

# Earth, Wind & Fire's Philip Bailey Honored at Jazz Hands For Autism's 25th Concert by the Musicians He Mentored

*Bailey accepted the WayMaker Award as autistic musicians he mentored played his catalog back to him; Emmy winner Janet Grillo received the Trailblazer Award.*

CULVER CITY, CA, UNITED STATES, June 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In 2020, Philip Bailey walked into a classroom at the Jazz Hands Music Academy and taught a masterclass to a group of autistic musicians, with no cameras and no fanfare. Christian Culmer-Evans, who has trained with Jazz Hands For Autism since 2019, never forgot it. On Saturday, May 23, he opened the 25th Jazz Hands Concert at Playa Studios in Culver City, performing the music of Earth, Wind & Fire for Bailey himself.



Philip Bailey, recipient of Jazz Hands For Autism's Spring 2026 WayMaker Award, during his fireside chat at the 25th Jazz Hands Concert. Credit: Dejavu Photography & Videography for Jazz Hands For Autism

Christian and the Saturday Band, one of the Academy's ensembles, brought the house down. Bailey was first to his feet, the first of several standing ovations he gave. "I'm glad that we got to have this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to perform for such a legend," Christian said.

The evening, themed "Reach Higher: The Legacy of Philip Bailey," was a milestone 12 years in the making. Twenty autistic musicians played a set running from Earth, Wind & Fire classics to classical piano solos.

Bailey, a nine-time GRAMMY winner, accepted the Jazz Hands Spring 2026 WayMaker Award. "This is humbling and very satisfying, because it's a wonderful cause," he told the crowd.

Before the concert, Bailey sat for a fireside chat with GRAMMY Award winning and two-time Oscar nominated singer/songwriter Siedah Garrett, who co-wrote Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" and whose song "It's Time To Listen" was adopted by Autism Speaks.

Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Janet Grillo received the Trailblazer Award for two decades of



Talent doesn't think one way, and neither should opportunity. That's what Jazz Hands For Autism is about: real stages, real opportunities for neurodivergent musicians who deserve to be heard."

*Philip Bailey, Earth, Wind & Fire*

bringing authentic autistic stories to film and television, including the Emmy-winning documentary "Autism: The Musical." "The films I've made are about family and love, and that is the magic ingredient that makes Jazz Hands such a special place," Grillo said.

Ron Funches, the comedian and actor who has spoken openly about his autism diagnosis, warmed up the room with stand-up, then co-hosted the evening with Aaron Bruck, an Academy student back on the stage where he performed two years earlier.

Culver City Mayor Freddy Puza sang his way onto the stage

to accept Jazz Hands For Autism's inaugural "City in Harmony" Award on behalf of the city.

"Tonight is about celebrating talent, talent that inspires people, that moves people, and reminds us that music has the power to connect us all," he said. The room included appointed officials and music industry professionals, from the Recording Academy's Los Angeles chapter to Sony Music Group.

Jazz Hands For Autism's musicians come from across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and beyond. This year it launched its Jazz Hands Educator Training program, which has already trained more than 100 educators reaching over 1,400 students, with a goal of 400 educators by year's end.

"The purpose of this concert is simple: to provide a platform where youth and adults on the autism spectrum can express themselves, explore their talent, and share it with their families, their community, and the world, with the goal of their talent being a bridge to belonging, community, and employment," said founder and executive director Dr. Ifunanya Nweke.

For more than a decade, Jazz Hands For Autism has given autistic musicians real instruction, real stages, and a community that believes in them. The Academy provides each student more than 600 hours of individualized training a year. Its musicians have played more than 300 gigs, most of them paid, and earned over \$52,000 from their craft. The organization also built the industry's first sync music library composed entirely by neurodivergent artists.

Christian Culmer-Evans and the Saturday Band closed the night the way they opened it, with the music of the man they came to honor. Five years after that quiet masterclass, the students Bailey taught were the ones on stage, playing for him.

The 25th concert was presented with support from headlining sponsor The Shade Room, alongside Sony Music Group, Amazon Music, First Entertainment Credit Union, and others. This performance was made possible in part by the City of Culver City and its Cultural Affairs

Commission, with support from Sony Pictures Entertainment and Culver City Arts Foundation.

Jazz Hands For Autism is the nation's only nonprofit combining professional music education, vocational training, and paid employment pathways for autistic musicians. To learn more, [support a musician](#), or get involved, visit [JazzHandsForAutism.org](http://JazzHandsForAutism.org).

[Press photos](#) are available.

Joshua Hines

Jazz Hands For Autism

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