

41st Tri-C JazzFest goes virtual Aug. 21-23

by Jarrett Hoffman



The [Tri-C JazzFest](#) kicks off its all-virtual 41st edition this weekend, August 21-23, with a focus on local acts and a schedule that's designed like a variety show. Each night's free 7:00 pm presentation will be made up of recent pre-recorded performances, live music, interviews, and features from the archive.

Of course, precautions around COVID-19 played a large part in how it all came together. "If we were going to try to honor our local musicians and our local scene, we needed to make something that would be as safe as possible," director Terri Pontremoli said by Zoom.

During the month of July, one band per day recorded a short set inside the 600-seat Simon and Rose Mandel Theater on the eastern campus of Cuyahoga Community College. "Because we're part of a big institution, the COVID safety guidelines were very serious, and the musicians felt really good," Pontremoli said. "We got them in and out, and kept it all as clean as possible."

Those sessions proved to be a powerful experience for everyone involved. "I have to tell you, it was so heartwarming to see the musicians play together, because it had been such a long time, and they were so grateful." She recalled one message that bassist Kip Reed delivered backstage. "He said, 'Playing means so much to me that I literally dream about it these days.'"

So much strong material came out of the sessions that the third day was added to what was originally a two-day schedule. “And we still couldn’t use all of it,” Pontremoli said. That footage turned out to be striking not only musically but also visually, thanks to colorful lighting and a unique stage setup carried over from the production of a play. “It really looks like a cool jazz set.”

The live component of the festival will be admittedly small — a different duo playing each night — but Pontremoli hopes that it brings that extra dose of excitement that comes with live music. It’s also there for the sake of variety, to help this virtual festival hold the attention of listeners who may be more easily distracted at home.



Pontremoli and her JazzFest co-host this year, Dominick Farinacci, will introduce the acts and bring in an element of conversation, chatting remotely with bassists John Clayton and Christian McBride. “We’re also going to show some old footage, like [Tommy’s Birthday Bash](#), where we had Al Jarreau singing *Foolish Heart* — that was so incredibly beautiful and wonderful,” she said. “So we’ll be able to take a little trip down memory lane.”

Shifting the spotlight to Terri Pontremoli herself, I asked her about two awards she’s received over the past year. In 2019 came the Robert P. Bergman Prize from the Cleveland Arts Prize. Then this past spring, she was selected by the Jazz Journalists Association to be part of the 2020 class of “Jazz Heroes.”

“It’s funny because you just do what you do, and you never think about getting awards for anything,” Pontremoli said. (She also showed a sense of humor about receiving honors during the time of a pandemic.) “But how wonderful for jazz and for JazzFest to get that recognition from the Arts Prize. And the beauty of it was that Jules Belkin presented me the award that night — I was very touched.” The JJA recognition also came as a surprise to her, though she reasoned that JazzFest *did* just reach its 40th anniversary last year, which couldn’t have hurt.

Talking about that milestone got Pontremoli thinking bigger-picture about jazz and Tri-C, and why they’re a good match. “One reason is that a community college is so democratic — it’s about everybody. The school is so diverse and inclusive, as is jazz.” Another reason stems from where the Metro Campus is built, “upon the very grounds that housed

some of the old jazz clubs starting in the late '30s — sacred ground for jazz, in a way. So it's a perfect home for us.”

Click to view the scheduled [lineup](#) for JazzFest, [register](#) for a free ticket, or [donate](#) to Tri-C's Student Emergency Fund. Performances will stream on the Tri-C JazzFest [website](#), YouTube [channel](#), and Facebook [page](#).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com August 17, 2020.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)