

For Immediate Release

In Celebration of International Jazz Day

San Jose Jazz
Presents

NEW WORKS FEST 2021

APR 29–MAY 8

**Featuring Live Performances by 11 Artist Grantees from the SJZ Jazz Aid Fund,
Captured in HD Video at San Jose Jazz's State-Of-The-Art New Venue:**



*SJZ New Works Fest Showcases Commissioned Compositions Set for Simulcast on
Innovative Multi-Media Video Wall for In-Person, Socially Distanced Outdoor Viewing
at The Break Room in Downtown San Jose and Live Virtual Broadcast at SanJoseJazz.org*

[Tickets On Sale Now](#)

San Jose, Calif. – Monday, March 22, 2021 – Arts organizations across the world have been met with substantial challenges on how best to sustain their roles as changemakers and to be catalysts of innovation for artists who have been devastated by the COVID-19 global pandemic. For 30 years, the heartbeat of nonprofit **San Jose Jazz's** platform to champion musicians has been its Summer and Winter Fests. San Jose Jazz expeditiously pivoted from their festival format to meet the new realities of the live concert industry with strategic programming to immediately support artists through individual grants and by offering a fundamental medium to feature their latest works. The nonprofit's latest venture debuts in April 2021 with their most forward-thinking program yet: a state-of-the-art pop-up video recording and performance venue **The SJZ Break Room** and the **SJZ New Works Fest 2021**. In celebration of **International Jazz Day (April 30)**, the SJZ New Works Fest 2021 runs from April 29 – May 8, 2021. Please view the SJZ New Works Fest 2021 video reel at this [LINK](#).

Housed inside San Jose Jazz's downtown office with a multi-media digital video wall featuring the latest in HD technology, **The Break Room** hosts leading-edge jazz artists on stage (indoors) while live performances are projection-mapped with Ultra-Short Throw Projectors onto high-end projection fabric mounted on motorized rollers. Sound from outdoor speakers and projections fill a 35 x 14 feet bank of floor to ceiling windows, providing a socially-distanced outdoor experience of the

concerts on San Carlos Street. The **SJZ New Works Fest 2021** is a ticketed streamed concert series (tickets ranging \$10 - \$20) available online at sanjosejazz.org. Outdoor viewing is for the general public; no tickets will be sold for viewing the shows from San Carlos Street. The public is kindly asked to observe Santa Clara County's social distancing requirements at all times.

The SJZ New Works Fest 2021 is The Break Room's inaugural production featuring SJZ commissioned compositions from 11 SF Bay Area artists (out of a total of 33 grantees) who were recently awarded \$1,000 grants through the nonprofit's **SJZ Jazz Aid Fund**. The artist lineup includes **GRAMMY** Award-winner **Oran Etkin** as the headliner (International Jazz Day: April 30 – Free Livestream – 7:30pm), as well as Bay Area musicians **Kev Choice, Javier Santiago, Tammy Hall, Ten Spencer, Vân-Ánh Võ, Chris Cain, Claudia Villela, Justin Ouellet, Howard Wiley, Robbie Benson, and Ian Santillano**. Bio information for all artists is listed below and available at sanjosejazz.org.

The Break Room Project Manager Scott Fulton spearheaded the build-out of the space to serve as a professional live music venue with world class recording and video capabilities. The Break Room presents high-def livestreaming concerts fronting a 3-D, animated backdrop, all presented via ultra-short throw projections with two simultaneous automated feeds on the video wall. Audience members can stand within 2.5 feet from the window without disturbing the video feed for a fully immersive viewing experience. During the day when SJZ staff are hard at work, the screens are rolled up. In a matter of a couple of hours on days of performances, The Break Room is ready for showtime.

Following the SJZ New Works Fest 2021, San Jose Jazz plans to program intimate performances at The Break Room once social distancing protocols allow for small indoor concerts, as well as future live streams. Free shows from previous Summer & Winter Fests will be projected on the video wall throughout 2021 for people walking by to enjoy in an effort to enliven downtown San Jose street life. The wall also serves as a "bulletin board" where organizations can promote upcoming programs and community news.

The Break Room is one of several initiatives San Jose Jazz has instituted to help Bay Area artists and local youth throughout the pandemic. SJZ programs also include the **Live at Home** concert series (100% of donations go directly to the artists); **Backstage** (racism and mentorship workshops led by musicians); **Progressions** (online video lessons and Google Classroom sessions for elementary school students in San Jose's Franklin-McKinley School District); **SJZ Live Music Series** at the Coronavirus vaccination site at the School of the Arts & Culture (Mexican Heritage Plaza); and the **SHIP Kits** initiative in tandem with the **Ella Fitzgerald Foundation** that helped provide educational and entertainment materials for families struggling during lockdown that were delivered by the **SJZ Boombox Truck**. The **SJZ Jazz Aid Fund** was established by the **SJZ Board of Directors** and garnered a substantial gift from longtime SJZ Board member **Jan De Carli**. The Break Room is funded by the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**.

SJZ Executive Director Brendan Rawson comments, "Similar to so many other arts institutions, we were shocked by the disastrous effects of the pandemic. But it's during tough times like these we must stay strong and connected as a community and develop creative solutions in response to real-world issues. San Jose Jazz has always worked to vitalize downtown San Jose with music and to provide avenues for artists to create and be heard. Over the past 12 months, our programs have underscored just how essential the arts are for people. It's part of their lifeline to live fully. We need to be a part of that."

SJZ Board President Julie Ramirez adds, "Music brings comfort and joy, and a strong sense of community. Our Board-driven effort to individually grant \$1,000 to 33 artists, and an additional performance fee for 11 artists to appear at the SJZ New Works Fest 2021, is only one way to sustain careers in the arts that have suffered so substantially. We continue to need help through individual donations until these artists are truly back on their feet, regularly performing."

"We've been inspired by the resilience and adaptability of arts organizations like San Jose Jazz that, throughout the pandemic, have leveraged technology to create content and experiences that meet people where they are," says **Jayne Butler, Arts Officer for the Knight Foundation**. "In a time when we need it most, The Break Room will allow jazz fans to connect with their community and safely indulge in performances by talented local and regional musicians."

Scott Fulton notes, "My team and I strategized on how best to create the vibe of a real jazz club, and I believe we succeeded beyond all of our expectations. Without the right feel of a room, it doesn't matter how much expensive equipment and lighting you bring into a space, it's not going to have that magic touch. We can't wait for music fans to see the pure energy emanating from the video wall, and hopefully soon, to also be in the space along with us. In the meantime, the virtual festival is going to bring dynamic performances right into people's homes. Since The Break Room serves as a pop-up venue, we can regularly and easily host artists at the office."

[SJZ New Works Fest 2021](#)

An extension of the **SJZ Jazz Aid Fund**, San Jose Jazz's forthcoming performance series the **SJZ New Works Fest 2021** uplifts SF Bay Area musicians by stimulating commissioned pieces from 11 artists who will be spotlighted at the 4-night event spread across 10 days (April 29 – May 8, 2021). The lineup for the SJZ New Works Fest 2021 represents the diverse fabric of genres and demographics that make up the vibrant Bay Area music scene.

The SJZ Jazz Aid Fun awarded 33 musicians who were selected by key members of the SF Bay Area jazz community, including **Monterey Jazz** artistic director **Tim Jackson**; **Public Radio International** Latin Music Correspondent (and SJZ Latin Music Coordinator) **Betto Arcos**; music critic **Andrew Gilbert**; **SFJAZZ** Director of Artistic Programming **Lilly Schwartz**; **KCSM Radio 91** Music Director **Alisa Clancy**; and other administrators, artists, and curators. The 11 artists at the SJZ New Works Fest 2021 will be introduced by the Bay Area's own **Greg Bridges** (radio DJ at KCSM), and Bridges will interview one artist each night of the Fest. Arcos will host additional artist interview segments during the week of May 3rd.

"The wide range of our 'recommenders' in the community allowed us to connect with new artists from the SF Bay Area and broaden our scope," comments **SJZ Artistic and Festival Director Bruce Labadie**. "We're very excited to have such a great cross-section of talent for the Fest. San Jose Jazz has worked tirelessly to present these artists through a very contemporary medium with the HD video wall, which will be integrated into the virtual broadcast alongside the performances. Whether people witness the concerts safely outside of our office or on their computer, I believe the Fest offers a groundbreaking platform for artists moving forward."

Headliner **Oran Etkin** will collaborate with SF Bay Area artists and select SJZ Jazz Aid Fund grantees for his free livestreamed concert on **International Jazz Day** (April 30). The Fest further includes electrifying 25-minute performances by **Kev Choice**, **Javier Santiago**, **Tammy Hall**, **Ten Spencer**, **Vân-Ánh Võ**, **Chris Cain**, **Claudia Villela**, **Justin Ouellet**, **Howard Wiley**, **Robbie Benson**, and **Ian Santillano**. Each performing artist has been awarded an additional grant to appear at the SJZ New Works Fest 2021. Bio information for all artists is listed below and available at sanjosejazz.org.

The SJZ New Works Fest 2021 runs on Thursday, April 29 with three individual artist performances (**Ian Santillano**, **Tammy Hall**, **Claudia Villela**); Friday, April 30 with the **Oran Etkin Project** (free); Thursday, May 6 with four performances (**Robbie Benson**, **Justin Ouellet**, **Ten Spencer**, **Chris Cain**); and Saturday, May 8 with four performances (**Howard Wiley**, **Vân-Ánh Võ**, **Javier Santiago**, **Kev Choice**). On April 27 – 28, San Jose Jazz will present two online educational programs hosted by Oran Etkin. All shows start at 7:30pm PST. Tickets to one evening of programming are \$10; a Fest Pass is \$20 for access to all performances; and access to the April 30 show is free with tickets available at sanjosejazz.org.

Artist Bios:

Oran Etkin

Oran Etkin has been described as "ebullient" by *The New York Times*, "composer of eminent individuality" by Yusef Lateef and was voted #1 Rising Star Clarinetist in *DownBeat* magazine's Critic's Poll. His unique sound on the clarinet, bass-clarinet and saxophone emanates from an openness to deep musical connections that often transcend cultural and generational boundaries. Last April, as the world was closing down, Etkin's response was Open Arms Project: a series of singles and music videos recorded and filmed shortly before the closures on location in Rio de Janeiro, Harare Zimbabwe, Prague, Paris and São Paulo.

"Open Arms to me is an attitude," reflects Etkin. "It's felt in the warmth with which I was greeted in each country and how we welcomed each other into our musical worlds. It is at the core of how we approach making new music together with open ears, unafraid to discover a new side of ourselves outside our comfort zone. And it's also an answer to the rigid isolation of hate and fear that has been permeating the political discourse."

One year later, as the world starts to open and imagine a new future, Etkin will premiere the next stage of the Open Arms Project. Traveling to San Jose from New York, Etkin will collaborate with Bay-Area musicians to reinterpret and add their own voice to the music of the Open Arms series. Reflecting on the rhythms, melodies and spirit of the people he collaborated with in his travels, Etkin and his band create a fresh forward-looking sound that tells the musical story of an opening and humanly connected world.

Chris Cain

Chris Cain offers up a soulful stew of Memphis style electric blues. His powerfully deep vocals and jazz inspired, blues guitar riffs are unforgettably his own, while reminiscent of legends like BB King and Albert King. When Chris burst onto the blues scene with the first of 12 albums, 1987's *Cuttin' Loose*, he found himself sharing the stage with a few of those legends

including Albert King and Albert Collins. The combination of his blues upbringing and his jazz studies melded to form the searing guitar style that has moved Chris Cain to the top ranks of the blues music scene.

Claudia Villela

Claudia Villela's glorious five-octave voice is lithe and startlingly beautiful in every register. Born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, she writes and sings mostly in Portuguese, interpreting lyrics with keen emotional insight and supple rhythmic command. Already performing professionally in Brazil in her teens, Claudia later attended the Manhattan School of Music evolving into an inventive scat singer and an ingenious songwriter with an astonishing body of original material. The latest of her seven albums is 2019's *Encantada (Live)*, a collection of performances that *DownBeat* lauded as exhibiting "an unwavering commitment to the highest level of improvisation."

Howard Wiley

Saxophonist Howard Wiley is a major force in the Bay Area music scene, steeped in African-American idioms like gospel, blues, jazz, funk and R&B. Howard is a certified prodigy, having been selected as a member of the Grammy All-American Jazz Band at age 14, later participating in the Herbie Hancock Institute program and winning a scholarship to Berklee School of Music. He's gone on to tour regularly with Kamasi Washington and has performed with the likes of Miss Lauryn Hill, Sheila E, Christian McBride and more. He has performed at the Playboy Jazz Festival, Monterey Jazz Festival, North Sea Jazz Fest, SXSW and at prestigious venues worldwide.

Ian Santillano

Hayward multi-instrumentalist Ian Santillano taught himself how to play the guitar after years of playing Guitar Hero. Since then, he's forged a melodic, soulful sound from influences including John Mayer's *Continuum*, D'Angelo's *Voodoo* and Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly*. While at Santa Clara University, Ian sharpened his music skills, learning jazz and music theory while getting degree in Computer Engineering. Now 24, he writes, produces and records his original music. Lush pads, funky drums, dreamy vocals and aggressive guitar solos support lyrics of honesty and self-experience. Ian has a sound all his own: "Greasy Mayer;" melodic funky soul with a touch of jazz vocabulary.

Javier Santiago

Javier Santiago is one of the most prolific young pianists in the Bay Area and a notable force in the jazz, beat and hip-hop scenes. He has played with top rising international stars including Theo Croker, Kenneth Whalum, John Raymond, Yosvany Terry and Irwin Hall. Javier's debut album, *Phoenix* (2018) on Ropeadope Records was named the #1 Jazz Album of the Year by *Vinyl Me, Please*. In addition to being a pianist and sideman, Santiago is also an accomplished educator, arranger and producer. He is alumnus of The Brubeck Institute Fellowship Program and The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in NYC.

Justin Ouellet

Justin Ouellet, named 2019's Best Jazz Instrumentalist by *San Francisco Classical Voice*, has garnered a reputation as a fearless performer and dedicated educator. In addition to an accomplished career as a classical musician on both violin and viola, Justin moves effortlessly between genres such as jazz, R&B, blues, rock and hip-hop, and has collaborated with an astonishing range of artists from Kev Choice and Jennifer Johns to Air Traffic Controller and Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg. Justin is a recipient of the Academy of Gospel Music Award for his achievement in arts education as co-director of Orchestral & Chamber Music Studies at Oakland School for the Arts.

Kev Choice

Oakland native Kev Choice is a classically-trained pianist, emcee, composer and bandleader who uses conscious lyricism to bring a positive message to his unique blend of hip-hop, jazz, R&B and soul. Kev has worked with the likes of Michael Franti, Goapele and The Coup, to name a few, and has toured as music director with Ms. Lauryn Hill. He currently leads his own multi-genre blending band, the Kev Choice Ensemble and has composed for the Oakland and San Francisco Symphonies. His latest album is 2020's *Social Distancing*. He currently teaches at Oakland School for the Arts and serves on Oakland's Cultural Affairs Commission and the Governor's Board of the SF Chapter of the Recording Academy.

Robbie Benson

Learning to play on a Wurlitzer electric piano while still in diapers, Robbie "Gwobs" Benson had a rich musical upbringing in San Jose, where a Hammond B3 organ was just an arm's length away. Surrounded by the sounds of his dad & uncle's R&B vinyl collection and their stories as bay area musicians, Robbie was born into a deep appreciation for his hometown's rich musical history. Greatly inspired and mentored by the local legends he'd see perform (Clifford Coulter, Ron E. Beck, Russell Ferrante, etc.), Robbie has tried to keep that old-school San Jose "funk" alive for the next generation.

Tammy Lynne Hall

Tammy Lynne Hall began playing the piano at age four, urged on by her two grandmothers who pooled their resources to fund her private lessons. Since then she has become one of the most respected and beloved performers and music directors in the SF Bay Area. Tammy has worked with acclaimed vocalists like Etta Jones, Kim Nalley, Nicolas Bearde, Ernestine Anderson, Melba Moore, and Queen Esther Marrow; and instrumentalists such as Regina Carter and Terrence Brewer. In 2017 she was awarded Best Musical Direction from the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle for her work in Pamela Rose's *Blues Is A Woman*.

Ten Spencer

Ten Spencer is a rising, Oakland-based vocalist and visual artist. Whether it's hip-hop, modern jazz, R&B, soul, rock or indie pop, her sultry, honey-sweet voice captures the minds of her audience and invites them into her world. Ten works with musicians on both coasts and has opened for artists including Joe, Alex Isley and Mario. Her music is original and healing, and expands upon a wide appreciation of the Black American improvisational music that guides her work today. She's the recipient of various vocalist awards and was the 2019 Jazz Search West Award winner.

Vân-Ánh Võ

A fearless musical explorer, Vân-Ánh Võ is an award-winning performer of the 16-string đàn tranh (zither) and an Emmy Award-winning composer who has collaborated with Kronos Quartet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and Yo-Yo Ma. She has performed her music in 14 countries, at prestigious venues including Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Houston Grand Opera, WOMAD Festival (UK), and the 2012 London Olympic Games. A prolific composer, she co-composed music for the Oscar® nominated documentary *Daughter from Danang* and the Emmy® Award winning film and soundtrack for *Bolinao 52*. In 2021 she premieres *Songs of Strength* at Cal Performances and *Mekong: SOUL*, commissioned by the Kennedy Center.

Media partners for the SJZ New Works Fest 2021 include *DownBeat* magazine and KCSM Jazz 91.

About San Jose Jazz

Founded in 1986, San Jose Jazz is a public benefit organization celebrating jazz as a dynamic, evolving art form and is producer of the annual San Jose Jazz Summer Fest and Winter Fest. San Jose Jazz innovates trend-setting initiatives to foster artistic ingenuity and preserve the jazz tradition as a forward-thinking movement. Through diverse music and educational programming, San Jose Jazz offers singular content and events by investing in the SF Bay Area ecosystem of exceptional talent for local and national audiences to enjoy.

For more information, please visit sanjosejazz.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit kf.org.

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Artist interviews and hi-res photos are available upon request.

Media Contact:

Jesse P. Cutler, JP Cutler Media, 510.658.3236, jesse@jpcutlermedia.com