

**Express**

# Hank Levy's legacy act keeps the 'Whiplash' composer's spirit alive at Bethesda Blues and Jazz

**By Jon Wolper** March 19

Hank Levy was a fixture of the Baltimore jazz community, the founder of the jazz program at Towson University and a prolific composer known for his extensive use of odd musical meters.

One of his strange tunes, a track that switches from 7/4 time (unusual) to 14/8 (bizarre), was “Whiplash.”

The song — first released on a 1973 album by jazz musician Don Ellis — has endured, thanks in large part to the award-winning 2014 movie of the same name.

“I’m going to see [the film] again,” says Bernie Robier, trombonist and general manager of the Hank Levy Legacy Band, which carries on the spirit of the late bandleader. “I’m going to make sure I get my copy of it.”

The film, about an abusive mentor-mentee relationship at a fictional music school, pits

J.K. Simmons' teacher against Miles Teller's drum student. (Simmons won an Oscar last month for his performance.) The song at the heart of the frenetic push-and-pull is Levy's four-minute opus.

The Hank Levy Legacy Band, which recently recorded a new version of "Whiplash," will play the song — and a host of other Levy tunes — Sunday at the Bethesda Blues and Jazz Supper Club. The performance will follow a screening of the 18-minute 2013 short that was the basis for the feature-length film.

Robier met Levy decades ago, before the composer started working at Towson in 1968. Robier would perform with Levy in local supper clubs and, in the early going, the technicality of Levy's songs proved daunting for the trombonist.

"I mean, it was mind-bending," Robier says. "I didn't have the chops to keep up with that."

Over time, Robier switched from tenor to bass trombone and began to get a handle on Levy's odd meters. At Towson in 1992, Levy started the Hank Levy Alumni Band, made of his former students.

A few years after his death in 2001, the band switched out "Alumni" for "Legacy," settled into a 19-person configuration and forged on. The members — old students and new players — still practice weekly in Towson, keeping Levy's spirit alive.

"What makes [his music] really neat is that you've got all these odd meters," Robier says. But "the music still swings."

*[Bethesda Blues and Jazz Supper Club](#), 7719 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda; Sun., 7 p.m.,*

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