

January 2026

PO BOX 60397, PALO ALTO, CA 94306

Ed Fox, Editor

FROM THE CHAIR

AI, AI, AI, it's everywhere. I'm not convinced it is the best thing since slice bread, but it certainly is being touted as a major element in our lives from here on. What might this mean for jazz and the Palo Alto Jazz Alliance? Not much for PAJA, as it is our intent to keep doing what we've been doing for the past 23 years, namely offering live concerts with live musicians presenting live, creative sounds. AI just isn't who we are.

COMMENTS ON A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS



Vince Guaraldi

"In the song 'Skating,' for instance, the quick tap-tap-tapping of the piano keys is meant to evoke falling snow much the same way Antonio Vivaldi used violins to suggest changing weather in his 'Four Seasons' in 1785. And Guaraldi's take on 'The Little Drummer Boy' ('My Little Drum') exhibits the sense of improvisation perfected by the commedia dell'arte theater in the 16th century. . . The Italian zest for life is evident in the first chords of 'Linus and Lucy,' a song that would even make Ebeneezer Scrooge tap his feet." From "Jazz Pianist Plays a Major Role in Charlie Brown Christmas Classic," by Bill Dal Cerro, in San Francisco Chronicle, December 24, 1925.

At year's end, it is the custom for all kinds of groups to review their past year and remind all what has happened. That's nice, but I want you to look ahead and to understand that changes are coming for PAJA. We expect to announce the names of new Board members soon. Some who have been carrying the load in operational details are ready to take a rest. It will all play out, we expect, with renewed vigor.

There are also questions about how do we cope with pressure from inflation. How many organizations have been able to never have raised their membership fee? PAJA still asks \$35 for a single annual membership, \$50 for a couple. The inflation factor makes it ever harder to cover the costs for concerts: venue fees are rising, and musicians need to be paid what they're worth. Insurance costs increase every year. Will we have to raise ticket prices to a degree that will hurt the number of ticket sales? For now, we are holding the line with our March 7th concert, and we hope you appreciate what a great deal it is.

We face lots of challenges, but I am confident that all will be met.

Thanking you for your continued support,

C. Stuart Brewster, Chair
Palo Alto Jazz Alliance



Mail your check to Palo Alto Jazz Alliance
P.O. Box 60397, Palo Alto, CA 94306

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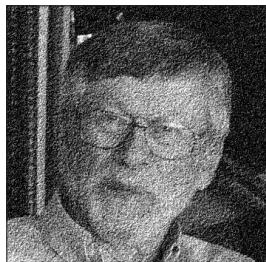
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LOOKING FORWARD

By Ed Fox

MINI-REVIEW

Sunday, November 23, I went to the Pete Douglas Beach House with great anticipation. It was the wonderful vocalist Veronica Swift, now in her prime at age 31, singing with the Django Festival All-Stars. I'd seen both separately a number of times before and wondered how they'd mesh. I was accompanied by two friends who are fairly new to jazz and had never been to the Bach before. They reminded me how attractive the place is with the huge wood paneled wall, the framed photographs and other adornments. The Django All-Stars have the same personnel I've seen before, except perhaps for the rhythm guitarist. But the outstanding soloists are still on the team: Samson Schmitt on lead guitar, Ludovic Beier on accordion, and Pierre Blanchard on violin. All three are amazing virtuosos who are perhaps the best Hot Club musicians in the the world. They played several brilliant numbers before Veronica made her appearance.

Ms. Swift finally emerged, decked out in a kind of harem outfit, topped by a small golden turban. No black cocktail dress for our Veronica. My concern about how she would mesh with the All-Stars was soon dispelled. She sang only five numbers with the group and all were sensational. The memorable songs were *Gypsy in My Soul*, *Nuages* (Clouds)—that beautiful Django Reinhardt composition, *Honeysuckle Rose*, and she brought down

the house with a superb rendition of the Russian folk song, *Orchichonya*, if you can believe it. But this is all music Django Reinhardt probably played back in the day, which, I'm sure, is why she chose such a program. Veronica is from a musical family and her vocal skills and chops put her in the absolute top tier of current female jazz singers. She also adds elements of drama and humor to her performance which contribute to the total entertainment package. My group left to drive home on a serious high. Only five songs from Veronica Swift, but no one felt cheated.

50TH ANNIVERSARY FOR KUUMBWA

Just a 45-min. to an hour's drive from Palo Alto to Santa Cruz is Kuumbwa Jazz, that great club that was co-founded 50 years ago by Tim Jackson, who served as Monterey Jazz's executiv director for 30 years or so. Over the years Kuumbwa has attracted the biggest names in jazz, and a star-studded 50th anniversary celebration is planned for Saturday evening, January 13. Among the participants will be Gerald Clayton, Ambrose Akinmusire, Joshua Rodman, and Billy Childs. There are two shows, at 7 and 9pm, and tickets start at \$65.75. Kuumbwa is at the edge of Santa Cruz's downtown area at 320 Cedar St. and there are city parking lots within easy walking distance. If you've not been to Kuumbwa, this is the one to check it out. If you don't want to drive back over Hwy. 17 at night, stay in one of the nearby attractive inns or motels for the evening.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

I am really looking forward to PAJA's next concert featuring vocalist Sherri Roberts. Harvey Mitterer has been touting her to the Board for months and we've finally signed her to perform on the afternoon of March 7th at the First Congregational Church of Palo Alto's Harmony Hall. Sherri will be singing the songs of some of our favorite tunesmiths: Bob Dorough, Dave Frishberg, Matt Dennis, Blossom Dearie and Bobby Troup. These are composers who produced "I'm Hip," "Will You Still Be Mine," "Yardbird Suite," "Devil May Care," "My Attorney Bernie," "Angel Eyes," and "Route 66," among many other familiar tunes. Full details on this don't-miss concert are elsewhere in this issue and on the PAJA website (where you can order tickets, after January 20th). Some Good Listenable Jazz.



Veronica Swift

Reach Ed Fox at chezfox@mindspring.com

WHEN HARVEY MET SHERRI

By Harvey Mittler, Events Chair, Palo Alto Jazz Alliance

I am excited that PAJA will be presenting the Sherri Roberts Quartet as its next concert on March 7, 2026. I have been a fan of hers for over 25 years when I discovered her recording "Dreamsville" in 1998. Released on Brownstone Recordings and produced by the New York bassist Harvie Swartz, parts of it were recorded in New York and in San Francisco using musicians from both coasts, including Harvie S, saxophonist Chris Potter, and pianist Mark Soskin. It contained "hip" songs which I adore from some of my favorite singer-songwriters, some of whom are on the playlist for the program she'll offer in the March 7 concert.

Other often-played Sherri Roberts albums of mine are on the Blue House/Pacific Coast Jazz label: "The Sky Could Send You" (featuring saxophonist Phil Woods) and "Anybody's Spring" from 2017, with the supporting trio of pianist David Udolf and drummer Akira Tana (both of whom will appear at our concert) and again bassist Harvie S.

I have been fortunate to see Sherri perform a few times at local clubs over the years. Recently, my wife Claire and I attended our first performance at Keys Jazz Bistro in North Beach in San Francisco, the site which formerly housed El Matador. What drew us was the appearance of Sherri and her quartet, presenting the premiere performances of her new "I'm Hip" program. I was so enchanted hearing her tribute to these great singer-songwriters—including Matt Dennis and Bobby Troup (whose tunes were made famous by Nat King Cole, Sinatra and Billy Holiday), Dave Frishberg, Blossom Dearie, and Bob Dorough—that we stayed for both sets. Afterward I

introduced myself to Sherri, told her about my enthusiasm for the program, and inquired if she'd be interested in bringing it to our PAJA audience. She graciously said she'd love to do so.

At our next PAJA Board meeting I told my fellow directors about my enthusiasm for this incredibly enjoyable program and my conversation with Sherri, and suggested we consider scheduling "I'm Hip" as our next PAJA concert. Some weren't familiar with Sherri, and I played a selection or two from her recording which were part of the new program; that won their support. Then began the usual activity of locating a suitable venue with available date.

Whether you already share my deep appreciation for these gorgeous, witty, clever, fun, funny, sophisticated classic tunes, or if they're new to you, I hope you'll come and enjoy what will be a memorable concert.

"I'm Hip!"

PAJA presents:

Vocalist Sherri Roberts

A Tribute to the Hep-Cat

Singer/Songwriters of Jazz:

Matt Dennis, Bobby Troup,

Dave Frishberg,

and Bob Dorough

Saturday, March 7th

3:00 pm

Harmony Hall

First Congressional Church of Palo Alto
(corner of Louis and Embarcadero)

Tickets available online at pajazzalliance.org

By mail to:

PAJA Tickets, c/o Fox

294 Tennessee Lane, Palo Alto 94306

or at the door (cash or check only).

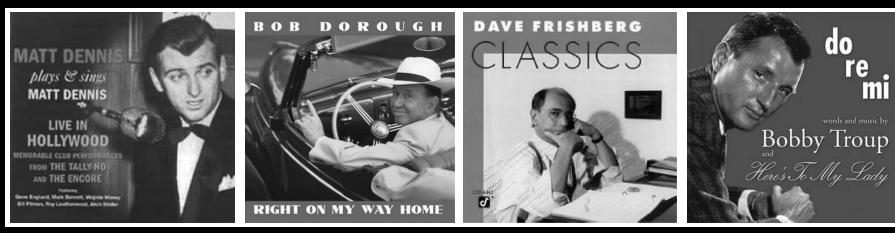
\$40 general, \$35 PAJA members, \$15 students.



with David Udolf - piano

Chris Amberger - bass

Akira Tana - drums



PENINSULA YOUNGSTERS MAKING WAVES IN THE BIG APPLE

Skylar Tang, who will turn 20 next month, has been an open secret among Peninsula jazz fans since her middle school days. She has won national awards and performed with the likes of the Stanford Jazz Workshop big bands, SF Jazz all-star bands, and the Carnegie Hall NYO Jazz Orchestra. The Carnegie Hall Orchestra accepts only 22 members each year, and Skylar and her trumpet were selected three straight years. Trumpeter Sean Jones, the ensemble's artistic director, had this to say about Skylar: "Every now and then a musician comes along with a vision and a focus you just know will affect the world—a sense of high artistry, skill and profound leadership..."

Skylar now attends Columbia and Juilliard in New York City. She sat in this year with Joshua Rodman at Lincoln Center, and also appeared with him on a recent Emmet Cohen Monday Night. You can watch that performance by Googling "Incredible New Trumpet Sensation in NYC—Skylar Tang!"



Nathan Tokunaga is a familiar name to those who remember his band, Nathan's Fearless Five which appeared frequently at the Rinconada Library in Palo Alto and other local venues. Nathan and those band members graduated from high school last year and he is now at the New School in New York. He has taken a class with John Coltrane's one-time bassist Reggie Workman. Tokunaga, a clarinetist and saxophone is into more traditional, melodic jazz from the 20s, 30s and 40s, and already has played at clubs like Smalls and Birdland (which he played at a week after arriving in New York, and has appeared there several times since). Near the end of 2025, he was announced as the recipient of the Young Arts award, for young artists 15-18 years old. Terence Blanchard and Jon Batiste are former Young Arts recipients.



JAZZ ON THE PENINSULA *Selected gigs for January and February, 2026*

BACH DANCING AND DYNAMITE SOCIETY, El Granada www.bachddsoc.org

1/25	Jonathan Barber & Vision Ahead	4:30pm
2/1	Mariah Parker Indo Latin Jazz Ensemble	4:30pm
2/15	Ekep Nkwelle Quartet	4:30pm
2/22	Mimi Fox Organ Trio (with Brian Ho)	4:30pm
3/1	Edward Simon Trio	4:30pm

MEYHOUSE RESTAURANT, PALO ALTO Meyhouserestaurant.com

1/9,10	Jamie Davis, w/Michael O'Neill Quartet	5, 8pm
1/16, 17	Vuckovich, Jewkes, Vitaala, Lee—NOLA	5, 8pm
1/30, 31	Jacqui Naylor Trio	5, 8pm
2/6	Patrick Wolff, w/ Matt Wilson	5, 8pm
2/13, 14	Jackie Ryan, w/Larry Vuckovich	5, 8pm
2/15	Mads Tolling and Ian Scarfe	5, 9pm
2/20, 21	Bill Cunliffe and the Acid Cole Trio	5, 8pm
2/27, 28	Nicolas Bearde	5, 8pm

STANFORD UNIVERSITY www.live.stanford.edu

1/17	Sasha Berliner, with Paul Cornish (Studio)	7pm
1/18	Stella Cole. (Bing)	4pm

EARTHWISE

1/28-30	Corey Harris (Mitchell Park Community Center)
2/28	Edward Simon Trio. (Mitchell Park Community Center)