

Inner Harbor Suite: Revisited

By Steve Monroe

Swaying trees, rolling lawns and distant green hills formed an arcadian backdrop several miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor as the musical offerings of the Carl Grubbs Jazz/String Ensemble magically evoked scenes of the harbor in the performance of "Inner Harbor Suite Revisited: A Tribute to Baltimore," on Sunday, May 31st at St. Paul's Schools in Brooklandville. The concert, co-produced by St. Paul's Schools and Contemporary Arts Inc., presented works from a project funded by the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance (GBCA)'s 2014 Rubys Artist Project Grant awarded to Carl Grubbs.

The event was held in a sunlit room of the school's Ward Center for the Arts. After a pre-concert performance by the St. Paul's Schools Jazz Band, Grubbs, for twenty years the St. Paul's Jazz Band director, opened the main show by lifting his alto saxophone and exploding into hot Latin riffs of his composition "Boss." He continued with "1927 Love" and "Like Trane," supported by Eric Byrd, piano; Charlie Himel, bass; John Lamkin III, drums; and Eric Kennedy, drums and percussion. The percussive duo of Lamkin and Kennedy registered throughout, and a string ensemble lifted the show to another dimension. Cleveland A. Chandler, Jr. and Samuel Thompson on violins; Daphne Benicho, viola; and Kenneth Law on cello helped to transport the audience to the waters of the



Photo of the Inner Harbor by Richard Smith Photography

harbor, with visions of boats, ships and milling tourists. They were most effective in the pieces "In The Market Place," "Sailing," "Harbor Place" and "Water," with their singing, drifting melodies. Grubbs's fierce blowing on "Saturn," one of his signature tunes, was a highlight. And "Barbara Dear" featured tenderly blown harmonies by Grubbs on a tune honoring his wife.

More than twenty years ago, the original CD *Inner Harbor Suite*, a live recording at the Baltimore Museum of Art, was financed by Carl and Barbara Grubbs with money "out of our own pocket," as Carl said. It was the result of a desire to record some of the compositions he had developed in the years after moving to Baltimore in 1980 and receiving a grant to play concerts in the Inner Harbor.

As Jeannie L. Howe, GBCA Executive Director, stated: "This past Sunday, the amazing jazz saxophonist Carl Grubbs debuted 'Inner Harbor Suite Revisited,' a musical love letter to Baltimore, at the [St. Paul's Schools] Ward Center for the Arts. This re-imagined composition . . . allowed Mr. Grubbs to experiment with a jazz/classical fusion and assemble an incredible group of musicians. . . ." Byrd, a rippling melodic wonder throughout the afternoon, was a highlight of the show, along with Grubbs's horn work and the strings. As Grubbs said afterward, the strings added a different feel and more colors to the music, notably on the tune "By and By," which became a dramatic, bluesy, waltzing lullaby vividly bringing visions of the Inner Harbor to life.

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