



NEWS

How The Jazz Coalition Commission Fund Is Helping More Than 100 Jazz Musicians In Need As The Pandemic Wears On

The COVID-19 pandemic wounded the jazz community, leaving musicians wondering where their next check would come from. Many of them just got much-needed help courtesy of the Jazz Coalition—and they've offered an ocean of curated audio and video in response

MORGAN ENOS | GRAMMYS / AUG 10, 2021 - 7:16 AM

Aaron Parks felt left behind. The original wave of COVID-19 had just hit, and the GRAMMY-nominated jazz pianist's livelihood and chosen form of self-expression—which he performs in close quarters amid reams of moving air—was, virologically speaking, an indefensible enterprise. Which was terrifying, given he had a newly pregnant wife and a young puppy.

"In those early, first few months of the pandemic, it felt like everyone was getting a bailout except for performing artists," the New York keyboardist, who has played with luminaries from guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel to drummer **Billy Hart**, tells GRAMMY.com, a hint of frustration remaining in his voice. He pauses. "I mean, I know that's not true, but it wasn't really high on their list of priorities."

Parks surveyed the sacrifices he'd need to make. Like many of his colleagues, he took to teaching private lessons—sometimes for too many students at a time—which left precious little time for creativity. Just then, a guardian angel came through: The **Jazz Coalition**, a financial support initiative spearheaded by NYC Winter Jazzfest's Brice Rosenbloom, artist manager Gail Boyd and concert producer Danny Melnick. With the help of an assemblage of music professionals, advocates and fans, they collected enough donations for the Jazz Coalition Commission Fund, which distributed \$1,000 each to a total of 104 artists.

The full list of Jazz Coalition members can be found [here](#); see the full list of recipients below.

To hear Parks tell it, the cash helped him and his 103 colleagues breathe easier. "There were other ones that came through, for sure," he says. "But [the Jazz Coalition Commission Fund] was one of the first ones where I was just like, 'OK, I can breathe a little bit.'"

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The names they chose represent a diversity of working jazz musicians ranging from relatively unknown to widely acclaimed: from saxophonist Alexa Tarantino, bassist [Linda May Han Oh](#), pianist [Elio Villafranca](#), double bassist William Parker, and everybody in between. (The list also includes the late drummer [Ralph Peterson](#) and trumpeter Jon Hassell, who both died in 2021.)

Four of those recipients praised the Jazz Coalition Commission Fund in recent calls with GRAMMY.com.

Like her colleagues, alto saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin received the news as a surprise; she hadn't applied for the grant herself. "My manager called me and I assumed it was just another cancellation or something," she dryly tells GRAMMY.com. "I had joked around with her, 'I'm never going to get a grant!' [*Faux-sullen voice.*]" She credits the unexpected cash boost as a boon to her mental health. Guitarist [Brandon Ross](#), who plays in the ensemble Harriet Tubman alongside bassist [Melvin Gibbs](#) and drummer J.T. Lewis, echoes the sentiment.

"Those of us who are freelance are continually unemployed and seeking employment. We have to be self-motivated and organized enough to manage ourselves and our inner and outer resources to productive ends," he explains to GRAMMY.com. "Anything that alleviated the stress levels was a blessing."

Granted, a grand can be a modest sum for someone with kids and a mortgage. But combined with other grants—or just on its own to cover a few grocery runs—a little help can go a long way. "I mean, there's still going to be worrying, whatever about," saxophonist James Carter tells GRAMMY.com. "But it definitely gives you one less egg to fry on that stove, so to speak. That continues to be a perpetual godsend."

The Jazz Coalition Commission Fund isn't just a bunch of distributed checks, though: It doubles as an ocean of curated offerings from its recipients. In an [immersive online gallery](#), you'll find video shorts, remote collaborations, clips from livestreamed gigs, and other assorted home and studio footage. Spend a day wading through this smorgasbord of musical riches, and even the uninitiated will receive a crash course in the state of creative music in 2021.

Again, it can't be overstated how a cash boost can give musicians not only extra spending money, but the mental and spiritual bandwidth to create. "Everything helps," saxophonist [James Brandon Lewis](#) tells GRAMMY.com. "I and others are nowhere near being out of the woods yet—not even close. But some temporary time to breathe was encouraging so I could make a piece of music that would touch peoples' hearts and minds."

Those interested can become a Jazz Coalition member [here](#) and donate to the initiative [here](#).



Complete list of Jazz Coalition Commission Fund recipients:

Inaugural:

Aaron Myers	Jaimie Branch
Aaron Parks	James Brandon Lewis
Alexa Tarantino	James Carter
Alfredo Colon	Jazzmeia Horn
Amir ElSaffar	Joel Ross
Amirtha Kidambi	John Santos
Anthony Wilson	Johnathan Blake
Ashley Henry	Jon Cowherd
Ben Lamar Gay	Jon Hassell
Ben Williams	Kate Gentile
Bertha Hope	Lakecia Benjamin
Brandee Younger	Linda May Han Oh
Brandon Ross	Melissa Aldana
Camila Meza	Mino Cinélu
Camille Thurman	Monnette Sudler
Chris Morrissey	Nduduzo Makhathini
Christian Sands	Orrin Evans
Christine Jensen	Rio Sakairi, The Jazz Gallery
David Torkanowsky	Roy Nathanson
Dayme Arocena	Sara Serpa
DJ Logic	Shabaka Hutchings
Dred Scott	Tarus Mateen
Elio Villafranca	Tim Berne
Greg Ward	Vincent Herring
Herlin Riley	Wallace Roney Jr.
	Wayne Horvitz

Second Round:

Aaron Johnston	Keyon Harrold
Allison Miller	Lesedi Ntsane
Ari Brown	Makaya McCraven
Aruan Ortiz	Marcus Shelby
Ava Mendoza	Maria Grand
Carla Bley	Matt Wilson
Carmen Staaf	Melanie Charles
Connie Han	Michael Formanek
Cyrille Aimée	Michael Mayo
Darius Jones	Michele Rosewoman
Diego Urcola	Milena Casado Fauquet
E.J. Strickland	Morgan Guerin
Edward Wilkerson Jr.	Nick Dunston
Eric Person	Ralph Peterson
Eric Revis	Ray Drummond
Fabian Almazan	Richie Goods
Fay Victor	Ronnie Cuber
George Schuller	Sarah Elizabeth Charles
Helen Sung	Sarah Hughes
Immanuel Wilkins	Steven Bernstein
JD Allen	Sullivan Fortner
Jorge Vistel	Sylvie Courvoisier
Josh Sinton	Theo Bleckmann
Justin Brown	Theo Croker
Justin Faulkner	Tom Harrell
	Wendy Eisenberg
	Willerm Delisfort
	William Parker