



Photo by Rich Hoover

George Cables in Topeka

# George Cables talks about the solo art of jazz piano

By Tom Ineck . . . . .

The solo George Cables is a rare and wonderful thing. The jazz piano master is so popular as an accompanist and as the leader of his own groups that he seldom has the opportunity to do a one-man show. But it is in that liberating solo setting that he truly shines as a keyboard artist.

That's why his performance March 13 at the Topeka Performing Arts Center in Topeka, Kan., was looked forward to with such anticipation. It was also the final concert in the first **Berman Jazz Series**. (*You will find the review on page 5.*)

Cables is a longtime favorite at the **Berman Music Foundation**, having fronted a trio three years ago at the outdoor Jazz in June series here in Lincoln. The BMF also has reviewed his occasional recordings. I recently connected with the pianist by telephone at his New York home. I asked about his solo experience.

"I've done a little bit of solo performance, every now and then," he said. In recent years, private "house concerts" have allowed the solo Cables to venture out more frequently. "When people have a real nice piano and they

sort of organize the ticket sales so they can fill that space up, I just do an intimate concert, which is really fun." Those venues have been especially lucrative for Cables on the West Coast, places like Seattle in Washington; Portland, Salem and Eugene in Oregon; and, of course, the San Francisco area.

Touring piano players, historically, have had to come to grips with the fact that they are at the mercy of the performance venue and its house instrument. Cables explains:

"You go and you say hello to the piano, and you get to know it and, hopefully, it will be cooperative," he said. "I really enjoy that because it gets to be very personal. When you play a solo concert or a duo concert, for that matter—piano/guitar or piano/saxophone—the character of the music that you most feel is the intimacy of just the one or two instruments. There's a direct communication. It's more personal with just one or two people playing."

The solo art also dictates, to some extent, the repertoire.

"There are just some tunes I don't play when I'm playing solo," Cables

*George Cables continued on page 4*

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## Prez Sez Jazz happenings past, present and future

By Butch Berman

Hello world...my best to you to-day.

It's March 8, just two days from my 56th birthday. Knock on wood, I'm feeling pretty good for an old middle-aged fart, and completely diggin' my life of late.

My gift to myself this year, besides getting a new electric keyboard for my band road work (I opted for an instrument that weighs 50-plus pounds less, plus a case with wheels and runners to make the schlepping easier on my half-century knees) is a new addition to my family.

Enter Kaliber, a seven-year-old chocolate Lab that reminds me of my old departed pal, Ben, yet is a much mellower guy. My 19-year-old Springer, Sherman, seems to tolerate his new buddy but my cat, Muggles, is still a little wary, but appears to be softening. Hopefully, pictures and a happier update will follow soon for you pet-loving jazz fans.

Oh yea, jazz...let's see what haps. Grace and I were both a little too under the weather to head down to Topeka, Kan., last month for our fourth concert in the Berman Jazz Series, featuring Luqman Hamza and Lucky Wesley. Thank God for my able-bodied staff of editor Tom Ineck and photog/filmmaker Rich Hoover to make the trip in my place and take care of biz (*see the review on page 10*). The March 13 concert ends the series for this year with a solo piano concert showcasing my all-time fave jazz keyboardist, George Cables. *Check out Tom's interview and review in this issue.*

In addition to my first presentation of the Topeka Jazz Festival as artistic director for four days over the Memorial Day weekend, the Berman



Mark Radzieski, Grace Sankey Berman, Butch Berman, Rich Hoover, George Cables and Tom Ineck dine at the Elan in Topeka.

Music Foundation is also celebrating its 10-year anniversary. I'm hoping to bring in all of my consultants from around the U.S. to make this festival a real blow-out experience. Grace and I are sharing our two years of marriage on May 30, so it's going to be BIG. Stay tuned for all the details.

Had a great time hanging with Kansas guitar wiz Jerry Hahn when he was here recently for a two-day workshop hosted with Dietze Music House and our best-attended concert ever at P.O. Pears. Dietze co-owner Ted Eschliman and I were at odds over the rather ungentlemanly way the Jazz In June committee decided to end my position as main booker for the festival. Nevertheless, we put that aside to do the Hahn thing and got along well.

Jazz must come before these personal hassles, and I realize that maybe I did set the bar too high with my lofty expectations, but that's another story for a different time. Anyway, check out New York vibes master Joe Locke as he makes the NJO work their butts off trying to keep up with his brilliant chops, don't miss former Hellecaster guitar ace John Jorgenson showcase his Django gypsy jazz, experience the warmth and years of professionalism

surrounding my good buddy, saxophonist Alaadeen with his crackerjack band, and welcome to Lincoln from Michigan my newest jazz pal, Kathy Kosins, whose vocal stylings should entertain and please all in attendance.

Kathy is a rock n' roll gal with a jazzy brain and a cabaret heart, whose first two solo efforts—"All in a Dream's Work..." on Schoolkids' Records and "Mood Swings" on Chiaroscuro Records—run the gamut of many varied genres blended into a smooth jazz mix caressed by her chameleon-like delivery. Both are worth picking up if you can still find 'em. Her newest release, "Vintage," due in April, is dynamite. Read Tom's review in our next issue.

You read about Teraesa Vinson in our last issue. Her CD "Opportunity Please Knock" on Amplified Records is getting rave reviews around the block.



Jerry Hahn, Butch, Gerald Spaits and Tommy Ruskin enjoy dinner.

Photo by Rich Hoover

The New Jersey/NYC jazz entertainment publication Hot House recently ran a little piece on her in its March issue. She wrote me to tell me her first in-the-air, out-of-state gig in Atlanta is coming up, and I'm very excited and proud to see her climb the success ladder. She's fairly new in the jazz world, but well on her way. Give both Teraesa and Kathy a listen, and spread the word.

Another new CD worth grabbing is Greb Abate's "Horace Is Here: A Tribute to Horace Silver," on a new label to watch...Koko Jazz Records. His old teammate and always my and the BMF's dear friend, Claudio Roditi, is aboard on trumpet (*read the review on page 15*). I've known Greg for nearly 10 years, and his stuff keeps getting better and better...deeper and richer. Greg gigged with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra and the Lincoln High School Jazz Band March 15 at the NJO's new digs in the Embassy Suites, instead of the Cornhusker Hotel. *The review of the show appears on page 6.*

Greg and Claudio are only rivaled by maybe Bobby Watson and Terell Stafford as one of the best "frontline" duos in the jazz world today. I've booked Bobby, along with his famed group Horizon, and Claudio at the upcoming Topeka Jazz Festival. It'll be a gas to hear them at times all play together. Check out the festival details on the page 19 and consider making it to Topeka in May.

If I may, please let me close on a rock 'n' roll note (that probably would be the note of E). Formerly the Nebraska Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame, the Nebraska Music Hall of Fame is gearing up to put on some shows this summer after a couple years off to regroup a little and work on a new budget. There are still so many senior rockers that should be remembered and appreciated throughout the ages to come. These music halls of fame in most states make these high school reunion-type affairs (only with guitars) living realities that are enjoyed by many and mean so much



Butch and Grace at Abate concert

Photo by Tom Ineck

to the musicians enshrined.

The Nebraska organization is now under the astute leadership of Mike "Pinky" Semrad, a member of the long-standing favorite Nebraska band The Smoke Ring, now residing in Fremont. The rest of the board consists of newly returned player from Nashville, guitarist Jim Casey, me, my former band mates from The Perks, Bob and Judy Letheby, and Norfolk, Nebraska's most notorious rock activist, Mel Sanders. We're in the process of booking the Plamor for May 20, one week before the Topeka Jazz Festival, for our first big blow-out. Check our website updates for more info and also the Rock 'n' Roll section of the website for more fun 'n' games surrounding my 40-plus years in the rock world. High brow, low brow...that's moi. I LOVE it all!

And speaking of digging it all so much, I'm still having a ball playing with the fun "cover band with taste"—The Cronin Brothers—and sittin' in with my ole buddy and long-time rock-mate Charlie Burton and his Dorothy Lynch Mob. Charlie, his drummer Dave Robel and I have been playing together in a variety of groups off and on for more than 30 years. Pop in on us at either Bob's Gridiron Grille or the Zoo Bar and we'll rock your socks off.

Gotta go now. Thanks for supporting us and jazz. Keep it up. Jimmy Smith will live FOREVER.

Butch Berman



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**Trustee:** Butch Berman

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*George Cables continued from page 1*

said. "I try not to play typical solo piano. You may be interchangeable with many other pianists. I try to play myself and play my music the way I hear it played."

Dynamics also enters into the solo equation. Just because the setting is more intimate and the audience is smaller than most group performances, Cables does not necessarily rely more on the more personal ballad form.

"Most of the stuff I play is not ballads. If they are, the tempos move from slow to something faster within the tune." For example, Cables' 1994 Concord Records recording in the Maybeck Recital Hall series of live solo performances begins with the ballad "Over the Rainbow" and also contains renditions of "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," his own composition "Lullaby" and Anton Dvorak's take on the old spiritual "Goin' Home." But within most of these performances are variations that step up the tempo, creating a range of dynamics.

The Maybeck recording, by the way, also features Cables employing shifting tempos on "My Man's Gone Now," "Someone to Watch Over Me," "You Don't Know What Love Is" and "Everything Happens to Me," among others. The key, as Cables makes clear, is keeping it fresh and personal. By definition, the solo art allows for more self-expression than a group interplay.

"I like dynamics. Silence is as important as sound. You need the contrast."

Over the years, Cables has recorded many George Gershwin tunes, including an entire trio recording of his compositions on 1987's "By George," on Contemporary Records. "I think Gershwin and Ellington are America's two greatest composers," he says without hesitation.

Despite a downturn in jobs for New York City-based jazz artists since Sept. 11, 2001, Cables has been keep-

ing relatively busy. He recently led a trio with bassist Essiet Essiet and drummer Victor Lewis at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The occasion was a celebration of the works of Romare Bearden, a legendary black artist of the Harlem Renaissance.

"I was really excited to be connected with that in any way," Cables said. "I played mostly my compositions. I thought of them as little portraits, little miniature paintings, and a couple of them related directly to some of his work. I consider music like painting with sound."

Cables' next release has already been recorded. Still untitled, it is a tribute to the music associated with tenor sax giant Dexter Gordon, including "Three O'Clock in the Morning," "Body and Soul," and "I Told You So," a Cables composition that Gordon recorded. The recording also features Rufus Reid on bass and Lewis on drums. Cables worked with the saxophonist from 1977 to 1979, and all three are Gordon alumni.

"Dexter Gordon is the embodiment of jazz," Cables said, with increasing enthusiasm. "Everything about Dexter is jazz, jazz as a state of mind, a lifestyle, a way of being. Somebody once asked Salvador Dali if he did drugs, and he said, 'Salvador Dali use drugs? Salvador Dali *is* drugs.' That's the way it is with Dexter. Dexter Gordon *is* jazz."

"There is a joie de vivre in his playing, when he picked up the horn and started blowing into the instrument. It was something that had just come to life. I could look out at the audience on many nights, and I could see a glow coming from them. It's hard to talk about the essence of a musician because it's not so much his notes, not even intellectual content. It's the essence of the music that really makes the person. Dexter was really a skilled musician in the way he would outline chords. He could go through several choruses and play different things. He had a great sense of humor when he played."

"He could quote different songs, like 'I'm Popeye the sailor man!' One thing that was important to him was that the musicians learn the words of a song. Then you know what the song is about, and you have an idea how to phrase it."

"Music, and the arts in general, have a lot of life lessons in them. I think it really helps you deal with life."

Besides his stint with Gordon, Cables also performed and recorded with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Sonny Rollins, Joe Henderson and Freddie Hubbard. Art Pepper called him his favorite pianist. With more than 20 recordings as a leader, Cables most recent releases are 2002's "Shared Secrets" and 2003's "Looking for the Light."



Photo by Rich Hoover

*George Cables during the March 13 solo concert in Topeka*

**Berman Jazz Series****Cables combines talents in solo concert***By Tom Ineck*

TOPEKA, Kan.—George Cables combines in his pianistic talents the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic roles usually shared among piano, bass and drums in the classic jazz piano trio.

On the afternoon of March 13, in the intimate lower level Hussey Playhouse at the Topeka Performing Arts Center, Cables held spellbound an audience of about 60 lucky patrons. The program, the last in the five-concert Berman Jazz Series, included a handful of memorable Cables originals, but relied most heavily on some of his favorite standards, exhibiting his considerable skill for creating unique arrangements of familiar tunes.

Even more impressive is Cables' ability to reimagine and reconfigure all the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic possibilities in a given piece of music. Like all jazz masters, he makes every performance unique by stretching the boundaries of convention and remaining open to improvisational whims.

On top of it all, Cables, 60, has a warm, endearing personality. Before playing a note, he invited the audience to imagine itself in his living room, an informal gathering of shared love for the music. By doing so, he established the relaxed tone for the nearly 2½-hour performance.

With his rendition of "My Foolish Heart," Cables revealed his *modus operandi* in miniature. Implying a tempo in the bass register, he played against that tempo with incredible right-hand improvisational flourishes. In effect, he erected a formidable chordal framework from which to hang his exquisite sound tapestries.

A short set of Cables originals began with the beautiful title track of his latest release, "Looking for the



*George Cables in Topeka*

Light." Returning to a favorite theme of personal sound "portraits," he segued from "Helen's Song" to "Helen's Mother's Song." Written for his best friend, the former is probably Cables' best known composition and remains a tribute to his writing skills. The two tunes had a similar, related motif and featured some dynamic percussive breaks and shimmering block chords.

Cables penned "Spookarella" more recently, this time for Helen's sister. A loping, left-hand figure set up a "spooky" right-hand exploration. Jobim's "A Felicidade" revealed Cables' affinity for Latin rhythms as he turned it into a percussive tour de force. Carole King's pop love song "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" received a rare jazz ballad interpretation with gospel undertones. Adhering to Dexter Gordon's rule that you must know the words in order to give a song a faithful interpretation, Cables voiced the lyrics as he played.

He ended the first half of the program with a Thelonious Monk medley, neatly combining "Round Midnight," "I Mean You" and "Blue Monk."

With its obvious calypso flavor, the second-set opener, "You Stepped Out of A Dream," metamorphosed into, as Cables himself put it, "You Stepped Out of A Drum." Turning to his two favorite American composers, Cables first

caressed Duke Ellington's "Prelude to a Kiss" with lush chords and arpeggios, then played some astounding variations on George Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me." At times, his hands seemed to operate independently in a brain-splitting display of virtuosity.

Before returning to his own songbook, Cables gave his unique interpretation to two more standards, "You Don't Know What Love Is" and Benny Golson's "I Remember Clifford," which featured a stride piano interlude of amazing dexterity and imagination as he simultaneously explored new harmonies and worked the pedal for percussive effect.

My personal favorite Cables composition is "Lullaby," a haunting melody I first heard in two brief statements on Frank Morgan's 1989 release "Mood Indigo." In live performance, the composer expanded the tune with some dark chords and a brooding funk motif before returning to the gentle theme. His "Senorita de Aranjuez," from a 2001 release of the same name, offered Cables another opportunity to explore his Latin tendencies.

Returning to Gershwin, he used powerful chord progressions to express the full emotional impact of "My Man's Gone Now," from "Porgy and Bess." "Someday My Prince Will Come" completed the regular concert with style.

But that wasn't all. Responding to a conversation after leaving the stage, Cables returned to the Yamaha grand to demonstrate another calypso favorite, followed by impromptu versions of "Misty," "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "Over the Rainbow." For the half-dozen or so listeners still in the room, it was a very special bonus.

Photo by Rich Hoover

## Concert Review

## Abate brings out the best in NJO players

By Tom Ineck

Some jazz instrumentalists have a way of eliciting the best from their colleagues, even while showcasing their own virtuosity. Even fewer can work that magic on a one-night stand. Saxophonist Greg Abate proved that ability March 15 at the Embassy Suites, when he put the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra through the paces in a program descriptively entitled "Hard Bop."

The appearance was sponsored by the **Berman Music Foundation**. A longtime friend of the BMF, Abate played his first Lincoln engagement in February 1996, supported by trumpeter Claudio Roditi, pianist Phil DeGreg, bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Todd Strait at the now-defunct 7th Street Loft. He returned in April 1997 to play Ebenezer's (another short-lived club) and to conduct a workshop at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Most recently, the Greg Abate Quartet appeared at the Jazz in June series in 2003. All were sponsored by the BMF.

Given Abate's hard-edged bop sound on alto sax, the March program was aptly titled. Among other tunes, it featured Abate's hard-charging compositions "On the Road" and "Bop Lives." To warm up for Abate's challenging set, the NJO performed Matt Catingub's "The Umpire Strikes Back," a clever take on "Take Me Out to the



Abate with Lincoln High Jazz Band

Ball Game." Especially impressive was the saxophone section soli with Ed Love, soprano; Rich Burrows and Darren Pettit, tenors; Jim Hartig, alto; and Scott Vicroy, baritone. It was the musical equivalent of batting practice.

But it was Abate who was swinging for the fences when he leaped into "On the Road" with a swirling, propulsive attack on alto sax, quoting "My Favorite Things" and playing rings around the tune's melodic variations. Jerome Kern's classic "Yesterdays," arranged by Mike Crotty, began as a ballad pitting Abate's alto with Peter Bouffard's guitar before moving uptempo to a shuffle beat. Abate turned in an extended solo, building on chorus after chorus, drawing astonished looks from the NJO reed players and finishing with an awe-inspiring cadenza.

Abate playfully counted off Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" at an outrageously fast tempo before protests from the NJO persuaded him to slow it down a bit. Drummer Greg Ahl got things off on the right foot with a short intro. Abate

stated the melody on soprano before turning it over to consecutive solos by Bouffard on guitar, Burrows on tenor, Vicroy on baritone, pianist Tom Harvill and Hartig on alto. All delivered first-rate performances.

Living up to its title, "Bop Lives" was an alto sax tour de force, but in an arrangement by Allen Wittig Abate generously shared the spotlight with Bouffard, who took the first solo and then traded licks with Abate. Completing the concert was Lew Tabackin's "Let the Tape Roll (Lew's Theme)," an uptempo blues arranged for big band by Tabackin's wife, Toshiko Akiyoshi. Bob Krueger soared on trumpet, and the reed section collaborated on another excellent soli with two altos, two tenors and baritone. Abate joined the fray with one final, fiery alto solo that put the cap on a fine evening of big band jazz.

In a short opening set, Abate also fronted the Lincoln High School Varsity Jazz Band in a new NJO venture called Jazz 101. Led by veteran music director Terry Rush, the band recently took top honors for the second consecutive year at the Bellevue East Jazz Festival in Omaha.

Showing promise as an ensemble and in several solo spots, the Lincoln High band warmed up with "Li'l Liza Jane," before bringing Abate to the stage for Charles Mingus' difficult composition "Fables of Faubus." Bob Mintzer's modern "Mosaic" contained some lovely voicing in the brass and a typically lyrical and vibrant Abate solo. The percussive nature of Tito Puente's "Ran Kan Kan" brought out the Latin tinge in Abate's blazing solo statement.

Abate's latest release, "Horace Is Here" on Koko Jazz, is reviewed in this issue of **Jazz**.



Tom Harvill, Peter Bouffard, Greg Ahl and Andy Hall perform with Greg Abate

Photo by Tom Ineck

Photo by Tom Ineck



## Tomfoolery

# Sutton to perform three shows at Brownville venue

By Tom Ineck

It came as a delicious surprise to learn in a recent news release from Telarc Jazz that the talented and strikingly attractive singer Tierney Sutton will perform a weekend engagement April 15-17 at the Brownville Concert Hall.

The Los Angeles-based vocalist will appear at the intimate venue at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday. Brownville, an historic south-east Nebraska river town, is just an hour's drive from Lincoln. In the past, I have made the trip for wonderful jazz concerts featuring saxophonist Bobby Watson, cornetist Warren Vache and KC pianist Joe Cartwright and for a solo piano recital by the famed Andre Watts. The hall's performance series frequently includes top-notch cabaret singers.

Sutton's style is exquisitely subtle, eschewing flashy vocal pyrotechnics in favor of perfect intonation, gentle swing and the ability of the best cabaret chanteuse to tell a story. In that regard, she brings to mind June Christy, Julie London, Jo Stafford and Jeri Southern.

Sutton grew up in Milwaukee and attended Boston University and Wesleyan, where she received a degree in Russian language and literature. At Wesleyan, she became involved in singing jazz and after graduating attended Berklee School of Music in Boston for a few semesters, studying under saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi. In 1994 Sutton moved to Los Angeles, where she has become a fixture on the jazz scene, often leading her own group and singing with Buddy Childers and Dave MacKay. Sutton also teaches voice at the University of Southern California.

Her debut CD on Challenge Records, "Introducing Tierney Sutton,"



*Tierney Sutton fronts a longtime quartet also featuring pianist Christian Jacob, bassist Trey Henry and drummer Ray Brinker.*

was recorded in 1996 and released in 1998. Since then, she has further established a solid recording career with four excellent CDs on the Telarc label. "Unsung Heroes" was issued in spring 2000, followed in 2001 by "Blue in Green," a lovely tribute to pianist Bill Evans. "Something Cool," a 2002 offering, emphasized her affinity to the "Misty Miss Christy," whose mid-1950s rendition of the title track is a classic.

Just a year ago, Sutton released what may be her finest recording to

date, an homage to Frank Sinatra called "Dancing in the Dark." It certainly is her most ambitious project, with arrangements for full string orchestra occasionally enhancing the fine accompaniment of her longtime trio—pianist Christian Jacob, bassist Trey Henry and drummer Ray Brinker. Sutton manages to put her own stamp on these immortal tunes associated with Sinatra, including "Fly Me to the Moon," "All the Way," "I'll Be Around," "Emily," "Only the Lonely" and "I Think of You."

"There are lots of songs that almost no one records, like 'I Think of You,'" Sutton says. "Although many of the songs that we chose were not big hits for Sinatra, in each case I felt his commitment to the song, either because he had recorded it more than once or because his version remains the standard."

Tickets for the Tierney Sutton concerts in Brownville range from just \$13 to \$20. The Brownville Concert Hall is at 126 Atlantic St. For tickets call (402) 825-3331 or visit: [www.brownvilleconcertseries.com](http://www.brownvilleconcertseries.com).

## Topeka Jazz Fest tickets available

Tickets are on sale for the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival, May 27-30 at the Topeka Performing Arts Center.

Headliners include Bobby Watson & Horizon, Eldar Djangirov, the Hot Club of San Francisco, Norman Hedman & Tropique, Alaadeen & Group 21, the Doug Talley Quartet, the Joe Cartwright Trio, and Interstring. Vocalists are Giacomo Gates and Kathleen Holeman.

Some of the standout soloists include reed players Ken Peplowski

and Rob Scheps, trumpeters Claudio Roditi and Terrell Stafford, pianists Ed Simon and Misha Tsiganov, guitarists Danny Embrey and Paul Mehling, bassists Essiet Essiet and Jay Leonhart and drummers Victor Lewis and Todd Strait.

Sponsorships and three-day passes are now available at 785-234-ARTS. For a complete schedule of events and other festival information, visit the TPAC website at [www.tpactix.org](http://www.tpactix.org).

## Concert Review

# Hahn's first Lincoln performance is trio romp

By Tom Ineck

Jerry Hahn's first full-fledged performance in Lincoln was on Feb. 24 at P.O. Pears, just two nights after his revelatory guitar clinic before an awed group of fans and musicians (*see story on next page*).

For this **Berman Music Foundation** concert, Hahn was joined by bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Tommy Ruskin, who have established reputations on the competitive Kansas City jazz scene. Having fronted this trio a couple of times before, Hahn was well aware that he would play on an equal footing with his two colleagues.

The trio burst out of the gate with the Hahn original "12 Bars with Entertainment," a cleverly titled 12-bar blues that swung to the rafters. Hewing to the blues, they followed with Oliver Nelson's "Stolen Moments," reharmonizing and reinventing the standard blues changes.

"Powder Canyon" was inspired by Hahn's visit to the Poudre River Canyon near Fort Collins, Colo., a favorite camping destination of this writer. The tune's complex changes and subtle bent-string embellishments remind one of the barely-restrained meanderings of that lively mountain waterway.

Leonard Bernstein's beautiful "Somewhere," from "West Side Story," bore a light Latin tinge. Spaits responded to Hahn's creativity with a stunning bass solo. Ruskin, on brushes, deftly ratcheted up the brisk tempo of "All the Things You Are." A true improviser, Hahn worked his guitar magic on the tune, showed he's not afraid to stick his neck out musically, and recovered just before the "axe" fell.

From the world of contemporary pop music, Hahn chose Norah Jones' "Don't Know Why." In their solo spots,



Photos by Rich Hoover

Kansas City veterans drummer Tommy Ruskin and bassist Gerald Spaits accompany guitarist Jerry Hahn at P.O. Pears in Lincoln, Neb. on Feb. 24.

both Hahn and Spaits brought new perspective to the familiar tune and its lovely changes. Returning to the standard repertoire, Hahn launched into "My Romance," varying his attack and phrasing and revealing the huge musical vocabulary from which he draws. The trio ended the set with Hahn's "The Method," a full-bore break song from his 1995 CD "Time Changes."

Hahn strapped on his solid-body D'Angelico guitar to open the second half of the show, utilizing the more cutting tone to create a virtuosic rendition of "Polka Dots and Moonbeams." A breezy take on Dave Brubeck's standard "Your Own Sweet Way" was followed by Hahn's sensitive ballad "Each and Every Day."



Hahn on Gibson L-7

Two spirituals followed, but the way in which Hahn and the others reharmonized them left some doubt as to the titles. As the guitarist later told us, they were "In the Garden" and "The Old Rugged Cross." Hahn switched back to the Gibson L-7 for the latter of these two pieces, and he waxed eloquent in a series of chord substitutions.

Another Hahn original from the CD "Time Changes," a tune simply called "Oregon," finished the second set with a mind-boggling guitar solo that seemed to build mathematically in its complexity.

Hahn's return to Lincoln can't be too soon. And, now that he once again resides (and regularly plays) in Wichita, Kan., a road trip from here is enticing.



Hahn on D'Angelico



## Music Clinic

# Guitarist Hahn proves himself an expert clinician

By Tom Ineck

Jerry Hahn's first public appearance in Lincoln seemed long overdue, given the fact that he was born 64 years ago in Alma, a small town in the southwest corner of the state.

But then, the guitarist and educator soon moved with his family to Wichita, Kan., and later he migrated to San Francisco to begin a career that would make jazz history and enlist many fans, despite a criminal lack of commercial fame and fortune. Along the way, he plied his fret board skills and/or taught guitar and improvisation to countless other aspiring musicians while living in Wichita, Portland, Ore., and Denver, Colo. He returned to Wichita in 2004.

His recent Lincoln visit allowed fans to experience both his playing and educating talents, first with a Feb. 22 guitar clinic sponsored by Dietze Music House and then with a Feb. 24 trio performance at P.O. Pears, sponsored by the **Berman Music Foundation**.

Setting up informally at Dietze's south Lincoln store, Hahn quickly established himself as a great clinician, fielding all questions from a group of avid guitarists and aspiring guitarists and providing detailed answers, illustrated with his masterful guitar playing and ample samples from his Mel Bay instruction book, "The Complete Jerry Hahn Method for Jazz Guitar."

Using a Roland Boss Loop Station, Hahn began by recording a blues shuffle rhythm guitar line, over which he improvised a lead guitar line on his 1952 Gibson L-7, a warm and resonant arch-top instrument. Asked about choosing the right guitar, he told the story of his long association with the L-7 model. Many years ago, his first



Photos by Rich Hoover

*Guitarist Jerry Hahn exhibits his playing and education skills as he keeps an audience of guitar fans spellbound during a Feb. 22 clinic at the Dietze Music House south store in Lincoln, Neb.*



*Hahn plays to full house at Dietze Music House.*

one was stolen at an airport, but he recently found his current instrument in Portland. It sold for \$3,000 but is valued at up to \$9,000.

He then played the ballad "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" to demonstrate the guitar's sensitivity and responsive nature. Again using the loop gadgetry, he first laid down a rhythm line for Paul Desmond's "Take Five," then played a lead solo on top.

He addressed the ever-important subject of learning songs, especially those in the standard repertoire. He also emphasized developing productive practice habits, practicing

scales and improvising over harmony. A mid-tempo "All the Things You Are" showed how a guitarist can comp behind a singer, as Hahn has frequently done. His performances of "As Time Goes By" and "Rock of Ages" showed how essential knowledge of harmony is in making chord substitutions.

Finally, Hahn performed a two-part version of Toots Thielemans' "Bluesette," mixing waltz time with a blues attitude.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson that Hahn preaches is musical diversity and remaining open to new sounds. He championed such jazz adventurers as saxophonists Greg Osby and Steve Coleman and drummer Brian Blade, and among the artists whose music he recommends to his students are Ray Charles, Ornette Coleman, Billie Holiday, Jimmy Smith, Gunther Schuller, and classicists Alban Berg, Bela Bartok and Julian Bream.

## Berman Jazz Series

# Friends Hamza and Wesley play to the crowd

By Tom Ineck

TOPEKA, Kan.—When Luqman Hamza and Lucky Wesley met on stage Feb. 13 for the fourth in the Berman Jazz Series of concerts at the Topeka Performing Arts Center, it was more than a meeting of like musical minds. It was two boyhood friends in playful musical repartee.

“We’ve known each other since we were kids on 16th Street,” Hamza told the audience at the beginning of the show. “I’m proud to be a friend of his.”

Throughout their two-hour performance, pianist Hamza and bassist Wesley exuded that warmth of friendship and a mutual love of jazz evergreens. Most of the vocal chores were handled with sophisticated aplomb by Hamza, with Wesley occasionally chiming in with his charming vocal wit.

Hamza seems to channel Nat “King” Cole in his sure sense of time and phrasing and a soothing croon that is perfect for the standard repertoire. His respect for Cole was evident from the first tune, the Cole classic “Sweet Lorraine,” which he delivered with suitable elegance. He applied his honey-toned voice to “My First and Last Love Is You,” based on Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Scheherazade.”

Wesley and Hamza joined their voices for the old Inkspots favorite “Java Jive,” a clever novelty tune that has never lost its hip status in over 60 years. Another Inkspots tune, the dramatic romantic ballad of the 1940s, “If I Didn’t Care,” got a comic treatment with a Wesley rap. Up next was Bobby Troup’s “Route 66,” another tune closely associated with Cole and equally impressive when rendered by Hamza on piano and vocal.

The “hits” just kept coming, from “Blues in the Night” to “Frim-Fram



*Luqman Hamza plays and sings with class at Topeka concert.*

Sauce” to “As Time Goes By” to “Just for a Thrill,” with vocal by Wesley, to finish the first set.

In the second half, Hamza exhibited his exquisite piano style on the standard “Poinciana,” usually associated with pianist Ahmad Jamal. He embellished the exotic piece with lovely arpeggios and baroque flourishes.

Special guest vocalist Arrika Brazil, with raspy tone and eccentric phrasing uncannily like those of Billie Holiday, sat in on “Moonlight in Vermont” and “Crazy He Calls Me,” two tunes inextricably linked with Lady Day. Brazil shows great promise and has already been tapped to perform at Holiday tributes in Kansas City, although she just moved back to the city quite recently. Her name will likely appear again here in the near future.

Hamza and Wesley continued with “Money’s Gettin’ Cheaper,” also recorded by Jimmy Witherspoon and Charles Brown, with whom Hamza shares a classy, sophisticated approach to the blues. They returned to the Inkspots songbook for “This Is Worth Fighting For,” a 1940s tune. After Rodgers and Hart’s “Blue Moon” and

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Younger Than Spring,” from the musical “South Pacific,” the duo performed an instrumental rendition of “Rough Ridin’,” with Wesley using an infectious walking bass line and Hamza adding imaginative piano passages.

Hamza delivered a wonderful rendition of Horace Silver’s “Song for My Father” before the dynamic duo closed the show with two more classics, “I’m Getting’ Sentimental Over You” and “I’ve Never Been in Love Before.”

There’s no denying that Hamza and Wesley played to the audience, a group of 60 or so people largely made up of senior citizens with fond memories of the standards. As a result, the musicians created an intimacy and warmth that is seldom achieved.



*Lucky Wesley*

Photos by Rich Hoover

## Concert Review

# Neumann leads NJO jazz master program

By Tom Ineck

Composer, arranger and versatile reedman Roger Neumann was this year's jazz master, performing as guest soloist Jan. 21 with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra at the Embassy Suites and working with the 2005 Young Lions All-Star Band in the NJO's annual program "Learning from the Master."

Neumann has proven himself worthy of the title in the fields of big band swing, popular tunes, movie soundtracks and television theme music. Most notable on his resume is a stint with soul legend Ray Charles.

This year's pride of Young Lions, an auditioned honor ensemble, hailed from schools in the Lincoln, Omaha and Kearney areas. They were immediately put to the test with Bob Mintzer's "Art of the Big Band" and Juan Tizol's "Perdido," exhibiting polished section work in a series of difficult passages.

Neumann took the stage to lead them through his bossa nova arrangement of "Body and Soul," also featuring Joey Gulizia on percussion. "A Quick One" allowed nearly everyone to solo in a swinging blues finale. As with most

Young Lions aggregations, this year's group was strongest in its ensemble passages.

Mark Benson's swinging "Space Czar," written for his father and featuring the composer on alto sax, opened the second half and set the stage for Neumann.

Neumann's brawny tenor sax playing was expressive and romantic on his arrangement of "I Thought About You," with excellent contributions by the NJO rhythm section. He switched to soprano sax for "Stompin' at the Savoy," which also featured a spirited exchange between percussionists Greg Ahl and Gulizia.

Pianist Tom Harvill gently established the chord changes to "You Stepped Out of a Dream," contrasting nicely with the brass section, before Neumann took off on a beautiful flute flight.

Switching back to tenor and inviting trumpeter Bob Krueger to the front of the stage, Neumann introduced his instrumental version of "Then I'll Be Home," a happy, lilting shuffle that he first arranged as a vocal for Charles.

Irving Berlin's "How Deep is the Ocean" got the royal ballad treatment, placing Neumann's tenor sax squarely in the spotlight, with subtle, tasteful accompaniment from the brass and reeds. Finally, Neumann turned the NJO loose on his carefree arrangement of the Charlie Shavers tune "Undecided," with Ed Love and Rich Burrows joining Neumann in a boisterous three-way tenor sax battle before trumpeter Krueger, trombonist Todd Thatcher, alto saxophonist Dave Sharp, guitarist Peter Bouffard, bassist Andy Hall, pianist Harvill and the rest of the rhythm section took brief turns in the spotlight.

## Concert Preview

### Hersch ensemble does Whitman

The 10-piece Fred Hersch Ensemble will perform excerpts from Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" to music by jazz pianist Hersch on March 31 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln. It is booked as part of a University of Nebraska-Lincoln symposium on Whitman's famous collection of poems.

Over his 30-year career, pianist and composer Hersch has established himself as a master in solo, duo, trio and quintet settings. For his third release on Palmetto Records, he departs radically from these forms with his biggest and most personal musical compositional statement to date, "Leaves of Grass."

The Hersch ensemble features vocalists Kurt Elling and Kate McGarry singing the words of Walt

Whitman set to compositions by Hersch. The players are Ralph Alessi, trumpet/flugelhorn; Mike Christianson, trombone; Bruce Williamson, clarinet/alto sax/bass clarinet; Tony Malaby, tenor sax; Erik Friedlander, cello; Drew Gress, bass; John Hollenbeck, drums/percussion; and Hersch on piano.

Hersch says he let the words guide him in his composing.

"The complete 'Leaves of Grass' is more than 600 pages. To distill and create a libretto from this life's work of poems was a lengthy and personal process. In setting out to compose the music, I had no idea where these words would take me. But I followed my instincts and, away from the piano, I simply started to sing the poems. Over time, musical themes emerged."



## Commentary

# Jazz killers (egos and apathy)

By Butch Berman

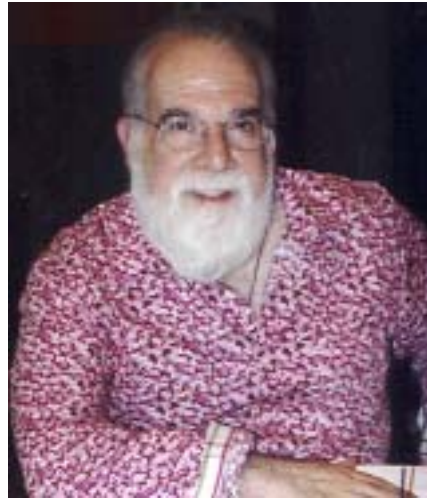
I used to think that my hometown of Lincoln, Neb., suffered culturally more than most cities I've experienced live music in. Now, sad to say, I feel this ego-driven lack of enthusiasm has spread outside just the jazz-starved Midwest that we call home.

When the **Berman Music Foundation** first burst onto the scene here, I held high hopes that jazz might catch on, like the early Zoo Bar did for the blues. Instead, my idealistic dreams fell upon one obstacle after another. For who-knows-what reason, our local news media seemed to go out of their way to ignore us and the incredible array of talent we offered.

When I was a youngster, if an artist the status of, let's say, the late Jaki Byard had performed here, it would have received front-page coverage for such a scholar to be in our midst, regardless if he or she was playing here. Just BEING here would warrant some recognition.

I know in the rock world, most local musicians would flock in droves to catch one of their heroes. It seemed like most of our resident jazz educators felt our "intrusion" threatened their little niches, rather than for jazz' sake it would enhance our environment. I almost always see Ed Love, Bill Wimmer, John Carlini, John Scofield and Scott Vicroy at our gigs, but that's about it. I truly thank these guys for following their ears, hearts and true passions for the gifts of music they've been given and supporting us and our artists.

Where are the REST of you cats who call yourselves jazz edu-



Butch Berman

cators but seldom show your faces? You can't all be playing all of the time.

I'm pretty much over the sting of losing my booking position at our annual Jazz in June. Read my December Prez Sez column if you haven't been tuned into that reality. We're a non-profit organization bent on creating a service, educating and entertaining the masses. Too bad a few people with narrow minds can screw up a gift created to benefit our community.

Anyway, this diatribe comes on the heels of our last Berman Jazz Series concert held in Topeka, Kan., March 13. We presented a solo jazz piano concert with one of the greatest living musicians still performing, Mr. George Cables. For more than 40 years, he has played and recorded with the likes of Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw; Art Pepper and Dexter Gordon, to name a few. We advertised this show for months, but mustered fewer than 100 fans at the beautiful Topeka Performing

Arts Center (TPAC).

With Kansas City, Mo., less than one hour away, I only saw one musician—master bassist and BMF consultant Gerald Spaits—in attendance. He had an evening gig back in KC, but wouldn't have missed the opportunity to revel in and soak up the incredible inspiration that memorable afternoon for anything. Thank you, Gerald! I'm sure what you picked up that day hearing George must have carried over to your own performance that night. But where in the heck were all of the other super players in KC that day?

Even when Grace and I were in Chicago and New York City in the last two years, I noticed that attendance was WAY down from when I last visited between five and 10 years ago. Large venues like Lincoln Center do well, but most of the famed jazz clubs are hurting. I hate to say it, but if the jazz scene totally dies out someday, we the fans and, yes, you the musicians will probably be to blame.

It seems like music on-line and pay-for-view TV has really cut into our live music scene, yet we DO have choices. Wake up America and go out in droves to keep this great American tradition alive. Do it tonight, or this weekend...but just do it. Think back to the last time you really got off to some special musician blowing his brains out for ya. If we don't get off our duffs, we'll only have their LPs and CDs to remember them by.

Yup, egos and apathy...the true jazz killers. Please don't be a part of the problem...be a part of the solution. I thank you for your time.

Photo by Tom Heck

## Commentary

# Johnny Carson jazz legacy is remembered

By Dr. Bruce H Klauber

The late and great Steve Allen, originator of the "Tonight Show" format, was well known as a jazz fan, friend to jazz musicians and a pretty decent jazz pianist. Few remember that Allen really went out on the television limb in the mid-1950s by booking folks like Billie Holiday, Lenny Bruce, Art Tatum, Charlie Parker and many others.

Talk-show host Johnny Carson, who died recently at the age of 79, will be remembered as the quintessential talk show host, comic and interviewer, but Carson also continued Steve Allen's legacy of using the power of television to further the cause of jazz. An amateur drummer since childhood, Carson was more than a fan. He supported the music and the musicians publicly and privately.

As one rather spectacular example, it was Johnny Carson who helped jazz drummer Buddy Rich become a star again, at a time when a 50-year-old Buddy Rich and the concept of a big band were considered old hat. Carson opened up his program to Buddy and Buddy's new band, beginning around 1966, and helped garner an entire new audience of all ages for "Buddy Rich: caustic comic and world's greatest drummer." Rich always credited Johnny Carson for reviving his career, and as thanks, awarded Johnny with a brand new set of drums. Carson loved Buddy Rich as a person and worshipped him as a player. When I was in the midst, along with the principals of DCI Music Video and the estate of Buddy Rich, of writing and co-producing a video tribute to the great drummer, there was nothing Carson wouldn't do for us.

"The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" was, of course, an en-

tertainment program. Many jazz fans of a certain age used to constantly complain about the lack of prime time television exposure accorded jazz on programs like Carson's. I vividly recall the jazz purists' contention that Carson's conception of jazz was Dixielanders Al Hirt and Pete Fountain, entertaining players who were booked frequently. But few of us realized that, along side an appearance by Hirt or Fountain, would be someone like jazz singer Joe Williams (booked more than 50 times) or Sarah Vaughan (booked more than 20 times).

The other argument, in line with television's always-at-a-distance relationship to jazz, was that a program like Carson's only booked the most "popular" jazz players, i.e., Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, etc. Where were the likes of the more creative players like Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Miles Davis, Clark Terry, Freddie Hubbard and the Modern Jazz Quartet? For the record, let it be said that each and every one of these players made at least one "Tonight Show" appearance during Johnny Carson's tenure as host. Dizzy Gillespie was on at least a dozen times. Wynton Marsalis made his first television appearances at Johnny Carson's insistence. You can look it up.

Carson's show was the last to feature what was called a "big band" as the house orchestra, with jazz as its common language. While players like Carl "Doc" Severinson and Tommy Newsome played the stooge on camera, the record will show that they were and are top, jazz-oriented players who staffed "The Tonight Show" orchestra with the greatest jazz musicians who ever lived, from Ed Shaughnessy and

Grady Tate to Pete Condoli and Ernie Watts. Whether they were backing a comic, a vocal duo or Buddy Rich, they always swung. They're still on the road and still swinging under "Doc's" leadership and the driving drums of Ed Shaughnessy.

Indeed, many viewers probably heard jazz for the very first time on the Carson show. But I doubt whether Johnny Carson himself ever thought he would be credited with these considerable contributions. The record, however, speaks for itself, and the careers of many jazz people would be considerably less were it not for him. The jazz world will miss him.

*Dr. Bruce H. Klauber may be reached through his website devoted to the jazz drumming legends: [www.jazzlegends.com](http://www.jazzlegends.com).*

## Yogi Berra on Jazz

**Interviewer:** Can you explain jazz?

**Yogi:** I can't, but I will. 90 percent of all jazz is half improvisation. The other half is the part people play while others are playing something they never played with anyone who played that part. So if you play the wrong part, it's right. If you play the right part, it might be right if you play it wrong enough. But if you play it too right, it's wrong.

**Interviewer:** I don't understand.

**Yogi:** Anyone who understands jazz knows that you can't understand it. It's too complicated. That's what's so simple about it.

## Jazz on Disc

## Eldar is going places with major label debut

By Tom Ineck

**ELDAR DJANGIROV*****Eldar*****Sony Classical**

Eldar Djangirov's piano virtuosity, the analogies to Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson and the increasing recognition by fellow jazz musicians, nationwide audiences and recording companies come as no surprise to those of us who were first awestruck by the young prodigy's talents at the 1998 Topeka Jazz Festival, when he was just 11 years old. Back then, he was virtually unknown outside the Midwest.

At 18, Djangirov has a hot new CD in the stores, his first on a major label, and boasting bassist John Patitucci and a guest appearance by tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker. He has retained longtime sideman Todd Strait on drums. Strait and Kansas City bassist Gerald Spaits accompanied Djangirov on his two previous, locally produced CDs.

With "Eldar," Djangirov has positioned himself for a rapid rise up the mainstream jazz charts, bursting forth with his trademark flag-waver "Sweet Georgia Brown," in which the rhythm section drops out as he accelerates to a tempo that only Tatum and the piano gods could imagine. As if to assure his listener that he's capable of great restraint and sensitivity, he begins the ballad "Nature Boy" playing a subdued

role, with Patitucci first stating the melody. At times, Djangirov's unaccompanied playing seems almost dreamily detached from the changes, veering into impressionistic flourishes. Strait sits this one out.

In contrast, the trio emphasizes the rhythmic and soulful aspects of Bobby Timmons' "Moanin'." Djangirov playfully inserts discordant notes and percussive block chords, alternately increasing the intensity and lowering it to a whisper, sustaining the suspense throughout the tune's nearly eight-minute length. Brecker joins the fray on the pianist's composition "Point of View," an uptempo romp that begins with piano and tenor stating the complex theme in unison before Djangirov and Brecker take their respective solos.

Two more Djangirov originals follow in rapid succession. The lovely "Raindrops" employs cascading chords stated by piano and bass in unison, suggesting the influence of classical impressionism. The solo piano rendition of "Lady Wicks" seems even more indebted to the classical realm, with its early waltz-like cadence and modulating harmonies.

Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage" receives a powerful, two-fisted reading by Djangirov, who has always favored Hancock's adventurous melodic flights. Here he extends the form with racing upper-register runs and percussive punctuation. Strait heightens the effect, riding the cymbals and taking a thunderous solo.

Another of the young pianist's idols is Thelonious Monk, who is represented by two consecutive tracks, beginning with an exquisitely slow "Round Midnight," in which Djangirov

explores implied harmonies while remaining faithful to the original. Patitucci adds a lyrical bass solo. "Ask Me Now," on the other hand, is a high-spirited exercise in stride piano technique with some aptly comic touches.

Fusing "Watermelon Man" and "Cantaloupe Island," Djangirov arrives at his own "Watermelon Island," another adventurous paean to Hancock and his influence on the young admirer. The set ends with a relaxed Latin-tinged take on "Fly Me to the Moon," with Djangirov embellishing the familiar lines with fanciful right-hand runs and full-blown orchestral flourishes.

It is a measure of Djangirov's musical maturity that four of the 11 tracks are originals, holding their own with a program of well-known standards. Thanks to Sony Classical and its far-reaching publicity and distribution network, the world soon will know what we've been saying for seven years. Eldar Djangirov is going places.

**BOBBY WATSON & HORIZON*****Horizon Reassembled*****Palmetto Records**

At long last, one of the great jazz combos of the last 20 years has returned to the recording studio and a series of concert appearances. An all-star aggregation, Horizon is ostensibly fronted by saxophonist



extraordinaire Bobby Watson, but it is a democratic outfit in the true sense of the word, each member contributing to the whole.

Especially essential to the mix is Watson's longtime friend and colleague, the brilliant drummer Victor Lewis. The rest of this dynamic quintet consists of trumpeter Terell Stafford, pianist Edward Simon, and bassist Essiet Essiet. Together again on "Horizon Reassembled," released in late 2004, they sound as if they had never parted company. As Watson himself writes in the liner notes, "in the jazz world, commitment to a cause and a sound is paramount."

That old familiar sound is instantly recognizable on Watson's medium-cool opener, "Lemoncello," the kind of lyrical, uplifting tune for which the composer is known. Simon penned "Pere," an intense, complex Latin ramble that is further intensified by Stafford's fiery bravura solo and Lewis' inventive and perpetual polyrhythmic attack.

Pamela Watson, a talented composer who has contributed many tunes to her husband's recordings, wrote the sadly romantic ballad "The Love We Had Yesterday," which Watson on alto sax turns into a thing of great beauty and grace. Jimmy Heath's classic "Ginger Bread Boy" gets a typically sparkling, energetic treatment from Horizon, led by the dual horns of Watson and Stafford.

Simon leaps into the Latin lilt of Watson's title track with flair, setting the pace for the rest of the band, which enters en masse before breaking into exuberant solo statements, as if to shout from the rooftops, "Horizon Reassembled!" Burt Bacharach's romantic ballad "The Look of Love" is treated with care and sensitivity at a slower-than-usual tempo. As composer, Lewis' sole composition is the insistent "Eeeyyess," whose title perfectly expresses its celebrative mood, as reflected in Stafford's growling,

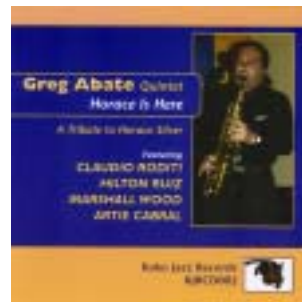
plunger-muted trumpet solo.

"Permanoon" is another uptempo tour de force, with the ensemble stating the melody. Watson takes off on a solo flight with Simon laying down some great keyboard comping before taking his own place in the solo spotlight. Stafford follows with a solo that builds in intensity. All of this is kept under strict rhythmic control by Lewis and Essiet.

Watson's "Dark Days" is a mournful tune with only brief glimpses of sunlight through the darkness. Could this be a musical impression of the post-9/11 world in which we live? Essiet's African roots are clearly heard in his closing composition "Xangongo," an inspiring tune whose contrapuntal construction brings out the best in his bandmates.

To get a good sense of what Horizon is all about, Watson suggests listening to the CD five times, each time concentrating on the work of an individual player. Not a bad idea, but why stop after five listens?

Bobby Watson and Horizon are headlining the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival on Memorial Day weekend. It is a show not to be missed.



**GREG ABATE QUINTET**  
***Horace Is Here: A Tribute to***  
***Horace Silver***  
**Koko Jazz Records**

Along with Art Blakey, Horace Silver is the undisputed architect of hard bop, also known as post-bop. Silver's development of the soulful, propulsive extension of bebop began in the 1950s and has influenced sev-

eral generations of modern, mainstream composers, bandleaders and instrumentalists.

Saxophonist Greg Abate is solidly in that hard-bop lineage, as exemplified by his latest release, a tribute to Silver that also contains two Abate compositions in the Silver style, the title track "Horace Is Here" and "On the Road." Set in the classic bop quintet format, the session also features trumpeter and longtime Abate comrade Claudio Roditi, pianist Hilton Ruiz, bassist Marshall Wood and drummer Artie Cabral.

All the usual Silver suspects are here. "Filthy McNasty" kicks things off with its bluesy swagger and illustrates the compatibility of the front-line horns with Ruiz on piano. Each solo builds on the one that precedes it. Abate and Roditi creatively harmonize the difficult changes of "Nica's Dream," and "Song for My Father" gets the respectful reading it so richly deserves.

The shifting tempos of "Nutville" bring out the best in the rhythm section as they deftly maneuver the changes and propel soloists Abate, Ruiz and Roditi at breakneck speed. Though the pace slows again on "Silver's Serenade," Abate delivers an astounding alto solo that explores all the theme's possible variations.

At nearly 10 minutes, "Peace" is the artistic centerpiece of this recording. Bassist Wood briefly states the melody before handing it over to Abate on alto, who is then joined by Roditi before the trumpeter makes his own solo statement. Ruiz also contributes another sterling solo performance. "May Reh" and "Quicksilver" close the recording with a display of technical virtuosity and soulful vitality that Silver would appreciate.

Even Abate's own contributions seem at home here. The title track is a breezy, mid-tempo number featur-

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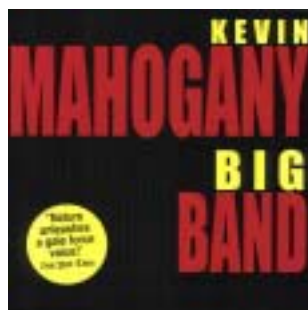
*Continued from page 15*

ing Ruiz on a long, cascading piano statement that establishes the mood for Abate's eloquent tenor sax response and Roditi's warm, lower-register trumpet. "On the Road" swings with bluesy brawn, again featuring the composer on tenor.

In many ways—rhythmic, harmonic and melodic—it is Ruiz who is the glue that binds this project. Never merely a timekeeper, an accompanist or a soloist, he masterfully handles all three roles with aplomb.

Recent years have yielded plenty of tribute recordings to Horace Silver, but few achieve the faithful mood and mighty performance chops of Abate's homage. With no tune less than six minutes and a total time of nearly 74 minutes, "Horace is Here" is a heaping helping of hard bop, indeed.

There's only one complaint about this recording. From the moment I set the disc spinning, I noticed that the overall sound was muffled and lacked dynamics in the upper (piano and cymbals) and lower (bass) ranges. It improved somewhat after increasing the volume, but better engineering would have brightened the sound and emphasized the dynamics inherent in this music.



**KEVIN MAHOGANY**  
*Big Band*  
Zebra Records/Mahogany Jazz

Out of the recording limelight since 2000's "Pride and Joy" on Telarc Jazz, Kevin Mahogany returns with

an impressive big band venture on his own label. "Big Band" was compiled from sessions recorded in Chicago, Englewood, N.J., Kansas City, Mo., Belleville, N.J., and Brooklyn, N.Y.

That geographic diversity allowed a number of great instrumental soloists to participate, including pianists James Williams and Ramsey Lewis, trumpeters Bobby Shew, Roy Hargrove, Danny Barber, tenor saxophonists Pete Christlieb, Scott Robinson, Bob Sheppard and Pat LaBarbera, and alto saxophonists Kim Park, Craig Treinen and Jon Gordon. Several arrangers were involved, most prominently the late Frank Mantooth of Garden City, Kan., who also fronted his own orchestra on six of the 10 tracks.

Mantooth created an easy funk groove for the opener, "Moonlight in Vermont," with brassy section work and a wonderful tenor solo by Robinson. "It Don't Mean a Thing" gets a swaggering Afro-Cuban rhythmic treatment and fiery solos by Christlieb and Barber. The bluesy "Centerpiece" is aided and abetted by Park and Shew, while Lewis lends his soulful, two-fisted keyboard style to the imaginative Mantooth arrangement of the old Leroy Carr blues "In the Evening."

Mahogany belts out "One for My Baby" in the classic Big Band ballad tradition. Regardless of the material, his soul roots are never far from the surface, and he uses them to good effect. "Three Little Words" is not the 1930 pop hit by Bert Kalmar-Harry Ruby, but a Mahogany composition that appeared on the singer's 1993 CD "Double Rainbow" and also was included on Mantooth's 1999 Sea Breeze release "Miracle."

Don Sickler arranged "Dear Ruby," the lyric version of Thelonious Monk's "Ruby, My Dear," with a flugelhorn solo by Hargrove. "There Will Never Be Another You" features the Kansas City Boulevard Big Band

in a swinging arrangement by Dan Gailey, and "It's Alright With Me" is performed by the Big City Swing Jazz Band, with an arrangement by pianist Allen Farnham and Veronica Martell in a duet with Mahogany. In a departure from the big band support, James Williams duets brilliantly with the singer on "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," another example of the late pianist's skill and sensitivity. He died July 20 last year.

"Big Band" is as much a tribute to the arranging and band-leading talents of Mantooth, who died Jan. 30, 2004, as it is a tribute to Mahogany's powerful vocal presence. It takes a robust, confident voice to front a big band with authority, and Mahogany possesses such a voice.



**STAN KESSLER**  
*Stan Kessler's Television*

Kansas City trumpeter Stan Kessler has hit on a gimmick—jazz treatments of popular TV themes—but this is a gimmick that also has considerable artistic merit.

You know you're in for a fun ride when Kessler and co-conspirators Jake Blanton on guitar, Mark Lowrey on keys, Jeff Harshbarger on bass and Tim Cambron on drums launch into the "Bullwinkle" theme, creating a moose of a different color. We boldly explore another galaxy when "Star Trek" is taken at a dance-ready Latin tempo, and the Cleavers have the blues with Kessler's shuffling take on "Leave It to Beaver."

It's not just the facts, ma'am, when the gang tackles the "Dragnet"

theme with a fusion sound reminiscent of early '70s Miles Davis. In fact, the only giveaway to identify the tune is the "dum-da-dum-dum" opening statement. Lowrey on electric keys and Kessler on Harmon-muted trumpet excel on this eight-minute improvisation. Perhaps the strangest of all is the ballad rendition of the "Mickey Mouse Club" theme, with Kessler's

flugelhorn wrenching every bit of emotion from those classic lyrics: "Hey there! Hi there! Ho there! You're as welcome as can be. M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E."

And then there's "The Flintstones," perhaps as Ornette Coleman would interpret it, "The Price Is Right" as a bouncy little funk number reminiscent of Chuck

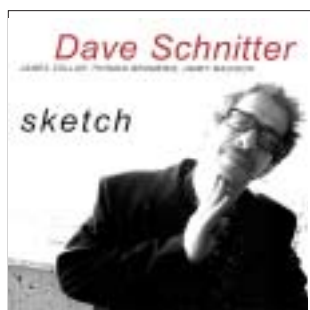
Mangione, and the surf guitar and space-age electronics of "The Dick Van Dyke Show" theme.

Only one of the nine selections falls flat in this context, perhaps because it's at least 30 years newer than the rest. The "Friends" theme is pleasant enough, but it just doesn't seem to fit in with those wacky and wonderful TV tunes of the '50s and '60s.

## Discorama

# Schnitter release one of year's best jazz CDs

By Butch Berman



**DAVE SCHNITTER**  
***Sketch***  
**DMix Records**

Almost every CD review has a story. I don't know too many other Butches besides myself. It was a trip on my answering machine to have another Butch call back Butch. It turns out Lincoln Journal Star reporter Butch Mabin's wife is the sister of Dave Schnitter, a terrific sax player formerly living in Europe and now back in New York. We're mutual friends of Bobby Watson, another monster on sax, and he lives in the same musicians' complex as my "brother," percussionist Norman Hedman. It's a small world, for sure, and in the jazz scene it's even tinier.

Anyway, we met on the phone, gabbed and his promo arrived very quickly. Wow! What a great jazz experience. Hands down, it's one of

the truest forms of the best in recorded jazz music I've heard this year, and maybe longer than that. I just couldn't get it off of my CD player, and EVERYONE (mostly other musicians) felt the same way about "Sketch."

A pianoless quartet featuring Dave just killing on tenor, James Zollar blowing some fine trumpet, acoustic bassist Thomas Bramerie and drummer Jimmy Madison providing the perfect rhythm section for this incredible collection of tunes. Dave also shows off his prowess composing four of the eight selections. Zollar adds one with the album closer, "Sputnik," and their take on the three standards chosen to round out this set—"For All We Know," "All or Nothing at All" and "You Don't Know What Love Is"—are so cleverly crafted you feel you just discovered these great songs for the first time.

Schnitter, an alumnus of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, is amazingly well schooled in the post-bop tradition and handles the ballads with the same kind of romantic intensity of Dexter or perhaps even Ben Webster, yet with a special twist that gives his music a personal identification that sounds like no one else.

From the first few moments of the opening cut, "Dili Dali," you will be well aware you're going on an adventuresome excursion to perhaps somewhere a little bumpy, maybe even a little bit dangerous. Don't be afraid... just sit back, buckle-up and hold on to a most enjoyable ride. To purchase "Sketch" and get more info, visit Dave's website at [www.daveschnitter.com](http://www.daveschnitter.com).



**DICK MORGAN**  
***Dick Morgan Live***  
**Foxhaven Records**

I first heard of Dick Morgan when I received a note from his bassist and agent Dick Einhorn asking if I'd be interested in receiving his promo to book him at any of my concerns either in Nebraska or Kansas. Well, on my first listen I

*Continued on page 18*



*Continued from page 17*

felt he'd be great for my shows. Then I checked him out again and REALLY dug his sophisticated, swinging style—so much so that I wanted to share this CD with you in my column.

Recorded live at the 1996 East Coast Jazz Festival, Washington, D.C.'s famed jazz pianist Dick Morgan and his band hit a groove so tight... these cats must have been giggin' together for years. Along with Morgan and Einhorn are guitarist Steve Abshire, drummer Bertell Knox and percussionist Sam Turner. Obviously performing for a festival crowd, this set of standards still catches fire, as all players under Dick's suburb tutelage have chops aplenty, employing astounding dynamics throughout.

Morgan truly is a commanding leader. Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson and Earl Hines come to mind, but Dick has his own thing going. He's a little dramatic and always bluesy, with a touch of gospel and a love of the best of American contemporary music that gives him a broad palette to create from.

You've heard this set list hundreds of times—"My Funny Valentine," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Somewhere," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," etc., yet this talented unit can challenge untested waters even in these ole chestnuts and make you love 'em all over again. This is the perfect CD to play at cocktail parties, or just kickin' off your shoes, lightin' up and enjoying a beverage while digging a most enjoyable musical adventure.

To purchase this CD and for more information, visit [www.dickmorganjazz.com](http://www.dickmorganjazz.com).

Dick Morgan live...indeed!!!

## Letters to the Editor

# Readers rave about website

### Coffee Critic is impressed

Hi Butch,

I checked out your website. I am soooooo impressed! You have an awesome site! Don't get discouraged by some of the negative "stuff" that happened. There are some things that we have no control over. I love the pictures and articles from "black & white" to the present. Thanks for reminding me to check your site.

Susan Schmir  
The Coffee Critic Inc.

### Website update is appreciated

Tom,

Thanks for the update. Good writing!

Doug Talley  
Kansas City, Mo.

**Editor's Note:** Visit the website at [bermanmusicfoundation.org](http://bermanmusicfoundation.org). If you want to receive an e-mail alert when website updates are available, send your address to: [bmusicfoundtn@neb.rr.com](mailto:bmusicfoundtn@neb.rr.com).

### BMF newsletter is good read

I read your December newsletter. It took a long time. It's a novel, and it's well done. Good job.

Michele Michaels

### Rock & Rock page gets rave from KC bassist Spaits

Butch,

I finally got around to reading your new Rock & Roll piece on the website. Great stuff! I really enjoyed all the pics.

Gerald Spaits  
Kansas City, Mo.

### Amazing musical history is documented

Butch,

I did find your website and tracked through your amazing musical history! I also realize that in these past decades I have listened to you play. Thanks.

Doug Campbell

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Gerald Spaits  
Piano: Joe Cartwright, Russ Long,  
Misha Tsiganov, Roger Wilder  
Guitar: Danny Embrey, Rod Fleeman,  
Paul Mehling  
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*The Megatonnes, formed in 1973 and Lincoln's leading rock band for several years, included (back row, from left) Walter Warnsholz, tenor sax; Charlie Burton, guitar and vocals; Butch Berman, piano and vocals; Dave Robel, drums; (front row) Gary "Otto" Spalti, bass; and Bill Dye, guitar. For more rock 'n'roll history, check out the new page at [www.bermanmusicfoundation.org](http://www.bermanmusicfoundation.org)*

**How can you help the foundation?**

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