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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 A fine blend

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 With Vermont Jazz Center’s Convergence Project, three  
3 artists will come to Brattleboro and join Director Eugene Uman  
4 in performing a concert of his own compositions

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 SIXTEEN YEARS AGO Eugene Uman, director of the Vermont  
7 Jazz Center (VJC), launched the Convergence Project, a concert  
8 that fills the VJC’s aesthetically cool Cotton Mill space in  
9 Brattleboro with a blend of hometown excellence and invited  
10 talent.

11 For Uman, this annual concert offers an opportunity to  
12 invite his favorite musicians to join him on stage to showcase  
13 new compositions, review old favorites, and connect with the  
14 VJC's growing, and loyal, audience.

15 The event wraps up each year's September-to-June  
16 season in which jazz professionals from around the world offer  
17 concerts curated and produced by Uman and a team that  
18 includes his wife, artist Elsa Borrero.

19 This Saturday, June 13, the Convergence Project carries  
20 on the ever-evolving uniqueness of Uman's offering: an ensemble  
21 concert of his own compositions, many of which are based on  
22 the indigenous South American rhythms of Borrero's native  
23 country of Colombia.

24 "Each year, it's not like I reinvent myself, or the music,  
25 though I always try to present tunes I've been working on," Uman  
26 recently told *The Commons*.

27 Each year, though, he always chooses "a new artist or  
28 two that will illuminate what I'm feeling in terms of the content  
29 of the music."

30 This year, inspired by the success of a faculty concert he  
31 gave at Amherst College, he's assembled a more pared-down  
32 ensemble that gives "more chance to dig deeper into the pieces  
33 themselves. And to give a little bit more space to improvisations  
34 rather than to the content of the compositions."

35 In so doing, Uman aims for more camaraderie and trust,  
36 generating "a sense of unity with the band itself, knowing the  
37 tunes already and performing them at the very highest level."

38 Uman is looking forward to performing his new tunes  
39 with the Convergence ensemble and "to hearing them in that  
40 context of piano, bass, drums, percussion, plus saxophone as the  
41 melodic voice."

42 "I can't wait to hear what they sound like" with some  
43 preparation and collaboration, he says, noting they will "having  
44 them still be super fresh."

## 45 ((subhed))

46 Joining Convergence 2026 is Stacy Dillard, who Uman  
47 describes as “a wonderful saxophone player” who commands  
48 “respect and love for his playing.”

49 Uman will visit New York to work on material with him,  
50 and “he’s already close with the drummer and the bass player, so  
51 we’ll maintain that sense of unity, and add some energy.”

52 Having taught saxophone and ensembles at the VJC  
53 Summer Workshop for approximately 10 years, Dillard,  
54 according to a VJC press release, has recorded four albums as a  
55 leader and more than 40 as a sideman.

56 He credits his stride to a fortunate encounter with  
57 Wynton Marsalis in Dayton, Ohio, after graduating from Central  
58 State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. That led him to New York  
59 City.

60 Convergence Project drummer Brian Shankar Adler had  
61 been on the faculty of the VJC Summer Workshop for more than a  
62 decade. He’s played in a trio Uman pulled together for various  
63 concerts, and he’s been playing with the Convergence Project  
64 since 2022.

65 The VJC release notes that Adler is a multidisciplinary  
66 percussionist and composer once [described](#) by *JazzTimes*  
67 magazine as “a polyrhythmic force” who has “a penchant for  
68 compositions that are mind-bendingly complex and New York  
69 City gritty yet still [is] somehow capable of evoking the delicacy  
70 of a summer breeze.”

71 He has performed at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center,  
72 and the Lincoln Center, among other notable venues. He’s heard  
73 on more than 40 recordings, including several as a leader.

74 Adler’s been featured in Jason Bivins’s book *Spirits*  
75 *Rejoice*, as well as in *Newsweek*, *DownBeat*, and *Modern*  
76 *Drummer* magazines and on NPR. Having recorded and/or  
77 toured with a range of performing artists from Ballet Hispánico to

78 Elizabeth Swados, he teaches at Bates College, Bowdoin College,  
79 and the University of Maine.

80           Of the Project's bass player, Mimi Jones, Uman says,  
81 "She's a first call bassist in the New York scene. I heard her first  
82 playing with Tia Fuller's quartet [at the VJC] some 15 years ago.  
83 And I was really impressed with her sound, her sense of time,  
84 and her spirit."

85           Jones attended the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of  
86 Music and Art and then the Manhattan School of Music on full  
87 scholarship.

88           As described in a news release, she "studied bass with  
89 and has been mentored by a host of big names; as a U.S. State  
90 Department Jazz Ambassador, she toured Africa to Russia, China  
91 to South America. She's played with a range of artists from Kenny  
92 Barron to Ravi Coltrane; Beyoncé to Dee Dee Bridgewater and  
93 Kevin Mahogany. Jones has released three albums as a leader and  
94 appears on recordings with many others."

95           Uman adds, "I've always loved her time feel because she  
96 has one of the most solid quarter note feels I have ever heard.  
97 When you play with her and a good drummer like Brian,  
98 everything just locks in automatically and it feels solid and  
99 buoyant at the same time."

100           Because "she's really familiar with the music of other  
101 cultures, [...] her playing of music from Latin cultures is deep and  
102 really strong and authentic," he says.

103           In short, Uman says, "Mimi is incredible: I really love  
104 playing with her."

105           Looking for a percussionist to round out the ensemble,  
106 Uman heard a recommendation from a colleague in Colombia,  
107 who'd said, "This guy from Peru, Jhair Sala, is beyond belief. You  
108 should check him out."

109           "So I listened to some of his recordings," Uman recalls.  
110 "I looked at his bio and I saw the people he'd played with."

111           Sala, he explains, "is one of these people who came up  
112 through family lineage. Like in New Orleans, Peru has that same

113 kind of thing. If your parents were musicians, then you're  
114 expected to be a musician. He follows in that tradition. His  
115 mother is one of the great singers of Peru and like his uncle is one  
116 of the great percussionists, so he grew up in that environment.

117 "When he plays, it's like the natural element of life just  
118 flows right out of him," with "all of that history of the Afro  
119 Peruvian culture, which is so powerful and delightful to listen to,"  
120 Uman says.

121 When Sala first started playing in the Convergence  
122 Project last year, "he showed he's one of these people who's  
123 really easy to relate to and who wants the chemistry to be a  
124 positive experience. So, when I heard him play, I was like, 'This is  
125 the guy.'"

126 Sala, who plays a wide range of traditional Latin  
127 percussion instruments, is "known for his deep roots in Afro-  
128 Peruvian and Afro-Cuban traditions, blending them with a fresh,  
129 contemporary edge," the news release says.

130 He has performed and recorded with Rubén Blades,  
131 Pedrito Martinez, Eric Clapton, and Steve Gadd, and he was  
132 twice named Rising Star Percussionist of the Year by *Drum!*  
133 Magazine.

134 **((subhed))**

135 Uman himself, according to the VJC release, is a "pianist  
136 and a composer who enjoys playing energetic rhythms and bold  
137 melodies that reflect his musical journey.

138 "His writing draws equally from the jazz traditions he  
139 absorbed through mentors like Sheila Jordan, Howard Brofsky,  
140 Mike Longo, and Jimmy Heath, and from the folkloric rhythms he  
141 encountered during years living in Colombia where he founded  
142 jazz studies programs at Universidad EAFIT and el Colegio de  
143 Música de Medellín."

144 "The Convergence Project" name is from Uman's  
145 "incorporation of rhythms such as cumbia, pasillo, bambuco, and  
146 currulao, with the North American styles he absorbed and

147 studied in his youth,” he says in the news release. It’s essentially a  
148 mash-up of the styles he loves “where groove reigns supreme.”

149 The VJC concert and educational season runs from  
150 September through June. This summer, the VJC also offers an  
151 intensive vocal workshop from Thursday, July 23 to Sunday, July  
152 26 with vocalist Charenee Wade, which will include a concert  
153 with her and Uman on July 23. Workshop participants will close  
154 the session with a concert.

155 Other VJC activities include a Music Under the Stars  
156 concert in collaboration with the Brattleboro Music Center. The  
157 VJC’s Big Band will perform repertoire from the Great American  
158 Songbook at the Retreat Farm on Saturday, July 11 with vocalist  
159 Peter Eldridge. The VJC Sextet will also appear as part of the  
160 Retreat Farm’s Food Truck Roundup on Thursday, July 23.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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161 Tickets for the Saturday, June 13 Convergence Project  
162 concert at 7:30 p.m. at the Vermont Jazz Center, 72 Cotton Mill  
163 Hill, begin at \$25 for general admission. To purchase tickets and  
164 for more information on the VJC, visit [vtjazz.org](http://vtjazz.org) or call 802-254-  
165 9088, ext. 1.

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