

Cool Jazz on a Warm Spring Night

A community news and information source for Killingworth, Connecticut. Coverage is selective and intended to give a daily update on town news and happenings.

Peg Scofield
Editor and Publisher

HOME

CONTACT THE EDITOR

TOWN SERVICES

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

POLITICAL COMMITTEES

SCHOOLS

LIBRARY

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

HOUSES OF WORSHIP

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

WEATHER & TRAFFIC

ARCHIVES

Killingworth, CT

48 °F / 9 °C

Light Rain
at 6:04 AM



[Click for Forecast](#)



Pictured: Giacomo Gates performs Cole Porter. The Russ Becker Quartet with guest vocalist Josi Wails.

The Arts Center at Killingworth hosted an evening of instrumental Jazz and Jazz vocalists on Saturday night at its second annual Jazz Night Out. The sold-out crowd was treated to original music and Jazz favorites by the Russ Becker Quartet and headliner vocalist Giacomo Gates.

The Russ Becker Quartet, featuring saxophonist Russ Baker, guitarist Chris Leigh, drummer Rich Dart and upright bassist Menno Marringa, performed several of its own pieces and was then joined by award winning vocalist Josi Wails for several popular Jazz songs including *Come Rain or Come Shine* and an up-tempo arrangement by Chris Leigh of Rodgers & Hart's *My Funny Valentine*. The audience enjoyed café-style food and refreshments, while viewing the performances live and seeing them projected on a large screen for emphasis on the

individual artists.

Headliner Giacomo Gates and his ensemble played the second set following a brief intermission and sumptuous desserts. Gates, a recent nominee for "Best Male Jazz Vocalist" by the Jazz Journalists Society of America, performed his relaxed style of song and conversation to a very appreciative audience. His spontaneous selections included works by Cole Porter, Duke Ellington and other Jazz legends. He was joined by upright bassist Lou Bocciarelli, guitarist Tony Lombardozi and drummer Bob Haray.

The Arts Center's Artist Director, Barbara Nair said she was very pleased with the turnout. She said many people enjoyed last year's evening with Jazz pianist Mike LeDonne and looked forward to this year's event. She was particularly pleased to be able to present a male and a female vocalist with such great talent and ties to the shoreline area. The event was again held at the Living Rock Church on Route 81.

The Arts Center, founded in 2003, is concluding its 2005-06 fundraising campaign at the end of the month. Money raised not only brings Jazz to Killingworth but year-round classes for children and adults in painting, music, photography and other fine art and craft arts. For more information on the schedule of Spring class offerings please visit the website at <http://www.artscenterkillingworth.org/> or call 663-5593.

© 2006  Purple Dog
Web Productions, LLC

Jazz NightOut 2006

Cool Jazz, from Doo-Wop to Scat

Mainstreet News, March 9-16, 2006

By Linda Ahnert
MSN Staff

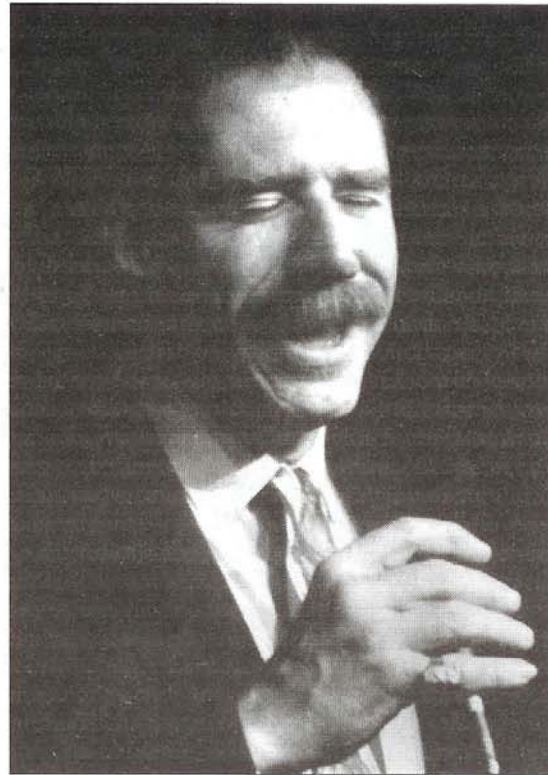
A musician whose first name is "Giacomo" might conjure up images of Italian opera and temperamental tenors. But Giacomo Gates (né Agostini) is a baritone who is described in a 2005 New York Times article as "fitting the profile of the suave, cool jazz singer with ease." What's more, Gates is "hot." His most recent CD, "Centerpiece," earned rave reviews and was on the Top 20 Chart of JazzWeek for three months. He has also been nominated by the Jazz Journalists Society of America as the best male jazz vocalist of 2005.

Jazz cognoscenti as well as those who just enjoy jazz will have the chance to hear Gates perform when he headlines "Jazz Night Out" in Killingworth on March 11. The event, sponsored by the Arts Center at Killingworth, will also feature Russ Becker and his Quartet as well as singer Josi Wails.

The saying goes that 'life begins at 40.' For Giacomo Gates, that could be amended to 'his performance career began at age 40.' Prior to that, however, life was pretty darn interesting. Born and raised in Bridgeport (Gates still makes his home there), he is from a blue-collar background. He played the guitar and sang "street corner doo-wop" in high school. Growing up, he loved listening to the records of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Cab Calloway. At age 10 or 11, Gates also remembers buying an LP of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five."

But, Gates explained, that "music was just fun and I never thought of making a living at it." He also loved the great outdoors and enjoyed physical labor. So, in 1975, he headed to the Alaskan wilderness. He stayed for 14 years (he spent three years working on the Alaska Pipeline). His jobs included operating heavy equipment for road construction and driving spikes into railway tracks.

On the side, Gates kept up his interest in music and continued buying and studying jazz records. He



Giacomo Gates headlines "Jazz Night Out" in Killingworth, March 11. He began his performance career at age 40 and today is regarded as "the suave, cool jazz singer with ease."

began to "pop into places in Fairbanks and sit in with the musicians." One day, Gates was attending a workshop for vocalists at the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival where he met the late Grover Sales.

At first, Gates mistakenly thought that Sales was also taking the class and said, "We just started to hang out." Gates explained that Sales was a jazz writer, historian, and educator. Sales had also been the road manager and publicist for Dizzy Gillespie in the

1940s. It was Sales who encouraged Gates to return back east to pursue a career in jazz. And, Gates added, "It was Grover Sales who was instrumental in getting my first record produced."

So in 1990, at the age of 40, Giacomo Gates decided to fully commit himself to music. Today he regularly sings at the major clubs around the country including New York's Birdland, the Five Spot, and the Jazz Standard. (It was at the Jazz Standard where Barbara Nair, the founder and executive director of the Arts Center at Killingworth, first heard Gates perform.)

In recent years, Gates' popularity has risen steadily and music critics from coast to coast also "sing his praises." Chuck Berg in the Topeka Journal wrote a review that might best explain the secret of Gates' success: "Gates is more than a jazz singer. He's a musician, a hornman who 'plays' through a wonderfully weathered baritone voice. He's also a storyteller, a traveler who's seen and lived a lot of life. It's a combination that gives his performance an unusually deep emotional and musical resonance. Giacomo Gates just may be the Dennis Hopper of vocal jazz."

It's a long way from the Alaskan wilderness to the sophisticated nightspots of New York and Los Angeles. But Gates' "hard-working" experiences are what helped to shape the artist that he became. After all, Gates noted, that "a strong work ethic is involved in whatever you do in life." His own life experiences have also made him appreciate "how happy and how lucky I am to be doing what I'm doing now."

The Arts Center at Killingworth presents "Jazz Night Out" with headliner Giacomo Gates on March 11 at 7:30 p.m. The show takes place at the Living Rock Church (138 Route 81 in Killingworth). Food and drinks will be available. Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$20 for seniors, \$15 for students, \$10 for children age 12 and under. Credit cards are accepted. To order tickets, call 663-5593. To learn more about Giacomo Gates, visit his Web site at www.giacomogates.com.

Connecticut Musicians Gather to Play JAZZ NIGHT Out in Killingworth

By Lorin Cipolla
Special to Living

Presenting its second year of the *Night Out* series, The Arts Center at Killingworth will feature headliner Giacomo Gates along with performances by the Russ Baker Quartet, and vocalist Josi Wails, rounding out an evening of jazz at the Living Rock Church.

"Our first *Jazz Night Out* was held last March when we presented headliner Michael LeDonne—that started the series out with a bang," says Barbara Nair, executive and artistic director of The Arts Center at Killingworth. "We were fabulously surprised by the



Headliner Giacomo Gates will sing standards from the American songbook at Jazz Night Out at The Arts Center at Killingworth.

West Mystic's Josi Wails is set to sing a few tunes with the Russ Becker Quartet



response. Last year we had about 100 people attend the performance."

The *Night Out* series presents a classical concert in the fall and a jazz concert in the spring. This year's jazz performance features musicians from across the shoreline.

Opening the show will be Clinton's own Russ Becker and his quartet. The group carries forward the musical traditions of modern American jazz and plays traditional jazz standards as well as original compositions. Composer and musician Becker plays many instruments including clarinet, bass clarinet, flute, and alto, tenor, and soprano saxophone. He's performed along the Connecticut shoreline for the past 16 years both with the group Collectively Speaking and the Russ Becker Quartet.

"I've been making music for a long time and I've pretty much played all over the place," Becker points out. "The guys in my group are all seasoned professional musicians."

The group features guitarist Chris Leigh who is from East Lyme and has performed and recorded professionally since 1991 with many prominent musicians along the east coast.

Westbrook resident Menno Marringa plays bass and recently relocated from San Francisco where he played with the Timmie Helsa Big Band, Blue Nemo, and his own quartet. Marringa is a regular member of the New Haven Jazz Orchestra and performs with a variety of small jazz groups as well as musical theater orchestras.

Rounding out the quartet is Guilford resident Rich Dart, a



Clinton's Russ Becker (second from left) will perform both jazz standards and original compositions with his quartet.

with jazz artists such as Lionel Hampton, David Anram, and Mark Pender. He performs regularly with the Bridgeport, Greenwich, and Wallingford symphony orchestras.

"One of the things the Arts Center tries to accomplish with all our events is to try to showcase people from the shoreline and give them access to press as well as to other musicians who are performing both internationally and nationally," Nair says.

Joining the Russ Becker Quartet on vocals is West Mystic singer Josi Wails, an up-and-coming artist in the jazz world who occasionally performs with the group.

The show's headliner is Bridgeport-native Giacomo Gates, a full-fledged jazz lounge singer who favors standards from the American songbook. His talents include a full-bodied and smooth voice, an uncanny vocal range, a natural sense of swing, rhythmic precision, and the ability to scat with attention to lyrics.

"Giacomo found out about our event from Michael LeDonne [who played last year's *Jazz Night Out*] and is also from Bridgeport," Nair explains. "I saw Giacomo at the Jazz Standard in New York and saw how he interacted with the audience...he also attracts people of all ages."

"I will be performing the music of Gershwin, Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and other famous American songbook and jazz artists along with telling stories and anecdotes about the songs and artists," Gates says.

Believe it or not, Gates didn't begin performing in public until 1990 when he was 40 years old. He previ-

ously worked a variety of jobs including driving school buses and working on the Alaska Pipeline. After being encouraged to perform, Gates returned to Connecticut to devote full attention to his music. He now performs and teaches at Wesleyan University, the Hartford Conservatory of Music, and New Haven's Neighborhood Music School.

"There's a whole lot of this music that's very accessible and over the years jazz has been made unaccessible to the average public," Gates explains. "If they hear where it's coming from and what it's all about then they think that it's not so far out and esoteric."

Not only will this evening of jazz feature renowned performers from throughout the state, it will also include café seating at the Living Rock Church. Waitresses will pass out appetizers and virgin drinks and a buffet will be served during intermission.

"To see the whole church set up like a café is amazing—I didn't know how far that concept would go," Nair says. "I was astounded because when people first walked in they didn't know what to expect, but within 10 minutes the audience got it. They took a leap of faith and became part of the show."

This year's show takes place on March 11 at the Living Rock Church in Killingworth at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$20 for seniors, \$15 for students, and \$10 for children 12 and under. Credit cards are accepted. To order tickets, call 860-663-5593 or mail check to The Arts Center at Killingworth, 276 North Parker Hill Rd., Killingworth, CT 06419.