

# An Evolution of Partnerships:

THE MILT HINTON JAZZ PERSPECTIVES  
CONCERT SERIES

BY EUGENE MARLOW, PH.D.



To produce and sustain a successful jazz concert series over a period of 18 years, especially in a big city, commuter college educational setting, requires not only great musicians, it also requires effective partnerships within and outside the institution. At Baruch College (the City University of New York), a combination of collaborations helped launch and has sustained the Milt Hinton Jazz Perspectives concert series since 1992.



## The Hinton Jazz Series' Inception

In 1992, Baruch alum Aaron Silberman, founder and CEO of the American Thermoplastics Company (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and a long-standing Baruch College board

member, made a generous contribution of \$20,000 to support a jazz concert series at Baruch College. A clarinetist by avocation and a jazz aficionado, Silberman wished to bring to Baruch accomplished jazz artists who, through workshop/lectures and performance, would inform and provide an educational and musical aesthetic for Baruch students and faculty in particular, and the Baruch community in general.

It was a natural that the series was named in honor of bassist Milt "the Judge" Hinton who, for many years, led a Monday afternoon jazz workshop at Baruch.

## An Evolution of Partners

A committee was formed in 1992 to administer and curate an annual jazz concert in Hinton's name. I was fortunate to be asked to join the Committee as one of its original members. Today the Hinton committee consists of professors from various departments, administrators, and, from time-to-time, a stu-

# lessons learned

dent from within the College's Weissman School of Arts and Sciences. All have a high interest in jazz as America's indigenous music.

Over time, the committee has partnered with several Baruch alums, maintained a close working relationship with the Dean of the Weissman School of Arts Sciences (one of Baruch's three schools), the Baruch College Fund, the College's Sidney Mishkin Art Gallery, the Baruch Performing Arts Center, the College's press office and mailroom staff, the Buildings & Grounds Department, and the Security office, among other college functions. The Committee has also partnered with outside organizations, such as the Jazz Journalists Association, Chamber Music America, the Manhattan School of Music, and numerous New York City jazz clubs for speaker and musician contacts.

Nurturing and maintaining these partnerships is an on-going effort all in the service of ensuring the concert series named in Milt Hinton's honor continues to have a life.

## The Concerts

The November 1992 inaugural concert starred Hinton, himself, together with his picks for an "All-Star" ensemble: Seldon Powell (saxophone), Bob Rosengarden (drums), Mike Walters (saxophone and woodwinds), Derek Smith (piano), Jay D'Amico (piano), Mike Grey (trombone), and John "Bucky" Pizzarelli (guitar).

This magical first concert in Mason Hall auditorium, the college's ground floor 600+seat auditorium in its landmark 23rd Street/Lexington Avenue building, saw famed trumpeter Wynton Marsalis join the group during the concert's second half. Mason Hall was packed. We could not have asked for a more successful first concert.

Since 1992 the series has hosted a range of jazz musicians and groups, from well known to up and coming, from duos and trios to big band, straight ahead jazz to R&B, bluegrass to Afro-

Cuban. We have even mounted concerts featuring zydeco and "crossover" styles. Identifying and contracting with jazz musicians in New York City – called by some the jazz capital of the world – is the easy part. The difficult part is everything else.

## A Passing, A New Building, New Challenges

On December 19, 2000, beloved Milt Hinton, who attended virtually all of the annual concerts since 1992 as a very special guest, passed away. We



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had always reserved front row center seats for him and his wife, Mona. She continued to come to the concerts until illness prevented her from attending. She passed in 2008.

In early September 2001, Baruch College opened its Vertical Campus two blocks from the College's landmark 23rd Street Building. The opening of the Vertical Campus marked a significant change for the College and the Hinton series. The flow of students and faculty gradually changed.



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## lessons learned

Prior to the 2002-2003 academic year all annual Hinton concerts were held in Mason Hall, usually in November at 1 p.m. on a Thursday – so-called “club hours” when no classes are offered. Even if students and faculty had not planned to attend the concert, hearing the sounds of the performers



through the doors of the ground floor auditorium drew them in. The move of student classes and faculty offices to a new building only two blocks away, however, presented new challenges. Even though we ramped up promotion activities, we began to see an eventual change in audience size.

In response, the Hinton Committee – now headed by myself (since 2000) and co-chair Gary Hentzi, Associate Dean of the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences – saw the need to change the series’ “perceived value.” It was increasingly apparent future funding would be a “challenge.” While seemingly counter-intuitive, part of the answer was to expand the series from an annual event to four per year while maintaining the same level of funding. This meant smaller groups, concomitant smaller performance fees, and ultimately cozier venues, but the overall

impact and impression was a more frequent, more beneficial contribution to the College’s mission.

The Committee re-shaped concert scheduling. Starting with the 2002-2003 season, we strategically partnered with annual themes. For example, while the first fall concert now usually took place in October, a second event was scheduled in early December to coincide with the holidays. A third concert took place in February to coincide with Black History Month, and a fourth was scheduled for April during Jazz Appreciation Month. We also planned early evening concerts, in addition to club-hours presentations.

We experimented with several campus venues to attract students, ultimately deciding on the 175-seat Engelman Recital Hall, located in the lower level of the Vertical Campus. The hall offered numerous advantages, including a mint-condition Steinway Concert Grand, a plentitude of dressing rooms close to the stage, a Green Room, and outstanding acoustics. A New York Times music critic called Engelman “...one of the best recital halls in the city.” We have hosted smalls groups there quite successfully, including Grammy-nominee R&B singer Carla Cook who presented us with our first “sold-out” SRO performance in the Vertical Campus, and the Turtle Island String Quartet that won the 2006 Grammy for best “crossover album” just one week before their scheduled performance. Again, a sold-out performance. In Engelman we have also hosted sextets, octets, even the 19-piece Manhattan School of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra under the direction of multi-Grammy nominee Bobby Sanabria.

Around this time Paul Ash, a Baruch College alum, and Chairman of Sam Ash Music, became another partner. He generously donated a brand new drum kit and a bass amp for specific use by Hinton concert musicians.

### A Shift In Emphasis

The 15th season ended with a lecture/demonstration on legendary pia-

# lessons learned

nist Art Tatum given by yet another Baruch alum, Arnold Laubich. This lecture was also part experiment. We perceived a need to create an even stronger link between the Hinton series and the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences' pedagogical mission. We began to plan in the direction of lecture/demonstrations as opposed to purely performance-oriented events.

We also began to program broader variety. For example, the 2008-2009 season (#17) focused on performers who reflected the "globalness" of jazz: Indian-born jazz guitarist Rez Abassi and his trio; Italian-born vocalist Roberta Gambarini and her trio; multi-Grammy nominee Nuyorican drummer Bobby Sanabria who delivered his masterful "clave celebration" lecture/demonstration; and Columbian-born jazz harpist Edmar Castaneda (with trio).

## BPAC: A Marketing and Media Partner

A significant change in our marketing modus operandi evolved simultaneous to the opening of Baruch's Vertical Campus in September 2001: the creation of the Baruch Performing Arts Center (BPAC). The Hinton Committee readily accepted the concept that the concert series should partner with and be placed under BPAC's "event" umbrella because of its strength in marketing, promotion, and stagecraft. Prior, Committee members handled all these functions. The Committee, together with BPAC's Managing Director, John Malatesta, and his staff, has forged a mutually advantageous collaborative relationship. The Hinton Committee selects, contacts, and negotiates with



jazz performers. We also host each concert. In turn, BPAC provides the facility and stage and house crew for a performance, contract and check payment preparation, and much needed marketing.

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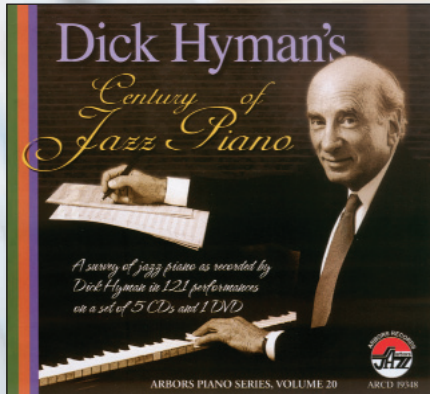
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Our partnership with BPAC has also extended our audience base. In addition to Baruch students, faculty, and administration, the Hinton series now attracts larger community audiences.

Ensuring an audience for each event has been a matter of effective promotion partners. Concerts/events receive advanced publicity in *The Ticker*, Baruch College's student newspaper. BPAC organizes the design and reproduction of postcards distributed to all 500+ faculty and administration at the College, as well as throughout the City University of New York system. Four-color posters are displayed at key junctures on the Baruch College campus. Smaller versions of the concert poster are distributed on each floor of the Vertical Campus.

An electronic news release prepared by myself is distributed via email to various internal and external promotion outlets, including a College web site dedicated to the Hinton series. The news release is also sent to Baruch College's manager of press relations who places the concert information with various newspaper and magazine calendar editors. The news release headline is also posted on the college's internal electronic bulletin boards, a system of flat-screen monitors throughout the Vertical Campus building, managed by the College's Office of Student Development.

The Committee also partners with professors. By cross-referencing course schedules with scheduled Hinton events, we encourage professors to assign each concert/event to their respective classes as an extra credit writing assignment or as an assignment for the entire class. This strategy directly ties into Baruch's overall mission of exposing students to broader cultural opportunities.

### The 18th Season: More Adjustments

As of this writing, America is still in the throes of the worst recession in its economic history since the Great Depression of the 1930s. When the Hinton Committee met in the fall of 2008

to begin considering the 18th season it was apparent then it was going to be financially challenging; we would have to be prepared to make adjustments. Sure enough, in early 2009 we met with the Weissman School's Dean, Jeffrey Peck, to talk about probable budget cuts for the forthcoming 2009-2010 academic year.

We were prepared. Prior to this meeting the Committee had a Plan B: a four-event season, this one, equally divided between performances (Trio Da Paz and the Andy LaVerne/John Abercrombie Duo) and two lecture/demonstrations (the four-hour PBS documentary "Latin Music USA" with Bobby Sanabria and "The Blues As It Lives Today" with Jazz Journalists Association President Howard Mandel). The Dean appreciated our cooperative response.

### People Partnerships Make It Happen

In truth, the Committee could not have mounted an 18th season or started planning for a 19th were it not for the support of the College's administration. Fact is, even though our budget has been curtailed and this may be a budgetary fact of life for the next couple of years, there is strong support for the series at the top. It is no accident. Committee members, both emeritus and current, have worked hard in the last 18 years to create and nurture partnerships within and outside the College. Without these numerous on-going partnerships and collaborations, the Series would have faltered. The Hinton Committee looks forward to many more seasons to come.

*Eugene Marlow, Ph.D., is a professor in the Department of Journalism and the Writing Professions, Baruch College, the City University of New York. He was among the original members of the Hinton Committee formed in 1992 to organize jazz concerts in Milt Hinton's name. He became co-chair in 2000. Dr. Marlow, himself a jazz pianist and composer of over 200 jazz and classical compositions with five CDs on his resume, has taught a range of courses in media and culture at Baruch since 1988.*

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