Charleston Gaillard Center and Closing the Gap in Health Care Announce the Return of Lowcountry Jazz Festival

August 30 - September 1, 2024

May 6, 2024 – Charleston, SC – The Charleston Gaillard Center is pleased to announce its continued partnership with Closing the Gap in Health Care to present the annual Lowcountry Jazz Festival this Labor Day weekend. Under the artistic direction of producer Tony Clarke, in collaboration with the Gaillard Center’s artistic team, the Festival boasts an impressive lineup of award-winning jazz singers and musicians, including headliners Samara Joy and Brian Culbertson. More than a series of concerts, the Lowcountry Jazz Festival is a multifaceted cultural experience that has become an annual highlight of Charleston's artistic calendar, bringing together a vibrant community of musicians and music lovers.

Drawing on the rich tradition of jazz in the South, this season's Festival unites venerable masters and emerging talents to celebrate this enduring genre and its profound connections to Charleston. As a pivotal hub for African American music from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Charleston played a crucial role in the evolution of jazz, nurturing some of its earliest pioneers and ensembles. This Festival honors that heritage, showcasing world-class performances in the heart of a city that continues to influence and shape the jazz landscape.

Saturday night's performance features the headline act of three-time Grammy Award winner Samara Joy, whose self-titled, chart-topping debut album electrified the jazz scene in 2021. At just 24 years old, Joy has captivated a new generation of listeners, amassing
over one million followers on social media and introducing new audiences to the vibrant world of jazz. The “smooth, but funky” Braxton Brothers and contemporary jazz masters Marion Meadows (soprano saxophonist/composer) and Alex Bugnon (jazz pianist/composer) open. Sunday opens with British jazz/funk band Incognito, and Brian Culbertson closes the Festival with a show stopping performance of genre-defying excellence.

Returning to the Gaillard Center this year is the much-anticipated All White Party, the Festival’s opening-night event on Friday, August 30. Guests are invited to don their finest white attire and mingle with fellow jazz enthusiasts in a festive atmosphere featuring performances by Art Sherrod, Lin Rountree, and Ragan Whiteside.

In addition to annually bringing together jazz fans from across the Southeast, the Festival is the primary fundraiser for Closing the Gap in Health Care, Inc.

All White Party (Friday, August 30, 2024)
Artists: Art Sherrod, Lin Rountree, and Ragan Whiteside

Day One (Saturday, August 31, 2024)
Opener: Braxton Brothers
Opener: Marion Meadows and Alex Bugnon
Headliner: Samara Joy

Day Two (Sunday, September 1, 2024)
Opener: Incognito
Headliner: Brian Culbertson

*Lineup is subject to change.

Lissa Frenkel, President and CEO of the Charleston Gaillard Center, noted, “The Lowcountry Jazz Festival has become a highly anticipated highlight of the Gaillard's season and we are thrilled to welcome audiences from all over the Southeast to experience and engage with world-class jazz.”

Dr. Thaddeus J. Bell, Founder of the Lowcountry Jazz Festival and Closing the Gap in Health Care, said, “As we approach the 18th Lowcountry Jazz Festival, I am thrilled to once again welcome audiences to experience the very best the genre has to offer at the
Charleston Gaillard Center. This partnership continues to serve our community by bringing people together in celebration of jazz, and we look forward to ‘jazzing with a purpose’ as we endeavor to decrease health disparities affecting the African American community.”

Download photos here.

Tickets on sale Friday, May 10, at 11 AM EST at gaillardcenter.org. Gaillard Center Members receive presale access! To learn more about our Membership program, please contact our Advancement Office at info@gaillardfoundation.org or (843) 718-1578.

ABOUT SAMARA JOY
With her Grammy Award-winning Verve Records debut, Linger Awhile, 24-year-old Bronx-native Samara Joy has positioned herself to join the likes of Sarah, Ella, and Billie as the next mononymous jazz-singing sensation recorded by the venerable label. Her voice, rich and velvety yet precociously refined, has already earned her fans like Regina King and Elton John, appearances on the TODAY Show, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, CBS Mornings, MSNBC, Kelly Clarkson, Jennifer Hudson, Drew Barrymore, etc., in addition to millions of likes on TikTok—cementing her status as perhaps the first Gen Z jazz singing star. Linger Awhile introduced that massive audience to a slew of classic standards several times older than she is through her timeless, irresistible sound. In 2024, Samara won a third Grammy Award for her take on the Betty Carter classic "Tight" and is currently in preparation for her full-length follow-up. The New York Times praised the “silky-voiced rising star” for “helping jazz take a youthful turn” while NPR's All Things Considered named her a “classic jazz singer from a new generation.”

ABOUT BRIAN CULBERTSON
Over the course of crafting a 25-album catalog and architecting nearly 40 Billboard No. 1 singles as a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and producer, Brian Culbertson has charted his own unique course in music. Label him jazz and he makes a funk record. Call him an R&B artist and he drops an acoustic jazz trio collection. Brand him pop and he creates a 32-minute New Age opus. And you’d be hard pressed to name another instrumentalist of his ilk who can mount an elaborately designed concert production that will keep him on the road for three consecutive months.
Culbertson burst onto the scene in 1994 with a chart-topping album that he recorded in his college apartment featuring keyboard-led contemporary jazz tracks. “Long Night Out” landed him a lengthy record deal and signaled that a star was born.

Flash forward to present day, Culbertson composed thirty songs that populate the three albums in “The Trilogy” that describes the three-part arc of a long-term relationship: the hot and steamy “falling in love” phase, the rocky middle when perhaps they even break up for a bit, and the couple reunites to live “happily ever after” phase.

“Hearing the three albums in a row provides the context. All the songs on Red (October 2021) were clearly about passion and love. Blue (January 2022) is melancholy and sad songs, breakup songs, and ‘losing people’ songs. Once you get to part three, White (May 2022) is all about songs that have an uplifting feel to them. Stylistically, they all feel similar even though they are emotionally broad,” said Culbertson.

Possessing style, panache, and a savvy business mind capable of moving the needle in music and beyond, Culbertson founded and curates the annual Napa Valley, Chicago, and New Orleans Jazz Getaways, which have attracted guests from all over the globe to experience his premier events.

Whether you’re listening to music from “The Trilogy” on record or live in concert, you’re hearing an eclectic, entertaining, and engaging set from an artist at the peak of his power.

ABOUT BRAXTON BROTHERS
The Braxton Brothers, Nelson and Wayne, bring over two decades of exceptional music to the smooth jazz scene, earning a revered spot as the "funky twins of Smooth Jazz." They started their illustrious career in 1996, captivating audiences with their debut album that stormed the charts and helped establish the 6-string bass and saxophone combination as signature elements of their sound. Born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, the brothers not only perform but write, record, and produce their own music, creating a distinctively melodic, smooth, yet groovy sonic experience.

With six studio albums and over 70 commercially released original compositions, The Braxton Brothers continue to innovate by composing lyrics first, a unique approach for instrumentalists, ensuring their music resonates deeply and never fades into the background. Their latest single, "Groovin’ at the Symphony Hall," exemplifies their blend of classic smooth jazz with symphonic elements, creating an immersive musical journey.
The duo's commitment to uplifting spirits and fostering a connection through music is evident in their live performances, described by Wayne as moments where "we laugh, we joke around...everyone's best comes when they are themselves." Their upcoming appearances include the Dave Koz & Friends at Sea 2024 Cruise, the Lowcountry Jazz Festival, the Long Beach Jazz Festival, and others across the country, promising fans on both coasts a dynamic, heartfelt, and fun experience.

ABOUT MARION MEADOWS
Marion Meadows was born in West Virginia and grew up in Stamford, Connecticut. He began playing the clarinet and studying classical music at the age of nine. He started playing tenor sax in high school, and then migrated to soprano sax. His passion for various types of music led him down an eclectic musical path.

After studying jazz at Rippowam High School in Stamford, CT, with Anthony Truglia, Meadows attended Berklee College of Music. There he majored in arranging and composition. He later went to the SUNY Purchase School for the Arts. During his college years he played in a number of bands including disco, R&B, and various jazz ensembles, and perfected his craft studying with Sonny Fortune, Joe Henderson, Dave Liebman, and Eddie Daniels. “Not long after I finished school, (drummer) Norman Connors recorded one of my songs, “Invitation,” and then asked me to join his band. I later produced his Passion album with my colleague Jacques Burvick (Aquarium Dream),” said Meadows.

After that, things just fell into place. He hooked up with numerous artists and musicians, becoming a well-known sideman, recording or performing with Brook Benton, Eartha Kitt, Phyllis Hyman, Jean Carne, The Temptations, Michael Bolton, Angela Bofill, Will Downing, Bob Baldwin, Chuck Loeb, and John Lee, among many others.

In the late ‘80s, Meadows stretched his boundaries by becoming a member of a New York avant-garde band called the Aboriginal Music Society. In 1990 Meadows submitted a solo project to Steve Backer at Novus/RCA and was signed to a recording contract, thus marking the beginning of his solo career. Meadows’ first RCA release For Lover’s Only in 1990 was a huge success and was followed by his groundbreaking Keep it Right There album in 1992.

He became a staple of the contemporary jazz format with his subsequent recordings, which include Body Rhythm (1994) and Forbidden Fruit (1996), Pleasure (1997), Another Side Of Midnight (1999), Next To You (2000), In Deep (2002), Players Club (2004), Dressed To Chill

Meadows is a semi-pro cyclist, graphic artist, and designer. Marion received a doctorate from Wilberforce University in 2016.

ABOUT ALEX BUGNON

Jazz pianist Alex Bugnon has been a prolific, energetic force on the contemporary music scene for more than two decades. A renowned musician/composer/bandleader, Bugnon hales from the picturesque town of Montreux, Switzerland—site of the world famous Jazz Festival. No doubt, the annual convergence in his hometown and in his own home, of some of music’s most illustrious names played a role in his decision to pursue a musical career, as did his early friendship with Herbie Hancock. The fact that his uncle was the legendary Donald Byrd only served to further his decision.

Bugnon left Montreux to continue his training at a music conservatory in Paris before landing in Boston to further hone his skills at the famed Berklee School of Music. It was here in the US that his exposure to a diversity of musical styles—from R&B to gospel and funk, began to shape and influence his personal sound. He toured the south playing with Gospel Leviticus and after graduation from Berklee, had the opportunity to play in bands backing R&B greats Patti Austin and James Ingram, Melba Moore, Freddie Jackson, and Keith Sweat. In between gigs he drove cabs and taught French at the Berlitz School as a means to support his musical career. But it would be his encounter with saxophonist Najee that would ultimately turn the tide for him. Signed to Orpheus Records, Najee would make the introduction that would result in Alex’s first recording contract.

His first album, Love Season (1989), with the fledgling record label, catapulted the virtual unknown to prominence and set him on his musical course. The album rocketed to number 2 on the R&B charts and was nominated for Best Jazz Album at the Soul Train Awards. In 1991 Alex released his second album for Orpheus, Head Over Heels, and like the first, it became a chart topper cementing his position as a radio and fan favorite on the R&B and smooth jazz circuit, earning him Black Radio Exclusive’s Best New Artist Award.

It was no coincidence that Alex was embraced by an R&B/soul audience, after all his love of music was rooted in an appreciation and understanding of classic jazz and soul-based artists, “from Memphis Slim and Bill Evans, to Herbie Hancock, Thelonius Monk, Art Blakey
and Earth, Wind and Fire.” This was his inspiration and it easily translated into his own compositions and in his delivery of the standards.

In 1991, he parted ways with Orpheus Records and signed with Epic to record his award-winning third album, *107 Degrees in the Shade* (1991) for which he received a Soul Train Award. He would release one more album under the Epic label, the best selling, *This Time Around* (1993), before signing with RCA for *Tales from the Bright Side* (1995), before taking a five-year hiatus from recording.

As the new century began, Alex was also beginning anew. Signed to the Narada/EMI label, he resurfaced with the first of four albums for the label; *As Promised* (2000) followed by *Soul Purpose* (2001), *Southern Living* (2003), and *Free* (2005). Then in 2007, a chance meeting with award-winning producer and label founder, Michael Cuscuna, resulted in a comprehensive compilation album, *The Ultimate Alex Bugnon*, featuring cuts from each of his past recordings, and giving Alex a taste of what he had always been in search of—control. *The Ultimate Alex Bugnon* was released on Michael Cuscuna's Mosaic label and provided Alex the time needed to give thought to his creative process and allowed him to return to what was important to him as an artist, as a composer and as a musician.

Bugnon continued touring, but used the in-between time to reflect and re-evaluate every aspect of his personal and career journey. The result of this introspective period was his 2010 release, *Going Home*, recorded under his own label, Xela Records. The album incorporated a traditional sextet format, with trumpet, saxophone, and trombone added to his trio, and featured old friends, drummer Poogie Bell and bassist Victor Bailey.

Over these past few decades, Alex Bugnon has built a strong and loyal fan base across the country and around the world. His tour schedule has never eased, even besting the great Dizzy Gillespie's record of appearances at Washington, DC's Blues Alley. He makes it a point of never missing a day of piano practice or of writing. If he is not composing, he is listening to his favorite artists and biggest influences: Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Red Garland, Kenny Kirkland, Mulgrew Miller, and Keith Jarrett.

As the year comes to a close, Alex has released his 12th album—*HARLEM*, the second on Xela. *HARLEM* is a mix of original compositions and his personal take on beloved and well known songs including the classic, “A Night in Tunisia,” Curtis Mayfield’s “Pusherman,” Stevie Wonder’s “Summer Soft,” and Burt Bacharach’s “A House is Not a Home.” Alex makes
his home in the historic village of Harlem, New York, and maintains his connection to his beloved Montreux.

ABOUT INCOGNITO
An acid jazz project rooted in the Brit-funk scene, Incognito is led by Jean-Paul ‘Bluey’ Maunick, a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, producer, and arranger who has guided an ever-changing lineup since 1979. Incognito appeared to be a ‘one-and-done’ deal after their debut Jazz Funk in 1981, but returned in 1991 to record and perform at a steady rate, continually refining their feel-good hybrid sound. Maunick and company have placed 15 singles on the UK pop charts, including a Top Ten version of Ronnie Laws’ "Always There" and Top 20 cover of Stevie Wonder’s “Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing.”

Since then, the collective has produced an enormous back catalog of music, seeing them play countless venues across the globe. In October 2022, Incognito were also the first to be honored as part of Universal Music Recording’s “Black Story” series, which honors Black UK artists as part of UK Black History Month.

ABOUT CLOSING THE GAP IN HEALTH CARE
The Greater Charleston Lowcountry Jazz Festival is the primary fundraiser for Closing the Gap in Health Care, Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose primary mission is decreasing health disparities and increasing health literacy, especially for African Americans and the underserved in our community, South Carolina, and the nation.

The organization airs radio and television health tips, publishes a weekly e-newsletter, and provides information on social media to improve health literacy. Lectures, seminars, and youth and community activities are also provided by Closing the Gap in Health Care, Inc. Proceeds from the Festival support the mission of Closing the Gap in Health Care, Inc. and the Thaddeus John Bell, M.D. Endowment Fund. This scholarship fund was created conjointly with the Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina to assist students who pursue a health science degree and graduate from the Medical University of South Carolina. This will facilitate an increase in the number of African American health providers in the state.

The Greater Charleston Lowcountry Jazz Festival and Closing the Gap in Health Care, Inc. have made contributions, exceeding $250,000, to the Thaddeus John Bell, M.D. Endowment Fund.
ABOUT THE CHARLESTON GAILLARD CENTER

A leader in the performing arts in the Southeast, the Charleston Gaillard Center commissions, supports, and presents ambitious, multidisciplinary cultural programming and provides access to the best local, national, and global artists and companies on its stage. Deeply rooted in the community, the Gaillard Center committed to elevating local and regional voices and partnering with Charleston institutions to reflect the city's diversity, both on stage and off. Through programming on its public campus and extensive arts education initiatives, the Gaillard Center serves as a platform to participate in community building and essential dialogue.

Established as a nonprofit in 2015, its campus includes the 1,818-seat Martha and John M. Rivers Performance Hall, a 16,000 square-foot exhibition hall that is home to artistic activations, community and corporate events, and celebrations, and an adjacent park space that was recently activated for artistic presentations. Behind the scenes the Gaillard Center also fosters a culture of excellence and inclusion, employing a robust and talented staff, and providing opportunities for growth and engagement across the arts sector. Find more information and upcoming programming at gaillardcenter.org.

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