Festival History

The Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz is a non-profit organization originally conceived by Paul Brown, noted Hartford jazz bassist and music educator. For 25 years, Paul had produced the Monday Night Jazz Concerts in Bushnell Park, drawing thousands of music lovers to Hartford's Bushnell Park for picnics and world-class entertainment. That first Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz, in July of 1991, was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of those wonderful summers.

Paul gathered some friends to help plan that first Festival but ultimately turned the festival over to a Board of Directors comprised of volunteers from the Central Connecticut area, who continued to fulfill his dream of a world-class jazz event in Hartford, while he concentrated on his professional career and the Monday Night Jazz Concerts. Now in its 35th year, this free-of-charge Festival is supported by small and medium-sized charitable gifts and donations from foundations, businesses and corporations as well as City of Hartford and State of Connecticut grants. The festival is also generously supported by contributions from individual jazz lovers throughout the region.

Notable performers at the festival have included:

The McCoy Tyner Big Band and Arturo Sandoval (1993); The Duke Ellington Orchestra under the direction of Mercer Ellington (1994); The George Shearing Quintet (1995); Nancy Wilson (1996); The Heath Brothers and John Hendricks (1997); Dave Brubeck (1998); Marion Meadows and The Dizzy Gillespie All Stars under the direction of Jon Fadis (1999); John Scofield, Chuck Mangione, the Ramsey Lewis Trio and Nicholas Payton (2000); Gerald Albright and Herbie Mann (2001); Phil Woods, Bobby Caldwell and Joe Sample (2002); Billy Taylor, Sonny Fortune and Euge Groove (2003); Joey DeFrancesco, Byron Stripling and Peter White (2004); Ahmad Jamal and newcomer Eric Darius, Pieces of a Dream, Yellowjackets (2005); Mike Phillips, Kim Waters and the Woody Herman Big Band, Shawnn Monteiro with Special Guest Clark Terry (2006); Joyce Cooling, Pamela Williams, and Kevin Mahogany & The Kansas City Review (2007); Jeff Lorber, Nick Colionne, Four 80 East, and Kendrick Oliver & the New Life Orchestra (2008); Paul "Shiltz" Weimar, Bobby Lyle, Bob Baldwin, Azar Lawrence and The Rippingtons (2009); Doc Gibbs & N' Fusion, Lao Tizer, Chieli Minucci, Karen Briggs (2010); Curtis Haywood, Cindy Bradley, Matt Marshak, Paul "Shilts" Weimar, Steve Cole, Ralph Peterson, Al Foster Quartet with Special Guest Wallace Roney (2011); Elan Trotman with special guest Gerald Veasley, Jeff Golub, The Sax Pack, The Hartford Symphony Orchestra Jazz & Strings featuring Jimmy Greene (2012); Ed Byrne's Latin Jazz Evolution, Ace Livingston, Toscha Comeaux, Walter Beasley,Tom Browne (2013); Manuel Valera, David Sanborn, David Davis, Urban Jazz Coalition, Brian Simpson, Sherry Winston,

Javon Jackson, Azar Lawrence (2014). Tony Succar, Monty Alexander and The Kingston Express, Maysa, Kim Scott, Dezron Douglas Featuring Abraham Burton, Anthony Wonsey and Victor Lewis, Airmen of Note (2015); Jonathan Butler, Marcus Anderson, Najee, Carl Allen, Haneef N. Nelson, Rene McLean (2016); Aziza Miller, Althea Rene, Jeanette Harris, Oli Silk, JJ Sansaverino, Ray Toledo, Donald Harrison (2017); Spryo Grya, Michon Young, Bernie Williams, Nestor Torres, Mike Casey featuring Bernito Gonzolvas (2018); The Braxton Brothers, Delfeayo Marsalis and the Uptown Jazz Orchestra, Funky Dawgz, Jasmine Ghent, Jonathan Barber, Julian Vaughn, Nat Reeves, Rohn Lawrence, Steve Clark, Zaccai Curtis (2019); Virtual JazzFest (2020); Adam Hawley, Brubeck Brothers, Eric Roberson, Grace Kelly, Hiroshima, Temptations (2021); AWB, Boney James, Manhattan Transfer, Isaiah Sharkey, Vincent Ingala, Marquis Hill, Jackiem Joyner, Steve Oliver, Chembo Corniel, Will Prince (2022). Camille Thurman, Eddie Palmieri, Paula Atherton, Rob Zinn, Ragan Whiteside, Special EFX All Stars feat. Elliot Yamen, Nelson Rangell, Dave Livolsi, and Joel Rosenblatt (2023). Nigel Bello & Friends, Jonathan Suazo & Ricano, Luisito Quintero & 3rd Element, The New Mosaic, Jeff Kashiwa, Larry Braggs, Alex Bugnon, Eric Leone, Loose Ends featuring Jane Eugene Peters, Matt Dwonszyk, Jon Coffee featuring Tye Brown, Cam Fletcher, and John Paul Lamb, The Ralph Peterson Legacy with Zaccai and Luques Curtis, The Blackbyrds featuring Keith Killgo and Joe Hall, Hall High School Jazz Band featuring Sherman Irby, Art Frm Da Hart (2024). Sounds of A&R, Ilya Serov, Sean U, Stix Bones and the BONE Squad, Andrea Lisa, 3 Alarm Fire with Art Sherrod Jr, Lin Rountree, and Nicholas Cole, The GHFJ Generations Big Band feat. Alexa Tarantino & Tatum Greenblatt, Michelle Coltrane.

The Hartford Festival of Jazz has grown to be the largest free of charge event in New England, with an attendance of over 100,000 people in 2025 over the course of three days. The tradition will continue in 2026 in Bushnell Park in downtown Hartford, America's oldest public park, when the Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz will present its 35th annual event of three nights and two days of hot and cool jazz at the Performance Pavilion, featuring great artists from around the world and the USA.

Connecticut's State Capitol Building and Hartford's skyline provide a beautiful, dramatic backdrop as the sun sets and the stars rise in the night sky and on stage. Over 100 volunteers donate their time to work at the festival, a true testament to the popularity of the festival since its 1991 debut. The festival has a history of presenting national and international mainstream, cutting-edge, traditional and contemporary jazz performers, aspiring local and regional artists and some truly wonderful young musicians from area schools and noteworthy jazz programs. During the Festival's lifetime, music history has literally been written on stage, perfectly matched by the intensity and appreciation of its audiences.