

Roswell Arts Fund inaugurates summer jazz festival



Credit: Courtesy of Stephane Colbert

ACCESS ATLANTA

By Jon Ross, For the AJC

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The Brubeck Brothers Quartet headlines the new fest.

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weekend the festival returns with some of the biggest names in jazz, a new event in the tradition of the Newport festival could shift the focus in Roswell to jazz on a summer's day.

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For the maiden Beaucoup Jazz and Blues Festival and Pop Up Art Village on July 31 at the East Village Center, the Roswell Arts Fund is bringing The Brubeck Brothers Quartet — led by the sons of the late Dave Brubeck, who was a Newport staple — and blues guitarist A.J. Ghent to headline a day of music. Jazz and blues performers based in and around Atlanta set to perform include saxophonist Kebbi Williams, trumpeters Joe Gransden and Joey Summerville, and guitarist Trey Wright.

The festival is a continuation of the nonprofit Roswell Art Fund's mission of cultivating art and music in the city using mostly private dollars. The group has had success with pop-up shows in the past, staging country and bluegrass shows at venues around town, and during the pandemic, the fund held streaming concerts. This is the first time the organization has tried something of this magnitude, but RAF board chair Scott Hitch said the organization has wanted to bring jazz and blues music into its presentation mix.

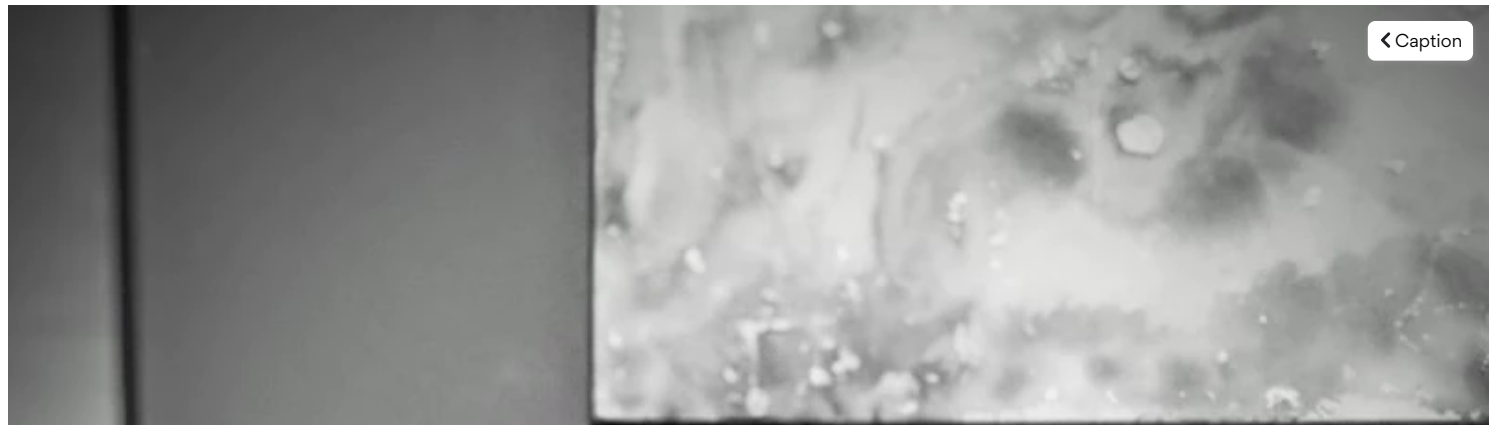


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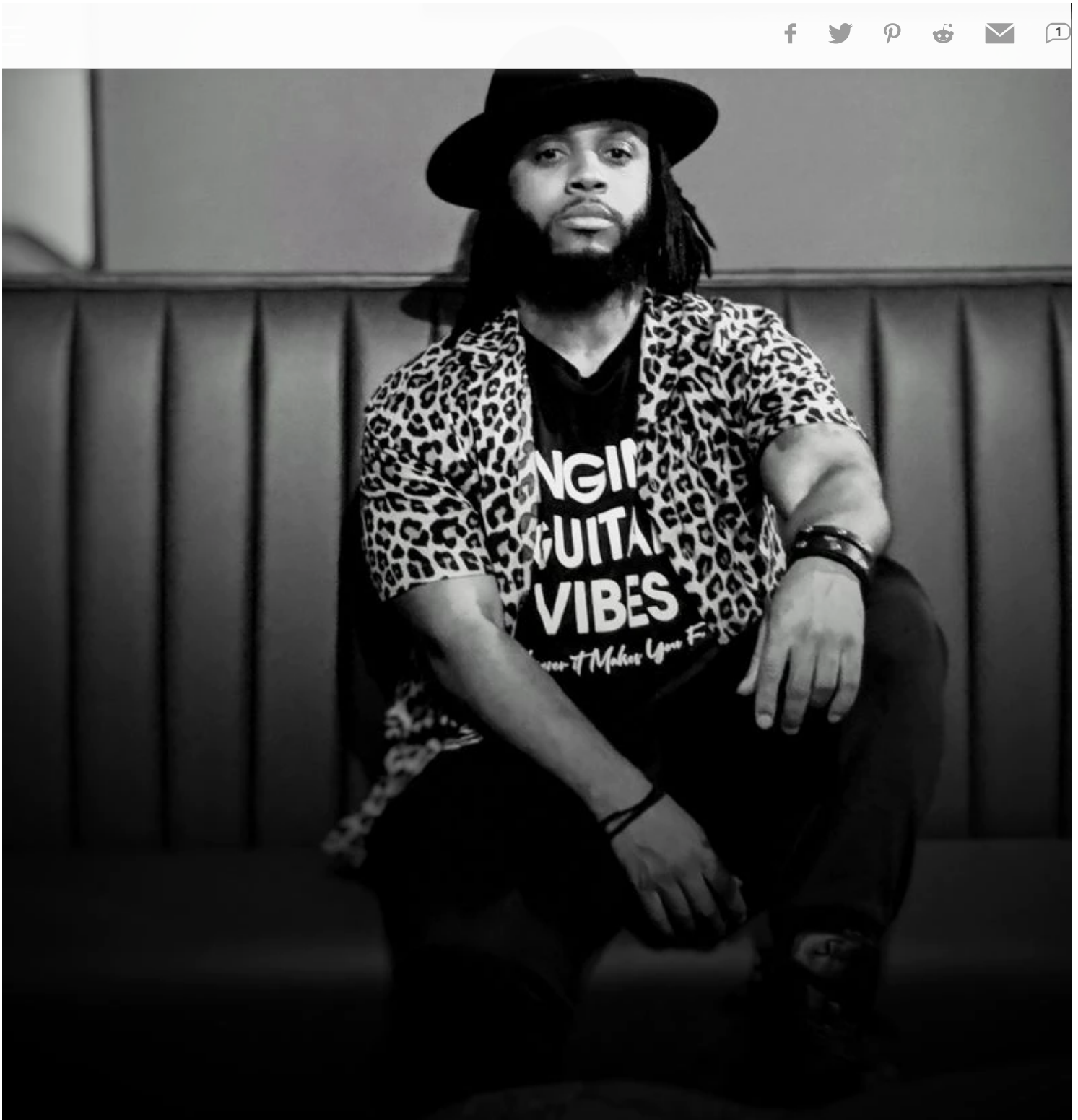
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“The trend in performing arts is that folks want good, high-quality options close to home,” said Hitch. He added that the organization is “trying to bring art and artistic experiences to places where people live. We think there’s a need to expand on that, particularly in this area of town.”



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Credit: Courtesy of Daniel J. Hall

In addition to making sure residents have access to good music nearby, Hitch said there's a significant argument for arts as an economic driver. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, arts and culture-related employment and events contribute around 4% to the state's GDP. The RAF would like to keep that number trending up. The festival kicks off in a space tagged for redevelopment into a mixed-used complex. When complete, the development will include a dedicated arts performance space. This partnership with local businesses and developers echoes the group's commitment to growing the city's economy through arts and culture.

The festival also represents another space where artists working primarily in Atlanta can hope their craft. In a metro area with so much jazz, there aren't a lot of outlets for the musicians even in normal years. Annually, the Atlanta Jazz Festival



Piedmont Park still draws the largest audience, but smaller outdoor shows like Music in the Park Atlanta, organized by Kebbi Williams, have a lively following. And for a metro area that only has one dedicated jazz venue in the Velvet Note, there are more than enough jazz musicians to go around.

“We were blessed with a lot of positive responses from folks that wanted to play. This probably could have been a two- or three-day festival, but we didn’t want to bite off all that at one time,” Hitch said. “Everybody is very excited to get out and perform live and have that sort of interaction with the crowd.”

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The pandemic still casts a pall over performing arts events, even outdoor festivals, and organizers have taken “enhanced health and safety measures” to protect against the spread of COVID-19. Vaccinations are strongly encouraged to attend the festival, but are not mandatory. Still, Hitch said the four-acre space allows for attendees to spread out, which could minimize the risk of disease.

“The space that we have is vast,” he said. “We don’t expect anybody would be in a situation where they’d be too uncomfortable and close to anybody they wouldn’t want to be close to.”

Hitch sees the festival as the first edition of a long-running event, and he is looking forward to returning in subsequent years to the new development. For now, the concert will be held in the parking lot, but perhaps a new tradition could emerge.

“During construction, we’ll need to move to a different location next year,” he said, “but we’ll see what the future holds.”

Beaucoup Jazz & Blues Festival and Pop Up Art Village

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