



PRESS RELEASE

Contact:

Steve Scarpa

Manager, Communications and Public Relations

Cell: 860-559-4873

E-mail: sscarpa@hplct.org

2021 Baby Grand Jazz Series Viewership At A High

HARTFORD, April 30, 2021 – In a time when the essential human activity of gathering together to listen to music has all been snuffed out because of the global pandemic, Hartford Public Library’s 2021 Baby Grand Jazz series has found a way to keep going, gathering close to 15,000 viewers from all over the world.

“It was extremely important to us as organization to make sure Baby Grand Jazz continued. People were stuck in their homes, with an uncertain future. We wanted to, if only for a couple of hours, offer people a respite in the lively and exciting music of the jazz series. We’ve gone beyond that, offering a polished and professional looking online production. We are really pleased at the outcome and hope that fans of the series are too,” said Bridget Quinn, HPL president and CEO.

The long time concert series reinvented itself this year, offering all of its performances on Facebook and YouTube. In ordinary times, the series is one of the library’s most popular live offerings, drawing over 3,000 people to the Center for Contemporary Culture on Sunday afternoons.

Liz Castle, HPL’s programming manager, wasn’t sure how an all online series would work. The programming department had some success offering short, self-made videos of people offering classes in gardening or yoga. Mounting a jazz concert is a much more difficult proposition.

Thanks to the careful work of Tre Davis (video) and Doug Fay (sound), the performances had a polished quality. It was a big step for the series and one that will be carried into the future.

“Our tech team was able to find a way to offer an intimate performance to give viewers the sense that they were up close with the musicians. Although we couldn’t be with our audience in person, we wanted them to feel like they were in the room with us experiencing the same Baby Grand Jazz energy,” Castle said.

The concert series had 14,957 views from viewers in 97 countries around the world. Each week a stalwart group of audience members commented on the concerts on social media. Some offered unqualified praise for all of the performers. Others made sure that the sound engineer knew in real time how he could improve. Still others spoke of how grateful they were for the music and cheered on performers they knew personally.

In short, a little community sprouted up online surrounding the concert.

“One of the most special elements of the Baby Grand Jazz series is the strong sense of community in the audience each Sunday. This year, our viewers were able to develop that sense of togetherness on the livestream chat and through social media. The virtual performances provided another venue for our audience to react and respond to the music, and connect with each other and the musicians,” Castle said.

By the end of the four-month long series, Castle was able to offer limited in-person tickets to a lucky few. The audience, masked and social distanced in the huge Center for Contemporary Culture, brought the final element to the series – a lively crowd. About 45 people attended in person, something no one expected back in January when the series started.

“It felt uplifting and healing to sustain a creative community during a pandemic. Musicians responded to the times by composing and performing songs about the grief, despair, and hope they have experienced this past year, and viewers responded with their own stories of loss. In an unprecedented time of struggle, this series provided a space of feeling together through music,” Castle said.

The performing arts have struggled during pandemic. Performances were cancelled. Artists’ livelihoods were in jeopardy and a big question loomed – would the audience return at all when it was all over? The 2021 Baby Grand Jazz series didn’t just offer great music. It offered hope in a time when it was in short supply.

About Hartford Public Library

Now celebrating its 127th year, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st Century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. www.hplct.org.