

“Chesapeake”: Bill Warfield and the Hell’s Kitchen Funk Orchestra

It’s not just funk anymore. Trumpeter, composer Bill Warfield founded the Hell’s Kitchen Funk Orchestra in 2014 with the help of two friends from the Czech Republic, one from Denmark and five of his jazz buddies from New York City. While the repertoire was primarily funk, the band always included some Latin Jazz and Hard Bop tunes in its offerings. This recording is different. The band explores all the genres that represent the Baltimore music scene from the 1960s and 70s, this time focusing primarily on Bop.

Joining the band on this outing is 2024 NEA Jazz Master, Mr. Gary Bartz. Bill and Gary started exploring material for a new recording during a chance meeting at Lincoln Center in January 2022. Joining them are friends Conrad Herwig on trombone, Lou Marini alto sax and flute and Paul Shaffer on Hammond organ.

Both Baltimore natives, Warfield and Bartz quickly agreed that a tribute to the Chesapeake Bay, where both had spent many happy hours in their youth, was a great idea.

The “Chesapeake” means many things to many people; a bay, a bridge, a town; but for a native-born Marylander from the Eastern Shore, it is also a way of life, a mindset. From the city of Havre De Grace, the Chesapeake Bay stretches to Virginia, from the Susquehanna to the Atlantic Ocean. The theme of the tone poem **“Beneath the Stacks”**, beautifully performed by pianist Eugene Albulescu, marks the start of our journey. “Stacks” refers to the chimneys of Bethlehem Steel which towered over the section of Baltimore known as Sparrows Point. **“Currents”** and **“Terrestris”** suggest the waterways and swampy land that borders the bay, **“Cissy Strut”**, the funky music we all grew up on and the first of two offerings by pianist Cecilia Coleman, **“The Message”** represents the Hard Bop which is the core of 50s and 60s jazz. **“Nusia’s Poem”**, is Gary’s beautiful tribute to the mother of his children. **“Rosewood”** by Woody Shaw refers to the 1923 massacre of an African American community in Florida. In this case the arrangement was inspired by the first time Bill saw the great trumpeter at the Famous Ballroom, hosted by the Left Bank Jazz Society, Hoagy Carmichael’s dramatic fantasy ballad **“Baltimore Oriole”** wistfully offered by vocalist Jasia Ries and the Cecil McBee tune **“Wilpans”** are two of Bill’s favorites from his youth. That brings us to the beautiful title cut, **“Chesapeake”**, masterfully composed by Cecilia and hauntingly performed by Gary. **“Light”** is a modern interpretation of the classic children’s song by the leader, recalling the innocence of youth and the many ship lamps and house lights that can be seen at night on the bay. The recording ends with Gary stating the theme in a soulful reprise of the original theme bringing us back to where we started. This is our vision of the beautiful Chesapeake Bay.

We sincerely hope you enjoy “Chesapeake” by the Hell’s Kitchen Funk Orchestra.