

Jazz Power Initiative Syncopated Celebration 2026, Honoring Jazz Heroes, Supporters, Partners and Friends

11-Time Grammy Award-Winning Bassist Christian McBride Hosted the Evening's Celebration

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, June 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Imagine being 12, 14, or 16, never having felt the heartbeat of jazz, when suddenly you are swept into a world where music, dance, and theater whirl together, all fueled by jazz's irresistible energy. Picture this world unfolding right in your neighborhood, with doors flung wide open and every moment free, so your family can join in without worry. Even better, your mentors are not just teachers but celebrated artists, ready to ignite your creativity with their passion and wisdom.



Zah! performing at Syncopated Celebration 2026 (photo: Tanya Kulesh)

“

Syncopated Celebration 2026 reflected the incredible heart, talent, and dedication of our staff, volunteers, artists, and supporters who worked tirelessly to produce an unforgettable evening...”

Event Chair, Tanya LeMelle

Now, picture your vocal coach is none other than the legendary Antoinette Montague, a world-renowned artist and proud Newark native. Alongside her, you join forces with peers your age to create the vibrant youth ensemble, Zah!

Then imagine all your hard work and dedication lead to an unforgettable moment: stepping onto the stage alongside jazz legends. You share the spotlight with [Christian McBride](#), an 11-time Grammy-winning bassist and visionary; the electrifying, six-time Grammy-nominated

saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin; the powerhouse drummer Alvester C. Garnett; and the incomparable Dr. E, Eli Yamin, on keys.

This was not just a dream—it became reality at the Jazz Power Initiative Syncopated Celebration 2026 fundraiser. The Zah! ensemble, a spirited group of teens and tweens, lit up the stage under the guidance of their inspiring vocal coach, affectionately known as “Jazzwoman to the Rescue,” Ms. Antoinette Montague. They dazzled guests during the cocktail hour with Bud Powell’s *Strictly Confidential*, before kicking off the award ceremony with their signature anthem, Don Pullen’s *Listen to the People*, a joyful song that captured the night’s exuberant spirit before a packed house.

Hosting the evening was Christian McBride and presenting this year’s award recipients was a group of legends who have demonstrated their commitment to the arts, to community, and to the preservation of the jazz canon.

Luis A. Miranda, Jr., is not just Lin Manuel’s father, he has been on the front lines of change in New York City’s political landscape for decades. He was there to honor the work of Council Member Carmen De La Rosa, who received the Miranda Family Champion of Arts and Culture Award in recognition of her leadership and support for Northern Manhattan’s arts and cultural landscape. And her tireless commitment to her community and its residents.

NEA Jazz Master Dorthaan Kirk, the face of WBGO (88.3 FM), the global leader in jazz radio, has been a tireless ambassador for the music and the artists who create it. She presented the station’s President & CEO, Steve A. Williams, with this year’s Rothman Family Syncopated Partnership Award. Mr. Williams, who has had a long and storied career in radio, returned to lead the listener supported, non-commercial radio station where he had once been Director of Programming. The station recently announced a novel partnership with Jazz Power Initiative.

JAZZ POZZ POWER INITIATIVE



JPI Syncopated Celebration 2026 group shot (Photo: Tanya Kulesh)

Pioneer jazz tubist, educator, and mentor, Bob Stewart, was on hand to present the JPI Changemaker Award to a rare talent, and one that he helped nurture - Washington Heights' very own Lakecia Benjamin, who will drop a new album, *We Dream*, on June 5th. She is an artist and faculty alumna of Jazz Power Initiative and maintains a strong connection to the organization, the new student participants, and the community, which has been her musical inspiration.

Before the evening's spectacular conclusion, acclaimed jazz journalist Ron Scott presented Dr. Eli Yamin with the [Jazz Journalists Association](#) 2026 Manhattan Jazz Hero Award.

Zah! returned to the stage, joined by Christian McBride on bass, Lakecia Benjamin on saxophone, Alvester C. Garnett on drums, and the organization's co-founder, Managing and Artistic Director, Dr. E., on piano for one more number, a Thelonious Monk and Jon Hendricks composition, *In Walked Bud*. The evening concluded with a lively jam session led by McBride, Lakecia, Alvester, and Dr. E, beginning with Ellington's *Sophisticated Lady* and closing out the celebration with a hardcore version of Mingus', *Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting*.

Syncopated Celebration 2026 Chair, Tanya LeMelle said of the night, "From the first note to the final standing ovation, the energy in the room was electric. Syncopated Celebration 2026 reflected the incredible heart, talent, and dedication of our staff, volunteers, artists, and supporters who worked tirelessly to produce an unforgettable evening for a truly meaningful cause. It was a beautiful reminder of the power of jazz, community, and investing in our young people."

And Dr. Eli Yamin concluded, "Syncopated Celebration 2026 was one for the record books and we are so grateful to have shared this moment with so many ardent supporters who feel as we do that jazz must be made easily accessible to our youth. It is their inheritance."

The evening would not have been possible without the help and support of our title sponsors, TD Bank and The Rothman Family Foundation, as well as the many others who contributed to the evening's success.

Oh, what a night it was—pure joy for everyone!

If you wish to learn more about supporting Jazz Power Initiative or about their programs, please visit www.jazzpower.org.

Sam Mattigly
SMC Solutions
+1 917-331-9375

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[YouTube](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/916586040>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.