



A Request to
the Helgeson Foundation

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I. Summary

Jazz Central Studios (JCS) respectfully requests from the Helgeson Foundation a grant of \$5,500 to help support the continuation of the Weekly Performances Program of live jazz concerts.

Begun in late 2010, the Weekly Performances Program is unique to the Twin Cities as the only series of nightly jazz concerts that feature local jazz musicians of all styles and levels of proficiency. Each night, Monday-Friday, features a new theme curated by an artistic director. Bands range in size from trios to big bands, and each performance is recorded both for archival and educational purposes. To date, more than 6,000 recorded tracks have been stored in our data base and are available for listening.

With modest means and a shoe-string budget, the Weekly Performances Program has continued more or less non-stop since we opened our doors. All musicians perform with no payment guarantee (collecting only the admission charge), artistic directors donate their time, and the executive director works on a completely volunteer basis. Because those involved are paid nothing or very little, the longevity of the performance program is a testament to the commitment of these jazz musicians and to the support of our listening audience.

However, no organization can continue operating forever on an all-volunteer basis. It is for this reason that we are seeking funds to help sustain this program for many years to come and have embarked on a multi-step process to fulfill this vision.

II. Organization Information

Established in 2010 by veteran jazz drummer, composer, author, and educator, Mac Santiago, Jazz Central Studios has become a catalyst for the innovative jazz arts in the Twin Cities. We present live jazz music to the community five nights a week in a non-commercial listening environment and encourage collaboration and education among musicians of wide and varied experience. JCS is not a jazz club, though, since there is no kitchen or bar service available. Because of our no-alcohol policy, we are also a family-friendly venue where jazz fans of all ages are welcome!

Since inception, JCS has progressed from a small non-profit entity run by Mac and his fellow musicians to a single-member LLC in 2012 to a formal non-profit corporation, attaining 501(c)(3) status one year ago. Along the way, we expanded into an 1800 square foot artist-run performance space that is completely staffed by volunteers and have become a hub where musicians come to perform, listen, learn, educate, rehearse, record, and strengthen the jazz community.

Over 500 different musicians have performed at JCS since we opened our doors and presenting live concerts remains the main focus of our mission. However, in addition to our nightly thematic programming, other initiatives we have developed include:

- **EDUCATION:** Masterclasses, clinics, & interactive youth programs - including recitals - comprise our educational outreach. More than 150 classes and student concerts have taken place at JCS since 2010.
- **LIVE TRACKS:** JCS records & archives every live performance for musicians to use for educational purposes. Over 6,000 recorded tracks are stored online in our archive.
- **REHEARSAL SPACE:** Musicians of every caliber use our facilities to rehearse their bands. Our space includes a baby grand piano, drum set, bass amp, Fender Rhodes electric piano, PA system, and recording facilities.

Every aspect of operations at JCS is overseen by Executive Director, Mac Santiago. He directs and coordinates the all-volunteer staff, which includes our hosts who open the doors and greet patrons every night, our artistic directors who program the live music, and our support staff that help with recordings, stage operations, and keeping the room tidy and clean on a nightly basis. In addition, all of the performers essentially volunteer their time as they are paid very little through the uncertain admission fees. Without these generous artists who love jazz music, in addition to our incredibly supportive Board of Directors, Jazz Central Studios would simply not be able to operate.

Because of the wide-ranging programming each night, performing opportunities for local musicians can reach upwards of 50 performance opportunities every week depending on the size of the bands. And with a seating capacity for over 50 audience members, in any given month JCS musicians perform for over 500 listeners and supporters. Over the past five years, total attendance in our space has easily surpassed 25,000, with dozens of JCS-sponsored performances taking place throughout the state of Minnesota.

In short, Jazz Central Studios has become the main gathering place in the Twin Cities for the jazz community, where this uniquely American art form is created and shared on a nightly basis.

III. Statement of Need

Jazz has been integral to the Minneapolis-St. Paul music scene since the early days of recorded music in the 1920's and '30's, helped in part by St. Paul native F. Scott Fitzgerald's glamorous descriptions of speakeasies and flappers. The Prom was a legendary concert hall that hosted top bands of the day when they were on tour, such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Buddy Rich. Jazz legends Lester Young and Oscar Pettiford got their start here, while current stars, Anthony Cox, Dave King, and Eric Gravatt, continue to wow audiences throughout the Twin Cities and beyond. The heritage of jazz venues supported by a growing jazz community continued through the decades all the way to our beloved Artist Quarter in St. Paul (which only closed a few years ago) and the currently vibrant Dakota Jazz Club. Jazz Central Studios has now become part of this rich history of offering nightly jazz performances, but we must ensure that it will sustain and grow well into the future.

Our remarkable resilience rests on the shoulders of one man, Executive Director, Mac Santiago. He has cobbled together this organization from scratch, helping to grow it organically as he has inspired hundreds of participants of all ages who donate their time. From the artistic directors to the musicians to the door hosts to Mac himself, all of these individuals have unequivocally volunteered their time because they love jazz and recognize the importance of this meeting place for the jazz community in the Twin Cities. Although the organization almost runs itself, the all-volunteer model is simply unsustainable.

Our current three-year strategic plan calls for increased funding to not only replace the majority of in-kind "sweat equity" that has kept our doors open the past few years, but to also expand our programming beyond our nightly offerings. The community of jazz musicians and those who enthusiastically support the Twin Cities jazz scene continues to expand, and we are confident that we will be able to grow our audience as our organization becomes more sustainable.

We have the capacity to more than double attendance in our current space, and as we successfully raise the funds to support additional jazz outreach programs, JCS will become better known throughout Minneapolis, St. Paul, and beyond. As our exposure grows, our donor base will undoubtedly expand, as will our earned income opportunities. Eventually we would like to move to a larger venue and grow in stature, comparable with other non-profit jazz entities across the country, like the Jazz Gallery in New York City or the San Francisco Jazz Center. We are confident that our community can easily support a 200-seat venue devoted solely to jazz concerts of mainly local talent. There are enough fantastic jazz musicians and supporters of this music to make this a realistic endeavor. The numbers support this claim, too, as the 2015 Creative MN Report* states:

- almost 16 million people attend arts and culture events in the 7-county Twin Cities region annually.
- total annual arts and culture spending in the region totals over \$400 million.
- average spending per person attending events is over \$30 per event.

* "The Impact and Health of the Non-profit Arts and Culture Sector," *Minnesota Citizens for the Arts* (www.creativemn.org)

But first, we must secure sufficient seed funding to help grow our funding outreach efforts. These will include public funding via the Minnesota State Arts Board and MRAC, increased requests to private foundations, expansion of our donor base, and focus on increasing earned income opportunities. Without a recurring revenue stream consisting of the proper mix of all of these areas, we will quickly approach the point where burnout sets in, enthusiasm wanes, and the organization disbands. Were this to occur, it would be a real blow to the music and arts community as we have already shown how deeply committed the players and our audiences are to JCS.

IV. Description of Weekly Performances Program

Jazz Central Studios stands apart as the sole venue in the Twin Cities completely devoted to presenting and developing the Great American Art Form called jazz. Although other opportunities exist where jazz musicians can perform, none are devoted to presenting jazz in a concert, listening-room format. With the sole exception of the Dakota Jazz Club — which features mostly national acts, many of which can't even be considered jazz (Ricki Lee Jones, Aaron Neville, Lucinda Williams, etc), JCS is the only space that features nightly groups comprised of local talent playing 100% jazz and creative music.

Since 2010, this weekly program has provided performance opportunities for local Minnesota artists to develop their playing, composing, and arranging skills. Each night is curated by a different musician based on a theme:

- Monday: Featured Artist and Jam Session
- Tuesday: Big Band
- Wednesday: New Boundaries
- Thursday: Vocal Night
- Friday: Twin Cities Masters/Student Performances

Musicians play two sets per night - 8:00 and 10:00pm. Some ensembles play all original music while others sprinkle their programs with jazz standards and/or pop tunes arranged using jazz techniques (re-harmonizing, re-arranging, altering the tempo, etc.). The admission fee is \$10, but patrons can stay as long as they wish. Students are welcome at no charge.

Each group is responsible for its repertoire, but all are asked to craft their set-list to correspond to that evening's theme. Monday nights are the exception to this rule. The featured artist's band is expected to play one set of their choosing and then provide the backbone instrumentation for our open jam session. During the session, when musicians playing different instruments are encouraged to "sit-in," jazz standards are spontaneously improvised together. The jam session usually lasts about an hour and begins immediately after the set of the featured group is completed.

The other four nights of the week include jazz and latin-jazz big bands playing arrangements of both new music and older jazz standards, the "New Boundaries" series which features all-original compositions, our vocal night which is devoted to shining the spotlight on up-and-coming male and female vocalists, and our Friday night special consisting of local jazz masters leading the way before stepping aside to make room for student ensembles to stretch their

wings. Each of those nights provide essential performance and educational opportunities not found in other venues.

The setting of our performance space is unique. Located on the corner of Central Avenue & SE 4th Street in Minneapolis, patrons descend into the basement, pass the front desk after paying their \$10 admission fee, and then enter our cozy-sounding listening room. Low ceilings and angular walls give the small concert venue its special acoustic characteristics, contributing to the warm and balanced ambiance. They immediately see the baby grand piano and drum set that are available to all musicians, and depending on the line-up, they might see an entire 18-piece big band taking up half of the front space. Music stands abound, and with seating for 50 and an overflow space in the back, the audience presence makes the room feel full nearly every performance.

Because we have a no-talking policy during performances, the music is respected and the musicians are always grateful for the opportunity to perform to attentive audiences in this fantastic-sounding room.

V. Benefits to the Community and Outcomes

Those members of our community that are directly affected by our efforts consist of our dozens of volunteers, the hundreds of musicians who perform, additional musicians who come to just hang out and listen, and of course the general public, many who might be considered jazz aficionados and others who might know very little about this music but want to learn more. In addition, the jazz radio station in the Twin Cities, KBEM, regularly announces our schedule, promotes our music, and often broadcasts interviews of musicians who are performing at JCS.

On a weekly basis, our Performance Program directly impacts:

- 30-40 musicians
- 5 door hosts
- 3-5 student assistants
- 5 artistic directors
- 80-200 audience members
- thousands of visitors to our website
- thousands of listeners on KBEM who hear about us

Because no alcohol is served, children and young adults are welcome each night and encouraged to learn more about this music from professionals in a relaxed and inviting atmosphere.

Oftentimes, the ensembles that perform use these appearances to develop a cohesive group sound and approach that is then showcased in further concert opportunities both in Minnesota and beyond. Additionally, as a direct off-shoot of these incubator-type residencies during our JCS Weekly Performance Program, many CD recordings of participating groups have been produced and distributed nationally over the years.

Jazz music is an art form that by definition is created in a group setting, and to have a space which is filled with attentive listeners is priceless. Every musician is grateful to have a fantastic-sounding listening room in which to perform live and grow as an artist, and it's rare to have

ample opportunity to perform on a weekly basis, as many of our musicians consistently enjoy. Because each gig is recorded and archived, the music is also preserved for further educational purposes, including review and critique, not to mention for the plain enjoyment of the music.

Our devoted audience comes from all ages and ethnicities. The number of these diverse jazz lovers is growing, too, as we see many of the same faces week in and week out, even during the coldest nights when the temperature is below zero! Students from many different schools and universities come to just hang out, perhaps draw in a sketch book while the music is playing, or simply use JCS as a meeting place with friends. Others come to studiously learn the tunes, sit in and play with other musicians, or network and talk shop.

What connects every visitor, though, is the desire to be surrounded by the special vibe and the sounds of jazz in a friendly atmosphere. There is no other performance space like ours in the Twin Cities, and listeners always leave with a smile on their face knowing that they've spent time in a special place.

VI. Conclusion

Jazz is America's one and only true art form. Combining European harmonies with African rhythms in early 20th century New Orleans, this music became an artistic expression of collaborative democracy at work. Its intricacies and grooves are infectious, attracting young musicians year in and year out. The "spirit" of this music is constant, though, from generation to generation, connecting young and old, even if the forms and shapes of jazz change over the years. Much like the American experience, "Jazz is freedom," as Thelonious Monk once famously said.

More than two-thirds of our efforts are dedicated to keeping our Weekly Performances Program running so that we can continue to provide the space and resources for musicians to grow and evolve. At the same time, it is essential to nurture our audience so that we not only provide musical entertainment on a nightly basis but that we continue to educate them about the importance of this uniquely American art form.

Without a sustainable form of revenue, though, we will not be able to keep our doors open. With this "seed grant" from the Hegelson Foundation, we will be able to kick-start our funding efforts and be on our way to fulfilling our three year objective of fiscal sustainability.

We are very grateful for your consideration. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (612) 281-2591 or email me at macsantiagomusic@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Mac Santiago
Executive Director