

# KCJO sizzles with Wycliffe Gordon

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The Kansas City Jazz Orchestra with guest artist Wycliffe Gordon presented “T-Bone Sizzle!” this weekend, paying diverse tribute to what some may call God's instrument, the trombone.

As a trombonist myself, I always look forward to those rare events that boast the power and facility of the instrument. This past Friday, the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra and guest artist Wycliffe Gordon did just that with a concert titled “T-Bone Sizzle!” at Helzberg Hall. Jam-packed with energy and creativity, this event highlighted the dazzling jazz trombone and gave a taste of this city's marvelous talent.

Beginning the program with Thad Jones's *Tip Toe* was a fantastic programming choice, not only because it allowed the ensemble to feature a great blend but also for the extensive and tricky trombone soli. Guest artist aside, the spotlight often fell on a trombonist, and Earlie Braggs was the primary trombone soloist during open sections with his pleasant and uncomplicated lines. The lyrical opening of Johnny Mandel's *Emily*, arranged by band member Brad Gregory, was the perfect opportunity for Jeff Hamer to showcase a lovely tone quality à la Dave Steinmeyer, while *Ruby, My Dear* by Thelonious Monk gave Steve Dekker a chance to showcase a more smoky sound that transported the listener to days gone by. Dedicated to trombone legend—and Kansas City native—Bob Brookmeyer, *Mr. Mean* featured its composer, Paul Roberts, on bass trombone with a melody reminiscent of “Cruella de Vil” and an emphasis on the lowest register of the instrument.

Guest trombonist Wycliffe Gordon is one of the greatest living jazz musicians, known for his fluidity within a variety of styles and unique use of unfamiliar timbres. With a full palette of sound at his disposal, Gordon develops clear musical ideas and seems to release them without any effort, incorporating mouth cavity manipulation, tonguing effects, and multiphonics to create sonic magic. Some of these more adventurous moments were heard and humorously received during his Latin-based chart *Wishing Well*. Not only is he a talented performer, Gordon also composed the majority of the works performed with the KCJO and took time to explain the personal connections felt with styles and aspects of his Southern and Christian upbringing. Aphoristic at times, he declared, “The blues is an antidote,” as he and the band poured out their souls in *Somebody New* with the edgy sound of pixie mute and plunger in the solo voice. Another original work, *The Woogie*, gave each member of the horn section a chance to improvise.

Gordon did not limit himself to playing just the recognizable tenor trombone either. During Sonny Rollins's *Oleo*, Gordon played the soprano trombone to mix the range of a trumpet with the smears capabilities of a trombone. The rhythm section drew attention to this piece as a contrafact of “I've Got Rhythm,” which was an exciting additional layer in the full experience of the concert. Gordon also sang on tunes such as the endearing *Hello Pops*, in which he eerily recreated the gruff yet sweet voice of Louis Armstrong, to whom the song was dedicated, and *Hallelujah Shout*, which featured antiphonal scatting and competitive improvisation with artistic director and conductor of the KCJO, Clint Ashlock. A glorious, soulful rendition of “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” performed by Gordon and Charles Williams, piano, was the most heart-wrenching encore I've experienced so far in my life and admittedly brought a gentle tear to my eye.

Whether the style is blues or bebop, gospel or funk, the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra demonstrates a fluency in all genres of jazz, engaging the listener with unified sound and a wonderful attention to

detail. Bringing in tremendous guest artists like Wycliffe Gordon speaks to the notoriety of the group and level of jazz talent found in our own backyards.

**REVIEW:**

**Kansas City Jazz Orchestra**

***“T-Bone Sizzle!” with guest artist Wycliffe Gordon***

Friday, March 21, 2014

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center of the Performing Arts

1601 Broadway Blvd., Kansas City, MO

For more information, visit <http://www.kcjazzorchestra.org/>

Top Photo: Wycliffe Gordon

By [Anthony Rodgers](#)

**Classical Contributor**

Anthony Rodgers holds degrees from Truman State University (B.M.) and the UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance (M.M.), where he is currently pursuing an artist's certificate in performance and a master's in musicology. During his time at Truman, he performed with the university ensembles and participated in various academic endeavors including presenting at the 2009 Student Research Conference. At UMKC, he similarly performs with the school's large and chamber ensembles and works in the Music/Media Library, where he shelves books and answers tricky reference questions.

As a passionate Germanophile, Anthony has traveled extensively in Germany, performing at the 2011 Lätzsch Trombone Festival in Heek and studying language at the Goethe-Institut in Heidelberg during the summer of 2012. With his love of travel, he has served as a staff member for the International Trombone Festival in several locations including Salt Lake City; Nashville; and Paris, France. Anthony is a member of the award-winning Fountain City Brass Band, Kansas City's premier British-style brass band, in addition to teaching privately and working as a freelance musician in the greater Kansas City area. When he's not busy with school, performances, and reviewing, he enjoys reading and spending quality time with his pet cactus, Thor.