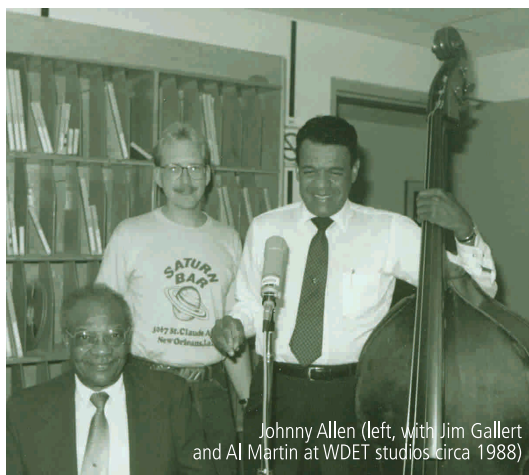


# 2008 Jazz Guardian Award Winners

The Jazz Guardian Award is presented annually by the Detroit International Jazz Festival in recognition of an individual with Michigan ties who through advocacy, teaching, philanthropy and/or musical achievement has made an extraordinary contribution to the elevation and perpetuation of jazz.



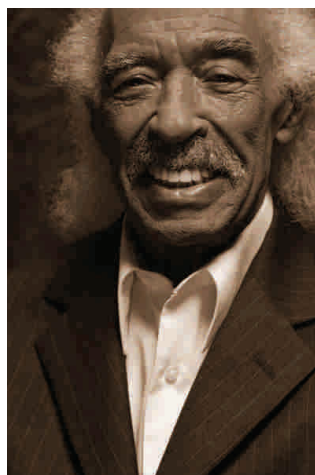
Johnny Allen (left, with Jim Gallert and Al Martin at WDET studios circa 1988)

## Johnny Allen 2008 Jazz Guardian Award for Artistry

A city's jazz reputation is *created* by musicians who leave and share that city's perspective with others - usually a worldwide audience. But a city's reputation is *sustained* by the musicians who remain and guide the generations that follow, ensuring that the high standard of musicianship remains unwavering. In this respect, Detroit is most fortunate to have Johnny Allen.

Allen, a highly respected pianist and teacher, was the musical director of many significant Detroit bands, including the Club Congo Orchestra, which provided a springboard to national recognition for musicians such as Al McKibbon, Wardell Gray, and Howard McGhee. As the staff arranger at Motown records from 1962-1970, he played an important role in shaping the much-vaunted Motown Sound – a sound created not by the many celebrated vocalists, but by the studio musicians. Allen's own pianistic style – understated, elegant and swinging – has been on display for nearly eighty years. Jazz historian Jim Gallert recently stated, "If Detroit jazz has a distinctive sound, Johnny's playing represents it."

Johnny Van Allen, born September 20, 1917, in Uchee, Alabama, was the second of three children. His family moved to East Chicago, Indiana around 1920. Allen's father died soon after the move and his two sons stayed with their mother's grandparents while she and her sister relocated to Detroit. The children didn't rejoin their mother until 1936. Allen began playing drums at age 12, which helped him learn basic rhythm concepts. He later switched to piano and, by age fourteen, was good enough to work as a professional musician around Chicago. By the time he arrived in Detroit in 1936, Allen was a proficient sight reader and a capable soloist.



## Gerald Wilson 2008 Jazz Guardian Award for Artistry

Gerald Wilson has received incredible acclaim throughout his career, including winning the DownBeat International Critics Poll both as composer/arranger and for his big band, winning the Paul Robeson Award, the NEA American Jazz Masters Fellowship, and two American Jazz Awards. Wilson was also elected to the Mississippi Jazz Hall of Fame, had his life's work archived by the Library of Congress and earned six Grammy nominations.

Wilson started out as a trumpeter and arranger for Detroit bandleader Cecil Lee, and then established his national reputation with Jimmie Lunceford (1939-42). He later assembled his own band, for which he composed, played trumpet and arranged (1944-46). In 1948 Wilson joined the Count Basie Orchestra for two years, and in 1950 he joined the Dizzy Gillespie big band as a trumpet player and arranger.

In the 1950s he became active as an arranger and orchestrator in jazz, as well as for popular singers and commercial music. He has written for Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, Ray Charles, Bobby Darin, Carmen McRae, Ella Fitzgerald and countless others. He also wrote symphonic compositions that were performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta and was the conductor and music director for the *The Redd Foxx Show*.

Gerald Stanley Wilson was born in Shelby, Mississippi, in 1918. He received his first piano lessons from his mother. The family moved to Memphis, TN, and then to Detroit in 1932, where he studied trumpet and majored in music at Cass Tech High School.