



Photo provided / Jimmy and Dena Katz

The touring band for "Newport Jazz Festival: Now 60," from left, Karrin Allyson, Clarence Penn, Larry Grenadier, Anat Cohen, Mark Whitfield, Randy Brecker and Peter Martin, performs Wednesday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Legendary festival marks its anniversary with a tour, which will stop at the Mendel Center

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**
HP Features Writer

BENTON HARBOR — George Wein was running the Boston club, Storyville, when Louis and Elaine Lorillard, a couple from Newport, R.I., approached him about having a jazz festival in their city.

"There were no outdoor jazz festivals at the time, but I knew that there was a classical festival up in Tanglewood, Mass., so I said, 'Well, why can't we have a jazz festival?'" Wein, still active at 88, says by telephone from his New York City office. "They made it possible for me to produce the first one, and we've been going ever since."

That first gathering of jazz acts at Fort Adams State Park in 1954 is better known today as the Newport Jazz

IF YOU GO

► **WHAT:** Newport Jazz Festival: Now 60

► **WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

► **WHERE:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

► **HOW MUCH:** \$25-\$39

► **CONTACT:** 927-1221 or www.lmcmainstage.org

Festival, an event that changed the jazz world by attracting a different breed of listener, leading to the creation of a summer festival circuit that has become a way of life for today's jazz musicians.

To mark the 60th anniversary of the annual festival, Wein hand-picked an all-star group of today's jazz players for the cross-country tour, "Newport Jazz Festival: Now 60," which makes a stop Wednesday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center. The formidable roster features clarinet player Anat Cohen, trumpet player Randy Brecker, guitarist Mark Whitfield, pianist Peter Martin, bassist Larry Grenadier, drummer Clarence Penn and vocalist Karrin Allyson.

"There's no doubt that every player on that stage is a force to be reckoned with," Allyson says by telephone during a tour stop in Pittsburgh. "It's seven band leaders and that's not typical. It's a collective and we all

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Folk troubado

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come with ideas for songs. They might be tributes to artists who have played the Newport Jazz Festival in the past and also some originals and tunes we think will lend themselves well to our instrumental makeup. We're just groovin' and having a great time with this music."

Although the show includes numbers from the repertoires of Newport stalwarts such as John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and Dave Brubeck, the equal focus on current compositions and where jazz is headed "now," as the title suggests, is certainly by design.

"Where is jazz going?" Wein says. "We have to be very concerned with that because if we don't we'll just be a museum piece and I don't want that. We have to find out whether the public is interested in jazz music or if they are interested in memories. Old people have memories, younger people create memories. We grow each year because we're really looking for the new people in jazz, the new names."

Allyson may not be a new name in jazz circles, but she is the only member of the band that will play Newport for the first time when the tour concludes there the first week in August. It's a milestone that is certainly not lost on her.

"This festival has given



Photo provided / John Abbott

George Wein, who is often called "the most famous jazz impresario," founded the Newport Jazz Festival, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary with a tour that stops Wednesday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center.

great jazz artists a quality venue to play and it has broken several careers," Allyson says. "Moments at the Newport festival, some of them are very well known. It's a really great reminder that the torches are being carried."

Allyson, who studied classical piano before becoming enthralled with singer-songwriters Joni Mitchell and Melissa Manchester as a teenager, says she discovered jazz in col-

lege at the University of Nebraska. She signed with Concord Records in 1992, which released her debut recording, "I Didn't Know About You," and has since recorded more than 10 albums, including "Footprints" (2006), "Imagina: Songs of Brazil" (2008), "Round Midnight" (2011) and the holiday album "Yuletide Hideaway" (2013).

"When I discovered jazz it bit me hard because of

the improvisational aspects of it and the integrity of the music, the intellect and the humor," she says. "It never loses my interest. It's my tried and true thing."

Given the improvisational nature of jazz, Allyson says the set list for the "Now 60" tour has varied each night, although some of the staples have been an opening rendition of Ornette Coleman's "Blues Connotation," an arrangement of Jay Livingston and Raymond Evans standard "Never Let Me Go," and Cohen's clarinet rendition of Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose," which Louis Armstrong liked to play as a jazz piece.

"It reflects the story of jazz," Wein says. "The band references different styles and eras. It just shows, without beating it into the ground, a capsule structure of what jazz has been over the years because that's what Newport has been over the years. I am proud of that. I'm proud of the whole history of Newport and the artists who we helped their careers. I still believe those people would have made it anyway. We just gave them a nudge."

Wein, who for many years played the festival with a group of all-stars, says he only has one regret about the current ensemble.

"I still play a little piano, you know?" Wein says. "I'm just sorry I'm not playing with the band myself."

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