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## NEWS RELEASE

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**NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Pays Tribute to Nat King Cole and  
Art Blakey with a Free Concert in Jersey City**  
*Featuring conductor Dick Lowenthal and special guests Wynton Marsalis,  
Allan Harris, and Antoinette Montague*

**Jersey City, NJ (August 28, 2019)** -- The New Jersey City University Center for the Arts presents the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual **NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Concert** on Friday, September 6 at 6 p.m. on the J. Owen Grundy Pier, Exchange Place, in Jersey City. Conducted by Professor Emeritus **Richard Lowenthal**, this free concert features trumpeter **Wynton Marsalis** and vocalists **Allan Harris** and **Antoinette Montague**.

The concert pays tribute to the 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays of **Nat King Cole** and **Art Blakey**. Cole, who died at the age of 45, began his music career as a jazz pianist but went on to become one of the most popular jazz and pop singers of all time. Drummer Art Blakey enjoyed more than 60 years as a jazz musician, leading the iconic Jazz Messengers and being inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, the Modern Drummer Hall of Fame, and the DownBeat Hall of Fame.

The Alumni Big Band concert began in 2013 at the request of NJCU President Sue Henderson, a jazz enthusiast who was being inaugurated as the first woman president of the University, which was founded in 1927 as a teacher-training college. President Henderson asked Professor Richard Lowenthal of the NJCU Music Department to produce a jazz concert as part of the inauguration festivities and Lowenthal put out a call to alumni of the program who were active in the music business.

The first concert included many of the top big band players in the country with Lowenthal's good friend and jazz trumpet player, conductor and composer Jon Faddis making a special guest appearance. The program was so well-received and attended that Henderson decided to make it an annual event with Lowenthal co-producing the concert with Don Jay Smith.

This year's special guests include one of the most famous names in jazz, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who joined Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers in 1980. An internationally acclaimed musician, composer, bandleader and educator, Wynton has won nine Grammy Awards, a Pulitzer Prize, the National Medal of Arts, the National Humanities Medal, plus numerous other awards and accolades. He expressed a delight to be able to pay homage to Art Blakey.

The salute to Nat King Cole features the Harlem-based vocalist Allan Harris, whom the Wall Street Journal called "the most exciting young male singer on the scene." Since launching his career some two decades ago, Alan has won numerous awards, including the DownBeat Critics Award, two Hot House Jazz Magazine Awards, the Backstage Bistro Award and several others. Critics have compared him to Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, and, of course, Nat King Cole. Allan will be joined for duets featuring a New Jersey favorite, Antoinette Montague, who will reprise the Grammy Award-winning performance of Natalie Cole singing "Unforgettable."

"Every year, we invite special guest artists to join our all-star alumni big band," said Lowenthal, who retired from NJCU in 2017, "and we have been fortunate to have some greats including Jon Faddis, Randy Brecker, John Pizzarelli, Bucky Pizzarelli, Cyrille Aimee, Paquito D'Rivera and Lou Marini."

As is the case every year, the all-star big band includes accomplished musicians who studied at the school as far back as the 1960s when Lowenthal started the jazz program. The band members are drummer Rich DeRosa; sax players Mark Friedman, Bob Magnusson, Dave Noland, Dustyn Richardson and John DiSanto; trumpeters Alex Norris, Nate Eklund and Vinnie Cutro; trombonists Rob Edwards, Mike Modero and Conrad Zulauf; and faculty member Garry Dial on piano. The big band will also feature three students: bassist John Benitez, trombonist Juanga Lakunza and trumpeter Alejandro Pizarro-Leon.

The sponsors of this free concert include the NJCU Foundation, Arch Insurance, Claremont Companies, Hampshire Companies, Inserra Supermarkets, NJTV, RBC Capital Markets, the Gia Maione Prima Foundation, NJM Insurance Group, Del-Sano Contracting, the Hudson County Office of Culture and Tourism, Dresdner Robin, the City of Jersey City, Jersey City Office of Cultural Affairs, Mack-Cali, Jersey City Medical Center, The PRC Group, Hyatt Regency Jersey City, Hyatt House, New Jersey Broadcasters Association, Hot House Jazz Guide, Exchange Place Alliance and WBGO.

The NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band Concert is free and takes place on the J. Owen Grundy Pier at Exchange Place in Jersey City on Friday, September 6 at 6 p.m. Food trucks will be on site and seating is on a first-come, first served basis. If it rains, the concert will be held in the Harborside Atrium, Harborside 2 and 3 at 34 Exchange Place. The J. Owen Grundy Pier is located near public transportation and there are numerous parking lots in the area.

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**ABOUT THE NJCU ALUMNI JAZZ BIG BAND**

The NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band brings together an impressive group of musicians and shares their talents with the Jersey City community. NJCU jazz alumni have credits in Broadway, television, recording industry, and symphony orchestras, and have worked with some of the most legendary artists of all time, including Gerry Mulligan, Ray Charles, Buddy Rich, Maynard Ferguson, Lionel Hampton, Johnny Mathis, Nancy Wilson, Cher, Mel Tormé and Tony Bennett.

This is the seventh year the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band will present a waterfront concert on the J. Owen Grundy Pier. Previous concerts have been A Tribute to WBGO's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with guest soloist Paquito d'Rivera, A 100th Birthday Salute to Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Buddy Rich, and Thelonious Monk, with guest artists Jon Faddis and Cyrille Aimée; A Tribute to Lew Soloff of Blood Sweat & Tears with Randy Brecker; A Tribute to Clark Terry with special guest Wynton Marsalis; *A Salute to the Other Jersey Boys* with John Pizzarelli, Bucky Pizzarelli and Ed Laub; and A Celebration of the Inauguration of President Sue Henderson with trumpeter Jon Faddis.

These annual concerts are conducted by Professor Emeritus Richard Lowenthal, who retired in June 2017 after 50 years at the University. Lowenthal founded the Jazz Program at NJCU, then Jersey City State College, in 1969. Under Lowenthal's leadership and continuing with professors Ed Joffe, Walt Weiskopf and Gabriel Alegria, NJCU boasts a strong jazz program on both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

## **ABOUT THE NJCU CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

**New Jersey City University (NJCU) Center for the Arts** is the creative umbrella for the University's public programs in the performing, visual, film and literary arts. A cultural hub of metro-north Jersey, NJCU has strong arts departments, led by accomplished faculty, and presents an array of guest artists and speakers in addition to student performances.

## **ABOUT NJCU**

NJCU is among the most comprehensive universities in the state of New Jersey, hosting 52 undergraduate degree programs, 28 master's programs, and 3 doctoral programs. NJCU competes in intercollegiate athletics within the New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC), and is a member of the NCAA Division III. NJCU students engage in rigorous applied-learning experiences that include opportunities to study abroad, and cooperative education internships. NJCU operates two additional campus sites—NJCU School of Business at Harborside in Jersey City's financial district and NJCU at Brookdale in Wall Township in Monmouth County.



**PHOTO:** Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis performs with the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band on the Grundy Pier in Jersey City on Friday, September 6; *photo by Clay McBride.*



**PHOTO:** Vocalist Allan Harris salutes Nat King Cole with the NJCU Alumni Jazz Big Band on Friday, September 6 at the Grundy Pier in Jersey City; *photo by Sandrine.*



**PHOTO:** Vocalist Antoinette Montague joins Allan Harris and Wynton Marsalis on Friday September 6 at Jersey City's Grundy Pier for a salute to Art Blakey and Nat King Cole; *photo by Tony Graves.*



**PHOTO:** NJCU President Sue Henderson presents a plaque to Professor Richard Lowenthal in recognition of his 50 years with the university; *photo by Dan Loh.*