

# WBGO's Steven A. Williams, Saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin, and Council Member Carmen De La Rosa Named JPI 2026 Honorees

*Jazz Power Initiative (JPI) Syncopated Celebration 2026 recognizes jazz's transformative, historic, and influential impact on global society and culture*

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, March 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The board of Jazz Power Initiative (JPI), is pleased to announce the honorees for the Syncopated Celebration 2026 fundraiser, scheduled for May 14 at 6:00 pm at Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Symphony Space, 250 West 95th Street, Manhattan.

WBGO President & CEO Steven A. Williams, who joined the iconic radio station and global jazz leader nearly six years ago, will receive the Rothman Family Syncopated Partnership Award.

Mr. Williams, a dedicated jazz enthusiast and self-described "radio guy," credits his family's musical legacy, especially his grandfather, who introduced him to jazz, for inspiring his passion for music and education.

As WBGO's leader, Mr. Williams is dedicated to maintaining the station's 47-year legacy of curating, promoting, presenting, and preserving this unique African American music genre, and honoring the creative talents who have inspired generations of musicians worldwide. Through its daily programming and knowledgeable on-air personalities, WBGO has built a global community of enthusiasts who help sustain the station's independence.

"Being honored by Jazz Power Initiative as part of its Syncopated Celebration on May 14 is



profoundly meaningful, as it recognizes not only my personal journey but the rich cultural legacy that jazz continues to inspire in all of us,” says Steven about the recognition. “This celebration embodies the spirit of creativity, community, and collaboration that defines jazz, and I am deeply grateful to stand alongside artists, educators, and leaders who are committed to uplifting this vital art form.”

This year’s Changemaker Award will be presented to Lakecia Benjamin, a six-time Grammy Award nominee, and New York-based saxophonist, arranger, composer, and educator.

Ms. Benjamin, a respected musician and bandleader who grew up in Washington Heights, is recognized for pushing musical boundaries and developing a distinctive jazz style that draws from R&B, Latin, and funk influences. The New York Times wrote, “...her sound feels rooted in tradition, yet broad enough to encompass R&B and Latin music; its pronounced funk suggests allegiances to hip-hop and dance.”

A powerhouse virtuoso, Lakecia Benjamin has performed with Clark Terry, Terri Lyne Carrington, Gregory Porter, Missy Elliott, Eli Yamin, and Alicia Keys. She studied with jazz veterans Billy Harper, Reggie Workman, Bob Stewart, and Buster Williams, and was mentored by Gary Bartz.

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*Steven A. Williams, President & CEO, WBGO-FM*

“I love what Jazz Power Initiative stands for and its mission,” says Lakecia. “It resonates deeply with me, especially since JPI and I are repping Washington Heights! I’m so honored to be recognized by an organization that is very special to me and to the jazz community at large.”

Council Member Carmen De La Rosa will receive the Miranda Family Champion of Arts and



JPI 2026 Honorees WBGO President & CEO Steven A. Williams, Saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin, and Council Member Carmen De La Rosa



Syncopated Celebration host, Christian McBride

Culture Award in recognition of her leadership and support for Northern Manhattan's arts and cultural landscape through legislation, discretionary funding, and capital investments.

Since entering public service, Council Member De La Rosa has advocated for economic justice and against racism and xenophobia. In 2021, she became the first Dominican woman elected to represent New York's District 10 at City Hall, expanding her focus to include criminal justice reform, workers' rights, affordable housing and tenant protections, climate justice, taxing the wealthy, LGBTIA rights, and other significant social justice policies.

"I am honored to be Jazz Power Initiative's Miranda Family Champion of Arts and Culture Award recipient. Supporting organizations like Jazz Power Initiative and investing in Uptown's artistic and cultural community uplifts the talent at the heart of our vibrant district, while removing barriers to entry for our youth. Equitable access to diverse art and cultural exploration not only brings our community together but also creates a holistic learning environment for our future leaders. Our artists, educators, and advocates make New York City a global cultural capital, and I look forward to celebrating 22 years of the incredible impact of Jazz Power Initiative," says Council Member Carmen De La Rosa.

For 22 years, Jazz Power Initiative has addressed the need for increased in-school and afterschool arts education in the communities it serves. With the support of its staff and teaching artists, children ages 6 to 18 in upper Manhattan have benefited from free and low-cost programs in voice, piano, dance, and acting. The organization seeks to broaden these programs and reach more participants through jazz arts education and ongoing intergenerational community concerts. Events like Syncopated Celebration 2026 help raise awareness and essential funds to sustain these valuable initiatives.

Eli Yamin, aka "Dr. E," co-founder, Managing and Artistic Director of JPI said this about this year's honorees, and their connection to the communities JPI serves, "We are proud to honor Lakecia Benjamin, an international jazz star who grew up in Washington Heights and has supported JPI for years with her dynamic performances at our Intergenerational Jazz Power Jam series and community concerts. WBGO gave me my first job in jazz in 1986 and set the direction of my life as an artist, educator, and advocate for jazz. For 47 years, WBGO has been carrying the torch for jazz and connecting our global community from Newark to Harlem, Brooklyn to Bonn, Washington Heights to Singapore. We are proud to salute WBGO and its stalwart and supremely resourceful CEO, Steve Williams. Council Member Carmen De La Rosa has long been a fighter for our beloved uptown community to have consistent access to high-quality arts and education. I am thrilled we can honor her as our Miranda Family Champion of Arts and Culture!"

Jazz Power Initiative Syncopated Celebration 2026 is being hosted by 11-time Grammy Award-winning jazz bassist Christian McBride. The event will include performances by Christian McBride, Lakecia Benjamin, and Dr. E, as well as JPI students.

Tanya LeMelle, VP at TD Bank/VP of JPI's Board and event chair, stated, "Through its support of

the Jazz Power Initiative, TD helps young people discover their rhythm, their confidence, and their voice—an example of what being More Human truly means. Through its commitment to arts and culture across North America, TD helps amplify diverse voices and creates opportunities for the next generation of artists.”

For details about Jazz Power Initiative’s programs, Syncopated Celebration 2026, or to donate, please visit [www.jazzpower.org](http://www.jazzpower.org).

Sam Mattigly  
SMC Solutions  
+1 917-331-9375  
[email us here](#)

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