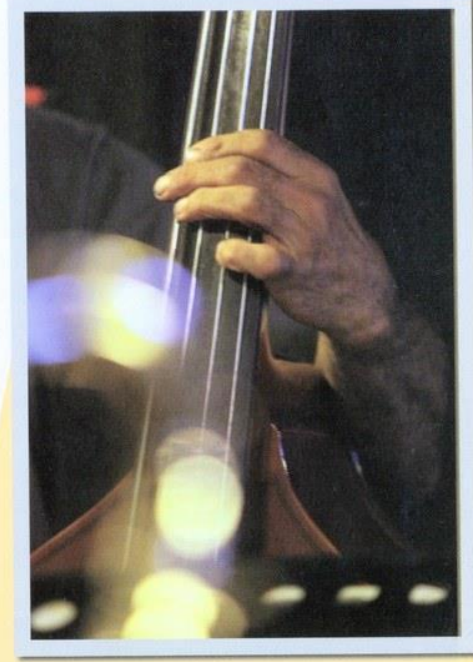
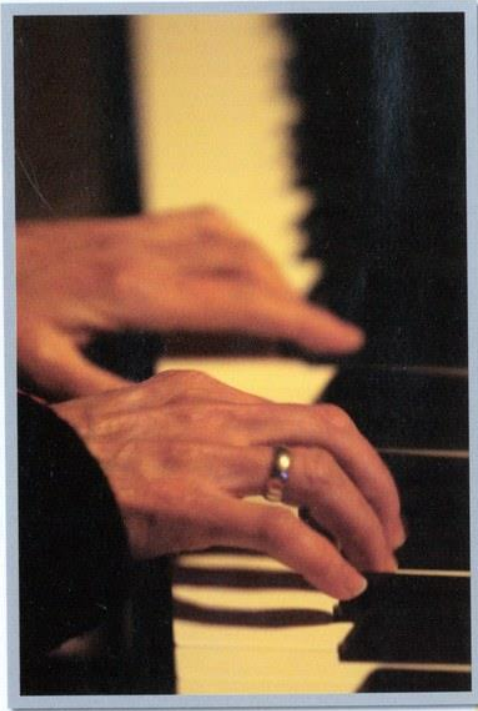


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# Jazz: Cool, calm, and collected in Santa Cruz

By Stacey Vreeken



Photos: Bill Lovejoy

Sometimes, artist and audience forge a special magic, lifting both to new realms of experience. It's an enchanted state that occurs so frequently in Santa Cruz that our small city on the Monterey Bay has become a magnet for music, especially jazz, on the West Coast. Dexter Gordon, Pharoah Sanders, Diana Krall, Cassandra Wilson, John Scofield, Max Roach, Pat Metheny, and Wayne Shorter are among the who's who list of jazz legends who have performed here.

We have all the ingredients to cast the perfect spell: receptive, knowledgeable listeners, dedicated well-equipped venues such as the Kuumbwa Jazz Center, and accomplished musicians who love playing Santa Cruz. There's also a community effort to educate and sponsor musicians and listeners of the future, both amateur and professional.

"The artists feel the energy and commitment," said Tim Jackson, cofounder and artistic director for the Kuumbwa Jazz Center. "It's also Santa Cruz itself. We're setting the table for a relationship between artist and audience." That relationship is so nice that *DownBeat Magazine* dubbed Kuumbwa as one of the great jazz venues in the world today.

"We give artists the tools and every reason to deliver a great performance," Jackson said. "Given a happy artist and a happy audience, the ability to create magic is that much greater."

The name itself embodies the very essence of jazz. "Kuumbwa" is a Swahili word that means "an act of spontaneous creativity."



Photo: r.r. Jones

(Above) Jazz trumpeter Terrence Blanchard performs in the intimate surroundings of Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz.

Now celebrating 40 years as a nonprofit, the Kuumbwa Jazz Center produces 150 concerts a year, featuring both legendary and emerging artists. The club is celebrating a \$100,000 renovation of its sound system with a series of concerts in February and March, culminating with the final concert on April 7: Dream Band, featuring pianist Benny Green, trumpeter Roy Hargrove, drummer Eric Harland, bassist Christian McBride, and saxophonist Joshua Redman.

"This is my favorite place in the world to play," said Green. That sentiment is echoed by many performers.

"Artists trust us to be treated well," Jackson said. "Audiences trust us that if it's at the Kuumbwa, it will probably be good. You have a community of people willing to support a new artist."

It's a principal that goes back to Kuumbwa's founding — putting the music first, and forming relationships with artists and volunteers who present the best experience possible.

"When in Central California, (artists) know where they can go," said Jackson.

"Tim (Jackson) has built that reputation. He's the real deal and

works with the artists," said musician and educator Dan Young.

In February Jackson was awarded the Eloise Pickard Smith Award by the Santa Cruz County Arts Commission for his "extraordinary and sustained level of commitment of time, leadership, and support of the arts."

The Kuumbwa Jazz Center started with a meeting of jazz lovers "with pure

hearts and an idea. We kept at it, and it grew," said Jackson. "In the mid-'70s, Santa Cruz was a cultural hot spot." Jackson adds, a flute player taught by local jazz legends and Cabrillo College instructors Ray Brown and Lile Cruse.

Bassist Brown has played with Stan Kenton, Roy Hargrove, and many others. Jackson was born in San Jose but spent much of time in Santa Cruz, surfing

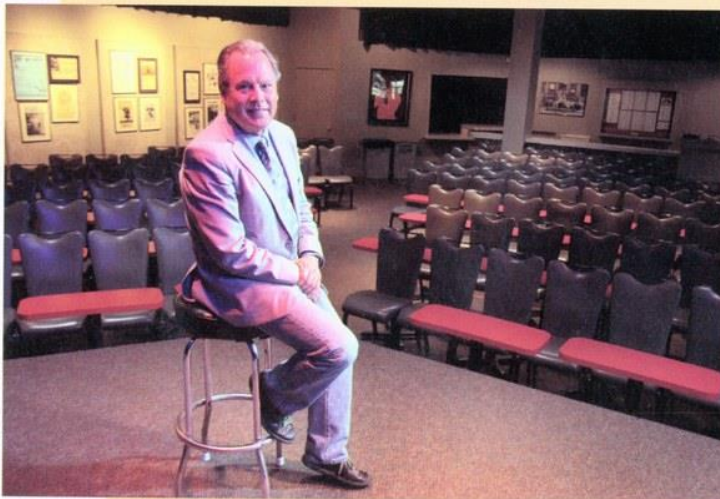


Photo: Bill Lovejoy

(Above) One of the founders and artistic director Tim Jackson has been bringing live jazz to the Kuumbwa stage for 40 years.

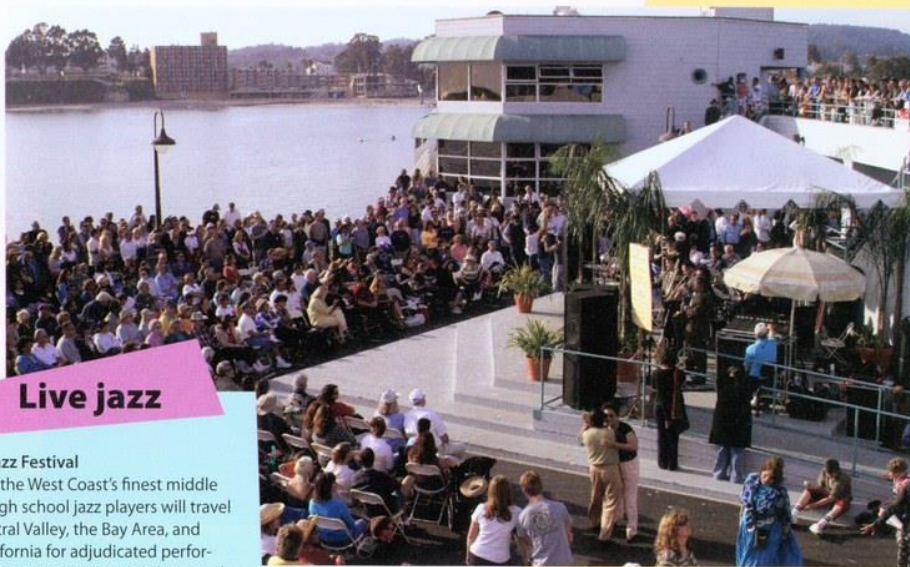


Photo: Dan Coyro

## Live jazz

### Santa Cruz Jazz Festival

Many of the West Coast's finest middle school and high school jazz players will travel from the Central Valley, the Bay Area, and Southern California for adjudicated performances and to participate in workshops at the 25th Santa Cruz Jazz Festival. Big bands, small combos, and ensembles play at the new music facilities on the campus of Cabrillo College in Aptos.

Last year's festival featured around 2,000 musicians in more than 100 different groups. Among local groups at the festival is the Cabrillo College band under Jon Nordgren, Harbor High School's band under Steve Wilson, as well as groups from Santa Cruz High, Soquel High, and Shoreline Middle School. Guest artists for 2015 include the Bobs, trumpeter Bobby Shew, the Cabrillo College Jazz Ensemble, saxophonist Bob Sheppard, and vocal jazz ensemble Voce. \$10 for two-day pass.

March 20 - 21  
Cabrillo College  
[www.santacruzjazzfestival.org](http://www.santacruzjazzfestival.org)

### Jazz on the Wharf

Top jazz musicians perform outdoors on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf and indoors at wharf restaurants with the Monterey Bay as backdrop. Free.

11 a.m.-5 p.m. April 26  
Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf

### Monterey Jazz Festival

Herbie Hancock, The Roots, Billy Childs, Gary Clark Jr., Michael Feinstein, Charles Lloyd, and many more headline the three-day festival in Monterey. The festival is world-famous for showcasing established and emerging artists. Tickets range from \$60 single-day grounds pass to \$360 for full weekend, arena package.

Sept. 18-20  
Monterey Fairgrounds  
[www.montereyjazzfestival.org](http://www.montereyjazzfestival.org)

(Above) Jazz on the Wharf held each spring on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf is one of the wharf's most popular events.

Shark's Cove near Pleasure Point, moving here in 1972.

In 1975, KUSP jazz programmer, Rich Wills, contacted Tim Jackson and Sheba Burney about forming a nonprofit jazz organization in Santa Cruz. The idea was to create a venue for the area's jazz musicians to perform and collaborate outside of the commercial establishments.

"I was doing a program at KUSP," says Burney, one of the Kuumbwa founders, "and one day got a note from Rich Wills which read, 'I have a project in mind that will interest you artistically.' We posted flyers inviting anyone interested to attend a meeting at the Vets' Hall."

That was the start of it. A lasting bond was formed that continues today with a dedicated band of volunteers and members.

"Audiences know and pay attention. We see the same faces," said Jackson. "It's attractive, comfortable, and safe."

It's a tight little group, really, a network of musicians and music lovers who have built a scene that's known throughout the West Coast. And they welcome all comers, including

legends such as drummer Art Blakey (the Jazz Messengers), pianist McCoy Tyner, and vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson. The first headliner, in 1975, was tenor sax icon Joe Henderson.

"If you're a legitimate jazz performer, you put Kuumbwa on your tour, it's built such a name for itself," said Young.

Hence the list of jazz greats goes on and on: trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Herbie Hancock, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, and more. Jackson is amazed at the opportunity to work with his musical heroes and to "experience their auras," he said.

"The legendary artist I've found to be interesting, level-headed and (imbued with) humanity?," said Jackson, who also is artistic director of the world-famous Monterey Jazz Festival. When you reach the level of Herbie Hancock or (saxophonist) Michael Brecker, it's more than musical ability that makes you special; it's your humanity.

"It's a way of looking at things, a heightened awareness," Jackson said.

That heightened awareness includes seeing jazz simultaneously as a history lesson, outreach to the world, and insight into yourself.

## Learn jazz

If you want a thriving music scene, you have to start by fostering music education — building the audiences and artists of the future.

Kuumbwa Jazz Center's Honor Band, Artist-in-Residence, Summer Jazz Camp, and Jazz Band B programs are a part of the wider music education and support network in Santa Cruz County. Most of the students won't go on to be professional musicians, but learning to play builds life skills such as how to work with others, listen attentively, and "be a well-rounded human being," said Kuumbwa artistic director Tim Jackson.

Former Pajaro High School music director Dan Young put it bluntly: "If you don't have a demographic that knows about jazz, you won't have an audience. It's not the most listener-friendly (music)."

Young said jazz training can be a base that takes the musician to other realms such as rock, reggae, and more. He is living proof of that, as leader of the Pleasure Point Brass Band, trumpet player for ska band Square Roots and reggae band Pure Roots, flugelhornist for "nu jazz" ensemble Utopian Dreams, and session man in a variety of genres.

Young is trying to resurrect the music program in the Pajaro Unified School District, but it is so underfunded that music appreciation is the only class he can teach. There aren't enough students who know how to play an instrument, and there is no music program in elementary or middle school to teach them.

Luckily music thrives at other schools in the county, including Soquel High School under Jim Stewart, Harbor High School under Steve Wilson, and Santa Cruz High School under Christina Latham. Students from those programs will perform at the Santa Cruz Jazz Festival, a gathering of middle and high school student musicians at Cabrillo College on March 20-21. Student performers are critiqued by professionals in the event, which is open to the public.

"We get almost 2,000 middle and



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(Above) Tenor saxophonist Mark Roths performs a solo with the Cabrillo 5:00 Big Band at the Santa Cruz Jazz Festival.

high school students attending that festival every year," said Steve Gray, president of the board of directors of the festival. Gray sells and repairs musical instruments and plays saxophone with a trio, a quartet, and with Jazz By 5, Little Big Band (swing), and the Cabrillo Big Band.

At the festival, during the command performance when the highest scoring bands play, you can see kids 12 to 13 years old playing solos on instruments, Gray said.

"Every year I do it, more because it's inspiring to me to see what kids are doing at this age," said Gray. He pointed out that the schools with the highest-funded music programs do the best, especially the bands from fine arts schools, where opportunities to learn, practice, and perform abound. Musicians and educators agree that more music programs are greatly needed in local schools.

"There are millions of studies that show kids in music excel in other programs. It's proven time after time," said Gray. Well, maybe not millions, but the research certainly does show the profound benefits of the school music experience.

Jackson and Young both attest to the advantages of music education, singling out Cabrillo College, especially teachers

## Play jazz

The Jazz Society of Santa Cruz County is where jazz lovers and players can meet informally for jam sessions and to share information on concerts and fellow players. They meet Sunday afternoons at Bocci's Cellar.

"It's for people in their young years to give them a chance to play with other people, and a chance for those who used to play to play again," said Steve Newman, director of the nonprofit society, which started in 2000.

"Our main activity is the jam. It's a place to go out and listen to others play and play yourself... It's all about fun. A pleasant recreational activity," Newman said.

The website ([santacruzjazz.org](http://santacruzjazz.org)) features a calendar and reference page where musicians can list what instruments they play, note if they are interested in finding others to play with, invite others to join a group, etc. There is also a newsletter that is sent out to 1,700 people to publicize different jazz events.

"It's amazing how many people enjoy and play jazz in Santa Cruz," Newman said. "I don't know of any comparable city of its size."



Photo: r.r. Jones

(Above) Mural artist Marvin Plummer (L) stands with Kuumbwa's Tim Jackson in front of Plummer's mural in Kuumbwa's Jazz Alley.

Lile Cruse and Ray Brown, who brought their professional backgrounds to the classroom. Cruse, who is best known for establishing the Cabrillo Stage musical theater program, also pioneered the jazz program and started the Cabrillo College Jazz Ensemble.

"Lile taught us to sight-read in the big band, and we played a lot. That's what a pro has to do," said Young, who credited Cruse with bringing jazz into the Santa Cruz mainstream and teaching the musicians who would later start the Kuumbwa Jazz Center.

Jazz instructor Brown, leader of the all-star Great Big Band, brought some serious credentials with him when he joined the Cabrillo faculty: He played trumpet and arranged for two jazz immortals — Stan Kenton and Count Basie — before he came to Santa Cruz.

Students learn from the pros, perform in the big band, and rub notes with seasoned musicians when the Santa Cruz Jazz Society meets for its Sunday jam session at Bocci's Cellar. That hands-on experience is one of the reasons Young called the Cabrillo College music program, now led by direct Jon Nordgren, the epicenter of jazz.

This music sensibility spreads throughout the county, from schools to amateur jazz jam sessions, from talented artists playing at small cafés and clubs to some of the best musicians in the world dropping by on a Monday night at Kuumbwa. ♪

## Hear jazz

The Jazz Society of Santa Cruz County offers a detailed calendar of jazz performances at [www.santacruzjazz.org/calendar.php](http://www.santacruzjazz.org/calendar.php). Here are a few of the spots that offer jazz regularly. Check calendar for updates.

### **Kuumbwa Jazz Center**

One of the most highly respected jazz-presenting institutions in the country, Kuumbwa presents artists of national and international renown in more than 150 concerts per year at the intimate 200-seat venue — plus concerts at the Rio Theatre and Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium. Monday night is the main night for jazz concerts but the club often has concerts throughout the week. Food, beer, and wine are available.

320 Cedar St., Santa Cruz • (831) 427-2227 • [www.kuumbwajazz.org](http://www.kuumbwajazz.org)

### **Bocci's Cellar**

The Jazz Society hosts jam sessions at this charming landmark Victorian on Sunday evenings and big band swing music Friday nights. The Italian restaurant also has a full bar, outdoor seating, two bocci courts, and a pool table.

140 Encinal St., Santa Cruz • (831) 427-1795

### **Wharf House Restaurant**

Panoramic views of Capitola Village and Monterey Bay set the scene for weekend jazz. Local jazz and blues bands are featured from 1-5:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays April-October on the top floor of the restaurant.

1400 Wharf Road, the end of the Capitola Wharf • (831) 476-3534 • [www.wharfhous.com](http://www.wharfhous.com)

### **Scopazzi's**

Joy of Jazz, Jazz Notes, Mood Swing Jazz, and Steve's Jazz Kitchen rotate Sunday nights throughout the summer at this historic former inn in the redwoods

13300 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek • (831) 338-6441

### **The Reef/Pono Grill**

Jazz jam 6-9 p.m. Tuesdays. Full bar and restaurant.

120 Union St., Santa Cruz • (831) 459-9876

### **Cava Wine Bar**

Steve's Jazz Kitchen 7:30-10:30 p.m. Wednesdays. Wine and small plates.

115 San Jose Ave., Capitola • (831) 476-2282

### **Severino's**

Don McCaslin and the Amazing Jazz Geezers 6-10 p.m. Thursdays. Full service bar and restaurant.

7500 Old Dominion Court, Aptos • (831) 688-8987

### **Center Street Grill**

Jazz Notes 6-8:30 p.m. Thursdays. Beer and wine, restaurant.

1001 Center St., Santa Cruz • (831) 423-4745

### **Aldo's Harbor Restaurant**

Variety of local jazz bands perform 11-2 p.m. Saturdays. Full bar and restaurant.

616 Atlantic Ave., Santa Cruz • (831) 426-3736