

Pleased to Meet You

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On the eve of the very first Tucson Jazz Festival, executive director Yvonne Ervin talks custom-made boots, jazz lingo and her dream jazz band. By Joan Calcagno.

Yvonne Ervin

Early bird or night owl? “I used to be a night owl when I lived in New York, but now I’m an early bird. I get up by at least by six every morning, jump on the stationary bike. And then I get in the Jacuzzi with my Kindle and I do my email. Then I get dressed and come over to Connect Coworking, and I have a home office. I usually don’t get out of here till 7 pm. It’s a long day. And I’ve been working seven days a week. There’s no other way - you have to be [dedicated to work] to pull this thing off!”

Favorite accessory? “My new boots [pictured left]. Look at these! This is the Tucson Jazz Society logo [on the front in silver leather]. I had [Paul Bond](#) down in Nogales make them for me. They’re fun. I wear size 13 so it’s either sandals or custom-made boots. These are my new babies.”

Favorite faux pas? “It goes back to my early days of booking artists for the Jazz Society. I got a call from Steve Getz, Stan Getz’s son. He wanted to book Phil Woods who is a great alto player. Steve said ‘We’d like to get Phil out [to Tucson} again.’ I said ‘So what’s the bread?’ He said ‘Six bills’. That was twice what we had paid him last time, so I talked to the board. Then I called Steve and said ‘Yes, that looks good. We’ll do it’ He said ‘Are you sure \$6,000. isn’t too much?’ I said ‘Steve, maybe in New York a bill is a thousand dollars but here in Tucson it’s still a hundred dollars. So, no, we don’t have a deal.” In the jazz business everyone tries to out-hip the other person. It’s a whole different lingo.”

Who is your dream customer? “I run the [Western Jazz Presenters Network](#) and when we get together for drinks our favorite game is to put together the band from hell – the most difficult people to work with - and try and top each other. I’d like to think of what a dream band might be – one that’s never been done. We’ve got this really cool band for the festival – JD Souther and Billy Childs. That’s never been done. That will be fun. But I think my dream band would be DeeDee Bridgewater on vocals, who’s an absolute sweetheart, and Lewis Nash on the drums – he’s a great jazz drummer from Phoenix. I’d put Cyrus Chestnut on piano – another great player. He was here recently at UA Presents. And the bass player would be Boris Kozlov – he plays Charles Mingus’ bass.”

The Tucson Jazz Institute Ellington Band, which will play at the Tucson Jazz Festival.

If I weren't the Executive Director of the Jazz Festival, I would... "I would love to direct the Monterey Jazz Festival, which is another of my favorite festivals. It's been around for 50-plus years. Beautiful setting. Just three days – not thirteen! It has many stages with big name artists and emerging artists, a youth component and an education component."

If I could change one thing I would... "It's awfully nerdy but I always said that when I'm queen of the universe I'm going to change the FASBE rule. It's this really arcane Internal Revenue Service way that non-profits have to account for their income. For example, if the organization receives a pledge for a million dollars spread over five years, they have to account the full million as income in the year they received the pledge. It's one of those things that annoy me to death because it makes accounting for income so onerous. It doesn't really make sense."

What would you tell someone new to jazz about the about the festival? "Whenever anyone asks me about getting into jazz I tell them that they need to go out and buy the [Miles Davis] album Kind of Blue. It's the best-selling jazz album of all time. It was recorded in 1959 and has it has held up all these years. It has some of the greatest players that have ever lived on it, including Jimmy Cobb who is going to be performing at the Jazz Festival with the Tucson Jazz Institute Ellington Band and Joey DeFrancesco in a trio setting."

Joe DeFrancesco will play at the Tucson Jazz Festival. Photo courtesy of Tracy Ketcher

***The 2015 Tucson Jazz Festival takes place January 16th to 28th in several downtown venues. Get**

all the details [on the festival's website](#) and follow festival happenings on their [Facebook page](#). Find out more about Yvonne [on her website](#).

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