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Queens celebrates International Jazz Day by Michael Perlman

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Queens has a rich jazz history, and in recognition of International Jazz Day, Flushing Town Hall is presenting “Remembering the Past and Celebrating the Future” starring David Oswald’s Louis Armstrong Eternity Band.

The public can purchase tickets online and tune in to YouTube for a live stage performance on April 30 at 7 p.m.

“I’m honored to be part of anything that lets the world know how truly unique Queens is,” said Oswald, a Kew Gardens resident who served as chairman of the Board of the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona for 28 years.

“Louis Armstrong inspires our music and our lives,” said Oswald. “You can live your life by his example, how he handled adversity, human relations, and just about every aspect of living life.”

The music of Bix Beiderbecke, who lived in Sunnyside, is also part of the program, in addition to songs by Duke Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton.

“Each musician inspires us in different ways with their originality and the beauty of their music,” Oswald added. “Jazz is everything America was designed to be as in the notion that when cultures combine, something new, beautiful, and functional is born.”



“It teaches mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation,” he added. “We need to educate young people about its history and the lessons we can learn about functioning in a loving and humanistic way.”

Clyde Bullard, a professional electric bassist and composer, has served as Flushing Town Hall’s jazz producer since 1998.

He is the son of Atlantic Records executive Clarence “CB” Bullard, who was involved in the careers of everyone from Aretha Franklin and Paula Abdul to The Rolling Stones.

Over the years, Queens has been a mecca for jazz musicians.

“Ever since Clarence Williams, a music publisher, musician, and record producer from the Louisiana Bayou purchased a house and eight adjoining lots in 1923 in Jamaica, the exodus of great musicians from other places began,” said Bullard. “They would relocate all over Queens.”

Jazz icons like John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Waller, Chick Corea, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Mildred Bailey, Count Basie, Buddy Rich, Tony Bennett, Benny Goodman and Glen Miller have at one time or another called Queens home.

“They are the architects of the jazz vernacular that is still being used and studied in universities around the world,” he added. “The newer jazz artists are employing what they learned from the elders, modifying it, and keeping good music in the air.”

The mission of Flushing Town Hall’s Jazz Orchestra is to introduce the music to new generations.

“Our monthly Jazz Jam administered by saxophonist Carol Sudhalter honors our past and is contributing to new potential virtuosos,” said Bullard.

The pandemic tossed curve balls at the music world, but Ostwald and Bullard are determined to keep creative opportunities alive.

“Many venues that once presented live music closed,” said Bullard. “Even before the pandemic, there were never enough venues to employ all musicians and performers on any given day.”

After Ostwald contracted COVID-19 last year, he was able to treat his shortness of breath by playing long-tone exercises on his tuba. His doctor called it a medical blessing.

“I began playing in front of my building and found that community members found solace in my music, which gave me the idea to play with my band in Riverside Park,” he said.

Since Labor Day, his band has played over 70 concerts in parks.

“The extent to which our music has alleviated the deep despair felt by so many community members has been incredibly rewarding,” Ostwald said. “Music is the most powerful force in uniting humanity.”

After the April 30th concert, a live artist talk and a Q&A moderated by Bullard will take place. Tickets are available at flushingtownhall.org.

Read more: [Queens Examiner - Queens celebrates International Jazz Day](#)