Straight Ahead Jazz Camp draws stars

Howard Reich
My Kind of Jazz

For the average jazz lover, the thought of performing alongside masters such as singer Dee Alexander, vibraphonist Stefan Harris and reedist Victor Goines amounts to a fantasy unlikely to happen in this lifetime.

Yet next week, that scenario will become very real indeed for several fortunate Chicagoans, thanks to an annual summertime event that appears to be reaching a creative high point. Straight Ahead Jazz Camp, running Monday through July 22, for the first time will spotlight a different major jazz artist each day at Columbia College Chicago, on South Michigan Avenue. Each of the pros will give a talk in the morning, conduct an improv session after lunch and close the afternoon with a jam session featuring participants (anyone can sign up).

Specifically, the lineup will spotlight Goines on Monday, trombonist Slide Hampton on Tuesday, Alexander on Wednesday, violist and MacArthur Fellowship winner Regina Carter on Thursday and Harris on Friday. In addition, leading Chicago performers such as pianist Willie Pickens, cellist Tomeka Reid, singer Bobby Wilcox, saxophonists Greg Ward and Geoff Bradfield, trumpeter Victor Garcia and Trumpet Whittled and others will welcome Chicagoans into the mysteries of what they do.

Rarely does this much jazz talent convene in a single locale during such a concentrated period of time, giving amateurs,

Tap dancers channel Coltrane’s ‘Love Supreme’

Jumaine Taylor, front, created the tap work “Supreme Love,” which will be part of the Chicago Human Rhythm Project’s annual “JUBAL!” performances at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Read this week's Tribune for a new show to Devonport's on North Milwaukee Avenue.

This week Marcorfici will perform “Let’s Get Lost,” which she offers as a way to escape the anxieties of our times.

“For this hour and 15 minutes, let’s get lost in music, let’s get lost in romance, let’s get lost in a world that has a bit more beautiful, a bit more elegant, a bit less violent,” that’s for sure,” says Marcorfici.

“Forgot what’s outside in the world today and listen to the
Laura Molzahn

"I tried to make sure Coltrane’s poem was the foundation of what we were doing," says tap dancer Jumaane Taylor. "It was a turning point in his life and it really moved me. So I used his poem—or his prayer, rather—it’s more of a prayer— in ‘A Love Supreme.’ I tried to create some sort of direction with that.

The stereotype of tap dancing, dating back to vaudeville and early musical-theater films, is that it’s happy-go-lucky entertainment. And it certainly can be. But not in the heart-tugging tap show “Supreme Love” or at least not totally. Debuting last September, it was the first long piece that Chicago native Tay- lor, 30, ever choreographed, set to a few recorded tracks but mostly to live music saxophonist Raji Halim and his jazz quartet riffing on John Coltrane’s ‘A Love Supreme.’

That work, written at a time when Coltrane was struggling to reconcile his faith, faith in drug and alcohol addiction, and his daily life, is a unique and poignant section that Halim and band brilliantly reinterpret, finding meaning in a moving subsection for the high individuality rhythms portrayed by Taylor and seven other dancers.

Now Tayor’s ‘A Love Supreme’ returns to the stage, a larger one at that, during the Chicago Human Rhythm Project’s annual "JUBA" performance at the Museum of Contem- porary Art. Running July 20-23, they begin with a fundraiser and student showcase July 20. Then “Supreme Love” headlines the two group pro- grams July 21 and 23, while the July 22 performance features a multigenerational work by the mysterious Groundloop.

Taylor may be young, but he’s been working a long time, and his teachers include some of the best-known names in tap today. It’s an art form that connected faces to face, too to toe—a small world whose citizens cross regional and even international boundaries easily, thanks to festivals like the Chicago Human Rhythm Project’s summer Rhythm World, which opened with classes in early July and culminates in the "JUBA" performance this weekend.

Based partly on his own interest, Taylor started taking tap at 7 at his mother’s insistence. (She always wanted to dance, but never learned; he says.) Like many Chicagoans, he — he and his mother, who took adult classes while he and his siblings took their kid classes— began at the Summy Dyer School of the Theatre, founded in 1934. Taylor’s teacher was Bill Bauer, who now runs M.A.D.D. Rhythm, the 15-year-old performance and teaching organization that supplied the “Supreme Love” dancers. Recently named M.A.D.D. Rhythm’s assistant director, Taylor also teaches there and at the Dyer School.

"Bill Barnett and Ida Jeed Reed (another Dyer instructor) really really influenced me," says Taylor. Each gave him a different skill. "Bill would promote improvisation, and Ida would promote performing — looking up, looking over you did it that." George Patterson III, who also trained at Summy Dyer and who toured with Savion Glover’s Broadway hit “Bring ’in da Noise, Bring ’in da Funk” introduced Taylor to Glover, providing a glimpse of what the future might hold. "I was maybe around 13," Taylor says. "I was growing my hair long — everyone wanted to be like Savion.

It was also as a young ten- ager that Taylor got involved with CHRP’s summer festival. There he met Derrick N. Grant, dance captain of “Bring ’in da Noise,” who brought him to New York for a visit. Taylor describes it as “a whole different experience. I got invited to the jazz jams there and was introduced to a lot of different jazz elements. So when I got back to Chicago, I was in the jazz clubs, with my wooden board,” tapping to the music.

Taylor started going to the old Velvet Lounge on the South Side, where he improvised along with the likes of Von Freeman and Fred Anderson. Then, when the Velvet Lounge closed and a lot of those old guys passed, it seemed like Raji (Halim) was taking control, trying to bring that old feeling back. I reached out, I said, ‘What do you think about revamping ‘A Love Supreme’ and having a tap show?’ And he was all about it.

Tap is a ‘began’ kind of culture, a network of complicated family trees.

Indeed, the new home of CHRP’s 26-year-old “Rhythm World” Festival is “Foot and Branch,” emphasizing its gen- erational relationships. “The analogy is a strong one,” CHRP director Lance Alexander said in an email.

But we’re also seeing something in the tap community is the product of the festival’s super-colliders. The energy released by multiple years of accelerated collisions between masters and students is producing ‘new particles’ that we knew existed but had never seen before. And they are extraordinary.

Ask how dancers manage, tap dancer responds, that first, they know their foundation; the Sammy Davis Jr., the Fred Astaire, the Baby Laurens. Then, “it really goes back to that journey, that search-and-discover thing. Not just, Oh, I wanna be on Broadway? Broadway is just another job. But who are you? Really digging into self. That’s something that Savion said to me: You need to search. That’s why the jazz musi- cians share the continuous reach for improvement, but never forgetting the founda- tion.

As for CHRP and the other organizations that have mem- bered him, Taylor says, “I can’t do much but say thank you. And that’s what ‘A Love Supreme’ is about saying thank you.”

Laura Molzahn is a freelance critic.

The September production of ‘Supreme Love’ features Taylor, from left, Donnawhia Jackson, Jumaane Taylor and Starisha Dixon.

Where: 7 p.m. July 7, 7:30 p.m. July 21-23
When: July 7; 7 and 9 p.m. July 8; 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. July 10-11, noon and 1 p.m. July 15-16; 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. July 17-18; 2 and 4:30 p.m. July 19; 7:30 p.m. July 20-22, noon and 2 p.m. July 23 at mccachicago.org

Andrea Marrocovichii's latest show
Summer in Chicago wouldn't be complete without cabaret star Andrea Marrocovichii bringing sounds of yesteryear, which are so extensively played.

In the case of this show, that means songs such as “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” “Those Foolish Things,” “St. Louis Blues” and “A Fine Romance,” all drawn from the enormous repertoire of songs Marrocovichii has built during decades of singing cabaret.

"For the first time in I don't know when, I'm doing a show that's not a tribute to someone else," she explains.

"In many ways, it's a tribute to my own life in music. Itcelebrates the songs that I've loved the most, the ones that really clpping.

Andrea Marrocovichii performs "Let's Get Lost" at 8 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday at Davenport Theatre, 1303 N. Milwaukee Ave.; $38-44, plus two-drink minimum; 773-276-1830 or www.davenporttheatres.com.

Hyde Park Jazz Festival
Held annually the first Sunday in July, the 10th annual Hyde Park Jazz Festival, running Sept. 24-25 across the South Side near the school, will feature Dana Hall discussing his book "The Hypocrisy of Justice," "Willy Pickers Quartet," Matt Urey's Loons, Thaddious "Doc" Holliday’s Blues Group, Dwyer McCarthy/Bill Cassius Duo, Clark Sensenbrenner’s 75/Lo, Lorin Cohen Group, Quentin Coaxum Quintet, Marvin Taylor's Weight of Rags/Maggie Brown/Orbert Davis Sextet's "Tribe to Fred's Hobbs," Douglas East and Orbit; Chicago Jazz Orches- tra and Marcus Hulset Blacker, among others.

Already announced for the fest: Amir ElSaffar’s Two Rivers Ensemble; Miguel Zenon and the Spoleto Festival’s Mattan Roberts/Randy Weston; Matana Roberts; Tim Harrell; Garden of the South Side, with Gwendolyn Brooks, Nick Mazzarella, Joshua Abrams and Mike Reed; Joshua Abrams/Art Brown/Gerald Cleaver/Jeff Parker Quartet; Des Alexander Quintet featuring Dwight Tit- bles; Greg Ward & 10 Tongues; Wayfaring with Koste and James Falzone; Victor Golitsin Quartet; and Bobby Lewis 80th birthday celebration.

For more information, visit www.hydeparkjazz festival.org.

Howard Reich is a Tribune critic.