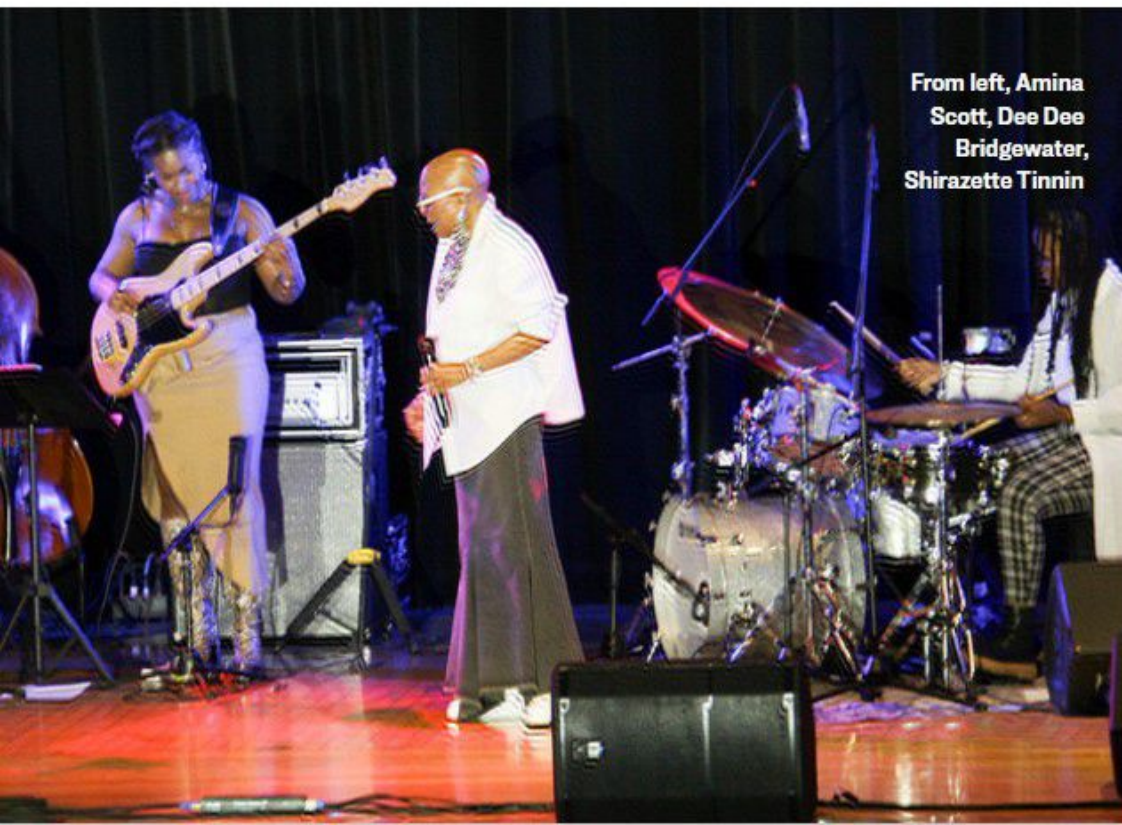


## Main Stage Concerts Featured Music with Important Messages

*“Strange Fruit” and “Black and Blue” Cited as Examples of Courage in Face of Racism*

BY SANFORD JOSEPHSON



From left, Amina Scott, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Shirazette Tinnin

Trumpeter Terell Stafford spent five years with saxophonist Bobby Watson’s acoustic quintet, Horizon, now considered one of the preeminent small groups of the mid-1980s to mid-1990s. The drummer in that band was Victor Lewis, who also appeared on Stafford’s debut recording as a leader, *Time to Let Go* (Candid: 1995).

So, when Stafford decided to record an album (La Coq Records: 2023), reflecting how the pandemic affected our everyday life, Lewis’ composition, “Between Two Worlds” was the natural choice to be the title track. At the opening main stage concert of this year’s Sarasota Jazz Festival, Stafford’s quintet led off with the Lewis composition, which, Stafford said, reflected “what we all do every day, how we would have to juggle during those three years living between different worlds.”

Stafford, who is Musical and Artistic Director of the Sarasota Jazz Festival, brought three band members from the album with him to Sarasota for the opening main stage concert on March 20: tenor/soprano saxophonist Tim Warfield, pianist Bruce Barth, and drummer Johnathan Blake. They were joined by bassist Philip Norris, subbing for David Wong, the bassist on the album. The band played several Stafford compositions from the recording that paid tribute to his family members. There was “Mi a Mia”, dedicated to his six-year-old daughter, and “Two Hearts As One” in honor of his wife, Carrie. But the showstopper was “Wruth’s Blues”, a pulsating blues number dedicated to Stafford’s mother, which was preceded by “Blues for JT”, a tribute to Stafford’s father that was not on the album but served as a catalyst for “Wruth’s Blues”. After Stafford wrote “Blues

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for JT”, his mother kept telling him how nice it was that he wrote something for his father. What she *really* meant, Stafford said, was ‘When are you going to write something for me?’”

“Two Hearts As One”, Stafford said, was motivated by Mia’s birth—“a 50th birthday present for me. I’ll never forget sitting in the hospital watching the two of them and thinking ‘What a gift God has given me.’” The song dedicated to Mia was inspired by his daughter coming home from piano lessons and saying, “Look, Dad, I can play this bass line.”

The concert also featured salutes to two other Stafford heroes (also on the album): Horace Silver’s “Room 608” and McCoy Tyner’s “You Taught My Heart to Sing”.

Vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master, following Stafford, honored some of her female



**LEFT: From left, Terell Stafford, Philip Norris, Tim Warfield, Johnathan Blake.**



**RIGHT: From left, Wycliffe Gordon, Kaleb Thompson, Adrian Cunningham, Alvin Atkinson, Jr.**

musical heroes—Roberta Flack, Nina Simone, Betty Carter, Billie Holiday, and Bettye LaVette.

She sang Donny Hathaway’s “Tryin’ Times”, recorded by Flack in 1969, which, she said reflected her current feelings. Before singing Simone’s “Mississippi God Damn”, the protest song about the racial turmoil of 1963, Bridgewater recalled going to Simone concerts, “sitting right up-

front. I wanted to study this woman.”

Bridgewater pointed out that “Mississippi God Damn” was written and performed by Simone in reaction to the deaths of four young Black girls in a white supremacist terror attack at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL. The song also focused on the killing of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the violence against

Blacks in the segregated South.

The Vincent Youmans/Irving Caesar standard, “Sometimes I’m Happy” was sung in tribute to Betty Carter, who performed it on a live album recorded at London’s Festival Hall, accompanied by pianist Geri Allen. Here, Bridgewater displayed her verbal pyrotechnics, utilizing her voice as a musical instrument as she interacted with the exciting

PHOTOS BY CAROL LORICCO



drummer Shirazette Tinnin, an Associate Professor in Berklee College of Music's Percussion Department.

In the most powerful segment of her concert, Bridgewater spoke of the courage displayed by Billie Holiday, who continued to sing Abel Meeropol's "Strange Fruit", about the lynching of Blacks in the South, in the face of controversy and threats by law enforcement. The song was rerecorded in 2021 by LaVette on her Verve album, *Blackbirds*, and Bridgewater performed the LaVette arrangement "in honor of two amazing women."

LaVette told *Rolling Stone* she rerecorded "Strange Fruit" in conjunction with ongoing protests against systemic racism and violence toward Black Americans.

In a shout out to John Coltrane, Bridgewater finished with Richard Rodgers' "My Favorite Things", featuring a powerful musical con-

versation between keyboardist Michael King and drummer Tinnin.

To say the Wycliffe Gordon Quintet came out swinging on March 21 would be an understatement. The gregarious trombonist promised some "good old good ones", and he delivered—Duke Ellington's "Pie Eye's Blues", Hoagy Carmichael's "Rockin' Chair", and Paul Barbarin's "Bourbon Street Parade", among the selections. Gordon also featured his rhythm section—pianist Kevin Bales, bassist Kaleb Thompson, and drummer Alvin Atkinson, Jr.—on a spirited performance of Charlie Parker's "My Little Suede Shoes".

In a more subdued moment, like Bridgewater the evening before, Gordon took a moment to address racism by performing Fats Waller's "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue" (lyrics by Harry Brooks and Andy Razaf). The song was intro-



Jazz Club of Sarasota President Nik Walker presents the Satchmo Award to Nancy Roucher

## Nancy Roucher Receives 'Satchmo Award'

IN 1959, I WAS A FRESHMAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, AND Nancy Hochman was a senior. I knew Nancy as the girlfriend of my fraternity brother, Jerry Roucher. Nancy and Jerry moved from Decatur, IL, to Sarasota in 1986, and Jerry, who passed away in 2013, became the second President of the Jazz Club of Sarasota in 1990.

Fast forward to 2017 when my wife, Linda, and I were planning to attend our first Sarasota Jazz Festival. I reconnected with Nancy (58 years later!), and we have become great friends. On Saturday, March 23, Nancy received the Jazz Club of Sarasota's Satchmo Award, created in 1987 to honor those who have made a "Unique and Enduring Contribution to the Living History of Jazz ... Our Original Art Form."

In addition to her support of the Jazz Club of Sarasota, Nancy has served on boards and leading arts and educational initiatives in the Sarasota area. In 2019, she received the Trailblazer Award from the Florida Alliance for Arts Education. She also created a jazz education program for students, Jazzlinks: Jazz Connects to Students, which has become a collaboration between the Jazz Club of Sarasota and the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe. And, she has been a JCS board member for 15 years, also serving for many years as Chair of the Music Committee. Congratulations, Nancy! —SJ



duced in the 1929 musical, *Hot Chocolates*, by Edith Wilson and was often performed by Louis Armstrong.

“Black and Blue” was one of jazz’s first efforts to comment on racism. Waller wrote the song for the musical comedy in which a dark-skinned Black woman would sing it as a lament, deploring her lighter-skinned lover’s loss of interest in her. Armstrong used the song as a comment about the difficulties faced by Blacks in a racist white society.

The band then played an exhilarating rendition of another Armstrong favorite, Don Redman’s “St. James Infirmary” with Adrian Cunningham on flute and both Gordon and Cunningham soloing with just their mouthpieces. The set ended with Juan Tizol’s “Caravan”, featuring an electrifying drum solo by Atkinson.

Other Sarasota main stage performers, on March 21-23, included

alto saxophonist Grace Kelly; saxophonist Valerie Gillespie and the Ladies of Jazz; a trio featuring organist Akiko Tsuruga, drummer Jeff Hamilton, and guitarist Steve Kovalcheck; drummer Paul Gavin and Mosaic; and pianist Chucho Valdes.

The main stage concerts were preceded on March 19 by the Jazz Trolley Pub Crawl, featuring 11 local bands. I sampled three of them—drummer Art Siegel’s Panama Drive, featuring an eclectic mix highlighted by Thelonious Monk’s “Straight No Chaser”; the Joe Bruno Band, a Dixieland group led by 96-year-old trumpeter Bruno; and Hot Club SRQ, gypsy jazz that got people up dancing.

Platinum Plus Level sponsor of the Festival was the Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax, and Platinum Level sponsors were the Davis Family Arts Foundation and Jazz Cruises-Michael Lazaroff.