

## Musician ‘jazzed’ to be back for Jazzin’ on Jefferson

By K. Michelle Moran  
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For Rodney Whitaker, Jazzin’ on Jefferson takes him back to where it all began.

The acclaimed jazz bassist — who has worked with Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, among countless others — grew up just a few blocks away from Jazzin’ on Jefferson, which runs June 23-24 on a closed-off portion of Jefferson at Chalmers on Detroit’s east side, adjacent to Grosse Pointe Park.

He started playing jazz in middle school, and credits that experience with a career that has taken him all over the globe.

“If it wasn’t for that, I probably wouldn’t be playing jazz [today],” said Whitaker, who now lives in Lansing and directs Michigan State University’s jazz studies program. He continues to tour as well; he’ll perform in July in Japan with Japanese pianist Yutaka Shiina and with Marsalis at a prestigious French jazz festival in August.

Whitaker — who recently issued “Get Ready,” a CD of originals and covers of Motown and gospel classics with drummer and longtime friend Carl Allen on Mack Avenue Records — will perform with Allen at Jazzin’ from 7-8:30 p.m. June 23 on the main stage. It’s the first time he’s played the festival in a couple of years; the last time, he performed a different set as a trio.

“It’s going to be a toe-tapping good time for [the audience],” Whitaker vowed. “We have a good time performing, and we always believe if we have a good time, the audience is going to have a good time.”

Now in its fourth year, Jazzin’ on Jefferson has grown into a two-day affair featuring top local musical talents with international reputations, including Eddie Bo featuring the Motor City Jazz & Blues All Stars, Kimmie Horne, Johnnie Bassett, Marcus Belgrave and The Sun Messengers.

More than two dozen artists and galleries from the area will have work on display as well, including 4731 Gallery, Pewabic Pottery, College for Creative Studies, Pangborn Design and 555 Studio. Kids can embrace their own creative sides with arts and crafts projects. And after a day of dancing and browsing, young and old alike can refuel with fare from local restaurants.

The festival has given greater visibility to the eastside neighborhood it calls home.

“By and large, when folks talk about our organization or this part of town, it’s one of the first things they think of,” said Chris Garland, executive director of the Jefferson East Business Association. “I think Jazzin’ on Jefferson has given the neighborhood some sort of a connection.”

Garland credits the support of sponsors, businesses and the residents themselves with making the festival a hit. It’s a local street fair in numerous respects — even many of the musicians are current or former eastsiders — but it has regional appeal; it’s expected to draw about 25,000 visitors this year.

“We spend a lot of time and work to make it a great event,” Garland said. “We recognize it’s our time to shine. And the payoff is, more people come out to enjoy it with us.”

For more about Jazzin’ on Jefferson, visit [www.jazzinonjefferson.com](http://www.jazzinonjefferson.com) or call (313) 331-7939.

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**Carl Allen and eastside native Rodney Whitaker will perform music from their new CD, “Get Ready,” during Jazzin’ on Jefferson. They’ll perform on the main stage at 7 p.m. June 23.**