

## 45th Tri-C JazzFest comes to Playhouse Square June 20-22

by Jarrett Hoffman



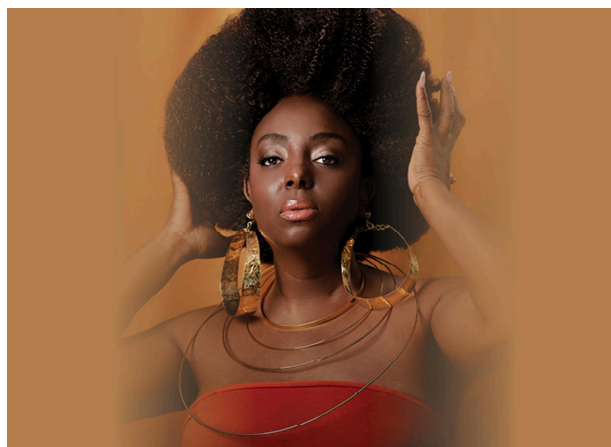
The 45th annual Tri-C JazzFest Cleveland will be held in Playhouse Square from Thursday-Saturday, June 20-22. And as always, the schedule is stuffed full in the most wonderful way.

The centerpiece is the indoor lineup of national and international artists, but there are also the outdoor stages showcasing regional musicians as well as students. Not to mention the meet-the-artist talks, jam sessions, and all the activities aimed

at kids — plus, speaking of a festival that is stuffed full, the cooking demonstrations and the array of food trucks.

I spoke to JazzFest director Terri Pontremoli to unpack everything in store. We began with the indoor lineup (tickets [here](#)), which kicks off on June 20 at 8:00 pm with the a cappella group **Take Six**, known for their blend of gospel, jazz, R&B, and pop. I noted to Pontremoli how their undeniably fun, charismatic style makes for a great opener — just as vocalist **Ledisi**, considering all the power and spirit in her voice and her stage presence, is the perfect closer (June 22 at 9:00 pm).

But Pontremoli pointed out something else those two acts share. “They both have kind of a crossover audience,” she said. “Ledisi is interesting because soul and R&B people love her, but there are a lot of jazz people that love and respect her as well, especially after she started doing some of that Nina Simone material. And my understanding is that she’s going to incorporate that material as well.”



Next we moved to the **Bob James Quartet**, who will perform on June 21 at 7:45 pm in a double-bill with **Marcus Miller**. “Bob James — God, he’s one of the most sampled guys out there,” Pontremoli said. “And I love the fact that, like Herbie, he’s in his 80s. So is **Charles Lloyd** (June 22 at 7:30 pm, with his Ocean Trio II). And they’re just playing great, and playing with wonderful musicians.”

Pontremoli then turned the spotlight to the Festival’s pianists. That list begins above with Bob James, and continues with Jason Moran as part of **Jason Moran and the Bandwagon** (June 21 at 5:00 pm) and Renee Rosnes as part of **Artemis** (June 22 at 2:30 pm).

Plus, Charles Lloyd’s Ocean Trio II includes pianist Gerald Clayton, vocalist **Cécile McLorin Salvant** (June 21 at 6:30 pm) will be joined by pianist Sullivan Fortner, and the supergroup known as **Scary Goldings** (June 21 at 10:00 pm) includes keyboardist Jack Conte of Scary Pockets as well as organist Larry Goldings.

“These are all such wonderful musicians, so it’s just going to be glorious,” Pontremoli said.



She also highlighted this year’s international artists, who will be sharing a bill on June 22 at 5:15 pm. “We have **Diego Figueiredo**, who is a wonderful Brazilian guitarist, and then **Harold López-Nussa**, who is an up-and-coming Cuban pianist. And that set will be wonderful.”

Turning the focus back to Artemis, that New York-based supergroup that was recently named the 2024 Mid-Sized

Ensemble of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association, Pontremoli said, “I love the fact that we have an all-women’s group with Artemis. The musicians are stellar, and they’re all composers and arrangers in their own right.”



One act with a special local connection is **Flying Home: A Trumpet Summit** (June 22 at 2:30 pm, sharing a bill with Artemis). That will bring together three decades of Tri-C JazzFest Jazz Academy alumni in Sean Jones, Dominick Farinacci, Tommy Lehman, and Curtis Taylor — not to mention the alums who can be found in the rhythm section, which features Jonathan Thomas (piano), Graham Guerin (bass), Gabe Jones (drums), and Patrick Grainey (percussion).

“You know, we’ve always had education at the center of what we do,” Pontremoli said. “And in the last few years, we have really grown our Saturday program. Sean Jones, Dominick Farinacci, Patrick Graney — there are all these people who have come through our doors that were part of this program. And now we have over 50 students on Saturday coming here to learn how to play this music.”

Speaking of education, there’s also the JazzFest Academy Summer Camp. “This year we have 82 kids,” Pontremoli said. “We’re just thrilled. And the kids really find their home. My favorite story is, a couple years ago this kid went to his first day of jazz camp. When his mother picked him up, she said, ‘How was your first day?’ And he said, ‘You don’t understand. I have found my people.’ So it’s a beautiful thing.”

That summer camp culminates in the students’ own performances at Tri-C JazzFest — which brings us to the **free, outdoor portion of the Festival**. “The kids get to play on the **Next Gen Stage**, and they get tickets to all the shows, and they’re so happy. It’s just wonderful to see them walking through the Festival with their parents in tow.”



Performances at the officially titled William M. Weiss Foundation Next Gen Stage will alternate with those at the SeibertKeck Insurance Partners **Outdoor Stage**, which features local and regional professionals.

Friday's lineup at the Outdoor Stage includes Moises Borges Brazilian Jazz, Ernie Krivda and the Fat Tuesday Big Band, Horns And Things, Sam Blakeslee Large Group, Ronell Regis, Sam Hooper Group, and Carlos Jones and the P.L.U.S. Band.

And Saturday's schedule will showcase Da Land Brass Band, Humbly Submitted, Ava and the Hitmen, Bobby Selvaggio 11, Chris Coles' Gleam, Thomas Schinabeck Quintet featuring Sean Jones, and Sammy DeLeon y su Orquesta. Click [here](#) to see the full outdoor schedule.

Another attraction is **Jazz Kitchen**, which includes artist interviews, food sampling, and cooking demonstrations with artists serving as sous-chefs.

"They're asked to hold this, or stir this, or cut that. I think a lot of musicians love to cook, so they like this idea. It's a twenty-minute hang, you know? So it's really fun and interesting, and it also speaks to Tri-C with its Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management program. Very often, the chefs who are doing these segments are people who went through our program and have their own restaurants or their own food businesses." Click [here](#) for the Jazz Kitchen schedule.



Also free and outdoors is the **Kids Corner**. "We've got all kinds of things — a chalk artist, balloons, bubbles, and face painting," Pontremoli said. "Then we also have this wonderful group from Quebec called **Sax-O-Matic**. They're a saxophone quartet, and they play all kinds of wonderful, fun things, from Stevie Wonder to anything that's jazz. But they're like street musicians, and they're very entertaining and funny. And they'll interact with the children too.

We'll have an instrument petting zoo." See the Kids Corner schedule [here](#).

And don't forget about the **jam sessions** after 10 pm. "Those are lots of fun because professional musicians play with students, but we also get surprise walk-ons by some of the national artists. And the students really do understand how special this all is, that they're getting such a wonderful education. Whenever we have master classes, the national musicians always play with the kids, and that experience alone is amazing."

Pontremoli brought up the saying *each one, teach one*. “I think that most jazz musicians remember somebody who gave them an opportunity and invited them up on stage. That’s their way of giving back.”

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