

BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

JULY 2013

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Todd Marcus Jazz Orchestra Concert



PHOTO CREDIT: GARY ARTHUR YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY

From left: Jeff Reed, Todd Marcus, Brent Birkhead, Russell Kirk

Globalization drives an inexorable mingling of musical cultures from all over the world. Among Japanese teenagers, American country music becomes all the rage, and Jamaicans, too, embrace American country stars like Kenny Rogers and Marty Robbins. The Argentine tango takes hold among the Finnish, who blend it with their own folk traditions. Fifty years ago, the Beatles introduced East Indian elements into Western pop. And of course, the Chinese are famous for their virtuosity in Western classical music.

Right here in Baltimore, we have our own home-grown musical globalizer, bass clarinetist and composer Todd Marcus, who contributes to that infiltration with Middle Eastern-

flavored compositions reflecting his Egyptian heritage. Marcus recently released a new album, *Inheritance*, which features two of his most notable Middle Eastern-influenced compositions, "Wahsouli" and "Blues for Tahrir," the latter inspired by the events at Tahrir Square, in Cairo, Egypt.

There are some precedents for his Middle Eastern predilections: a variety of American jazz musicians have found themselves attracted to the sounds or at least the idea of Middle Eastern music, as evidenced by well-known tunes such as Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" and Juan Tizol's "Caravan," and by lesser-known tunes such as Clifford Brown's "Daahoud," Curtis Fuller's "The Egyptian" and Duke Ellington

(continued on page 2)



BALTIMORE JAZZ ALLIANCE

We are a 501(c)(3)
tax exempt organization

The Baltimore Jazz Alliance (BJA) is a grass-roots organization of jazz aficionados, musicians and venues dedicated to enhancing and promoting jazz in Baltimore and the surrounding areas. New members sharing this passion are always welcome as the BJA continues its efforts to build a stronger and better networked jazz scene. Together we can help this music thrive in the region and reward listeners and musicians alike.

BJA Priorities

- To develop new audiences for jazz
- To strengthen communication within the jazz community
- To improve media relations on behalf of the jazz community
- To bring greater visibility to the entire array of jazz offerings in the Baltimore region
- To provide greater access to performance opportunities for Baltimore-area jazz musicians

Visit www.baltimorejazz.com
for information about our
accomplishments and future goals.

Baltimore Jazz Alliance

847 North Howard Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Please direct your
questions and comments to:
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Todd Marcus Jazz Orchestra Concert

(continued from front page)

and Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan," among many others.

As for our own times, a casual web search for "Middle Eastern jazz" turns up names of numerous jazz groups that fall in that category. For example, there is JAAFAR, which melds Middle Eastern music with jazz, funk, and fusion. And there is Davka, blending Jewish klezmer with Middle Eastern rhythms and cadences; M'oud Swing, a Moroccan jazz sextet; Bviolin (Bahman Sarram), playing Persian jazz and Middle Eastern fusion; Asala, playing Hayati Arabic Jazz—and there are more.

In all the compositions, the brass and woodwinds, and particularly the sonorous tone of the bass clarinet, create spine-tingling dissonances that resolve into richly pleasing harmonies

Most of the other groups playing Middle Eastern jazz use some traditional Middle Eastern instruments, such as the pear-shaped, lute-like oud, along with standard Western instruments. Marcus is perhaps unique in performing entirely with American musicians and traditional jazz instruments. Most of these groups are based in Israel or elsewhere in Asia, and have found ways to impose the improvisational quality of American jazz on the themes and sounds of their own cultures. Marcus, born and raised in the United States, reverses that pattern by rooting his compositions in the rich and varied soil of American swing, blues, and bebop

while introducing influences drawn from his Middle Eastern heritage.

It would be too easy to exploit certain cartoonish, stereotypical features of Middle Eastern music. As Robert Shahid writes in a recent review of *Inheritance*, "It's no easy compositional task combining the two musical cultures without sounding hokey and snake charmer-ish" (or belly-dancer-ish)." But as Shahid says, "Marcus hurdles that difficulty with ease." Marcus's compositions are best heard when performed by his nine-person jazz orchestra. With an ensemble of tenor and alto saxophones, flutes, trumpet, and trombone, and rhythm section, he brings to his Middle Eastern-themed tunes great richness of harmony and rhythm.

The mood is sometimes festive, sometimes brooding and elegiac, sometimes passionate and frenzied—but always full of energy, intelligence, and conviction.

On Sunday, June 16th, the nonet gave a Father's Day performance at the 14 Karat Club on West Saratoga Street. The personnel of the nonet has varied over the years, but they are always among region's best musicians. On this occasion, in addition to Marcus, the group consisted of saxophonist Gary Thomas, who directs jazz studies at Peabody; Columbia, Maryland natives Alex Norris (trumpet) and Alex Brown (piano); New York-based trombonist Alan Ferber; and Baltimore natives Jeff Reed (bass), Brent

(continued on page 4)

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PHOTO CREDITS: GARY ARTHUR YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY

From top left: Alan Ferber, Jeff Reed, Todd Marcus / Russell Kirk, Gary Thomas / Alex Norris / Alex Brown
 Brent Birkhead / Irene Jalenti / WEA's Doc Manning, who emceed the event / Eric Kennedy

Todd Marcus Jazz Orchestra Concert

(continued from page 3)

Birckhead (flute & alto sax), Russ Kirk (flute & alto sax), and Eric Kennedy (drums). A guest appearance was made by the exotic-looking, smoky-voiced vocalist Irene Jalenti, singing "Alien," a song written by composer and photographer Gary Arthur Young.

Multiple influences may be heard in the compositions—not only Middle Eastern, but Latin, classical, and American blues. For example, Marcus explains that his tune "Collage" was influenced partly by the music of the late-romantic Austrian composer Gustav Mahler and by the theme music of the weekly radio show *This American Life*. In all the compositions, the brass and woodwinds, and particularly the sonorous tone of the bass clarinet, create spine-tingling dissonances that resolve into richly pleasing harmonies. Hypnotically repetitive rhythms suddenly shift, catching listeners off guard. The music conveys exoticism and mystery, adventure and discovery. The mood is sometimes festive, sometimes brooding and elegiac, sometimes passionate and frenzied—but always full of energy, intelligence, and conviction.

The exotic mood was enhanced by setting of the 14 Karat

Club: down a narrow staircase, one enters a dark, basement-level room with black walls and a large mural of a big-eyed, sinuous, reclining African lady clad only in necklace and bracelets. A buffet dinner of traditional Southern American fried chicken and potato salad helped remind us of the American roots of the music.

Jazz, that quintessentially American music, has now spread worldwide, where musicians hailing from Iceland to Ghana to the Caribbean impart the flavors of their own traditions. Likewise, American musicians like Todd Marcus are using jazz to explore their own inheritance.

The 14 Karat Cabaret is an ongoing series of casual performances, music, dance, film and video in an informal nightclub setting. It is a non-profit, artist-run program of Maryland Art Place. The Cabaret is supported by public admission and in-kind contributions of local businesses. This concert was made possible by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council Touring Artists program and Eubie Blake National Jazz Institute and Cultural Center.

— LIZ FIXSEN

BJA'S BALTIMORE JAZZ COMPOSERS' COMPETITION

and the winners are...



PHOTO COURTESY OF TODD BUTLER

TODD BUTLER



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICO SARBANES

NICO SARBANES



PHOTO COURTESY OF IAN SIMS

IAN SIMS



PHOTO COURTESY OF ETHAN HELM

ETHAN HELM

Details about the outcome the **BALTIMORE JAZZ COMPOSERS COMPETITION** and its winners will be revealed in the August issue of *The BJA Newsletter*.

The second **BALTIMORE JAZZ COMPOSERS' SHOWCASE** will be held September 29th, 2013 at Loyola University's McManus Theatre.

Dr. Phill's Big Band at Caton Castle



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN TEGLER

As we arrived, the band was already on the stand. Several familiar faces greeted us, including trombonist Charles Funn and saxophonists Whit Williams and Larry Prascus.

We had a chance to chat with leader and left-handed drummer Dr. Phill Butts. Phill grew up in a musical family in Norfolk, Virginia and later worked with Gladys Knight and B.B. King. He retired as a music teacher at Arundel High School. Dr. Phill said that the guys get together to preserve the big band sound that they love and feel is an important part of jazz history. The band has been together for about a year and the average age of the members is 60. There are four trumpets, five trombones, five reeds and piano, bass and drums—a little brass heavy, as we quickly confirmed.

How many jazz spots have come and gone while
Caton Castle soldiers on, bringing us great jazz?

The band kicked off with Ellington's "In a Mellow Tone." What would we do without Duke? On this number the brass immediately overbalanced the reeds, making them sound weak. Next up was a spirited big band arrangement of Joe Zawinul's "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy," which closely followed Cannonball Adderley's original arrangement. Then it was time for some Basie. "Jumpin' at the Woodside" featured the tenor of Whit Williams. The crowd loved it! Ballad time brought forth trumpeter John Collins, who has known and played with Doc since high school, with a nice rendering of Johnny Burke and Bobby Haggart's "What's New?".

Back to Duke. "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" not only featured . . . but introduced vocalist Julie Hall, who did a very nice job even though she had to compete with the overbearing brass section. A little more pianissimo please, Doc, and try some brushes.

Next came "The Man I Love," a ballad that Ms. Hall

learned when first singing jazz at Howard University. Another musical treat from her came with "My Funny Valentine." Hall wound up her appearance by going a little bit commercial with a tune Dean Martin introduced called "Dance With Me." The band handled this one nicely in mambo time. Conclusion on Julie: this girl can sing!

The band came back with Sonny Rollins's "Tenor Madness," featuring the tenors of Williams and Prascus. This one had the audience popping their fingers even though the brass almost drowned out the soloists.

The male vocalist, "Flynnatra," made the next three numbers, "Chicago," "That's Life," and "Fly Me to the Moon" totally forgettable. These just didn't fit and dampened an otherwise enjoyable concert.

Trumpeter Dave Russell brought things back to life with a pleasant offering on "My Way," written by Paul Anka but made famous by Sinatra. "Time Check," a tune from the Buddy Rich book, rounded out the set with, of course, the leader featured. Doc's nice solo put me in mind of Lionel Hampton's work when he got serious behind the kit.

All in all, it was an enjoyable set, but the biggest kick was watching a bunch of guys having fun playing the music they love! It was also fun seeing old friends like Rosa Pryor-Trusty and WEAA's blues master "Big Jim" Staton. And don't forget Ron Scott and all the good folks at Caton Castle. How many jazz spots have come and gone while Caton Castle soldiers on, bringing us great jazz? Bless 'em.

Dr. Phill Butts and the band will be participating in a Battle of the Big Bands with the Bayside Big Band and the Dale Corn Capitol Limited Orchestra at Blob's Park on Sunday, August 11 from 1 pm to 6 pm. Blob's Park is located at 8024 Max Blob's Park Road, Jessup, Maryland.

JOHN TEGLER

Host of "Jazz Straight Ahead" – WEAA FM
President of Wings Productions

Gene Okonski Brings Jazz to Café de Paris

As a dedicated jazz fan, I think nothing of making the half-hour drive from southern Howard County up to the jazz venues in Baltimore. But how many Baltimore jazz fans are aware that just as quick a drive to the Columbia area will take them to some great live venues such as the Stanford Grill in Ellicott City, The Great Sage in Clarksville—and Café de Paris in Columbia?

Tucked into a back corner of an office building in a suburban commercial development near MD Routes 100 and 108, Café de Paris would seem an unlikely spot to find great jazz. But that's what I found on a recent Friday night, when I heard pianist Gene Okonski play with sidemen Larry Kinling (bass) and Tim Ghiz (drums). From time to time, owner Erik Rochard, a conservatory-trained multi-instrumentalist, would pop over to join the group on flute.

When we arrived, Okonski was performing Chick Corea's "Spain" solo with a masterly touch. Throughout the evening, he and his sidemen interpreted many familiar standards with much creative flair and good taste. There's a certain art in playing at a restaurant: performers need to please a variety of tastes without dumbing down the music; they need to strike the balance between familiarity and inventiveness both in the repertoire and its treatment; and they need to control the volume while keeping up the energy level. Okonski's group handled these challenges with great finesse. The band played in the cozy bar, but the sound carried well into the adjacent dining room.

"... a wonderful escape for me—nourishment in a way. I always enjoy playing with other musicians who bring their own perspectives and styles."

The music fits in well with its ambiance of a 1950s French bistro. Rochard, who is French, greets guests at the door as if they are old friends; even our very attentive waiter had a French accent. The warm garnet and mustard walls are adorned with prints of Parisian scenes. The menu is described as "authentic French country cooking."

Okonski, with two degrees in engineering, is among several local jazz musicians who have STEM-related careers (that is, science, technology, engineering, & mathematics). But for Okonski, music has always been a passion. He began playing the piano by ear at age three, and he played a variety of instruments throughout his school years. At Colorado State University, he received a partial music scholarship and



played in the university's "A" big band. Since then, he has played in many small combos, big bands, and casual groups. He lived for three years in Japan, performing in the Aomori region of that country with local jazz musicians. And he spent five years in eastern Washington state, playing with local musicians there, including David Thorp and the Nu Jazz Coöp, who recorded an album titled *Soul Factor* in 1998. During the 1990s in the Washington, DC area, Okonski worked with Latin groups such as Alfredo Mojica's Latin jazz band *Locura* and occasionally with *Rumba Club*. He performs regularly with drummer John Cusick's group, *Jazz City*.

Okonski says, "I consider myself incredibly lucky to be able to perform on a regular basis. It is a wonderful escape for me—nourishment in a way. I always enjoy playing with other musicians who bring their own perspectives and styles. At some point I would like to spend a greater proportion of my time on musical pursuits." He performs regularly at Café de Paris on Friday evenings from 6 to 9 pm. On Tuesdays, pianist Otis and vocalist Mandy perform jazz from 6 to 9 pm.

— LIZ FIXSEN

Jazz is the only music in which the same note can be played night after night but differently each time.

— ORNETTE COLEMAN

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Harvey Siders, *Jazz Times*, March 17, 2010

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by other Baltimore jazz artists.

Performed by The BJA Quintet,
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JAZZ JAM SESSIONS

where the cats congregate
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* NOTE: As these events may be subject to change, it's always a good idea to CALL AHEAD for CONFIRMATION.

Mondays

Museum Restaurant & Lounge – Monday night jam sessions hosted by SPICE. 924 N. Charles Street. 8-midnight. 410-528-8630

Tuesdays

NEW! – Best Western Hotel & Conference Center – Tuesday night straight-ahead jam sessions hosted by Todd Marcus. More information at: toddmarcusjazz.com. 5625 O'Donnell Street. 6-9 pm. 410-633-9500

Mount Paran Presbyterian Church – Tuesday night open jazz jam sessions/book and poetry readings Tuesdays hosted by Derrick Amin. Sponsored by BJA. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. 10308 Liberty Road, Randallstown. 6:30-8 pm. Contact Derrick Amin: dricks101050@aol.com or 410-696-8574

Wednesdays

Eubie Blake Jazz Institute – SECOND Wednesdays. Outstanding house band hosted by Craig Alston. 847 N. Howard Street. Jazz jam with the emphasis on playing standards. Vocalists may bring charts. \$5 cover. 7:30-11 pm. 410-225-3130

Latin Palace – Wednesday night jam sessions hosted by Jesse L. Powers, Jr. and SPICE, 509 South Broadway. All are welcome. Dress to impress. \$5 cover. 8-11:30 pm. 410 522-6700

Phaze 10 – Wednesday night jam sessions at Phaze 10 hosted by April Sampe and The Next Level Band. 885 Howard Street. 8-midnight. 410-462-2010

The Big Easy – Wednesday night jam sessions at The Big Easy Restaurant & Lounge, 9820 Liberty Road, Randallstown. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. \$5/\$7. 8-11:30 pm. 410-922-1980

49 West Café – FIRST and THIRD Wednesdays. "Starr's Jazz Jam" at 49 West Street, Annapolis. Hosted by John Starr and house band. Musicians and singers very welcome! Delicious and reasonably priced food and drink available! \$10 cover. 7-10 pm. Reservations 410-626-9796

Thursdays

Tilted Pig – Thursday night jam sessions hosted by Tom Reyes and friends. 771 Washington Boulevard (in the Pigtown neighborhood.) House drums and PA system, featuring the band's Hammond B3 organ. 8 pm. 443-449-7622

The Place Lounge – "Tho' Down Thursdays" jam sessions hosted by Jesse L. Powers, Jr. 315 W. Franklin Street. Musicians and vocalists are welcome. 7-10 pm. 410-547-2722

If you know of local jam sessions, please share the information with our readers by emailing the details to the editor at: jazzpalette@gmail.com

WEAA's Cool Jazz Pick of the Month

MAYSA: *Blue Velvet Soul*



Fans of Maysa's brand of silky-smooth jazzy soul have never had to wait long between offerings, especially since the Baltimore native signed on to the Shanachie Label in 2006. Having recorded her sixth album in seven years for the label, Maysa

has been honing her solo chops with great success since stepping out of the shadow of British jazz/soul band Incognito with her self-titled debut on GRP in 1995. But she really stretches out on *Blue Velvet Soul*, bringing in musical influences from the past 50 years, from Motown's distinctive sound to disco to spoken word. And instead of sounding schizophrenic, *Blue Velvet Soul* feels more like a smooth journey that you wish wouldn't end.

Though Maysa has long been known for her warm mezzo-soprano that seems to touch listeners right through the speakers, this release feels even more personal than usual, perhaps because this year has been especially challenging for the Morgan State University graduate after losing her mother. "I am a storyteller, a counselor and a friend that helps others through the good times and bad through my music," she says on her website about the work. She also speaks about how her mother's passing affected her. "She made me promise to keep going no matter what. I was able to continue with my live shows in almost a robotic state but when it came time to create. I was lost. I finished this record with God's help and a little help from my friends."

The help served the project well. Grounded in a decidedly R&B/smooth jazz groove, the last track on the album, "Love Me Good," appears to be the first single, and it practically bounces, thanks to her gliding vocals. Maysa also tries her hand at spoken-word artistry to great effect with "Sophisticated Lover," and "I Care" takes a few notes from Marvin Gaye's "You're All I Need to Get By." She also does great justice to a cover version of "Quiet Fire," performed in the style of Nancy Wilson. But perhaps the most successful track from the album is "Good Morning Sunrise," a duet Maysa sings with Incognito leader Jean-Paul "Bluey" Maunick. It's the first time the two have paired up musically, and hopefully not the last.

CARLA E. WILLS

Producer/Co-Host, The Baltimore Blend

Assistant Music Director

WEAA-FM

MARS 4-tet at 49 West

With its rustic, simple décor, 49 West Coffeehouse, Winebar and Gallery in Annapolis provides an intimate ambience for listening to jazz. Even from a table at the back of the room you can see the band and hear the music well. On June 6th, I was fortunate to hear the MARS 4-tet there.

"MARS" is an acronym for the members of the quartet: Max Murray, bass; Jeff Antoniuk, sax; Frank Russo, drums; and Donato Soviero, guitar. Max Murray could not be there that evening, but substitute bassist Amy Shook was more than up to the task. The quartet's performance was one of the tightest, most powerful I have heard by any jazz artists at any venue.

The first set began with John Scofield's "I'll Take Less," consisting of extremely tough syncopated rhythms, played in unison with incredible precision by tenor sax and guitar. I was captivated from the start. Antoniuk uses a synthesizer, adding octaves, fourths, and fifths, thus enhancing the texture. Next we heard guitarist Donato Soviero's "Pan to the Left"—a dark and bluesy tune possessing a feeling of impending happiness. Antoniuk's melancholy, plaintive melody set a dramatic tone that evolved as the piece unfolded. Shook's bass solo was sweet and melodic. "Nothing Personal," by Don Goodrich, allowed a more free-form approach over a grounded bass/drums mixture, with saxophone and guitar playing complicated rhythms. The musicians were able to move easily back and forth between straight 4/4 time and intensely fast double time. Antoniuk played at a blistering pace, and Soviero's guitar performance was powerful and fast.



The MARS 4-tet preparing for their show at 49 West in Annapolis.

TOP FROM LEFT: Jeff Antoniuk,
Amy Shook and Donato Soviero

RIGHT: Frank Russo

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GLENN ANGUS



Russo's drum solo, complex and diverse, was executed with precision.

Also included in the first set were "Suddenly," and John Scofield's "Wabash III,"—a complex, upbeat tune with intimations of honky-tonk. Shook's bass solo contained some great references to "Billie's Bounce," and did I also hear some "Wabash Cannonball?" Next we heard another Soviero original, "Sleepless Blues," a moving tune in 5/4 time. Russo's simultaneous use of stick and brush created some sublime textures, and Antoniuk's synthesizer added another voice a fifth above, making this group a 5-tet. The first set concluded with "Cowboys," by Jeff Antoniuk.

During the second set we heard "Rudy's Blues" (Soviero), "The Red

One" (Pat Metheny), "Country" (Keith Jarrett), "Willow" (Antoniuk), and "Freight Trane" (Tommy Flanagan).

Antoniuk is a veritable beast on the tenor saxophone, on a par with any sax man I've heard. Soviero handles the guitar the way a neurosurgeon approaches brain surgery. During the course of the evening he probably hit every fret and string on his guitar. Russo soothes and caresses a drum set, creating just about every emotion a musician can fashion, and does so with power and finesse. Amy Shook's tasteful lines are consistently dynamic, yet sweet and sublime.

The MARS 4-tet will return to 49 West on July 4, this time *with* bassist Max Murray.

— GLENN ANGUS

I always challenge myself. I get out in deep water and I always try to get back. But I get hung up. The audience never knows, but that's when I smile the most, when I show the most ivory. — EARL HINES

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

BALTIMORE'S ARTSCAPE FESTIVAL July 19-21

A HUGE opportunity for BJA to spread the word about jazz in Baltimore, recruit members to BJA, sell our merchandise, etc. We will have a booth for the ninth year, and we need volunteer members to man our booth. Each member will work a two-hour shift, and those who have never done it before will be paired with a member who has. To volunteer, please email Bob Jacobson at bobboj@aol.com or call Bob at 410-415-5199.

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bja member notes

Welcome To Our New Members

Musicians: Ronald Bailey, Ethan Helm, Jeffrey Hoover,
Timothy Andrulonis, Nicolas Sarbanes / Other: John Kromkowski

Todd Marcus Featured

Todd Marcus was prominently featured in the June *Jazz Times* article on bass clarinet by Geoffrey Himes, "The Low End Theory."

Mark Osteen's New Book

Mark Osteen's book, *Nightmare Alley: Film Noir and the American Dream* was recently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Available at Amazon.com. The book includes a chapter on jazz in film noir.

bja member discounts

An die Musik offers 10% discount for BJA members for music purchases at the An die Musik record store.

Chamber Jazz Society of Baltimore is now offering BJA Members a \$2 discount off the general admission price. Just indicate your affiliation when ordering tickets.

Eubie Live! at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center at 847 N. Howard Street offers a discount to BJA members on rentals of its performance and events spaces.

Jazzway 6004 offers BJA Members a \$5 discount on performances at their venue.

The John Lamkin "Favorites" Jazz Quintet – July Performances

Sunday, July 7 11 am to 1 pm

St. Andrews Episcopal Church

2859 Tech Neck Road, Pasadena MD 21122

Darius Scott, Piano; Romier Mendez, Bass

Jay Moody, Drums,

Eartha Lamkin, Vocals

Sunday, July 14 4 to 7pm

The Tremont Hotel

225 St. Paul Street, Baltimore MD

Craig Alston, Saxophone; Allyn Johnson, Piano

Romier Mendez, Bass; John Lamkin III, Drums

Sheila Ford, Vocals

Saturday, July 27 6 to 9 pm

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Kris Funn, Bass; John Lamkin III, Drums

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JULY 2013

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"The Baltimore Blend"
with Robert Shahid,
Carla Wills &
news with
Beverly Burke
3am-8am (Mon-Fri)

"Cool Vibes in the Mid-Bay"
with Sandi Maltory
9am-1pm (Mon-Fri)

"In the Groove"
with Marcellus
"The Bazman" Shepard
1pm-5pm (Mon-Fri)

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