



# NORTH CAROLINA JAZZ REPERTORY ORCHESTRA

WITH SPECIAL GUEST  
BRANFORD MARSALIS

**JIM KETCH, DIRECTOR**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 7:30 PM**

**BEASLEY-CURTIS AUDITORIUM, MEMORIAL HALL**



## STUDENT TICKET ANGEL FUND BENEFACTORS

*Sharon and Doug Rothwell*

*This evening's program will be announced from the stage.*

**I** **T WAS RIGHT AROUND** the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve 1993 at the Pinehurst resort. The eight-piece Gregg Gelb Swing Band was on its last break of the night, and, as trumpeter Jim Ketch recalls, "Somebody said, 'Man, wouldn't it be great if we could augment this group with enough players to have a big band, and play music like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman?'" A few years earlier, Wynton Marsalis had founded the big band that would become the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and big band sounds were very much in the air. Inspired, Ketch and his compatriots quickly brainstormed a list of players who might be interested, and thus was born the North Carolina Jazz Repertory Orchestra.

- Jim Ketch**, Music Director
- Saxophones** Aaron Hill, Keenan McKenzie, Gregg Gelb, Dave Finucane, Dave Reid
- Trombones** Lucian Cobb, Wes Parker, Evan Ringel, Mike Kris
- Trumpets** Jerry Bowers, Benjy Springs, LeRoy Barley, Jim Ketch
- Piano** Ed Paolantonio
- Guitar** Marc Davis
- Bass** Jason Foureman
- Drums** Stephen Coffman
- Vocals** Kathy Gelb

Twenty-five years, three albums, and hundreds of concerts across the state of North Carolina later, the seventeen-piece group, with Ketch at the helm, is still at it. Their core mission is unchanged: to bring big band repertoire to life, and to as wide an audience as possible. That repertoire is vast, from the classic swing of Fletcher Henderson and Jelly Roll Morton to modern masters like Maria Schneider and Bob Brookmeyer. The group has played it all, travelling around the state to bring this music to as many audiences as they can. They've even helped push beyond the boundaries of jazz, collaborating with composer/arranger Jack Cooper to perform big band arrangements of the iconoclastic early-twentieth-century composer Charles Ives, and performing an explosive free-jazz and minimalism-inspired work by local composer Todd Hershberger, featuring German saxophonist Frank Gratkowski, among others.

But no figures loom over the history of big band music in general—and the NCJRO in particular—more than Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Over the years, the group has performed a couple hundred pieces by the pair. “We built our reputation doing a lot of the music of Duke Ellington,” Ketch says.

By the time he hired Strayhorn as a lyricist and arranger in 1939, Ellington had already achieved wide fame for his innovative arrangements with the Cotton Club orchestra and, later, his own band. During that time, he perfected an approach to arranging based on the particular personalities and musical strengths of his players. “Ellington collected players much like a painter would collect colors for his

or her palette,” Ketch observes. “He wasn’t after trumpet three or trumpet one; he’s after somebody who’s got a sound personality.” In Strayhorn, Ellington had found a gifted composer and arranger; together they pushed Ellington’s orchestra in increasingly complicated directions, culminating in the series of extended suites the two wrote beginning in the late 1950s. Given the depth and breadth of music the two men wrote, it’s no surprise the NCJRO has performed so much of it.

This concert, the final event in the NCJRO’s 25th anniversary series,

sees them trawling through their extensive knowledge of Ellington and Strayhorn’s songbook to pick a representative set of tunes. That’s no easy feat; Ketch notes that you could do a week’s worth of shows and still leave out vast swaths of material. Whatever they decide, the group will bring their 25 years of experience to bear on the pieces. They’ll also add local luminary Branford Marsalis to the saxophone section to channel the sounds of Johnny Hodges or Paul Gonsalves through his own distinctive voice. ■

**JIM KETCH** is a Professor of Music and Director of Jazz Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Summit Records artist (*Next Set* (2009), *A Distant View* (2012), and *Distracted Society* (2015)). In 2012, he received UNC’s prestigious Chapman Award for outstanding teaching, and under his direction, the UNC Jazz Band and Combos have recorded four CDs and appeared in jazz festivals in France (Jazz à Vienne), Switzerland (Montreux), and the Netherlands (North Sea). He is a faculty artist for the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops and Associate Director of Swing Central Jazz for the Savannah Music Festival. Ketch has served as conductor for numerous All-State and Honors jazz ensembles and as Music Director of the North Carolina Jazz Repertory Orchestra (NCJRO). The NCJRO has recorded three CDs and has presented Duke Ellington’s Sacred Concert for North Carolina Public Television. Currently, Ketch is at work on a book titled *Jazz Trumpet Essentials*.

**BRANFORD MARSALIS** is an NEA Jazz Master, renowned Grammy Award®-winning saxophonist, and Tony Award nominee. Leader of one of the finest jazz quartets today and a frequent soloist with classical ensembles, Branford has become increasingly sought after as a featured soloist with such acclaimed orchestras as the Chicago, Detroit, Düsseldorf, and North Carolina Symphonies as well as the Boston Pops. Making his first appearance with the New York Philharmonic in the summer of 2010, Marsalis was invited to join them as soloist in their 2010–2011 concert series, bringing “a gracious poise and supple tone... and an insouciant swagger” (*New York Times*). In 2013, he served as Creative Director for the Ascent Series of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, which included two week-long residencies as well as a number of concerts with the CSO. Whether on the stage, in the recording studio, in the classroom, or in the community, Branford Marsalis embodies a commitment to musical excellence and a determination to keep music at the forefront.