improvisation and the integration of jazz and CI freshman curriculum.

Definitions of who could be a jazz student were changing as rapidly as definitions of what was jazz. "Jazz was looking for a new image at that point, so my thing was about the individual. I felt strongly about jazz as creative music, and what you could do with students was make sure they had the skills and the repertoire to create music. The rest of it was their own creativity and their own life experience. I also cared a lot about African roots of jazz, and I wanted to push those two things: African roots and creativity."

When today's jazz chair, Allan Chase, walks through the defining principles of NEC's program, you can hear echoes of Atkins, Netsky, Schuller, and other pillars upon whom NEC's 30 years of jazz stand.

"The ear comes first here, before theory," Chase says. "Everybody learns to hear melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre—and our students really excel because of that approach. The thing that goes hand in hand with that is that we nurture individual creativity in improvisation and composition. If your



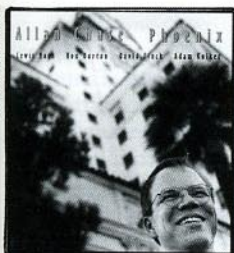
SHAWN GURBERGER

NEC Jazz Orchestra rehearsal, 1999.

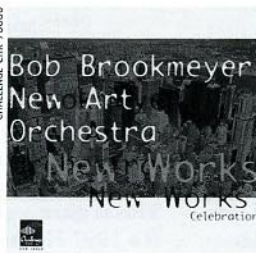
musical output is driven by a theory that you can get out of a book, then you're going to produce things that sound like things that have already been done. But our students tend to go on and do more original, creative things, and I attribute that to the emphasis on ear training and development of the ability to play what you hear in your head."

Chase looks to enroll students "who show signs of having a good ear, a feeling of rhythm, and creativity." It's up to each teacher to take it farther, each in his or her own individual way. "Ran Blake emphasizes deep memorizing,

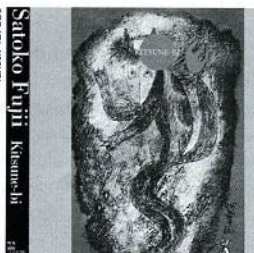
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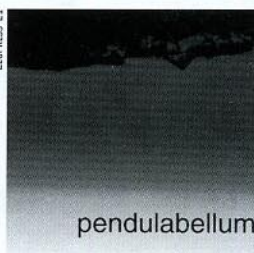
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1986

DIANE ASSEŒ GILLESCHES



Composer/reed player **Hankus Netsky '76, '78 M.M.** hired as Jazz Studies chair.

Miles Davis made honorary Doctor of Music.

ANDY RYAN



1989

Third Stream vocalist **Dominique Eade** is the first improvisation student to graduate from the Artist Diploma program.

1991

Drummer **Grisha Alexiev** is the first Jazz Studies major to graduate from the Artist Diploma program.

1995

Saxophonist **Michael Rossi** receives Doctor of Musical Arts degree, one of four in the program's first graduating class.

Seven-student ensemble joins entering fall class as part of NEC's four-year collaboration with **Thelonious Monk Institute**.

Third Stream Department changes name to **Contemporary Improvisation, C.I.** and Jazz majors share freshman curriculum.

1996

RICHARD FRANK



Saxophonist **Allan Chase '80** hired as Jazz Studies chair.

1999

Funding from the **Low Foundation** supports creation of a Jazz Master residency program at NEC.



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Jean Rife

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June 11-17

Contemporary Piano and Percussion

Performance Institute includes Stephen Drury's John Cage Symposium.

June 12-16

Teaching Jazz Improvisation

Institute with present and former NEC Jazz chairs Allan Chase, Carl Atkins, Hankus Netsky, and RCA recording artist, vocalist Dominique Eade.

June 26-30

Kodaly Pedagogy

Institute directors Mary Epstein and Jonathan Rappaport. Kodaly Certificate Music Teacher Training Courses, Levels I, II, and III; Vocal Vacation for children entering grades 4-6.

July 5-21

NEC Festival Youth Orchestra

Aaron Kula, director. For middle and high school students; New England tour.

July 5-August 4

Second Annual Thomas A. Dorsey Gospel Music Institute

Lectures, colloquia, concerts.

July 11-17

Klezmer in Context

Hankus Netsky (Klezmer Conservatory Band founder), Institute director. Jewish weddings and celebrations with a focus on the Eastern European and American traditions.

July 16-20

Organ Masterclasses

Yuko Hayashi at Old West Church.

July 24-28

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PAUL FOLEY



JEFF THREBOUTH



Each year guest artists come to challenge and stretch the top-rank players of the NEC Jazz Orchestra. It doesn't end there though: the rest of the year ranges from studying the jazz orchestra literature with Allan Chase to composer George Russell's intensive preparation of his music, as well as opportunities for students to write and arrange for the Jazz Orchestra and its companion, the Little Big Band. **Clockwise from left:** NEC Jazz Orchestra member Jason Palmer takes a solo, 1999; Maria Schneider conducts the Jazz Orchestra, 1998; during a visit with the Jazz Orchestra, Arturo O'Farrill leads a workshop with a student ensemble, 1999.

whereas I'll have my students transcribe, or compose what they wish they could improvise." These are the steps that ultimately lead to finding a language of one's own.

One crucial step—what made the school "hip" for Chase as a student 20 years ago: "It's a school that believes in change and evolution of musical ideas. I would say this is one of just a couple of jazz schools that's really oriented towards the future. Historically, I think that comes from Gunther's modernist aesthetic, which is epitomized by composers like George Russell. We have a lot of people who really love the jazz of the '50s and think you should learn it, but we don't have anybody who sees that as an end in itself.

"We're trying to give students the tools to change music."

But where does change take you? Allan Chase doesn't know what he'll hear next, and that's what excites him. "It's too early to tell when they're in school here; it takes them a few years to put together all these very diverse influences and the skills

they gained here and find out who they are. A lot of people go to New York. There's quite a few groups that have taken the tack of getting together to develop an original sound, putting out a CD, getting a Web site, and taking that out of New England. This is often a group effort." Pendulabellum is a 1997 Honors Ensemble that has already managed to take their sound as far as the prestigious North Sea Jazz Festival in the Hague. Rock-style band names seem to be a current trend, with Dead Cat Bounce, Guaranteed Swahili, and Onomatopoeia some recent entries in the vocabulary.

"Individual players moving to New York are still often part of a huge NEC alumni network," says Chase. "I moved to New York nine years after attending NEC, and everything good that I did during my six years there began with NEC connections. It really has to do with common interests and common goals. It's not a clique that excludes other people, it just happens that many people with those goals have been affiliated with this place.

I couldn't be a musician without NEC. —Satoko Fujii



JEFF THIBEAULT

Chase's ideal toolkit of alert ears, individual creativity, and a forward-looking aesthetic is in the hands of some of today's most visionary jazz artists, and informs how these artists hear the past as well as the future.

Ear training is about hearing every note, hearing the essence, hearing different. Don Byron uses his ears, his clarinet, his history as a black man, and the history of the music he plays — whether it's called klezmer, rap, or Ellington — to hear the common elements that give it all meaning. When asked by *Jazziz* magazine to write on the 1999 Ellington centennial, he asked readers to hear how "at any point [Ellington] was sneaking in the outest stuff he could think of and, mysteriously, making people like it. ... He was a true subversive, always involved in the act of creating 'ugly beauty.' ... Duke was a secret agent, tirelessly working to save the world from the same old shit."

Satoko Fujii came to NEC from Japan to study with pianist/composer Paul Bley. She now divides her creative impulses among ensembles of all sizes. When she capped a blizzard of Japanese recordings with a high-profile release on John Zorn's Tzadik label, she brought the music live to New York's Tonic club, where the *New York Times* called her "a dervish who is in control." With separate big bands in Japan and New York, she says "I have been working with these orchestras for two years, using the exact same score, and have found out they make totally different music. That doesn't mean good or bad.

I wanted to show how they are different, that is why I am making CDs with both." Fujii could have gone to what she calls "a school to become like somebody else, like some great musician — Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea — but NEC is a school to *not* become somebody else, you have to be yourself. I couldn't be a musician without NEC."

Javier Arau is a student of Bob Brookmeyer who is currently working on an hour-long piece for orchestra — "but instead of a string section, I only have one on a part, amplified. There's probably a little bit of jazz in everything I write, because that's what I like doing, but I wouldn't call it a hybrid." When he does write for "trumpets, trombones, and saxophones with rhythm section, I try to make them sound as far from brassy and jazzy as they can possibly sound. Put that 'band' onto 'jazz band,' and there's a connotation of 'brass band.' A lot of us hold up Maria Schneider on a pedestal because she's really mastered that approach of making a jazz band sound more like an orchestra: a jazz orchestra." NEC is the only place where Arau could study with Schneider's immediate mentor, Bob Brookmeyer, and play in a jazz orchestra led by her theory master, George Russell. Listening by preference to Russell, Brookmeyer, Mahler, and Latin music, Arau still doesn't know where his music will go. But he will keep heeding his teacher's constant admonition: "Give me more. Give me more development. Keep on developing until you can't go any farther. And then go farther."

With the exception of the historical LPs on page 8, the majority of the recordings shown in this story were released within the past two years, and represent a small portion of the extremely productive output of NEC's jazz alumni and faculty.

For more on 30 Years of Jazz at NEC, visit NEC's web site, www.newenglandconservatory.edu.

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JAKI BYARD 1922-1999

With collaborations ranging from Eric Dolphy to Charles Mingus to Duke Ellington, pianist Jaki Byard's path through the history of jazz is too lengthy to document in a brief summary. Born in Worcester, he brought bebop to Boston in the 1940s. He made a different kind of mark when he taught at New England Conservatory during the jazz program's first decades, starting in 1969. When he was found shot to death in his Queens, N.Y., home last February, the shock waves carried through many generations of jazz musicians. The following is a portrait in words by some who knew him.

Jaki Byard is the reason that I became a jazz pianist. ... I learned that he taught at New England Conservatory, whereupon a voice in my head said, "You mean you can actually STUDY with someone who plays like THAT? I've got to check that out." And within two years I was doing just that. ... Those of us with "conservatory training" tend to over-emphasize the more challenging aspects of music while forgetting that music, at its core, should be enjoyable. A joy to play and a joy to hear. With Jaki, I never saw the joy not there.

— **JEREMY KAHN '80** is a freelance pianist who lives in Illinois.

Jaki was very generous with his knowledge and his time, although he taught in a way that could be frustrating for those expecting a spoon-fed musical education on a predictable schedule. I remember walking into a lesson one day and asking Jaki what he thought I should work on. "Well, how should I know? You're the student!" he roared, comically. Jaki wanted students to take charge of their own search for knowledge—a lesson that not every student was ready to hear, but a lesson worth learning.

— **JOE BERKOVITZ '81** is a composer and software architect who lives in Massachusetts.

Jaki was wacky and wonderful—he has an approach to music which is similar to some of what happens here in Holland. He was not afraid of humor and he was willing to just drop what he was playing if he felt like it. I know that it hurt him career-wise but, ultimately, it's liberating. He also had a very deep knowledge of rhythm—I feel that no one can play like that anymore—it's something that will disappear with the generation. I remember a concert in Zurich with the ICP Orchestra and guests where Jaki was comping in such a subtle and skillful manner

that [drummer] Han Bennink could not keep up with him.

— **MICHAEL MOORE '77** is a multi-reed player who lives in Amsterdam, and names Jaki Byard as "my reason for going to NEC."

Jaki Byard was a big influence on different aspects of my career. I was in his big band for three years, and learned to arrange for big band from Jaki. I wanted to document our experience together through recording, so he played on my first recording for Muse, Manhattan Plaza (1978); in later years he appeared on other recordings of mine: Ebony Rhapsody (1990) and Manhattan Blues (1989) with Milt Hinton. He was a great teacher and a great improviser, and opened my ears up to different musical possibilities. He taught me how to write music and create music for big band. There was also the personal relationship: he was like a second father to me, and I spent a lot of time with him and his wife. You could say it's a sound teacher/student relationship that blossomed into a professional relationship.

— **RICKY FORD '83** is a tenor saxophonist who lives in Paris. Two years ago he brought Jaki Byard to Paris to make his last recording, on which Ford also plays.

What I remember most about Jaki Byard's class was his annual "history of jazz" lecture. He would remind us that when he was a child, Paul Whiteman was the "King of Jazz," Benny Goodman was the "King of Swing," and Duke Ellington was the "King of Jungle Music." The irony of these classifications was, of course, lost on no one in the class. Jaki would open the door of the classroom, let us take in a little of whatever Brahms or Chopin was being played down the hall, and close the door in mock disgust, complaining about being surrounded by "saloon music."

— **HANKUS NETSKY '76, '78 M.M.** is a multi-reed player who has taught at NEC since 1978. He chaired the NEC jazz department from 1986 to 1996.

One of the reasons why I came to NEC as a student in 1980 was that I loved Jaki's playing, and when I saw a picture in Down Beat of Jaki leading the Apollo Stompers at Michael's Pub on Gainsborough Street, with a caption saying that the band included NEC students, the idea of studying with someone with his experience, intelligence, sense of humor, and ability to incorporate historical styles into fresh new playing was very compelling.

— **ALLAN CHASE '81** is a saxophonist who has chaired the NEC jazz department since 1996.



Jaki was my shining light, and the only reason I ever went to NEC ... he was the baddest.

— **ALAN PASQUA '74** is a pianist who lives in California. He organized the West Coast memorial concert that launched the Jaki Byard Scholarship Fund at NEC.

I knew him as a man with three-dimensional humor. Some of it was a façade for a lot of anger, not only because of racial division in America, but society as a whole, the agony of an African-American. Some of it was on himself. Some of it was genuine humor and love of people. He was a walking encyclopedia of the history of jazz, but it lent authenticity as opposed to some kind of slickness.

— **RAN BLAKE** chairs NEC's Contemporary Improvisation department.

Jaki was one of the last of the great "two-handed" piano players, and his genius will be missed by all who knew him and his music.

— **CARL ATKINS** was NEC's first jazz chair.

Jaki Byard always personified the past, present, and future of jazz, wherever or whenever one might have been fortunate enough to experience his challenging ideas. An icon in the history of jazz, he isn't a household name, but most likely his low profile is the result of an irresistible need to constantly reinvent himself, the sure sign of the consummate artist.

— **GEORGE RUSSELL** has taught jazz at NEC since the program's formation in 1969.

The case of Jaki Byard's shooting death was still on "active" status with the Queens 103rd Precinct Detective Squad as of the end of 1999, and police could not comment on their investigation.

Byard's performances are increasingly available as CD reissues. *Anything for Jazz*, Dan Algrant's 1980 film on Byard, is available on video as part of *Three Piano Portraits* (Rhapsody Films).