



HISTORY OF JAZZ: *OXYGEN FOR THE EARS*

History of Jazz: Oxygen for the Ears is a full-length documentary film about one of the only truly American creations – Jazz music. This award-winning documentary film tells the story of jazz from its inception in New Orleans to its migration to the nation’s capital and expansion to Harlem while capturing the past, present, and future of the jazz community. The film ends with an inspiring performance by Grammy Winner Esperanza Spalding performing at the White House for jazz lovers President Barack Obama and the First Lady Michelle Obama.

Narrated by the familiar voice of Erik Dellums (from hit TV series *Homeland*, *The Wire* and *Homicide: Life on the Street*), the story begins in the late 1800s utilizing photographs, recordings, performance clips, and interviews to spin this fascinating tale. The film details how Duke Ellington discovered his musical skills in D.C. alongside other Jazz geniuses such as Thelonious Monk. Elder statesmen included in the film are Monk’s bassist Butch Warren, legendary saxophonist Buck “mailman” Hill and Miles Davis who appear with young talents like saxophonists Antonio Parker and Brian Settles, pianist Dwayne Adell, vocalist Akua Allrich and of course Grammy award winning bassist and singer Esperanza Spalding.

Prominent clubs, such as the Howard Theatre (opened in 1910), Bohemian Caverns (opened in 1926), HR-57 Center for the Preservation of Jazz and Blues, and Twins Jazz are featured, along with brand new venues and historic jazz spots whose doors have long been closed.

Fortunately, Dr. Billy Taylor, Gene (Joe) Byrd – who brought Boss Nova music to the U.S. and Jimmy ‘Junebug’ Jackson, three titans of the Jazz world were interviewed for the film before their passing. In fact the film’s title came from Jackson, who said, “Music is a powerful thing...fresh air for your life. You need jazz to breathe. It’s just like oxygen!”

Stefan Immler, executive producer and director of *History of Jazz: Oxygen for the Ears*, is by day an astrophysicist at NASA’s Headquarters. The co-producers are Tom Abel (a professor for Cosmology at Stanford University) and Cathy Abel (an editor and writer). The film is presented by GIGANOVA Productions LLC and distributed by Indican Pictures.

The unique twist of the film is that History of Jazz: Oxygen for the Ears is the first documentary to zero in on the story of the vibrant D.C. jazz scene which has long been ignored in film in lieu of New Orleans or New York. Film festival awards include Best US Documentary at the International Film Festival Manhattan, Best Music Documentary in the World Music and Independent Film Festival, merit awards in the

Lucerne International Film Festival in Switzerland and Indie Fest in California, runner-up in the People's Choice Award at the San Francisco Black Film Festival, and finalist for Best Music Documentary at the Park City Film Music Festival in Utah.

Synopsis:

History of Jazz: Oxygen for the Ears is a documentary chronicling the trials and triumphs of Jazz in America. The film showcases Jazz's rich history through candid interviews with its living legends and original music played by contemporary stars of the historically powerful Washington, D.C. jazz scene. Meet its key players, its followers, its past and its promising future. Told from the landmark of Washington, D.C., the film shows how jazz history was made and continues to be made in the Capitol today. Through rare recordings and revealing interviews with jazz giants like Esperanza Spalding, Billy Taylor, Buck Hill, Butch Warren, Eric Lewis, Chuchito Valdes, among many others, *Oxygen for the Ears: Living Jazz* takes the viewers on an emotional journey through historic and present-day jazz moments.

Q & A with Filmmaker Stefan Immler

History of Jazz: Oxygen for the Ears director and executive producer Dr. Stefan Immler, is working as an astrophysicist at NASA's Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and as faculty member of the University of Maryland. He is the owner/founder of GIGANOVA Productions LLC, which created the film. He lives on Capitol Hill with his wife, Dr. Silvina Gatica (a professor of Physics at Howard University), who was assistant producer on the film.

Q: Why did you make this film?

A: We made the film because when my wife and I moved to D.C. about ten years ago, we were just blown away by the incredible jazz scene here that we'd never heard of. We'd been travelling all our lives, and had never heard D.C. and jazz in the same sentence. But if you think about it, D.C. is the second hottest city for jazz – second to New York City.

Q: What were the most fascinating aspects of making this film?

A: We didn't have much jazz in Germany where I grew up. If I wanted to see jazz, I would have had to pay \$100. But here in D.C., you can go out any night and see world class jazz live for almost free.

And we'd notice that the jazz venues really packed. So, D.C. has a very supportive audience that really appreciates jazz, which is deeply rooted in the D.C. community. It took us a while to really break into the jazz scene, to establish trust. But when we did, we met all these amazing legends that are still living in this area: (saxophonist) Buck Hill, (saxophonist) Andrew White, (percussionist) Maurice Lyles, (bassist) Butch Warren, (vibraphonist) Lennie Cuje. We met up with Billy Taylor at the Kennedy Center, and he told us about when he checked out Jelly Roll Morton in the 1930s, who actually owned a jazz club for three years. Most people don't know about that. He had a jazz club – The

Jungle Inn – in the building that's right next to Ben's Chili Bowl. So, we have people in D.C. who were right there from the very beginning of jazz.

Q: What has been the response to your film?

A: We've been just so surprised by the response to the film. Making a film can be a very lonesome endeavor for a long time. We acquired 200 hours of footage. Then, for nine months, I was in my editing suite creating the movie and discussing it with my producers in San Francisco. The film was finally completed after working on it really hard for more than four years, and we had no idea how people will respond to the film.

Last year we had a test screening for all participants in the film at The Atlas, and I was very nervous. But the response of the 200 people in the movie theater was overwhelmingly positive! When the audience gave us standing ovations after the test screening, it suddenly hit us that we made a film people responded very well to. And then, encouraged by that, we submitted the film to festivals around the world – in Europe, in Canada, and all across the United States. Just getting accepted in a film festival is a great honor. They get hundreds of submissions and select only a handful for screening. Within just a few months, we've been selected for screening at 17 festivals, and have won a few major awards.

Q: What are your hopes for this film?

A: There're no big record labels in D.C. and very few promoters. It's very difficult for jazz musicians to get their music to big audiences beyond just gigging at clubs. We felt very strongly that there's a story to be told here. We saw that there were so many amazing jazz talents living in D.C. that we wanted to give them a platform to bring their music to the world. We just wish we could have featured even more of them in our film! We're also looking forward to working with educators at the high school and college level to supply the film for use in classes covering American and African-American history and, of course, music and jazz. Independent film makers like us usually struggle bringing a film to a wide audience, so we were all thrilled when Indican Pictures invited us to visit them in Hollywood and offered us to distribute the film! The ultimate goal of the film is that one day people from all around the world will come to visit D.C. not just for the monuments and to get a glimpse of the White House, but to go out at night and enjoy world class jazz music.

Awards:

Winner ***Best Music Documentary*** at the World Music and Independent Film Festival

Winner ***Award of Merit*** at the Lucerne International Film Festival

Winner ***Award of Merit*** at The Indie Fest

Runner-ups for the ***People's Choice Award*** at the San Francisco Black Film Festival

Finalist for ***Best Music Documentary*** at the Park City Film Music Festival

Nominated ***Best Documentary Screenplay*** World Music and Independent Film

Festival Nominated ***Best US Documentary*** at the International Film Festival

Manhattan, NY

Featuring:

Dwayne Adell, *pianist*
Akua Allrich, *singer*
Larry Appelbaum, *Library of Congress*
Tedd Baker, *saxophonist*
Elijah Jamal Balbed, *saxophonist*
Colombia Barrosse, *US Department of State*
Bohemian Caverns Big Band
Joe Byrd, *guitarist and bassist*
Ravi Coltrane, *saxophonist*
Lennie Cuje, *vibraphonist*
Dr. Bernard Demczuk, *George Washington University*
Luis Faife, *saxophonist*
Marc Fisher, *The Washington Post*
Zach Graddy, *saxophonist*
Buck Hill, *saxophonist*
DeAndrey Howard, *trumpeter*
Jimmy "Junebug" Jackson, *drummer*
Knud Jensen, *saxophonist*
Tamika Love Jones, *singer*
Grace Kelly, *saxophonist*
William Knowles, *pianist*
Eric Lewis, *pianist*
Brad Linde, *saxophonist*
Maurice "Brother" Lyles, *drummer*
Donvonte McCoy, *trumpeter*
Prof. Connaitre Miller, *Howard University Music Department*
Antonio Parker, *saxophonist*
Prof. Chris Royal, *Howard University Music Department*
Little Royal, *singer*
Blair Ruble, *Keenan Institute*
Mark Ruffin, *SiriusXM Satellite Radio*
Mark Saltman, *bassist*
Brian Settles, *saxophonist*
Esperanza Spalding, *singer and bassist*
Dr. Billy Taylor, *pianist*
Michael Thomas, *trumpeter*
Chuchito Valdés, *pianist*
Prof. Patrick Warfield, *University of Maryland Music Department*
Butch Warren, *bassist*
Ernie Watts, *saxophonist*
Andrew White III, *saxophonist, oboist and publisher*
Ben Williams, *bassist*
Steve Wilson, *saxophonist*

Credits (abridged):

Director	Stefan Immler
Producers	Tom Abel Cathy Abel Stefan Immler
Associate Producer	Thomas Walker
Written By	Stefan Immler Thomas Walker
Cinematography	Stefan Immler Manuel Lavalle Corey Williams Mike Ratel Silvina Gatica Anthony Lafleur Thomas Walker
Editor	Stefan Immler
Narrated by	Erik Todd Dellums
Additional Narration	Darryl Tittley
Production Assistants	Silvina Gatica Dario Stuth Enrico Stuth Adam Bryant
Sound Recording	Lucumi Studios Takoma Media
Production Stills	Carlyle V. Smith, Soulfotography Images
Production Legal	Amy E. Mitchell, PLLC
Graphics Design	GIGANOVA Productions LLC

Jazz Performances Filmed at:

HR57 Center for the Preservation of Jazz and Blues
Bohemian Caverns
Columbia Station
Jazz Loft @ Red Door
Twins Jazz
Utopia
Indulj Lounge
Westminster Presbyterian Church
The Kennedy Center Jazz Club
Jazz in the Garden National Gallery of Art

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