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Jazz Faculty Members Lead August Wilson Center’s Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra

Trumpeter Sean Jones and saxophonist Mike Tomaro, members of the Jazz Studies faculty of the Mary Pappert School of Music, have been tapped to head the newly created Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra (PJO) at the recently opened August Wilson Center for African American Culture on Liberty Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh.

Jones, assistant professor of jazz studies, and Tomaro, a composer and arranger who has served as director of jazz studies since 1997, will be the PJO’s artistic director and co-director, respectively.

In addition to Jones and Tomaro, the PJO features 15 of Pittsburgh’s finest jazz soloists and ensemble players, an assemblage of musical talent for a rebirth of the orchestra that was first envisioned three decades ago by Nathan Davis, director of jazz studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

The August Wilson Center provides an ideal home for the PJO. The Center, named for Pulitzer Prize- and Tony Award-winning playwright and Hill District native August Wilson, has a mission of preserving, interpreting and celebrating the art, culture and history of African Americans in Western Pennsylvania and...
people of African descent throughout the world. Jazz is an essential part of that story.

The current incarnation of the PJO is loosely modeled after the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra where Jones serves as lead trumpet under Winton Marsalis. The ensemble will be featured in many aspects of the August Wilson Center’s cultural programming, and it will perform in educational events in Pittsburgh and across the United States.

The PJO celebrates Pittsburgh’s jazz history by uniting musicians of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. While celebrating the city’s jazz tradition, the group will also demonstrate the inherent potential of the jazz genre to youth in Pittsburgh and across the nation, as well as create new works that help advance the genre.

The Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra premiered on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2009, at a concert that was a symbolic “passing of the baton” to Jones as the orchestra’s artistic director. The program featured music written and performed by some of the most prominent musicians in Pittsburgh’s jazz history, including Billy Strayhorn, Stanley Turrentine, Earl “Fatha” Hines, Mary Lou Williams, George Benson, Erroll Garner and Tommy Turrentine.

Not limited to jazz performances, the August Wilson Center reflects all aspects of African American culture. The two-story, green building houses seven exhibition galleries, a 486-seat theater suited for all types of performances, an education center, a café and gift shop, and multipurpose spaces for community programs and events.

Tickets for upcoming PJO performances are available by calling 412.456.6666 or visiting pgharts.org. The PJO has the support of the Multicultural Arts Initiative, the August Wilson Center and Duquesne University. For more information about the Center and its inaugural season, visit AugustWilsonCenter.org or call 412.258.2700.