

**ARTSDESK****The Jazzies: D.C.'s Best Jazz in 2011, According to Michael J. West**Posted by **Michael J. West** on Dec. 23, 2011 at 11:29 am

It's a terrible name, isn't it? But "Jazz Awards" was taken, and this was the best I could do on short notice. And our city's ever-more-vibrant jazz scene deserves some superlatives for its members. So! Without further ado, here are the winners of the Arts Desk 2011 D.C. Jazzies:

**ARTIST OF THE YEAR:****Afro-Blue**

I said much of it already, but it bears repeating: Between their crowd-pleasing Kennedy Center appearances, their triumphant work with **Bobby McFerrin** at the D.C. Jazz



Festival, and their elimination-cum-vaediction on NBC's *The Sing-Off*, Afro-Blue ran away with this title. The Howard University a cappella ensemble gave literal voice to jazz, Howard, and Washington on a national level, and did so beautifully.

**RECORDING OF THE YEAR:****Brian Settles & Central Union, *Secret Handshake***

The year was a banner one for jazz records in this town, but none offered so uncompromising and compelling a vision as saxophonist Settles' buffet of lyricism, freeform exploration, and stylistic versatility. It's a cross-section of the leader's musical personality that, considering it's his debut recording, is all the more astonishing in its assurance.

**BEST TRUMPETER:****Joe Herrera**

Herrera's ambition is a big help in this category—he's got ideas to spare, and finds fresh ways to implement all of them—but ultimately he just played the most horn this writer heard in D.C. this year.

**BEST TROMBONIST:****Reginald Cyntje**

There were a surprising number of spectacular trombone players this year. Cyntje, however, outdid himself with a remarkable album (*Freedom's Children: The Celebration*) and a series of formidable album release gigs, as well as great sideman appearances that showed just how able and imaginative a

Search Arts Desk

GO

## ◀ PREVIOUS

Don't Be Bored: Wu-Tang Clan and Things That Aren't Christmas!

## NEXT ▶

Reviewed: *The Artist*

advertisement

**SOCIAL MEDIA WEEK** **Global Social Media Week 2012 ART GETS SOCIAL** Thu Feb 16

**E-GEAUX (BETA) • 8pm**  
Theatre + Improv + Your Facebook Data = Hilarious  
What does your data say about you?

**TWEET SLAM WITH POET HOLLY BASS • 9:30pm • Free**  
\$2 drinks w/ an e-Geaux beta ticket stub!  
Calling all slam poets, haiku masters and creative tweeps! Can you impart poetic wisdom in 140 characters or less? Win \$140 & bragging rights. Judges include NBC's Angie Goff.

**ARTISPHERE**  
where people and art collide

## Subscribe



## Archives

February 2012  
January 2012  
December 2011  
November 2011  
October 2011  
September 2011

Browse By Month

Last 7 Days

advertisement

**live!**  
AT THE WEINBERG CENTER FOR THE ARTS

**SPRING HIGHLIGHTS**

**Bettye LaVette**  
Saturday, February 18  
8:00 p.m.

**Grace Kelly Quintet**  
Thursday, March 1  
7:30 p.m.

**The Mozart Group**  
Saturday, March 3  
8:00 p.m.

**SFJAZZ Collective**  
Wednesday, March 7  
8:00 p.m.

**Jack Hanna's Into the Wild**  
Saturday, March 17  
2:00 & 6:00 p.m.

**Béla Fleck & the Flecktones**  
Friday, March 23  
8:00 p.m.

**Squonk Opera**  
Saturday, March 31  
8:00 p.m.

**WEINBERG CENTER FOR THE ARTS**

**PURCHASE YOUR TICKETS TODAY!**  
301-600-2828  
www.weinbergcenter.org

player he really is.

**BEST ALTO SAXOPHONIST:**

**Brent Birckhead**

With his tough, aggressive sound and a font of rhythmic power behind it, Birckhead is a young player with bottomless potential.

**BEST TENOR SAXOPHONIST:**

**Brian Settles**

Settles can and has played in every context imaginable in jazz this year, but his tone, probing and sinewy but with a soft edge, remains unmistakable—as does his penchant for finding adventure in whatever style he plays.

**BEST BARITONE SAXOPHONIST:**

**Brad Linde**

There's a certain "by default" element here, but Linde earns the title with his hard work, hefty melodic playing, and versatility in God knows how many ensembles.

**BEST PIANIST:**

**Allyn Johnson**

Johnson remains the best piano player in the city by a considerable margin, with such astonishing facility that a club patron would be easily forgiven for checking the piano keys for grease.

**BEST BASSIST:**

**Herman Burney**

The single most competitive category on this list. However, Burney has a singing in his bass sound that is rare in any scene, and the work he did this year (including his *Offering* album) was surpassingly beautiful.

**BEST DRUMMER:**

**Nasar Abadey**

This writer has yet to hear something that the dean of D.C. jazz drummers can't play. Gospel, funk, free, hard bop, or some combination thereof, Abadey is a first-call musician who brings power, zest, and generous amounts of joy to every bandstand on which he appears.

**BEST PERCUSSIONIST:**

**Victor Provost**

Duh.

**BEST VOCALIST:**

**Lena Seikaly**

The robust contralto is full of surprises, but inconsistency isn't one of them. She is precise, rich, articulate, and emotionally profound.

**BEST COMPOSER:**

**Lena Seikaly**

Original composition is one of the recent glories of D.C., and Seikaly is one of many top-notch players in that game. Hers weren't necessarily the most ambitious, sophisticated, or technically intriguing (though they weren't far off); they were simply the most compelling and memorable.

**BEST LARGE ENSEMBLE:**

**Bohemian Caverns Jazz Orchestra**

Another by-default choice, perhaps, but the BCJO refuses to rest on its laurels. They're constantly introducing new members, new material, new arrangements and new ways to explore the older ones. Perhaps that's how they manage to pack the house every week.

**BEST SMALL GROUP:**

**Donvonte McCoy Quintet**

Talk about exciting. McCoy, who was *just* edged out in the trumpet category,

wins this one with his absolutely killin' gig at Eighteenth Street Lounge, a spicy stew of classic jazz, electronica, rock, funk, hip-hop, and whatever else tickles their fancy any given weekend. They make "jazz" the biggest word in the world.

   99

AFRO BLUE, BRIAN SETTLES, D.C. JAZZIES, JOE HERRERA

## Comments

**Will**  
December 28th, 2011  
3:57 pm  
Love all these guys, but is this whole thing smells like the wammies. #1

**Gina Herrera**  
December 29th, 2011  
3:05 pm  
Oh I so have to agree Joe Herrera is the best! #2

 [Subscribe to the comments on this article.](#)

## Leave a Comment

Name (required)

Email (Required - Will not be published)

Website

## Blogs Linking to this Article

**Linked From:** [Around The Jazz Internet: Dec. 23, 2011 | Jazz Forum](#)  
December 23rd, 2011  
5:04 pm  
[...] top five and the honorable mentions. The Post features records with D.C. ties. The local alt-weekly hands out awards. Always nice to see Not-New-York folks caring about the scenes they live in. (Yes, I live here too, [...])

**Linked From:** [Around The Jazz Internet Dec. 23 2011 | Hala Musique Music](#)  
December 24th, 2011  
2:07 am  
[...] top five and the honorable mentions. The Post features records with D.C. ties. The local alt-weekly hands out awards. Always nice to see Not-New-York folks caring about the scenes they live in. (Yes, I live here too, [...])

**Linked From:** [Rounding up the "Best Jazz of 2011" lists | Songcography.com](#)  
December 28th, 2011  
11:23 am  
[...] [...]

**Linked From:** [Brian Settles: Secret Handshake \(Review\) | The Cross Pollinator](#)  
January 3rd, 2012  
12:38 pm  
[...] <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/artsdesk/music/2011/12/23/the-jazzies-d-c-s-best-jazz-in-20...> [...]

 Comments Shown. [Turn Comments Off.](#)

SIGN UP! D.C. IN TEN LINKS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

SUBSCRIBE

## Contests &amp; Free Stuff

## Movies

- Win advance screening passes to see *Act of Valor*
- Win advance screening passes to see *Project X*

## Performances

- Win tickets to Flamenco Festival 2012: Compañía Rafaela Carrasco
- Win tickets to see Judy Gold
- Win tickets to see Corey Smith

## Prizes

- Win a \$50 gift certificate for Qi Spa
- Win a 4 pack of tickets to the Chesapeake Oyster & Beer Festival
- Win a spot in the Spanish Immersion Workshop at Lazos De Amistad in Washington, D.C.

## Classifieds

- Place a free classified ad
- Place a free personals ad

## Special Content



Best Of D.C. 2011



Crafty Bastards



D.C. Neighborhood Guide



Shop Local

## This Week



## Add Us

