

The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra

Intro

John Clayton, Jeff Hamilton and Jeff Clayton founded the CHJO in 1986. The two young men, John and Jeff Hamilton, had played together with Monty Alexander then gone their separate ways, reuniting in Los Angeles to found the band. Brother Jeff Clayton, who had been living and working in Los Angeles all along, came on board to help put the band together. John explains, "He knew all the best players in the city and how compatible they were musically and personality-wise."

Verse

It's all about the music and the camaraderie. In addition to technical instrumental prowess and excellent jazzmanship, the primary criteria for choosing band members is dedication. The love of the music and the love of the 'band-family' must be the motivation and anyone who thinks this is just a gig need not apply. A number of renowned jazz artists have been a part of this musical family including George Bohanon, Oscar Brashear, Bobby Bryant, Al McKibbin, Charles Owens, Andy Simpkins, Gerald Wiggins, Ricky Woodard, and Snooky Young.

The Head/Melody

While typical in configuration (19 pieces: 4 rhythm, 5 saxophones, 4 trombones, 5 trumpets, and John as bass soloist/conductor), the music is anything but typical, and that's what keeps the band members and the audiences enamored. Songs are composed and arranged for the band through self motivation, commissions and recording assignments. "The Hollywood Bowl may be interested in a premier work; Diana Krall may want to record with the band; Jeff Hamilton may suggest a feature for someone in the band. These are all normal ways that allow the band's repertoire to grow," explains John.

Coda

The unique sounds of the CHJO, which are both swinging and sophisticated, have been captured on their six CDs to date:

Groove Shop (Capri, 1990) ***Grammy nominated***
Heart And Soul (Capri, 1994)
Absolutely (Lake Street, 1994/95),
Shout Me Out (Fable/Lightyear, 2000)
Live At MCG (MCG Jazz, 2005)
"Explosive: Milt Jackson Meets the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra"
(Qwest, 2010)

They can also be heard on records with:

Ernestine Anderson (Boogie Down: Ernestine Anderson with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, Concord, 1990)
Charles Aznavour with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra (EMI France, 2009).
Gladys Knight (Before Me, Verve, 2006),
Diana Krall (Christmas Songs, Verve, 2005; From This Moment On, Verve, 2006; and a not-yet-released project coming soon)
John Pizzarelli (Dear Mr. Sinatra, Telarc, 2006),

The Leaders

John Clayton began his bass career in elementary school playing in strings class, junior orchestra, high school jazz band, orchestra, and soul/R&B groups. In 1969, at the age of 16, he enrolled in bassist Ray Brown's jazz class at UCLA, beginning a close relationship that lasted more than three decades. After graduating from Indiana University's School of Music with a degree in bass performance in 1975, he toured with the Monty Alexander Trio (1975-77), the Count Basie Orchestra (1977-79), and settled in as principal bassist with the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra in Amsterdam, Netherlands (1980-85). He was also a bass instructor at The Royal Conservatory, The Hague, Holland from 1980-83. In 1985 he returned to California, co-founded the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, rekindled the The Clayton Brothers quintet, and taught part-time bass at Cal State Long Beach, UCLA and USC. In 1988 he joined the faculty of the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, where he taught until 2009. Now, in addition to individual clinics, workshops, and private students as schedule permits, John also directs the educational components associated with the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, Centrum Festival, and Vail Jazz Party. With a Grammy on his shelf and

eight additional nominations, artists such as Diana Krall, Paul McCartney, Regina Carter, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Gladys Knight, Queen Latifah, and Charles Aznavour vie for a spot on his crowded calendar.

Jeff Hamilton, continually receiving rave reviews for his dynamic drumming, brings both originality and versatility to every group with whom he performs. That is why he is constantly in demand on stages and in studios whether with his trio, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, the Clayton Brothers, or co-leading the Clayton/Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. Born in Richmond, Indiana, Jeff grew up listening to his parent's big band records and at the age of eight began playing drums along with Oscar Peterson records. He attended Indiana University and in 1974 got his first big break playing with the New Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. He then joined Lionel Hampton's Band until 1975 when he, along with bassist John Clayton, became members of the Monty Alexander Trio. He attained a childhood goal in 1977 when he joined Woody Herman and the Thundering Herd. The whirlwind continued with the L.A.4 (with Ray Brown, Bud Shank and Laurindo Almeida), Ella Fitzgerald, the Count Basie Orchestra, Rosemary Clooney, the Ray Brown Trio, and others. Jeff has been on nearly 200 recordings with artists such as Natalie Cole, Diana Krall, Milt Jackson, Rosemary Clooney, Barbara Streisand, Mel Torme, John Pizzarelli, Benny Carter, Lalo Schifrin, George Shearing, Dr. John, Clark Terry, Gene Harris, Toshiko Akiohi, Scott Hamilton, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Keely Smith, Bill Holman, Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel and Mark Murphy.

Jeff Clayton, three years John's junior, began playing clarinet at age 9. By age 14 he added the Alto Sax and the Flute later becoming an Oboe major at CSUN where he was able to add other related instruments from the woodwind family which included the Tenor Baritone saxes, Alto Flute and Piccolo, the English horn, and the Bass Clarinet. At the end of his third year attending Northridge he auditioned, toured and recorded with Stevie Wonder for 2–1/2 years. His years as a studio musician also allowed him to play with such icons as Gladys Knight, Kenny Rogers, Michael Jackson, Patti Labelle, and Madonna. Others who requested his big warm tones on their bandstands were Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Ella Fitzgerald, Woody Herman, Lionel Hampton, and Lena Horne. Jeff also played in the Count Basie Orchestra under the direction of Basie and later under the direction of Thad Jones, and was a member of the Phillip Morris Superband. He also toured with Gene Harris, Dianne Reeves, Joe Cocker, B.B. King and Ray Charles.

