

U of L Jazz Fest continues to pull in top-notch talent

by [Martin Z. Kasdan Jr.](#)



Alan Broadbent will perform at this year's U of L Jazz Fest. | Photo by Juan Carlos Hernandez

Jazz students and lovers of the form, take note.

The Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program at the University of Louisville School of Music presents a weekend of top-notch concerts for the community, and the opportunity for students to get firsthand exposure to master musicians, with this weekend's 23rd annual [U of L Jazz Fest](#).

The Jazz Fest began in 1992 and has featured iconic artists such as Dave Brubeck, Toots Thielemans and the late Clark Terry, among many others. This year's concerts feature pianist/composer Alan Broadbent on Friday, and brothers Derrick and Vincent Gardner on Saturday.

"The goal has always been to put our students, primarily, and our faculty, in touch with the leading jazz masters," says Mike Tracy, director of U of L's Jazz Studies Program.



It also serves as a touchstone for local jazz lovers who otherwise don't have many options to see the form live in town anymore.

"Honestly and regretfully, Louisville has no jazz venues anymore, except for maybe a restaurant here and there playing background music. So there's no real place to go, except maybe a concert occasionally at the Clifton Center," he says. "Our student concerts usually have a full house. For the festival concerts, when we bring in artists like these, the goal is to make something available that otherwise would not be here in town."

Mike Tracy is director of U of L's Jazz Studies Program.

Tracy hopes that after 20-plus years of the Jazz Fest, bringing in everyone from Brubeck to Wynton Marsalis to Elvin Jones to Michael Brecker, the community will look to U of L's Jazz Studies Program as an important resource.

And he says this year's guests are no exception to the talent roster.

"One of the things that led me to go to Alan was because, with John La Barbera's retirement, Alan's going to be working with our jazz composition people. Besides being a great pianist and having wonderful charts, Alan will be a resource to our composition and arranging students," he says. "Derrick and Vincent were recommendations by some of the faculty who had worked with them before, and we thought having a duo like that would be a nice combination, and they were very accommodating. All three will do a master class for the festival."



Derrick Gardner will perform at the U of L Jazz Fest.

Vincent Gardner was here recently with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, holding down first trombone and singing. Derrick plays trumpet, has performed with the Count Basie Orchestra and Harry Connick Jr., and leads a hard bop ensemble called The Jazz Prophets.

Broadbent has worked with artists ranging from Diana Krall to Glenn Frey and was an integral part of Charlie Haden's Quartet West. He grew up in New Zealand, coming to the United States in 1969 to study at Berklee, and soon joined the Woody Herman Big Band. He tells Insider he misses Haden and gave him credit for broadening his exposure. "Charlie taught me a lot about the road, doing jazz festivals and taking music very seriously."

With more than two dozen albums as a leader, many in a trio context, Broadbent's two most recent releases range from solo (*Heart to Heart: Solo Piano*) to big band (*America the Beautiful*).

"I've always loved to write and compose," he says. "After Woody, some 30 years went by without writing anymore big band charts. Then I had a commission from the NDR Bigband, the Northern Germany Radio band. They wanted to do an album with me because of my reputation years ago with Woody. Suddenly I had an album of my compositions."



Derrick's brother Vincent Gardner will also perform.

Broadbent says he likes to bring back what he's learned on the road and impart practical experience to students.

"It's people like Mike (Tracy) who enable people like me to present our music to an audience who might not be familiar with it," he says. "The corporate musical industry determines what we listen to every day, but people like Mike say, 'Maybe we can present this guy in a way that we can help his music.' And for me, it's very rewarding to bring my music to a new audience, so I can communicate my little world of music."

U of L's Jazz Fest takes place Feb. 27-28 at the School of Music's Comstock Hall, 2301 S. Third St. Alan Broadbent performs Friday at 8 p.m.; Derrick and Vincent Gardner perform Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 (\$5 for students), and more info is available [here](#).