

Jazz Heroes for 2026

BY LINDA YOHN

Every April, the Jazz Journalists Association honors regional Jazz Heroes for Jazz Appreciation month. “Activists, advocates, altruists, aiders and abettors of jazz” — members of jazz’s ‘A Team’ — are recognized by the JJA and in their communities throughout the U.S. The JJA is recognizing two Jazz Heroes from Southeastern Michigan for 2026: Ellen Rowe from Ann Arbor and Dr. Professor Leonard King from Detroit. Both working musicians contribute well above and beyond the call of musical duty in their life and community activism.

It is altogether appropriate to honor Ellen Rowe as Jazz Hero as she wraps up her tenure as the Chair of Conducting; Arthur F. Thurnau Professor / Earl V. Moore Collegiate Professor of Music at the University of Michigan.

To experience Rowe conducting the U-M Jazz Ensemble, is to be in the presence of a woman who conducts and connects with



both band members and the audience. She has the gift of creating relationships through the unspoken language of jazz. These relationships extend to her recordings and performances outside of the university. Of note are Rowe’s All About The Trio sessions at Kerrytown Concert House. From the piano, Rowe tells personal stories and impressions of legendary musicians and composers while illustrating unique aspects of the music. Her relationship with bassist Paul Keller and drummer Pete Siers enhances the intimacy and intrigue of each profiled artist. To listen to an Ellen Rowe recording is to be welcomed into her sphere of life, friendships, family, passions, memories, and distinctive piano technique. She shares willingly. She embodies the finest qualities of a leader, teacher and friend. Ellen Rowe is most deserving of a 2026 Jazz Journalist Association Jazz Hero Award.

Drummer, vocalist, band leader, producer, historian, and record label owner, Leonard King will now be recognized nationally for



his contributions to music in Detroit since 1960 with his 2026 Jazz Hero Award from the Jazz Journalists Association. A visit to his website www.leonardkingdrums.com links you to his record label, Uuquipleu Records and his extensive catalogue of Detroit recordings covering rock, soul, R&B, blues and jazz from the 1960s to the present. Single-handedly Leonard King has documented the evolution of Detroit music talents through Uuquipleu Records. King also celebrates



the talent of Motor City musicians with his nonprofit organization, The Lyman Woodard Organization for the Arts. The organization presents concerts at Fraternal Order of Eagles in St. Clair Shores featuring one of Leonard’s three working ensembles: The Proportioned Orchestra, Oopapada, and The Dr. Professor Leonard King Orchestra. Leonard can be heard with Alberto Nacif’s Cuban jazz septet, Aguankó, the Planet D Nonet and as a featured artist at the Detroit Institute of Arts Friday Nights Live series. King’s music swings hard in the moment, but Leonard wisely preserves treasures of the past. Photos, stories, anecdotes abound on his website which also has a link to his online autobiography the Visger Road Playground. King’s memory and his attention to detail in his life story illustrates the development of multiple Detroit musical styles and talents. For his generosity to the music community, creativity, admirable professional talents, and mentorship, Leonard King is a most worthy recipient of the 2026 Jazz Journalists Association Jazz Hero Award.

Ellen Rowe and Leonard King join the ranks of Detroit and Ann Arbor Jazz Heroes including Marcus Belgrave, Lars Bjorn, Jim Gallert, Marion Hayden, Ralphie Armstrong, Charles Latimer, Wendell Harrison, Oliver Ragsdale, Don Chisholm, W. Kim Heron, Gretchen Valade, Bill Foster, Rodney Whitaker, and more. Each will be honored in the community at special events in April, Jazz Appreciation Month. Follow the SEMJA jazz calendar for event details. To see all the 2026 honorees and to learn more about the Jazz Heroes over the years, visit www.news.jazzjournalists.org.

Lars Bjorn Honored

BY IRA LAX

Tears of joy flowed from family and friends on March 1, 2026, as the Southeast Michigan Jazz Association presented its 2025 Ron Brooks Award to Lars Bjorn at Kerrytown Concert House. Applause erupted as Piotr Michalowski, Jim Gallert and Linda Yohn paid tribute to Bjorn's great intellect, and as a man "so easy to love."

As president of SEMJA for over two decades Lars has lovingly promoted the southeast Michigan jazz scene by reviewing concerts and new recordings, and writing obits in the monthly SEMJA Update, along with Barton Polot, the webmaster and managing editor. As editor of the SEMJA Update Bjorn included contributions from other board members as well. Also, he and Gallert worked together for years exploring Detroit's fertile jazz scene by interviewing all the living musicians they could locate who gave their artistry to the great sounds coming out of Motor City in the twentieth century, resulting in the titanic success of Berry Gordy and Motown Records.

The SEMJA tribute was given its groove by a group of well-known local musicians led by Paul Keller on bass, Ralph Tope on guitar, Adam Mosley on

piano and Jesse Kramer (son to SEMJA luminary Barbara Kramer) on drums. Keller provided a great personal touch with a song well known in Bjorn's native Sweden as "Dear Old Sweden," about a place near the Norway border where Bjorn's grandfather was from. After playing tunes like "Blue Monk" and "I'll Remember April," another highlight was Ron Brooks himself, and Paul Vornhagen joining Keller's group for a few songs.



They were in the group that played at Lars and Susan's 1984 wedding. Lastly, Bjorn himself took the stage to receive the annual Ron Brooks Award. He recounted playing drums in Trio A Go-Go as a young man, and being inspired by hearing the great trumpeter Benny Bailey in his hometown in Sweden. He also recalled how lucky he felt in working with Jim Gallert on their acclaimed book, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920-1960*. He said the interviews with every living Detroit jazz musician they could locate were the essential heart of that beloved project, which took them years to complete. This book, plus the interviews with musicians



CLOCKWISE:
Linda Yohn and Jim Gallert speaking on behalf of Lars Bjorn SEMJA V.P. Piotr Michalowski presenting a commemorative plaque to Lars Bjorn Adam Mosely (piano) Paul Keller (bass), Ralph Tope (guitar), Jesse Kramer (drums) Saxophonist Paul Vornhagen joining Paul Keller on vocals Piotr Michalowski serving as master of ceremonies SEMJA founder Ron Brooks joining Paul Keller on bass

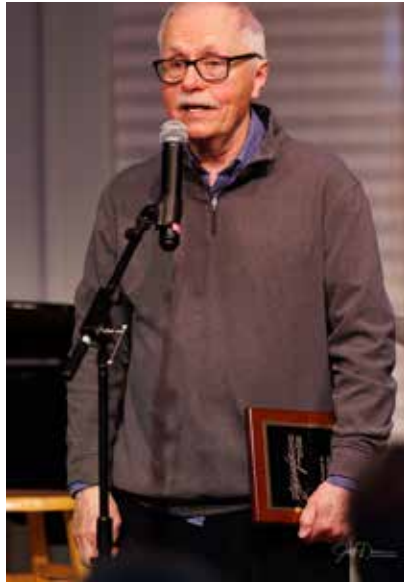


photographs by Jeff Dunn



and jazz scholars in the Talk Tent at Detroit Jazz Festivals put flesh and bones to these stories and gave a great musical gift to Detroit and the world. Keller then brought the room together in celebratory song with “Isn’t it nice we can all get together!”

Yes it was a wonderful afternoon of swinging music, along with glowing tributes by loving friends and family (wife Susan Wineberg, daughter and son Mia and Krister, granddaughter Oona) to honor the lifelong contribution to jazz in southeast Michigan by Lars Bjorn, a guy “so easy to love.”



Vincent York's **JAZZistry** 819
Jazz + History + Artistry

KERRYTOWN CONCERT HOUSE

APRIL is JAZZ Appreciation Month

Experience JAZZistry's Award-Winning Show:
The History of JAZZ
Through Stories, Pictures & LIVE Performance
by Metro-Detroit's Finest JAZZ Artists

Vincent York's
14th Annual
International Jazz Day
CONCERT
April 30, 7:30pm
Tickets: KerrytownConcertHouse.com

April 30th Band:
Vincent York
John Douglas
Ron English
Taslimah Bey
Josef Deas
Jesse Kramer

WEMU 89.1

The Choice for NPR...
news, jazz and blues.

Schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5							PUBJAZZ
6						PUBJAZZ	PUBJAZZ
7							REVEAL
8							WEEKEND EDITION Rachel Martin
9						WEEKEND EDITION Scott Simon	WEEKEND EDITION Rachel Martin
10						THIS AMERICAN LIFE	SUNDAY BEST Nik Thompson
11						WAIT, WAIT... DON'T TELL ME! TRAVEL Rick Steves	SUNDAY BEST Nik Thompson
12							
1						PUBJAZZ	
2						89.1 JAZZ AFTERNOON Hosted by Michael Jewett	GROOVEYARD Daniel W. Long
3							THE IN CROWD Jessica Webster
4							BIG CITY BLUES CRUISE Joe Tiboni
5						ALL THINGS CONSIDERED NPR news, information & public affairs	BIG CITY BLUES CRUISE Joe Tiboni
6							
7						REVEAL	MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce
8						ALL SONGS CONSIDERED	MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce
9						CUBAN FANTASY Marc Taras	JAZZ NIGHT IN AMERICA
10						ALT. LATINO	
11						MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce	
12							
1							
2							
3							
4							

National Public Radio
Eastern Michigan University

jazz events April



	1	2	3	4						
5	6	7	8	9	10	11				
12	13	14	15	16	17	18				
19	20	21	22	23	24	25				
26	27	28	29	30						

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners

Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor MI 48105
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at
www.semja.org/submit

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall

jazzcafedetroit.com
350 Madison
DETROIT 313-887-8500

APRIL

- 6 7:00 Sky Covington: Billie Holiday Tribute
9 7:30 Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

- Sun 7:00 Aretha's Jazz Jam

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

theofficialbakerskeyboardlounge.com
20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

- Fri 7:00 Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams
Sat 7:00 Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams

Blue Llama Jazz Club

bluellamaclub.com
314 South Main St.
ANN ARBOR 734-372-3200

APRIL

- 1 7:00 Big Tent – featuring Wayne Gerard 8:30
2 7:00 Ari and Cecil Alexander Quartet 8:30
3 5:00 WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series: Dave Sharp Worlds Quartet
3 7:00 Rodney Whitaker Group 9:00
4 7:00 Tierney Sutton & Tamir Hendelman
5 6:00 The Triumvirate 7:30
8 7:00 Aya Sekine Trio 8:30
9 7:00 REDWOOD 8:30
10 4:00 Kerrytown Stompers
10 7:00 Wendell Harrison: Pharaoh Sanders Tribute 9:00
11 7:00 Demetrius Nabors 9:00
12 6:00 Howard Alden Trio 7:30
15 7:00 Jonathan Barahal Taylor Quartet 8:30
16 6:00 Max Bowen
16 8:30 El Khat
17 7:00 Tiffany Gridiron Quintet 9:00
18 7:00 Walter Smith III Trio 9:00
19 6:00 Sarah D'Angelo & Cliff Monear 7:30
22 7:00 Aguankó 8:30
23 7:00 Sean Dobbins: Tribute to Stevie Wonder 8:30
24 7:00 Kris Johnson 9:00
26 6:00 Straight Ahead 7:30
29 7:00 Detroit Jazz Project 8:30
30 7:00 Rick Roe Trio 8:30

Cadieux Café

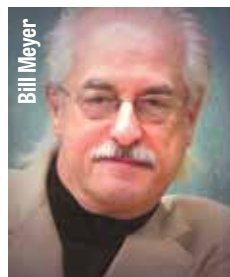
cadieuxcafe.com
4300 Cadieux Rd.
DETROIT 313-882-8560

APRIL

- 26 4:00 Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

- Thu 8:00 Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins



Cliff Bells

cliffbells.com
2030 Park Ave at West Adams
DETROIT 313-961-2543

APRIL

- 2 7:30 Lex Kortzen Trio – 9:30 featuring Robert Hurst
4 7:30 Falooshh 9:30
9 7:30 Over Under Quintet 9:30
10, 11 7:30 Rodney Whitaker Quartet 9:30
12 5:30 Erich Goebel 7:30
16-18 7:30 DJANGOPHONIQUE 9:30
19 5:30 Brian Allen 7:30
23-25 7:30 Noah Jackson & Full Circle 9:30
26 5:30 Trono Hudgins and 7:30 The Uncommon Experience
ONGOING
Wed 7:30 Session 9:30

Dirty Dog Jazz Café

dirtydogjazz.com
97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

APRIL

- 2 6:00 Chris Codish
3,4 6:30 Chris Codish
9 6:00 Ben Sharkey
10, 11 6:30 Ben Sharkey
17 6:00 Gene Dunlap
18, 19 6:30 Gene Dunlap
23 6:00 Allen Dennard
24, 25 6:30 Allen Dennard

ONGOING

- Wed 6:30 The GUD Band



The Earle

theearle.com
121 West Washington St.
ANN ARBOR 734-994-0211

ONGOING

- Tue 7:00 Jake Reichbart
Wed 7:00 Jake Reichbart
Thu 7:00 Jake Reichbart
Fri 7:00 Jazz Trio
Sat 7:00 Jazz Trio

Ginkgo Records

3546 Michigan Ave.
DETROIT

APRIL

- 23 7:00 Pamela Wise Trio – with Jaribu Shahid & Gayelynn McKinney
No Man's Land – with Pink Marlana, Brynn Hilliker, Annie Hayes

Kerrytown Concert House

kerrytownconcerthouse.com

415 North Fourth Ave.

ANN ARBOR 734-769-2999

APRIL

1	7:30	Tropos+ Fortune Teller Trio
12	4:00	Larry Fuller Trio – featuring Paul Keller and Pete Siers
19	2:00	Ellen Rowe's All About the Trio: But Not For Me – The Evolution of a Jazz Standard
30	7:30	Vincent York's International Jazz Day Concert

London Chop House

155 West Congress St.

DETROIT

ONGOING

Thu	7:30	Paul Keller, Paul King, Ralph Tope, Adam Mosley
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Lucille's Jazz Lounge

lucillesjazzlounge.com

1447 North Summit St., Suite C

TOLEDO, OH

APRIL

3	8:00	Nicole Heitger
4	8:00	Paxton/Spangler Band
9	8:00	April Varner Sextet
10	8:00	Paul Keller Quartet – with Sarah D'Angelo, Cary Kocher, Ralph Tope
11	8:00	Tumbao Bravo
17	8:00	The Four of Us
18	8:00	Houston Patton

Mothfire Brewing

713 West Ellsworth Rd.

ANN ARBOR

APRIL

1	5:00	Chris Tabaczynski
8	5:00	Here's Hope Quartet
15	5:00	Omar Karthikeyan
22	5:00	The Sideman Trio
29	5:00	Fortune Teller Trio

Schoolcraft College

schoolcraft.edu/music

Vistatech Center, 18600 Haggerty Rd

LINOVIA 734-462-4403

APRIL

1	Noon	Kongruent
20	7:30	Up Jumped Spring

Rec' Bowl

recbowl.com

40 Crocker Blvd.

MOUNT CLEMENS 586-468-7746

APRIL

22	6:30	Dorothy Martin
29	6:30	Stardusters Big Band

Shield's

25101 Telegraph Rd.

SOUTHFIELD

APRIL

4	1:00	Mark Loduca and The "C" Notes
21	7:00	Mr. B's Annual Blues and Boogie Celebration

Venue by 4M

experience4m.com

1919 South Industrial Hwy.

ANN ARBOR 734-800-0128

ONGOING

Sun	11 am	Jazz Sunday Brunch
Sat	7:00	Saturday Night Jazz

Weber's Habitat Lounge

thehabitatannarbor.com

3050 Jackson Rd.

ANN ARBOR 734-665-3636

ONGOING

Mon	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Tue	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Wed	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Thu	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Sun	5:00	William Marshall Bennett

Zal Gaz Grotto

zalgaz.org

2070 West Stadium Blvd.

ANN ARBOR 734-663-1202

ONGOING

Sun	5:00	Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings
Mon	7:00	Paul Keller Orchestra
Tue	5:30	Paul Klinger's Easy Street Jazz Band

Ziggy's

ziggyspsistore.com

206 West Michigan Ave.

YPSILANTI

ONGOING

Tue	8:00	Rotating Bands
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Upcoming Jazz Events

MAY

1	WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series: Olivia Van Goor • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
1	Noah Jackson • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
2	Pat Elliott Tribute Band • Shield's, Southfield
2	Tariq Gardner & Evening Star • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
2	Jean Holden • Lucille's, Toledo OH
3	Leslie Vincent • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
6	Gabrielle Cavassa • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
7	Bleu Reed • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
8	Russ Macklem Detroit Quintet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
9	Artemis • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
10	Nick Masters • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
10	Lucía • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
13	Randy Napoleon Octet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
14	Signal Quartet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
15	Detroit Jazz Fest All-Stars • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
16	Jeff Haas Quintet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
16	Brian Cheatham and The Stardusters Big Band • Shield's, Southfield
17	Marlena Studer's Jazz Ensemble • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
20	Houston Patton & Hidden Nomination • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
21	Tumbao Bravo • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
22	Dave McMurray • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
23	Sean Dobbins & Dave Stryker • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
24	Jacob Hart Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
27	Bob Sweet Quartet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
28	Brian Charette Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
29	Michael Mayo • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
30	Michael Dease • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
31	The NOW Trio – featuring Travis Aukerman • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor

JUNE

3	Tristan Cappel Quintet • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
6	Scott Gwinnell • Shield's, Southfield
6	Straight Ahead • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
7	Alain Sullivan's SoulHeart Collective • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
11	Kasan Belgrave • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
12	Jordan VanHemert • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
13	Sean Dobbins • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
14	Nick Collins Trio • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
17	Third Coast Swing • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
18	Hannah Marks • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
20	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gayelynn McKinney • Shield's, Southfield
21	Michigan Jazz Festival Father's Day Brunch – featuring Barbara Ware • Schoolcraft College, Livonia
21	Rossano Sportiello Trio – featuring Paul Keller & Ed Metz • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor



3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 240
Ann Arbor, MI

Membership

New

Sandy Yturri

Renewal

Michael Cogley
Jeff Dunn
Lester Floyd
Piotr Micholowski
Marilyn Sandelin
Judy & David Thurmon

The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA,
3020 Bolgos Circle,
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
For phone messages
call: 734.668.7470
email: semja@semja.org

Publication

The *SEMJA Update* is published monthly and sent to members at no cost. It is edited by Lars Bjorn and Piotr Michalowski with additional assistance from Barton Polot (production editor), Margot Campos (layout), and Jeff Gaynor.

SEMJA online

website: www.semja.org
social: facebook.com/semja.org

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets normally on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The meeting on April 21 will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars at 734-353-3568 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
Piotr Michalowski, *Vice-president*
Jeff Gaynor, *Secretary, Treasurer*
Barton Polot, *Webmaster and Managing Editor*
Ron Brooks, *President Emeritus*

Ira Lax
Kenji Lee
Ingrid Racine
Ellen Rowe
Sandy Schopbach
Linda Yohn

SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 3020 Bolgos Circle.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

- New Member
 Renewal

Membership Levels

- Basic \$30
 Student \$20
 Couple \$40
 Patron \$60
 Nonprofit Corp. \$50
 Corporate \$250
 Lifetime \$500

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Check payable to SEMJA Credit Card | _____

Exp. ____/____/____ CVV ____