

# IMPACT 2023



**LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:**

# GREETINGS, FAMILY!



Looking back in the spirit of Sankofa - an African proverb whose translation is to "Go back and get it!" - we reflect on our past so that we may build a successful future.

This past year, DSC experienced milestones that further defined us. We received support and resources from our family of donors, artists, memory workers, advocates, and residents.

For myself and our staff, volunteers, and board members of Detroit Sound Conservancy, this year has been truly phenomenal!

The resulting, exciting developments are owed, in large part, to the unwavering support of our generous community. We've said it before and will say it again: "Detroit is the greatest music city in the world!" Our community deserves the resources to protect, keep and share that truth!

We are in the process of structuring a community-led vision of preservation, sustainability, and access to our voices.

To accomplish this, we have spent the last year asking, listening, and learning. What needs to be in place for Detroit music and sound to flourish? And what can we do to support our families and friends who are experiencing illness, diminished agency, or death?

This past year we began to earnestly hold space for discussions about our

role to not only preserve, educate, and place-keep, but to advocate for an under-supported and overlooked sector of Detroit - our artists and creative folk, the spirit of our home and of the world.

I give special thanks to our crew: the incredible staff, interns, volunteers, independent contractors, advisors, and board members who work tirelessly to develop our building initiative, help process and keep the collections safe, develop and document engaging programs and exhibitions, raise vital funds to support all our activities, welcome guests to the programs, feed our helpers, and so much more.

Our work is made possible by the unwavering dedication of our friends and donors, whose support allows us to create unprecedented and innovative experiences and to envision even greater offerings as we look to the future. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the DSC staff, we look forward to celebrating many more milestones in this new year.

Michelle Jahra McKinney  
Director of Detroit Sound Conservancy

## **OVERVIEW:**

# **A PROUD YEAR**

In 2023, Detroit Sound Conservancy continued our growth both within our organization and through our community programs.

Throughout the city, our programming reached into our community and forged relationships with new partners and participants. We cultivated conversations around preservation and advocacy like those at our panel, 'Interstate 313', coordinated with our partner Black Bottom Archives and Detroit Public Library. We curated music performances for new audiences in downtown and surrounding the city. We supported the community events of our partners, ranging from the City of Detroit to neighborhood advocacy groups.

In the spirit of advocacy, we established the Detroit Community Voice Legacy Council where we brought together Detroit music culture bearers to identify problems and solutions related to preserving our heritage. We invited a varied group of music professionals representing the range genres of Detroit music and asked them to authentically discuss the range of issues facing Detroit culture bearers and what would be some possible solutions of those issues.

We explored ways of supporting one another through participation in projects focused on musical practice and preservation, and ultimately, explored ways to provide creative processes, tools and resources for empowering musical communities in Detroit. We considered

ways to establish networks of mutual aid and become stewards of our own cultural heritage. These findings will drive our programs and insights into the years to come.

In the fall, we produced a keynote event, "Celebrating Black Resistance in the Graystone Collection," where we wove together an artifact exhibition, storytelling, and a masterful performance from Detroit-area musicians led by world-renowned jazz drummer, Ali Jackson. We take great pride in telling our story through such a diverse range of venues and programs.

On the inside, we have continued the hard work of turning this organization into a lasting community-rooted institution serving Detroit's musical heritage. We continued developing internal documents and processes. We brought on four incredible new board members with a range of experience and expertise. We continued to forge relationships and tell our story within Detroit's cultural heritage ecosystem.

This work culminated with a tremendous announcement of partnership. Over the next three years, Erb Family Foundation will grant us \$300,000 to strengthen our operations and plan for our future at The Blue Bird Inn. This support is transformational in allowing us to begin to match our vision with capacity to do this hard work!





Our community of supporters, neighbors, board members, partners, volunteers and friends outside The Blue Bird Inn at our Groundblessing ceremony, September 2023.



General Contractor, Harold Wilcox, of Wilcox Business Consulting conducting at site walk on the interior of the Blue Bird Inn, September 2023.

## **EDUCATION:**

### **INTERGENERATIONAL LEGACY LEARNING**

Over 2023, we offered a range of education programs across generations. In February, we hosted a collective remembrance and advocacy panel on I-375, entitled "Displacement and Preservation: on the Road to a Just Future." In the spring, we designed a Learning Program Strategy for our education work and implemented those ideas in collaboration with Inside/Out's creative writing project and as a part of a 6-week pilot program with students from the Downtown Boxing Gym. Our theme was "Everyone Is an Archivist."

## **PRESERVATION:**

### **CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF COLLECTIONS**

We are continuing our work building the tools, capacity, and systems to preserve Detroit music heritage from within. We aspire to model the power of archiving through our intentional work. Through the Lafer Fellowship with the University of Michigan, we mentored two archives students over the summer in which we created meaningful and accessible digital archival processes for staff, volunteers, and community. We have nearly completed full description and physical preservation of our treasured Graystone International Jazz Museum collection. We are growing our reference material and in the past year we cataloged 4000 Detroit music books and audio recordings.

## **PERFORMANCE:**

### **CELEBRATING BLACK RESISTANCE AND EXCELLENCE**

We produced stellar performances, ranging from the Straight Ahead playing fellows from nearly 100 different countries, to Hi-Tech Jazz from Jon Dixon at the Ground Blessing Ceremony and to Gayelynn McKinney at The Hawk in Farmington Hills. The year culminated in a magnificent performance led by world-renowned drummer and bandleader Ali Jackson, who with saxophonist Cassius Richmond reworked arrangements from the Graystone Ballroom orchestra for a lights out performance!

## **PLACEKEEPING:**

### **PREPPING FOR CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING!**

After years of partnership and creative development, we completed our construction documents with our architect, Sandra Little of Quinn Evans Architects. With designs in hand, we have found a tremendous partner in Wilcox Business Consulting as our general contractor. We have begun work at the site and are looking forward to a year of serious developments with an eye towards programs in the building as soon as we are ready. We're ready for our home and home of Detroit music history!





New Graystone Ensemble perform at "From the Ballroom to the Museum: Celebrating Black Resistance in the Graystone Collection." Band led by drummer Ali Jackson (right) featuring a world class band including Rodney Whitaker on bass, Walter Blanding Jr. on sax, Anthony Stanco on trumpet and Rick Roe on piano. November 2023.



Members of the Community Voice Legacy Council work on a creative visioning exercise. This was the second of two meeting that took place at our partner's Class Act Detroit's reimagined church space. August 2023.



## ONLINE DIGITAL COMMUNITY:

# FACEBOOK

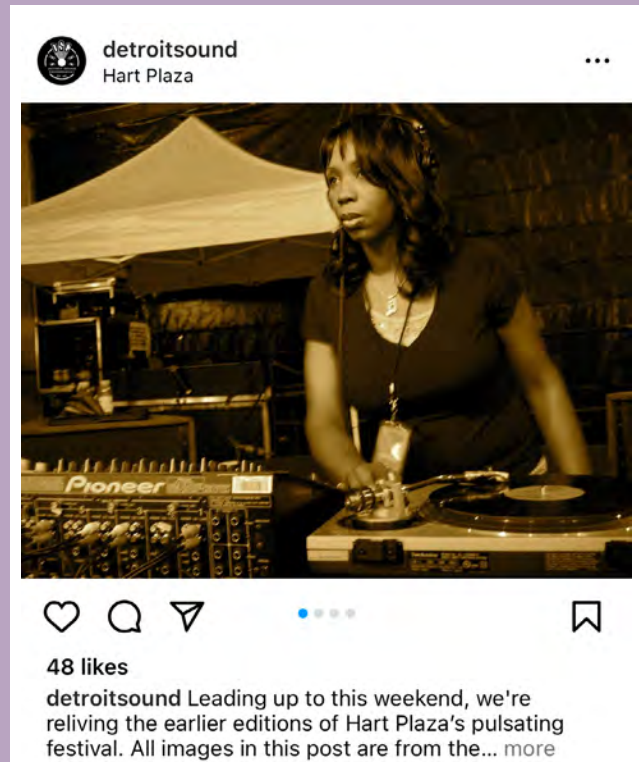
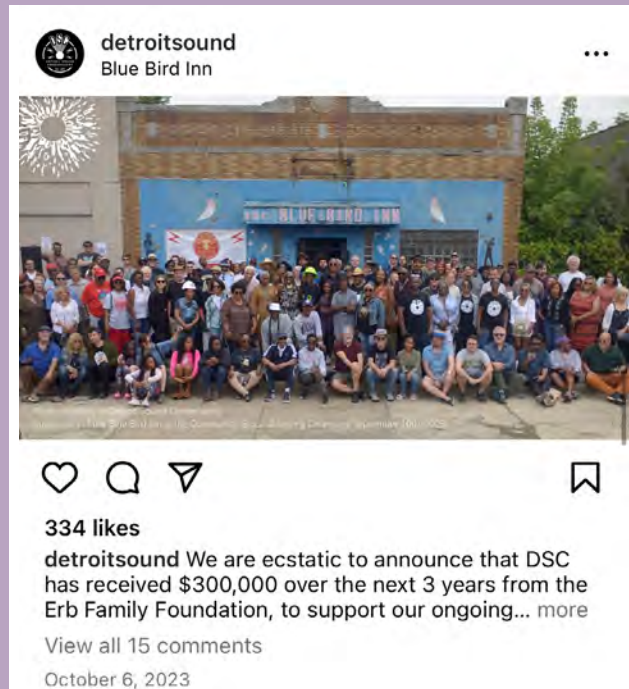
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## COLLECTIONS

DSC is in the process of redirecting its archival focus from archiving collections of salvaged materials to archiving collaborative community collections. To structure in an easier way to archive a community-based collection, we have found superpower 'tools' of a software system, collaboration with academic programs, and the memory worker community. We are planning to make collaboration, access & use, and active preservation a normal, everyday routine but also an important part of every musician's life geared to saving the magnificent legacy of Detroit music. We continue this work with archival volunteers, partners and partnerships build solutions to challenges that face the gathering and preservation of our voices.



## VOLUNTEERING

DSC continues our work building our vision in collaboration with our community. There is power in numbers! Memory workers and volunteers, please join our movement. We are available: Weekdays and Wednesday evenings, and there are remote job opportunities too. For our in-person volunteers, we are open for you inside WGPR, located at 3146 East Jefferson near downtown Detroit. We are dedicated to providing a positive and mutually rewarding volunteer experience. Come on down!

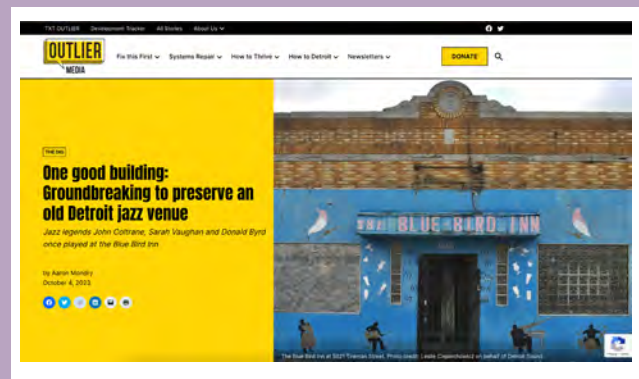
More info: [detroitssound.org/volunteer](https://detroitssound.org/volunteer)



# AWARENESS RAISING:



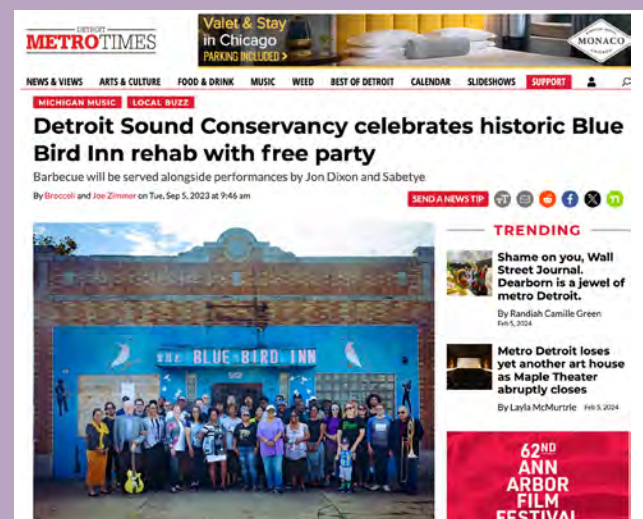
Detroit's Blue Bird Inn jazz club gets massive renovations *via American Black Journal PBS*



One good building: Groundbreaking to preserve an old Detroit jazz venue *via Outlier*



Highway project threatens historic Detroit recording studio *via Axios*



Detroit Sound Conservancy celebrates historic Blue Bird Inn rehab with free party *via Metro Times*

## **LOOKING FORWARD:**

# **WHAT'S NEXT FOR DSC?**

In 2024, we're continuing on the road towards our home at the Blue Bird Inn. All of our programs, initiatives and development is geared towards this future. This year we will complete a significant portion of the physical construction work on the building and hope to host at least one program inside before the end of the year!

Our archival initiatives such as actively collaborating and building community collections to our detailed inventory work and our programming will all look towards this rooted future.

Thanks to the generous support from Erb Family Foundation, we have already hired our existing staff to full time employee positions! We've been part-time for a long time. This is a serious step for our capacity building and energy for the work. We can show up now like never before.

We're always looking for more voices and hands to get into the work of preserving this vital cultural history for the future. If you'd like to get involved further or know anyone you might want to recommend as a board member or strategic advisor, drop us a line at [info@detroitssound.org](mailto:info@detroitssound.org).

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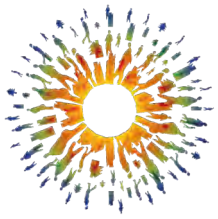
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