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Eau Claire Jazz Festival to feature acclaimed musicians

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EAU CLAIRE — The guest artist lineup for the 43rd Annual Jazz Festival includes Grammy-winning trumpeter Nicholas Payton, Twin Cities saxophonist Kenni Holmen, violinist Randy Sabien, cellist Matt Turner, alto saxophonist Richie Cole and jazz vocalists Connie Evingson and Fred Steele. Events are slated for a variety of area venues April 15-18 and made possible through a partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

The April 15 opening reception will turn Eau Claire's Haymarket Grill into a jazz club when vocalist Fred Steele, backed by a UW-Eau Claire Jazz I combo, performs from 5-7 p.m. Steele is a noted composer, arranger and producer who is part of the Steele Family, five siblings who have been singing since they were children in Gary, Ind. The group has recorded and performed with Prince, Donald Fagen, Morgan Freeman and George Clinton, among others.

The Connie Evingson Vocal Jazz Concert will be held at 7:30 p.m. April 15 at the State Theatre in Eau Claire. Evingson has appeared in clubs and concert halls across the United States, Europe and Japan. Based in Minneapolis, Minn., Evingson has appeared on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion," has performed with Doc Severinsen, and has opened for Harry Connick Jr., Joe Williams, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae and Dizzy Gillespie.

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Payton and Holmen will perform in the “Jazz Takes Center Stage” concert at 7:30 p.m. April 16 and the “Spotlight on Jazz” concert at 7 p.m. April 17, both at Eau Claire Memorial High School. *The New York Times* describes Payton as "soulful, pendant, romantic and abundantly gifted," and has been compared to Louis Armstrong. Payton's newest project, "Dear Louis," evokes the essence of Armstrong's spirit.

Voted the “Best Tenor Sax Player of the Year” by the *Twin Cities Reader*, Holmen is one of the most active touring and performing artists in the Twin Cities. A part of Prince's horn section, "Hornheads," he also has performed with Michael Bolton, Celine Dion and the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Holmen writes, co-produces and performs with new-age artist Lori Line.

At noon April 17, Cole will perform a free concert in UW-Eau Claire's Haas Fine Arts Center. He will be backed by a UW-Eau Claire Jazz I combo.

Cole founded and directed the Alto Madness Orchestra and has performed throughout the world. His prolific work includes more than 50 albums and more than 3,000 compositions and arrangements.

The April 18 Jazz Finale, featuring violinist Randy Sabien and cellist Matt Turner, is slated for 2 p.m. at the Heyde Center for the Arts in Chippewa Falls.

Sabien returns for a second year at the festival. Dubbed "the past, present and future of jazz violin" by NPR's Jazz Profiles, Sabien has recorded six albums with his label, Fiddlehead Records, and was voted “Artist Deserving Wider Recognition” in a critic's poll conducted by leading jazz publication *DownBeat Magazine*.

Turner is known for his eclectic style, playing everything from classic jazz to alternative rock. He has been featured on more than 50 recordings and has performed with such artists as Marilyn Crispell, Kyle Fisher and Joseph Jarman.

The Eau Claire Jazz Festival is a partnership between Eau Claire Jazz, Inc, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, area businesses and organizations.

The festival is sponsored in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the state of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support comes from major sponsors Visit Eau Claire, TravelWisconsin.com, Hal Leonard Corporation, Sitepro.com, The Print Shop, Ludwig Drum Co. and Morgan Music.

For ticket information and a complete listing of events, visit www.eauclairejazz.com or call Eau Claire Jazz, Inc. at 715-836-4092. You can follow the Eau Claire Jazz Festival on Twitter and Facebook.

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