by Beth Schucker

“Absolutely not,” says Monty Alexander, with a hint of indignation. I had asked him if he raised an eyebrow when Al Sikes invited him in 2010 to perform a one-nighter, in a small theater, in a small town on the Eastern Shore. I thought the question relevant: after all, Monty, the namesake and Artistic Director of The Monty Alexander Jazz Festival, claims the world as his stage.

Monty finishes his thought, “I had no formal music training. I learned piano by playing. So I played anywhere. I never raised an eyebrow. After sixty some years, I’m still learning, playing anywhere and not raising an eyebrow.”

Al Sikes steers the showmanship behind “Jazz on the Chesapeake” which produces The Monty Alexander Jazz Festival. During Sikes’ illustrious career that zigged and zagged through law, business and government service, he never had an inkling that one day he might become a jazz impresario. He mentions that he played jazz trombone in high school, and his voice drops to a whisper when he admits “we played from sheet music.” Now he boasts of being a “passionate listener of jazz.”

Soon after retiring, Sikes rekindled his old friendship with Rush Moody, past president of Chesapeake Chamber Music. “We’ve always shared an affinity for jazz and classical music,” says Sikes. “That’s why Moody challenged me to throw a jazz hat into the arena. After I caught my breath, I turned to another friend, Dr. Bill Edgar, who at the time was writing liner notes for Monty Alexander.” The rest is history.

Growth of The Monty Alexander Jazz Festival has been remarkable. “In five years, we’ve grown from two to six concerts a year,” says Sikes, who never finishes a sentence about the Festival without emphasizing the top-ranked quality of the performers. Even the emerging artists are often the Juilliard pedigreed, much-in-demand young artists making waves on the New York scene.

Al estimates that hundreds of Shore residents, who never considered themselves jazz enthusiasts, now support the Festival as benefactors and patrons. Clearly an important audience core of locals serves as ballast for the Festival, but Al also likes to muse about the winsomeness of jazz and how it draws a small but growing number of jazz lovers from states near and far.

Monty elaborates, “Since I’m in the trenches, I make the first pick of Festival performers, but at the end of the day, Al and I make mutual decisions.” We look for top notch talent and good will, good taste and positive outlook. “It’s like a delectable meal. We want to be feted with outstanding and varied ingredients.”

“No question, performers are the key to success,” says Sikes, “and this is where ‘Jazz on the Chesapeake’ is in a very good position. We have direct paths to outstanding musicians through Monty and others. We avoid agents, pin down costs, and the relationship with the potential performer can be grounded on a firm foundation of music kinship.”

As Sikes talks “top-ranked quality,” Monty talks “uplifting music.” Monty first experienced uplifting music as a kid in Jamaica. “It was Louis Armstrong,” he says. “You achieve uplifting music when you get out of your own way and just let the music flow.”

Listening to Monty talk, I recalled my reactions to his enthralling renditions of “Sweet Georgia Brown” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” at the Avalon. In those moments my being did leave the theater surroundings to become part of his music.

I didn’t ask Monty about the pending music for the fifth anniversary. But I know it will be uplifting.
Frank Vignola, Guitar Virtuoso

by Ron S. Liebman

Recording and touring artist Frank Vignola is a guitar virtuoso. He began playing at age six, and while very much a jazzman, he is also an across-the-board musician and player. As a youngster, Frank listened to a wide spectrum of music ranging from classical to jazz, rock, pop and even rhythm and blues. His playing reflects his deep appreciation of all good music, whatever the genre.

Frank’s influences have been many, including guitar legends Django and Les Paul, with whom Frank played many times until Paul’s death. “I met Les when I was a teenager,” Frank has said, “and we not only played together regularly, but became very close friends.”

In a Wall Street Journal article, Les Paul named Frank to his “Five Most Admired Guitar List.”

Frank has recorded and/or toured with Madonna, Leon Redbone, Ringo Starr, with famed trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, and has performed with the Boston Pops. He has made featured appearances for a wide variety of record companies, including Sony, Atlantic, and Warner Brothers Records. He has even played Gershwin. His recorded collection of Gershwin pieces, entitled “Vignola Plays Gershwin” for Mel Bay Records was ranked number two on National Public Radio’s airplay charts.

Despite his heavy touring and recording schedule, Frank has managed to write eighteen guitar instruction books and has recorded six educational DVDs. Through the years he has also performed at hundreds of clinics and has offered master classes at major universities and colleges, including Juilliard and Boston University. Those who have had the pleasure of watching and listening to Frank’s playing can understand why The New York Times named him “one of the brightest stars of the guitar.”

Appearing at our own Monty Alexander Jazz Festival will be a treat, not only for his audience, but for Frank as well. “I’m very excited to be a part of the Monty Alexander Festival,” Frank recently said. “Monty has been one of my idols. It’s both a privilege and an honor to share the stage with one of the greatest jazz players living today.”

Frank will open at the Art Academy Museum on Thursday evening, August 28, at 8:00 p.m. and will appear again with Monty Alexander at the Avalon Theatre on Saturday night, August 30, at 8:00 p.m.

Bobby Militello

At Monty Alexander’s invitation, Bobby Militello will lead the Salute to Dave Brubeck on Saturday afternoon, August 30 at 2:00 at the Avalon Theatre. Known as one of the most exciting and innovative alto soloists in jazz, Militello played alto saxophone and flute in Dave Brubeck’s quartet for almost thirty years. Dave asked Bobby to join his group in 1982 following in the footsteps of alto saxophonist Paul Desmond and baritone saxophonist Jerry Mulligan. Dave Brubeck first heard Bobby Militello playing baritone saxophone and flute in Maynard Ferguson’s orchestra during the late 1970s. Militello has played with almost every major orchestra in the US, Canada and Europe and has appeared at many international jazz festivals, television and radio shows for the last four decades.

Etienne Charles Headlines Friday Evening

by Barbara Parker

Trumpeter, composer, educator, and bandleader, Etienne Charles is slated to headline Friday evening, August 29th at this year’s Monty Alexander Jazz Festival. With a rich musical history in jazz and the music of the Caribbean, this native of Trinidad brings a Creole flavor to his music that ranges from subtle to unavoidable, weaving a variety of stories with panache.

The fourth generation of his family to become a musician, he began playing trumpet at age ten, added percussion to his skill set, and was playing in his father’s band by the age of sixteen. He was awarded a scholarship to Florida State University and started playing in international competition, placing second in the Trumpet Guild Jazz Competition in Bangkok, Thailand, and performing in The Hague, Netherlands at the North Sea Jazz Festival. He placed first at the National Jazz Competition in Virginia in 2006, and earned a full scholarship to The Juilliard School for his master's studies. In June 2012 he was written into the U.S. Congressional Record for his “musical contributions to the citizens of Trinidad & Tobago and the World.”

Now an Assistant Professor of Jazz at Michigan State University, Mr. Charles tours extensively nation-ally and internationally, connecting with audiences through his sheer passion for his craft. His latest recording, “Creole Soul,” is a blend of Afro-Caribe arrangements and virtuoso performance that soars and moans by turn. Applauded as a “daring improvisor” by Jazz Magazine, he has arranged interpretations of the complex and varied rhythms of the Spanish, French, Dutch and English-speaking Caribbean in a fresh and exciting sound that builds upon those diverse origins, yet takes jazz in a new direction.

In addition to his solo albums, Etienne Charles has played with a wide range of stars, including Monty Alexander, Roberta Flack, Wynton Marsalis, the Count Basie Orchestra, and many others.

Coming to Easton with his quintet, Etienne will play a combination of the music from his albums titled “Folklore” and “Kaiso.” In fact, the original recording of “Kaiso” featured Monty Alexander. He is also planning some new compositions and arrangements for the Festival, which will surely to delight subscribers.

Chesapeake Chamber Music’s mission is to enrich the musical life of the Chesapeake region by delighting today’s audiences and developing tomorrow’s.
The legendary soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet once remarked on the roots of jazz, “There’s two kinds of music,” he said, “there’s classic and there’s ragtime. When I tell you ragtime, you can feel it, there’s a spirit right in the word. It comes out of Negro spirituals.” Ragtime is an older word for jazz, although most people think of it as a piano style associated with Scott Joplin and his colleagues. To “rag” a tune meant to tear up the rhythm the way you might rip up an old rag.

Although jazz was born in New Orleans at the beginning of the twentieth century, its roots are much older. Black marching bands in the great Southern cities played hymns and spirituals, with a cadence known as swing. Isn’t jazz basically entertainment music, you might ask? Much of it is, indeed. And yet the starting place for this wonderful music is in log cabins on the edge of the plantations where the enslaved Africans could worship in relative secrecy. These simple structures were known as “praise houses” or “hush houses.”

Many slaves had embraced the Christian message during the great awakenings. There is irony here, as well as tragedy. Many of the slave owners claimed to be Christians, despite the clear biblical teaching against slave trading (1 Timothy 1:10). But when the enslaved Africans heard the gospel message, they responded to Christ, the great liberator, not to Southern church culture. Because many masters disapproved of their conversion, they were forced to worship clandestinely. Thus they gathered, two-by-two, walking to the hush house at a remote location, carrying with them blankets and buckets of water. Once inside, they nailed the blankets to the walls and soaked them with water, providing a primitive sound-proofing.

When the preacher arrived, he would remind them of passages such as Ezekiel and the dry bones, and of such heroes as Daniel who endured the lions’ den. He would start speaking slowly, with deliberate inflection. The congregation responded with amens, or other words of encouragement. Then they would begin a pattern of call and response. Soon they were singing and speaking at the same time. This is how spirituals were born.

After the Civil War this extraordinary music became known to the world. Groups such as the Fisk University Jubilee Singers brought these sacred songs to the general public that loved them and began to imitate them. In the twentieth century, spirituals gave birth to gospel music, a more urban and complex sound. Pioneers such as “Arizona” Juanita Dranes brought a ragtime feel to the accompaniment. Thomas A. Dorsey (“Georgia Tom”) wrote some of the most endearing gospel songs such as “Precious Lord” and “There’ll Be Peace in the Valley.” He was also instrumental in promoting the careers of gospel greats such as Mahalia Jackson.

Jazz and black sacred song are deeply connected. Today many musicians perform gospel music using a jazz style. Sunday, August 31, at 2:00 p.m., as the conclusion of the Monty Alexander Jazz Festival in Easton, the amazing Dee Daniels will bring to her adoring audience a unique blend of spirituals, gospel and jazz. “Dr. Dee” is both a performer and an educator. Her vocal range is astonishing. She is one of the most expressive singers of our time and records with the best musicians. She embodies the tradition we have been discussing. And she is a thoroughly delightful person. You won’t want to miss her, nor any of the rest of the Festival.
Dave Brubeck, My Memories

by Al Sikes

There are times when I wish the call had not come. And then there are times when I am pleased that Rush Moody asked me to start a jazz program for Chesapeake Chamber Music. Starting something has its ups and downsides.

My close association with the jazz program often leads to the question: What instrument do you play? Not, how did you end up producing a jazz festival? Truth is, my first real experience with jazz was promoting a concert at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. Yes, I did play an instrument, the trombone. I did play it in a dance band (1950s lingo), but my talent was modest at best. So when Rush called, my initial reflection took me back to the 1960s when I helped produce a jazz concert featuring Dave Brubeck and his quartet.

Dave Brubeck, encouraged by his wife Iola, toured college campuses with his band in the 1950s and 60s. His band included the incomparable Paul Desmond on alto sax, Gene Wright on bass, and Joe Morello on drums. Iola Brubeck was inspired. I know that when I heard “Take Five” in person, my music world changed. I listened to almost no rock music after that sublime moment.

On December 5, 2012 this is the way The New York Times began Dave Brubeck’s obituary:

“Dave Brubeck, the pianist and composer who helped make jazz popular again in the 1950s and ’60s with recordings like “Time Out,” the first jazz album to sell a million copies, and “Take Five,” the still instantly recognizable hit single that was that album's centerpiece, died on Wednesday in Norwalk, Conn. He would have turned 92 on Thursday.”

Early in Brubeck’s career he graced the cover of Time. It was 1954 and the inscription was “The joints are really flipping.” At this year’s Monty Alexander Jazz Festival we will salute Dave Brubeck. The salute will be led by Bobby Militello who became Brubeck’s alto saxophonist after Paul Desmond’s death. The joint will be flipping.

Time will pass but Dave Brubeck’s contributions will not be forgotten by jazz historians. For me there is something special about this salute. And for all of us there is something special about celebrating the life and music of an icon while our memories remains vivid.

Jazzy Cars and Jazzy Music

by Marty Sikes

It was a classic blend: jazz, cars, food, and, most importantly, friends. Gale and Henry Petronis hosted this year’s Jazz on the Chesapeake fundraiser. What fun being entertained in a unique car barn filled with stylish vintage automobiles. And, with the shiny chrome on the cars, tables covered in white with candles, the car barn took on a special elegance.

Lena Seikaly, one of Washington’s preeminent jazz singers, performed along with Max Murray on the bass and Wayne Wilentz on keyboard. They were absolutely terrific, chose songs everyone was familiar with and, to quote Beth Schucker, “The best line I heard at the car barn, ‘We never played together until tonight.’” That’s jazz!

The trio opened with “I’ve Got the World on a String,” and continued to dazzle us with the Gilberto bossa nova song, “Corcovado” known in English as “Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars”, the ballads “Baby, What Else Can I Do?”, “Honeysuckle Rose”, and, for an encore, presented a wonderful rendition of “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing).” Lena’s extraordinary voice – her range and emotion were reminiscent of Sarah Vaughan. If we closed our eyes as she sang scat, we felt we were under the spell of Ella Fitzgerald.

This year’s jazz benefit was well attended and financially successful which gives us the opportunity to bring in “A” list performers and gifted emerging stars.
Bravo! Festival 29

It truly takes a community to create the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival. We thank those who make it possible: our Artistic Directors and the celebrated artists who gather here in Easton, Centreville and St. Michaels to play memorable music, our Executive Director, our sponsors, friends of CCM who work throughout the year, and you, our audience.

Come join us in June 2015 to celebrate our 30th Anniversary Festival!

Bernice Michael
Festival Chair
The Wasmuth String Quartet

by Michael Silver

I recently had the pleasure of meeting with the members of the Wasmuth String Quartet after listening to their return concert in June at the Avalon Theatre. Winners of both the $10,000 Gold Prize and the Audience Choice Award at last March’s Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition, hearing them again reinforced my initial impressions of their brilliant talent. They performed both an extremely complex modern piece by György Ligeti, as well as Robert Schuman’s lush Toccata in C Major, Op.7. The quartet consists of Jonathan Ong (violin), Brendan Shea (violin), Abigail Rojansky (viola) and Warren Hagerty (cello).

This group was formed at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in 2012. They all started learning to play their instruments at quite a young age and have already accomplished so much that if I listed all of their musical achievements to date, it would monopolize the contents of this newsletter. Instead, I suggest you view their biographical information at: http://www.musicintheloft.org//season/january.php

In order to maintain and add to their abilities and repertoire, they practice six hours every day. Additionally, they teach students from beginners to others well into honing their skills, a pursuit they view as a positive and challenging experience.

The friendship and camaraderie, so important to excellent collaboration, is evident and a delight to observe.

You can hear examples of their talent at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSmkr30OzUQ

Their future as a quartet is bright. After winning the silver medal at the 2013 Fischoff National Competition and the Grand prize at the Coleman Chamber Music Competition, they are currently in residence at Banff, Canada and will tour Japan this summer.

Music Unmasked in School

By Donald Berlin

Music abounds everywhere whether recognized or not. Yet, our musical identity is often disguised. Usually, when we meet someone new, we identify him or her by name and appearance. Then, we ask: “What do you do?” So far, so good in mining somebody’s information. Still, we know nothing about that person’s musical dimension. The challenge is to unmask it.

Recently, our CCM YouthReach Committee piloted a new program in Easton Middle School. An adult from the community, Phillip Sawyer, unknown to the students, was introduced to the Band Class where he played his Classical Guitar. He played snippets of 4 selections, briefly described the style of each, when written, and how the guitar was utilized to produce its sounds. Yes, the young people were attentive and respectful of his playing. But imagine their surprise when informed, music is not his profession, followed by the question: “What kind of work do you think he does for a living?” After a number of wild guesses, he revealed that he is a “medical physicist” working at the cancer center in charge of monitoring the delivery of radiation in radiation therapy. He explained a little about his profession through a series of power-point slides pointing out how his demanding vocation is a “medical physicist” working at the cancer center in charge of monitoring the delivery of radiation in radiation therapy. He explained a little about his profession through a series of power-point slides pointing out how his demanding vocation is an essential ingredient of his day-to-day living complementing his professional work.

This program was a team effort. We were fortunate to have a volunteer like Phillip Sawyer who, not only gave his time in preparation for this program, he related so well with these young inquiring minds. His two partners in this enterprise were Donna Ewing and Kathy Dill. Donna, Band Teacher at Easton Middle School, coordinated and planned the lesson with Phillip. She was also responsible for making the introductions, setting up the lesson and managing the time. Kathy Dill, Social Studies and Arts Coordinator for Talbot County Public Schools, and a member of the CCM YouthReach Committee, provided direction for Phillip and Donna and upbeat motivation for teaching how students should prepare to become College and Career Ready. One of the key by-products of such a program is that it provides an outlet for building and improving one’s creative potential.

The YouthReach Committee is grateful for the co-operation and participation of this team. We plan to replicate similar programs next year utilizing various musical instruments and a variety of occupations. Want to volunteer? One of the biggest secrets of life is how deeply music plays into the essence of our being. And so we walk around with a lot of our music disguised. Music is really an avenue guiding us into mathematics, scientific discovery, cultural diversity, spiritual solace, disciplined living and psychological well being. Our challenge is to unmask the music within us!
Music, Meet Art by Barbara Parker

preciated stock works well for many and is simple to accomplish.

thrive and grow for 29 years. The capital fund sustained us through the
laid the foundation for the financial stability which has allowed us to
dinarily generous gift, augmented by the 21st Century Fund capital drive,
then the Eastern Shore Chamber Music Festival, $100,000. This extraor-
competition and the expansion of the Festival to include recitals
was an amazing artist.

ML: My Mom decided when I was eight years old that I needed
something complicated to do with my hands other than cutting
paper and coloring, so I started violin lessons. It was when a
cuartet came to our school and played the Dohnányi String Quartet
that I fell in love with the viola – I guess you could say it was love at
first sound! I remember phoning in requests to a WKUFM program
hosted by former deejay David Kappy, asking that he play music
featuring the viola. I did it so many times that I had to disguise
my voice. But he figured it out, and then did a whole program for
“that kid who loves the viola.” I taped that show on to a cassette
and listened to it until I wore the tape out!

DB: Your family is settled in Baltimore, your son Daniel
who is now eighteen grew up in Baltimore. I remember
when you were performing at the Festival and pregnant
with Daniel. Baltimore has been your home, but I see
in my investigations that you will be teaching at the
New England Conservatory staring the 2014-2015
academic year. Are you moving?

ML: No, Baltimore is our home! My husband, Michael Kannen, is
Director of Chamber Music at Peabody and I’m on faculty there! I’ll
be teaching at both conservatories. We have no plans to move from
Baltimore, we love it here, and besides, we’re Orioles fans!

Maria Lambros has performed throughout the world. As a member
of the renowned Ridge String Quartet, the group was nominated
for a Grammy in 1993. The recording won Europe’s prestigious
Diapason d’Or in the same year. She was also a founding member
of the Naumburg award–winning Meliora String Quartet which was
Quartet-in-Residence at the Spoleto Festivals of the United States,
Italy, and Australia. She was also a member of the Mendelssohn
String Quartet. Currently Maria is the violist with the New York
based chamber ensemble La Fenice that also includes Cathy Cho,
Peggy Pearson, Diane Walsh and Marcy Rosen.

We are lucky to be able to hear talented musicians like Maria
at our Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival!

The Russian Trio’s Cellist Dies

Dmitry Volkov, cellist of the prize-winning Russian Trio, died this May at
the age of 26. The cause of death was cardiac dysrhythmia. The Baltimore-
based Russian Trio won the Silver Medal and the Audience Appreciation
Award at the 2012 Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition. In 2013 they
received first prize at the Coleman Chamber Music Competition, winning
the Coleman-Barstow Prize for Strings. In April 2014 they were named the win-
ner of the 29th Annual Yellow Springs Chamber Music
Competition in Ohio.

Russian-born Volkov won both the Carlos Prieto Inter-
national Cello Competition and the Heifetz Institute of
Music Concerto Competition in 2009. He was also
named the winner of the Midland-Odessa Symphony
National Young Artist Competition in 2011. He re-
corded his first solo album for Urtext in August 2012.
The Russian Trio was formed in 2011 at the Peabody
Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University.

Notes from Michael Bracy, CCM President

In 1995, Harry Feinberg bequeathed to Chesapeake Chamber Music,
then the Eastern Shore Chamber Music Festival, $100,000. This extraor-
dinary generous gift, augmented by the 21st Century Fund capital drive,
laired the foundation for the financial stability which has allowed us
to thrive and grow for 29 years. The capital fund sustained us through the
long recession and helped us manage our extremely volatile seasonal cash
receipts and expenditures.

As you consider how you might support CCM, note that many donors find
that alternatives to direct cash donations are advantageous. Donation of ap-
preciated stock works well for many and is simple to accomplish.

Given the recent change in Maryland estate-tax law, many of you will be
reviewing your estate plans. When you do, please remember CCM as you
review your bequests. Other methods of donating, such as charitable trusts
and life insurance may be appropriate for your situation.

We also will be offering, in conjunction with Mid-Shore Community
Foundation, a Charitable Gift Annuity Program, which can provide attrac-
tive income along with tax benefits under the right circumstances.

Please keep Chesapeake Chamber Music, Inc. in mind in your estate
planning.

We would like to keep you informed of the latest events in our growing series
of year round programs. To help us reach you, please sign up on
SAVE THE DATES

Valentine’s Day Jazz Concert
Saturday, February 14, 2015

David Trio
Winner of the 2006 CCM Competition
Saturday, February 21, 2015

Chesapeake Chamber Music Gala
Saturday, March 28, 2015

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Chesapeake Chamber Music’s Jazz on the Chesapeake presents

Monty Alexander Jazz Festival
Fifth Anniversary

Frank Vignola
Thursday, August 28, 8:00 p.m.
Academy Art Museum, Easton, Maryland

Etienne Charles
Friday, August 29, 8:00 p.m.
Avalon Theatre, Easton, Maryland

Dave Brubeck Salute led by Bobby Militello
Saturday, August 30, 2:00 p.m.
Avalon Theatre, Easton, Maryland

Monty Alexander and Friends
Celebrating Monty’s 70th Birthday
Saturday, August 30, 8:00 p.m.
Avalon Theatre, Easton, Maryland

Dee Daniels
Back by Popular Demand
Sunday, August 31, 2:00 p.m.
Avalon Theatre, Easton, Maryland

ChesapeakeChamberMusic.org/jazz  410-819-0308