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Wellington Jazz Festival celebrates 30 years of jazz across the Capital

The Wellington Jazz Festival is set to take over Te Whanganui-a-Tara this October for its 30th anniversary, with more than 180 performances filling the capital across five days.

From 14-18 October, the city will come alive with an extraordinary mix of jazz, soul, funk, blues, brass and contemporary sounds, with acclaimed Aotearoa artists, emerging talent, album releases, late-night sessions and exclusive performances taking place across Wellington's venues.

From intimate club shows and second-hand bookshops to major international performances, this year's City Line-up celebrates the depth, diversity and creativity of Wellington's thriving music scene.

Festival Co-Director Dolina Wehipeihana says the City Line-up is a celebration of the community that makes the Festival possible.

"The prolific way the local scene powers this festival is the reason it has such an excitement and vibrancy. This year we have almost 70 venues taking part, which is the largest number of venues in the Festival's history."

Festival partner venue **Rogue & Vagabond** continues its long association with the Festival, hosting a stellar programme that includes the return of the much-loved **Rogue Classic Album Series**. Across three nights, iconic albums will be performed live by some of Wellington's best-known musicians, alongside the late-night **Rogue Late Lounge** events.

The venue will also host album releases from **Oscar Lavén** and **The Three Rays**, while female vocalists feature strongly throughout the programme. **Zoe Moon** will showcase the classics with **Blue Moon**, soul singer **Wallace** presents an evening of songs from the movies and musicals that soundtracked her childhood, and **Chelsea Prastiti** brings Disney classics to life backed by a jazz combo.

Second-hand bookshop **The Undercurrent** will host around **30 gigs** throughout the five days, spanning performances by **John Rae's BOP IT!**, the **Ella Sophie Quartet**, **Hepster Quartet** and **The David Fromont Quintet**, alongside late-night jams that will keep the music going into the early hours.

Festival friends **Capital Blues** are also back, presenting gigs throughout the Festival at **Lynott's Irish Bar**, adding another lively venue to the citywide programme.

Also returning are 2025 First Release act, the **Aotearoa Jazz Orchestra** debuting big band works by eight Aotearoa composers at **Meow Nui**.

Jazz meets pop in **Set Fire to the Brass**, where vocalist **Joanna Darling** reimagines Adele's biggest hits alongside beloved jazz standards backed by a powerhouse big band at Wellington's **Opera House**.

Among the many emerging artists taking the stage this year is **nine-year-old TomTom Woodson**, who will perform with **TomTom and the Groove Daddies**, making him the youngest artist ever to perform at the Wellington Jazz Festival.

Festival Co-Director Tama Waipara says the City Line-up demonstrates that the Festival is as much about Wellington's own music community as it is about bringing international artists to the capital.

“Wellington is renowned as a home for great musicians many of whom have extensive experience internationally already. Much of the jazz community play across multiple genres, work in a strongly collaborative way and are already hugely accomplished which means the homegrown offering is of an extremely high calibre. I think the innate creativity of this city also means that we get to see some fun and interesting innovations in music too.”

One of the joys of the Wellington Jazz Festival is discovering music in unexpected places. This year, jazz will spill out into galleries, cafés, churches and public spaces across the capital, inviting audiences to experience the Festival in new ways. From free mini-concerts at **Jazz in the Window** at **Bowen Galleries**, **Jazz on the Rooftop** at JB Morrison law firm and a jazz-inspired art exhibition at **Blue Belle Café**, an immersive audiovisual jazz experience at **Photospace Gallery**, to an interwoven service with jazz music at **St Peter's on Willis** and street performances from the GRAMMY Award-winning **Rebirth Brass Band**, the City Line-up showcases the creativity and diversity that define the Festival.

As a pre-Festival warm-up, you can also celebrate Te Wiki o te Reo Māori with **TNT!**, a free, whānau-friendly event at **Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui, Wellington Central Library**, on 20 September, bringing together the power of big band jazz and the rich storytelling of te ao Māori with Capital City Big Band and Lisa Tomlins with her rōpū kaiwaiata. The City Line-up adds to the Festival's 30th anniversary programme, joining the already announced First Release acts featuring major international artists, exclusive Aotearoa performances and acclaimed New Zealand musicians.

Triple GRAMMY-nominated pianist, composer and bandleader **Joey Alexander (USA)** will make his Aotearoa debut with the **Joey Alexander Trio** at **The Opera House**, while GRAMMY Award-winning **Rebirth Brass Band (USA)** will bring the unmistakable sound and energy of New Orleans to **Meow Nui**.

Silver Scroll-nominated vocalist **Zoe Moon** will return to the Festival with ***Real Black for Me***, her celebration of soul legend Roberta Flack at **Tāwhiri Warehouse**, while Mercury Prize-winning British artist **Benjamin Clementine** will make his first-ever New Zealand performance with his ***Back To Basics Tour*** at **The Opera House**

The Festival will also premiere ***Te Ao Kōhatu***, a newly commissioned work from acclaimed Ruawaipu and Ngāti Porou drummer and composer **Hikurangi Schaverien-Kaa**, alongside **The Unknot**, **Bub(z)** and **da Ouncle\$** and **Ruby Hinepunui Solly** at **Tāwhiri Warehouse**.

These performances join the already sold-out ***Macy Gray Live*** at **St James Theatre**, with the GRAMMY Award-winning singer-songwriter returning to New Zealand for the first time in a decade.

Mark Oldershaw, Chief Executive of WellingtonNZ, says the Wellington Jazz Festival continues to make an important contribution to the city.

“The Wellington Jazz Festival is a fantastic contributor to Wellington's visitor economy while also being popular amongst local audiences. Each year, the festival draws audiences into venues, restaurants, bars and hotels across the city, creating a welcome boost for local businesses and helping showcase everything Wellington has to offer.

“Just as importantly, it reinforces our reputation as Aotearoa’s cultural and creative capital, bringing people together through world-class performances and memorable experiences.”

With more than 180 performances across five days, a stellar international programme and a City Line-up showcasing the extraordinary depth of Wellington’s own music community, the Wellington Jazz Festival’s 30th anniversary promises to bring the capital alive with music, creativity and connection.

For full details on the Wellington Jazz Festival programme and to explore the City Line-up, visit www.jazzfestival.nz.

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ABOUT WELLINGTON JAZZ FESTIVAL

The annual Wellington Jazz Festival is the highlight of Aotearoa’s music calendar, featuring some of the finest musicians from across Aotearoa New Zealand and around the globe. For 2026, the Festival will be presented in multiple venues across Te Whanganui-a-Tara including The Opera House, St James Theatre, Meow Nui and Tāwhiri Warehouse.

Festival Dates 14 - 18 October 2026.

Core Partner:

**Absolutely
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Me Heke Ki Pōneke