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## Riffs



**Woods' Coups:** Phil Woods has added pianist Bill Mays to his quintet. The saxophonist also received Pennsylvania's Governor's Award for the Arts for his work with the Celebration of the Arts Festival. Details: [philwoods.com](http://philwoods.com)

**Hilton Helps:** Pianist Lisa Hilton performed at a benefit for the blind and visually impaired at Andy's Jazz Club in Chicago on Jan. 8. Hilton has also worked with students at the Perkins School for the Blind in Massachusetts and at Camp Bloomfield in Malibu, Calif. Details: [lisahiltonmusic.com](http://lisahiltonmusic.com)

**Bass Chats:** Christian McBride is releasing a series of duets and conversations with veteran musicians under the title *Conversations With Christian* digitally through Mack Avenue. Participants will include Hank Jones, Chick Corea and George Duke. Details: [christianmcbride.com](http://christianmcbride.com)

**Kessel Chronicled:** Maurice Sumner has written *Barney Kessel: A Jazz Legend* (Ashley Mark). The book includes photographs, memorabilia and discographical information on the guitarist. Details: [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)

**National Swing:** Blues Alley in Washington, D.C., will host Big Band Jam at the National Mall from April 17–26. The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra will perform at the Sylvan Theater on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Details: [bluesalley.org](http://bluesalley.org)

**RIP, Martyn:** Guitarist John Martyn died of complications of pneumonia on Jan. 25 in Kilkenny, Ireland. He was 60. Initially a British folk player, he adapted the techniques and spirit of jazz improvisation on a series of albums in the 1970s.

## Jazz House Gigs Build New Living Room Circuit

The newest Atlanta jazz venue doesn't have a backstage. There's no stage, either—just a red Oriental rug protecting hardwood flooring. On a wintry Sunday evening, pianist Takana Miyamoto and vibraphonist Christian Tamburr performed at the space simply by walking in the door and playing. At intermission, between bites of mini quiche, Tamburr and Miyamoto chatted with the audience of 40 neighbors, jazz lovers and musicians.

The show, put on by the Southeastern Organization for Jazz Arts (SOJA), represents a growing trend in jazz presentation. House concerts, proponents say, bring a new audience to jazz through cheaper ticket prices and more accessible performance spaces. Tickets for house shows range from \$20 to \$40, depending on the prominence of the artists. Musicians play two sets, and light snacks are often served during intermission.

Mary Jo Strickland started bringing musicians to her Atlanta-area house 10 years ago. With the help of fellow jazz lover Phil Clore, she created SOJA to expand the concerts to a handful of houses throughout the city.

"A lot of people go to the house concerts who would never go to a club," Strickland said, adding that musicians enjoy playing in private homes for an attentive, all-ages audience. "Musicians are used to playing restaurants where people are talking, blenders are going off."

Bassist Craig Shaw, who has played SOJA events, added, "The audience appreciates the concert more than in a club setting."

In June 2007, Baltimore residents Marianne Matheny-Katz and her husband, Howard, started a monthly series called Jazzway 6004, including a homemade meal with dessert in the \$40 ticket price.

"People are getting such a good deal here," Howard Katz said. "This is an economic buster—they're getting a show and dinner for \$40."

In January, Washington, D.C.-based saxophonist Jeff Antoniuk brought his quartet to Jazzway after hearing about the venue from area musicians. Antoniuk enjoyed working with hosts who valued his art.

"You see excitement when you show up to the front door. They've been looking forward to this," Antoniuk said. "There's a different vibe playing in a big living room. It's relaxed, it's



Craig Shaw and Audrey Shakir at a SOJA house concert

respectful."

Pianist Joel Holmes, who has previously performed at Jazzway, appreciates the hosts' commitment. In the past, the Katzs have used personal money to fund the concerts. "Even if they take a loss, they'll do it for the love of the music," Holmes said.

House jazz concerts are steeped in a rich history. In 1920s Harlem, stride pianists Willie "The Lion" Smith and Fats Waller performed in packed apartments to raise tenants' rent money. Fifty years later, avant-garde musicians opened private lofts to the public, their music relegated to alternative spaces by the shrinking number of venues. *Wildflowers: The New York Loft Jazz Sessions*, a multi-album collection released in 1976, chronicles music created during the '60s and '70s by Anthony Braxton, Oliver Lake and other like-minded artists.

Today, house concert promoters try for a blend of local and national talent in the straight-ahead genre. At Jazz at the "A" Frame in Los Angeles, Betty Hoover routinely packs more than 100 people into her home to see artists like Wycliffe Gordon, Jeff Hamilton and Tamir Hendelman. Musicians perform in houses because they earn a large portion of the ticket price. Fees for touring acts are negotiated before the concerts. Lesser-known musicians can make much more than they do in traditional venues.

"I pay them well. The local musicians, they are paid about three times what they're paid in these clubs," Hoover said.

Frank Hanny, who runs Chez Hanny in San Francisco, unwittingly launched his series by hiring a pianist for his 50th birthday party in 2001. He ended up inviting musicians back the next month. Last year, he produced 15 concerts featuring musicians from all over the region and shows no signs of slowing down.

"I assumed it would be only occasional, but it's come to have a momentum of its own," Hanny said. "I get to have world-class players in my living room."

—Jon Ross