

SPOTLIGHT

Global jazz artists visit Severna Park

BY LILLY PRICE

Anne Arundel-native Paulina Phillips, along with Annapolis resident and jazz vocalist Theresa Sise, created a new monthly jazz series hosted at Café Mezzanotte in Severna Park that kicks off on Sunday, Jan. 19.

Phillips, who writes music and performs at jam sessions in her free time, made the mission of her organization, Jazz Beyond Borders, to make live jazz music more accessible to Anne Arundel County residents. From January through June, the "Sunday Jazz at the Mezz" series will bring renowned international jazz stars to the county. Residents can enjoy live music in the comfort of an intimate Mediterranean restaurant for \$20. Tickets would usually be upwards of \$50 to see these musicians, Phillips said.

Phillips, 69, talked to The Capital about her career promoting music and art, her love for jazz and her organization's motivation for creating the Sunday series.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How long have you been promoting music through your public relations firm The Phillips Agency?

The Phillips Agency has existed since 1992. We traditionally worked with mortgage companies, banks and found over the years that art venues, organizations, businesses and artists just kept coming to us. That developed into our brand. About five years ago, I founded Jazz Beyond Borders with a very specific purpose.

The idea with Jazz Beyond Borders is to match cultural diversity, which I thought we still really have a long way to go in Anne Arundel County, but we're working on it. I wanted to bring all types of people together and celebrate cultures. But I also wanted to do that by bringing in a really high level of artistry. I believe in community singing and community choirs and people working their way up through the ranks. But I also like to bring something really excellent to the county.

For a lot of entertainment, people go to Baltimore or they go to Washington. And I am thrilled about the opportunity to do a series in Severna Park near my old neighborhood. The person who had the idea to do the concert series at Café Mezz was Theresa Sise.

How did you pick Café Mezzanotte for this Sunday jazz series?



PAULINA PHILLIPS

Through her presenting organization Jazz Beyond Borders, Paulina Phillips created a new "Sunday Jazz at the Mezz" concert series at Café Mezzanotte in Severna Park.

Theresa passed it a lot. I did a lot of arts promotions, first for the City of Annapolis, then Washington D.C., then Baltimore. Then for me, I thought, "OK, wait a minute. What about our own backyard?" Theresa kept passing this restaurant and thinking it might be a good spot. I have brought jazz programs to Maryland Hall and jazz performers to other venues in Annapolis, but there's not a lot of that. Theresa kept saying we need a new venue that is particularly focused on world music and jazz.

Where did your passion for jazz music come from?

My mother was a jazz singer. She sung on the radio in Winnipeg, Canada. She was a jazz singer before we came to the states. My dad loved all kinds of music. Every Saturday, while he was doing chores around the house, we would hear music from the Congo, music from Spain, music from Ireland, and then jazz. It was there from the beginning. Then I married a jazz bassist and composer. I did a lot of work for his

band. The band was very popular. Kind of a legendary cult band called Wooden Hands. A lot of very popular jazz singers and musicians were in that band many years ago. I used to book and promote that band. That was starting in my 20s. And I never stopped working with jazz. I do write music myself but more as a hobbyist.

Live performance is really important to me. There is now a lot of research that people become happier, calmer, positive after a live performance and they can't get the same result from hearing something on a phone or computer or even radio. The experience is not the same, it's just not the same. You get such a lift from hearing music and seeing the performers and experiencing this creative process. You get this feeling of community because other people are enjoying it sitting around you. And everyone is smiling. People are tapping their toes, sometimes singing the refrain to themselves or even joining in.

Is there a performer coming to the series that you're particularly excited about?

These are international artists. These are people who play at major festivals all over the world. Tickets could easily cost \$40 or \$80 somewhere else. I'm really proud to bring them to Anne Arundel County. Theresa is performing on Jan. 19 and she is up and coming and people just love her. She did some interesting research about MLK Jr. and he had some favorite jazz tunes and he made some statements about jazz and the importance of it. She'll be sharing that with the audience.

Lynn Veronneau, she is fantastic. I worked with her on her first two albums. She charted no. 9 out of 10 in the World Music Charts. In the world. She's that good.

It's hard to pick your favorite. I am really excited about the one on June 14. That's Kenney Polson. He's very well-schooled in jazz, has a master's degree from Howard and he has a lot of hit singles all over the world. I, like a lot of people who love straight-ahead jazz, aren't crazy about slow jazz. I put on his music and it was so relaxing. He is such a great player and he knows so much music. Pretty sophisticated stuff. I just came to appreciate slow jazz. I love it. I'm excited about that. It's a change for me, I felt like I grew.

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