

THE JAZZ ARTS FOUNDATION

Keeping Jazz Alive in Lexington

By Melissa R. Wilkeson

Artists in Lexington never cease to amaze me...their tenacity or, as my high school drama teacher would say, stick-to-it-tiveness is the reason we have so many groups in central Kentucky who continue to work hard to build an awareness for the art and grow an audience. Whereas building such an awareness is important to all artists and arts groups, the Jazz Arts Foundation (JAF) has actually made this its official mission statement and, thereby, the very core of its existence: "To enhance the awareness of jazz as a performing art."

Current President of the JAF, Dave McWhorter, says "I'm astounded by it...we're making an impact with music in the community."

Founded in April 1990, the JAF is a nonprofit educational organization that has sponsored many events and programs over the past several years to accomplish its mission. Currently, the focus of the organization is in producing *Jazz: Live at the Library*, a series of free concerts held on the second Thursday of every month through June 2009 at the Central Branch of the Lexington Public Library in downtown Lexington. These live jazz performances highlight many of the premier musicians from Lexington, Louisville, Cincinnati, Morehead and the surrounding region. Even though they have found an audience of regulars and have more people discovering the series every month, it was a challenge to get the series off the ground.

"We had musicians who would play for free just to get the music going," said McWhorter, remembering when they were struggling to get the series started. After receiving its original grant from LexArts, JAF needed to find matching funds to succeed in making the series a reality.

"We almost didn't find matching funds for the grant," said McWhorter.

Then, as a result of one of its regular e-mail newsletters, JAF found what they really needed...a sponsor. Enter Jamey Aebersold, a businessman who had become extremely successful in perfecting a jazz play-along instructional CD series. Aebersold, a jazz musician in his own right, has done much in his native Indiana, among other places, to further music education in schools and the art of jazz. He saw the e-mail and approached the JAF to ask one question: "How can I help?"

"Jamey's awesome," said McWhorter. "He does so much to keep the music alive...he's kind of my hero."

An exciting aspect to *Jazz: Live at the Library* is a partnership with the University of Kentucky Department of Journalism to bring the series to television. Every night at 9:00 pm on the library channel, channel 20, anyone can tune in to see the latest concert in the series. Thanks to JAF board member John Clark, a professor of communications at UK, helping to facilitate the partnership allows students to get valuable hands-on experience in TV production, and the JAF gains a new venue to create awareness for jazz music and its organization.

All the work accomplished by the JAF over the last fifteen years has been a direct result of the dedication and support of an all volunteer board of directors made up of musicians, educators, business leaders and jazz enthusiasts. Like so many of its fellow arts organizations, the JAF relies heavily on the generosity of their volunteers for its continued success as well as individual memberships and tax-deductible donations to keep the music playing.

With such strong dedication to its art, the Jazz Arts Foundation has made many contributions to our community over the years and, if Dave McWhorter and his fellow board members have anything to say about it, they will continue to raise awareness for the art of jazz in Lexington and central Kentucky for many years to come.

For more information on the history of the Jazz Arts Foundation or how to become a member, visit www.jazzartsfoundation.org



Jazz: Live at the Library concert with McWhorter, pianist Orville Hammond and Matt Davidson on bass.