



Last Topeka Jazz Festival was a bittersweet affair

By Tom Ineck

TOPEKA, Kan.—Knowing that we likely were witnessing the “swan song” of the Topeka Jazz Festival made for a bittersweet experience, but the high quality of most performances May 27-29 kept our minds focused on the bright moments.

What follow are my impressions of the festival’s highs and lows.

Several hundred people who arrived for the Friday Yard Party scrambled into the Topeka Performing Arts Center when the rains came, creating the critical mass, festive atmosphere and enthusiasm on which jazz artists thrive.

Longtime TJF fave Ken Peplowski fronted a six-piece outfit that performed the standards “Old Folks,” “Polka Dots and Moonbeams” and an outrageously fast rendition of Sonny Rollins’ bop classic “Oleo.”

Area high school musicians were featured in a well-received session with

professional clinicians. Saxophonist Rob Scheps led the band on “C Jam Blues,” and with trumpeter Claudio Roditi, percussionist Norman Hedman, and guitarist Rod Fleeman joined them on “Blue Bossa.”

Hedman’s “Gypsy Caravan” was a vehicle for a septet that also included Roditi, saxophonist Bobby Watson, pianist Misha Tsiganov, vibraphonist Alexei Tsiganov, bassist Jay Leonhart and drummer Victor Lewis. Gifted vocalist Giacomo Gates joined the band on “Four,” “Straight, No Chaser,” “How High the Moon/Ornithology,” and “Night in Tunisia.”

Illustrating the broad range of the 2005 festival, The Hot Club of San Francisco offered up a rousing set of “gypsy jazz” to finish the free concert. Leader Paul Mehling and his young cohorts delivered on “The Man I Love,” and “I’ll See You in My Dreams,”

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Giacomo Gates and Bob Bowman

Photo by Rich Hoover



Claudio Roditi and Jay Leonhart at the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival

Photo by Rich Hoover

July 2005
Vol. 10, Number 2

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Prez Sez Jazz happenings past, present and future

By Butch Berman

Hi Jazz Fans...

Happy summertime and the living is easy, and sometimes not so easy, as you'll soon read about. My newest catch phrase, "a tough biz...this jazz is," seems to have become a major-league reality, at least here in the Midwest.

The Topeka Jazz Festival came and went as a complete artistic success, but lost miserably at the box office. I know the damage done by the former head honcho's inability to gracefully transfer his allegiance and constituents to help continue funding through sponsorship was big time. Yet, there are still a lot of other jazz fans who, maybe due to the former tradition of holding this event on the Memorial Day weekend, had too many other options available to make jazz its main priority.

We had sufficient coverage on all media months in advance, and our Taste of Topeka Jazz Yard Party picnic was well attended, probably because admission was free. We had to move inside due to storms brewing, but the energy flowing between the magnificent musicians and their fans was spellbinding. Yet, when it came to paying for the actual festival the following two days...Zippo. I think we had as many Nebraskans there as folks from K.C., Lawrence and Manhattan, Kan., combined during some sets.

On the other hand, I want to thank all the wonderful people that did come and supported jazz and hung around to catch some of the best music they've heard in years. I, my staff, and the entire crew from TPAC (especially Assistant Director Mark



Photos by Rich Hoover

The Topeka Performing Arts Center was the scene of many great performances since the Topeka Jazz Festival began in 1998.

Radzieski) can all share in our hearts that we put on one of the best Topeka Jazz Festivals in its eight-year history. If it is the last one, we went out on top swinging.

One hundred percent of all the cats that played it this year said they really enjoyed themselves and felt more creative and groovin' under our more relaxed manner of presentation than ever before. That made me feel like a winner, NO MATTER WHAT. If you lead with your heart, you get back pure soul music, whether it's jazz, blues or rock 'n' roll. To all my monster player buddies who blew their asses off on every song, every set, every day, a mutherfuckin' thank you, and I love you all for doin' your thang so well.

Tom will fill you in with his blow-by-blow account of all the hot bops. Yeah, we did stretch a bit, and tried some different stuff: Gypsy jazz, Afro-Cuban Latin world beat, a little more



Kathryn Sinclair, Monica Schwarz, Grace Sankey Berman and Butch Berman at 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival

bebop, lots of new faces and still a lot of the same pros that preserved the original jazz party scene the TJF was first noted for. All in all, I applaud you. BRAVO!

One week after the festival was over I received the shocking news that the fabulous staff that had made everything possible for our BMF to flourish and create the jazz in Kansas that I could never sustain here in my hometown had been let go by their

Ames, Iowa-based bosses, for undisclosed reasons—but mostly coming from the lack of enthusiasm toward entertainment in downtown Topeka sufficient to fill enough seats to maintain its budget and cost of operations.

This sucks and is so sad for them and their families, as well, and for the very uncertain future of the TJF and the Berman Jazz Series. However, after 10 years in this crazy jazz biz, I've become even more determined to be an advocate of this wild music I'm so passionate about. Have jazz will travel, I guess, as we're already in the process of contacting other foundations dealing with the same kinda stuff to collaborate in keeping jazz alive, or working with other educational institutes, hoping to bring or augment whatever jazz programs they now may or may not have.

Check out my other story in this issue reporting on the ever-so-successful master class we held in Topeka prior to the festival. They may take away our venues, but they can't kill the curiosity, drive and determination of our youth towards jazz that is growing all over the country despite all the bullshit, egos, apathy and bad politics that seems to try to screw up everything in our world today. We shall overcome...one day...someday.

Even though we weren't involved in booking for Lincoln's Jazz in June this year, we were instrumental in obtaining, through the Mid-America Arts Alliance roster of fine talent, the master himself—saxophonist, composer and educator Ahmad Alaadeen and his Group 21 from Kansas City, Mo., for this year's concert series. I met him and his manager, Fanny Dunfee, eight years ago at a Mid-America convention in K.C. and have loved them, and his brilliant music, ever since. It was indeed a pleasure and honor to have had them headline the last show of this year and just tear the place up. Tom's reviews of that gig and Alaadeen's sensational

new ASR Records release, "New Africa Suite," also appear in this issue.

Some other news before I scam. Got a nice letter from former Lincolnite Carter Van Pelt, whose job working at the Lincoln Center in N.Y.C. has become fulltime. A super journalist, his recent interview with pianist Marcus Roberts graced the cover of the center's publication. Carter has written some great pieces in the past on Bob Marley, Fela Kuti and Monty Alexander, to name a few, as well as superb concert presentations such as the one we did together at Lincoln's Royal Grove, bringing in Brooklyn's great Antibalas. Nice goin', my friend.

I'm hoping to bring in Minneapolis trumpet player Kelly Rossum and his band, and Bob Bowman's new K.C. group, perhaps to P.O. Pears sometime this fall, as well as debuting my new buddy, vocalist extraordinaire Giacomo Gates, hopefully with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra in 2006. My dear pal sax player Rob Scheps is also planning to be in the area around October. We will keep you posted on all the haps as they appear.

Things on our jazz front may be a little shaky as of late, but if I survived the San Francisco earthquake of 1989, then these minor setbacks are only little aftershocks to the really big picture of protecting, preserving and presenting this great American music to you for years to come. Have a very happy and safe summer.

Yours in jazz,



Butch Berman



Jazz is published online at: www.bermanmusicfoundation.org
The office of **The Berman Music Foundation** is at 719 P St., Studio G, Lincoln, NE 68508.

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For inclusion of any jazz or blues related events, letters to the editor or suggested articles, mail them to the office, phone (402) 476-3112, fax (402) 475-3136 or e-mail bmusicfoundtn@neb.rr.com.

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The Butch Berman Charitable Music Foundation is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)(3) private foundation recognized by the Internal Revenue Service and the Nebraska Department of Revenue. It was established in the spring of 1995 to protect and promote unique forms of jazz music.

Trustee: Butch Berman

Consultants: Grace Sankey Berman, Russ Dantzler, Dan Demuth, Norman Hedman, Gerald Spaits, Leslie Spaits and Wade Wright

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among others. At evening's end, I returned to my hotel room in high spirits, hoping that the performances had been just enough of a tease to entice returning, paying customers.

Saturday's marathon began with a session featuring singer Kathleen Holeman, whose talents are more impressive in live concert than on her debut CD. With a band consisting of Kansas City's finest, she scatted through "Exactly Like You," soared on a soprano flight on "Mood Indigo," preached gospel style on "Get Happy," and again scatted impressively on "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," featuring Mehling on guitar. Holeman was especially effective on "Don't You Wonder?" the ballad of a tragic relationship.

Mehling kept the stage and was joined by the Interstring quartet—guitarists Danny Embrey and Rod Fleeman, bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Todd Strait. They took "Body and Soul" as a Latin-style ballad, also performing "Whispering" and Django Reinhardt's "Daphne." Mehling lacked the assertiveness of his swinging companions and seemed out of his "gypsy jazz" element during the first two numbers, but regained his poise for the Reinhardt classic.

Trombonist Paul McKee was the nominal leader of a strong ensemble that featured tenor saxophonist Rob Scheps assuming the true leadership role. Scheps' inspired solo on Sam Rivers' "Beatrice" dominated the performance, as did his solo on "It's You or



The Quintet of the Hot Club of San Francisco, led by guitarist Paul Mehling (above) were the hit of the Friday night pre-festival concert.



Photos by Rich Hoover

No One." Joe Cartwright on piano and Stan Kessler on trumpet and flugelhorn also contributed notable solos. Kessler and bassist Jay Leonhart joined for a stunning duo passage on "Invitation."

The annual return of young pianist Eldar Djangirov has become a festival tradition, awaited for with eager anticipation as fans wonder just how much better he can get. Now 18, we can say that Djangirov has exceeded the promise that was evident at age 11, when his precocious talent may have seemed little more than a freak of nature.

With longtime sidemen Gerald Spaits on bass and Todd Strait on drums, Djangirov now exhibits even greater confidence as a composer and soloist. The original opener, "Point of View," was taken at a hair-raising clip, while his breezy composition "Raindrops" combines classical and folk influences in an irresistible riff.

Standards, however, still play an important role in the trio's performances. Bobby Timmons' "Moanin'" included a piano-drums dialogue; Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" received a balanced ensemble reading that relied largely on lush arpeggios and

chords; "Fly Me to the Moon" was given a Latin treatment with the keyboard wizard doubling and subdividing the time; and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" was taken at an insane tempo that had Spaits sitting out much of the tune as Djangirov and Strait went head-to-head.

Flugelhorn master Claudio Roditi fronted an eight-piece band that included trumpeter Stan Kessler, allowing the two to mix and match brassy statements in good-natured repartee. "Samba de



Gerald Spaits



Eldar Djangirov

Photo by Rich Hoover



Todd Strait

Photo by Rich Hoover

Orfeu” by Luiz Bonfá was a logical tune for the Latin-tinged ensemble. Roditi, Kessler and Bobby Watson improvised group riffs behind trombonist Paul McKee on “C Jam Blues,” which also featured outstanding solos by Kessler, pianist Joe Cartwright and bassist Gerald Spaits. “Milestones” was highlighted by Roditi’s solo and a set of trades between drummer Ray DeMarchi and conga master Norman Hedman.

Scheps led a quintet with his usual authority on “Fantasy,” a Danny Embrey original called “Ergo,” with the composer playing acoustic guitar and bassist Bob Bowman contributing a wonderful solo. An uptempo version of “Lover” brought out the best in everyone. Using brushes, Todd Strait set the manic pace for outstanding solos by Roger Wilder on keys and Scheps on tenor sax. Never one to rely too heavily on standards, Scheps finished with Kenny Wheeler’s obscure “Kayak,” which provided an excellent basis for solos by Embrey, Scheps and Wilder.

The vocal pyrotechnics of Giacomo Gates were in full flight during a set that featured prominent contributions by Ken Peplowski on tenor sax and Rod Fleeman on guitar. Tadd Dameron’s “Lady Bird” beautifully illustrated Gates’ trademark sonority,



Kathleen Holeman

Photo by Rich Hoover



Claudio Roditi

while Gershwin’s “Oh, Lady Be Good” (lyrics by Eddie Jefferson) exercised his highly developed rhythmic impulses. Singer Kathleen Holeman joined the fray for “All of Me,” matching Gates scat for scat. Roditi made a guest appearance on “Speedball,” which also had the singer slyly trading bass licks with Jay Leonhart.

By comparison, Saturday evening’s lineup was somewhat disappointing. Ahmad Alaadeen and Group 21 delivered a lackluster performance, the leader’s Coltrane-inspired tenor and soprano sax styles occasionally clashing with the rhythm section’s funk tendencies. A slow vocal on the old blues warhorse “Driving Wheel” and the band’s listless take on the ballad “A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing” did nothing to improve things, although pianist Christopher Clark contributed some inspired playing throughout the set.

Norman Hedman’s Tropique, always more impressive for their ensemble sound and intricate arrangements than for their solo excursions, struggled through a set that lacked the cohesion of past performances. Bassist Ron Monroe shouted out the changes as his colleagues attempted to achieve the fine audio balance for which Tropique was known under the

past musical direction of percussionist Willie Martinez.

Ada Dyer delivered a nice vocal on “Angel of the Night,” and leader Hedman and his new percussionist teamed up for a wonderful conga duo on “Flight of the Spirit.” Eventually, 11 musicians crowded the stage as trumpeter Roditi and saxophonists Watson, Alaadeen and Bill Wimmer rotated through the solo spotlight on “Hed-Theme.”

The day ended on a sweeter note as an intimate late-night jam session in TPAC’s lower level established a relaxed mood among the most avid fans. Pianist Eldar Djangirov initially assumed the role of maestro, with trumpeter Stan Kessler, trombonist Paul McKee, vibraphonist Alexei Tsiganov and bassist Gerald Spaits backing him on “Alone Together.”

Giacomo Gates, however, quickly put the impetuous young piano player in his place. Gates counted off “Five Spot Blues” at a slower tempo. Joining them in a wonderful rendition of the Monk tune were Bobby Watson on alto sax and Bob Bowman on bass, in addition to Kessler, McKee and Tsiganov. For the bop classic “Confirmation,” Vic-

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Ahmad Alaadeen

Photo by Rich Hoover

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tor Lewis made a rare appearance on drums. On Gershwin's "But Not For Me," Watson on alto sax and Scheps on flute squared off, ending in Watson's hilarious extended quote of the 1960s pop hit "Downtown."

As the audience began to file out, Kessler and pianist Roger Wilder performed a duo flugelhorn-piano rendition of Jobim's "Pele." As if to top that, Roditi at the piano and Tsiganov at the vibes explored variations on Jobim's "Triste."

The festival's final day began with bassist and comic genius Jay Leonhart teaming up with fellow musician and humorist Ken Peplowski. First, Leonhart reprised the solo bass-vocal performance of his hilarious composition "It's Impossible to Sing and Play the Bass." Peps, pianist Roger Wilder and drummer Tommy Ruskin (sitting in for Victor Lewis) followed with "Surrey With the Fringe on Top." Roditi on flugelhorn joined them for "I'm Only Dreaming." The obligatory "I Got Rhythm" changes were employed yet again for a tune featuring the front line of Peplowski on tenor sax, Paul McKee on trombone and Roditi on flugelhorn.

In the conspicuous absence of the world-class drummer, Peplowski jokingly referred to the "Victor Lewis Memorial Concert." Leonhart followed that with a jab at the "Victor Lewis in-absentia set." Lewis fans were especially disappointed that the drummer chose to sit out two consecutive sets, including one for which he was the designated leader.

Featured players for this set included Scheps, Kessler, McKee, Cartwright, Bowman and Ruskin. Joe Cartwright wins accolades for the brilliant crab-like construction of his solo on Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way." Kessler, Scheps and



Photo by Rich Hoover

Jay Leonhart, Tommy Ruskin and Ken Peplowski

Cartwright turned in great solo statements on an uptempo rendition of Weil's "Speak Low." Gates joined the rhythm section for "Summertime," later matching his versatile voice with McKee's trombone and his flute-like whistle with Bowman's bass.

Interstring gradually reassembled for a set that eventually featured vocalist Kathleen Holeman. Guitarists Embrey and Fleeman began with twin acoustic guitars on Jobim's "Triste,"

quartet. Holeman added a scatting Latin capper to the set with "That's All."

Bobby Watson and Claudio Roditi fronted a stellar quintet that also featured pianist Roger Wilder, bassist Jay Leonhart and drummer Todd Strait. They wittily put "things" in a thematic context with a medley consisting of "What is This Thing Called Love?" "All the Things You Are," and "These Foolish Things." Wilder acquitted himself well with an outstanding solo on "All the Things." Roditi soared on Clifford Brown's "Joy Spring," and Watson matched the trumpeter lick for lick on a very fast rendition of Charlie Parker's "Donna Lee."

A Stan Kessler-led quintet delivered a very nice reading of "Yesterdays," then the twin trumpets of Roditi and Kessler fired a swingin' blues take on "Moanin'," the Bobby Timmons classic. Rod Fleeman and Jay Leonhart also delivered remarkable solos, as drummer Tommy Ruskin kept impeccable time.

Introduced with a personal testimonial by longtime fan and benefactor Liz Stratton, Eldar Djangirov's final festival appearance was a pleasant surprise. Expanded from the publicized solo performance, it began with a piano-gui-



Photo by Rich Hoover

Norman Hedman, congas, and Alexei Tsiganov, vibes

adding bassist Bowman on the lovely Johnny Mandel waltz "Emily." Drummer Strait slipped behind the trap set for "East of the Sun (and West of the Moon)," with Fleeman switching to electric guitar. Both guitarists took impressive solos, proving that their styles are both very different and very compatible in the context of the Interstring

tar duo with Rod Fleeman, and then continued with Djangirov's very capable trio bandmates, bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Todd Strait. Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage" got things off to a rousing start. The pianist explored the outer reaches of the upper registers on "Nature Boy," and infused his composition "No Regret" with a breezy, folk-rock drive. It was back to Hancock for the energetic closer, "Cantaloupe Island," which included a piano-drums interlude that challenged both players to deliver the goods.

Interstring returned to open the evening set with the elegiac "Dearly Beloved," followed by "Swifts," a gently soaring piece reminiscent of Pat Metheny's heartland jazz, with its evocation of open spaces. Using the same chords as "Someday My Prince Will Come," the quartet played its original version, cleverly referred to as "The Song Formerly Known as Prince."

The festival's last set in the main hall was a very special one. The concert performance of Bobby Watson and Horizon had been anxiously anticipated all weekend by a large segment of the audience. With only slight changes in the personnel, the quintet has recorded and toured off and on for 15 years, and their deep mutual respect and musical chemistry is evident.

Watson and drummer Victor Lewis are especially close. The alto saxophonist told me in an interview more than a decade ago that he considers Lewis the group's essential co-leader, and his rhythmic contributions certainly play an integral role in Horizon's very advanced and propulsive sound. Trumpeter Terrell Stafford, pianist Edward Simon and bassist Essiet Essiet are the other key ingredients.

Among the superb offerings that evening were "Quiet as It's Kept," Jimmy Heath's "Gingerbread Boy," a dirge-like version of "The Look of Love," and Lewis' raucous original



Bobby Watson and Horizon were the hit headliners of the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival, with Watson on alto sax (above), Victor Lewis on drums and Terrell Stafford on trumpet.

"Hey, It's Me You're Talkin' To," with an astounding drum solo introduction leading to bop time and solos by Stafford and Watson. Similarly, Essiet introduced "Heckle and Jeckle" with an incredible bass solo.

The lovely ballad "The Love We Had Yesterday" was written by



Bobby Watson, Jay Leonhart, Claudio Roditi and Todd Strait

Watson's wife, Pamela Watson. From the criminally out-of-print "Post-Motown Bop," Horizon's 1991 debut record on the Blue Note label, came "The Punjab of Java Po," a rousing tune that embodies all the creativity and technical virtuosity of this masterful aggregation of musicians.



Photos by Rich Hoover

After witnessing this transcendent performance by Horizon, we floated downstairs for the final "after-hours" session. Giacomo Gates was holding court on "Stolen Moments," also featuring Joe Cartwright, piano; Gerald Spaits, bass; and Rod Fleeman, guitar, the cream of Kansas City-based players. Gates also turned in a wonderful reading of "I Got the Blues," a vocal variation on Lester Young's "Lester Leaps In" with lyrics by Eddie Jefferson.

Kathleen Holeman joined Gates for a vocal duo on "Centerpiece" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me," with Roger Wilder at the piano. Bassist Bob Bowman took the stage for "Over the Rainbow," and bassist Jay Leonhart paired off with Gates on a hilarious version of "You Go to My Head," with Leonhart vocalizing in harmony with the bass line and leading Gates astray with his late-night antics.

It was a fitting end to the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival. Sadly, it was the last of its kind.

Photo by Rich Hoover

Photo Gallery

Images from the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival



Danny Embrey



Eldar Djangirov and Rod Fleeman



Ray DeMarchi



Joe Cartwright



Giacomo Gates



Ken Peplowski and Rod Fleeman



Norman Hedman



Bob Bowman and Paul McKee



Misha Tsiganov



Bob Bowman



Stan Kessler, Gerald Spaits and Rob Scheps



Tommy Ruskin

***Photos by
Rich Hoover***



Roger Wilder



Danny Embrey and Rod Fleeman

Tomfoolery

Topeka jazz fest lost a long-shot gamble for survival

By Tom Ineck

TOPEKA, Kan.—We knew going in that the 8th Annual Topeka Jazz Festival might be the last. Advance ticket sales—having never achieved a level that would sustain the three-day Memorial Day weekend festival—were so low that Monday's performances had been cancelled.

The only thing that would allow the event to survive another year was a burst of paid attendance for individual sessions on Saturday May 28 and Sunday May 29. Friday evening's free "teaser" concert was forced indoors due to rain and drew a significant audience, but not enough of them returned with money in their pockets to recoup expenses. Our worst fears had been realized.

In the final analysis, attendance and revenue figures for the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival were insufficient, the expenses too high. It is impossible to say if anything could have saved the TJF. In its eight-year history, perhaps it had simply run its course, its aging audience irrevocably depleted by attrition and apathy.

Like so much arts programming nationwide—from jazz to classical music, from live theater to classical ballet, the Topeka Jazz Festival failed to attract a younger audience, despite an effort to expand beyond the staid swing-style format to incorporate the gypsy jazz of The Hot Club of San Francisco, the post-bop inventiveness of Bobby Watson & Horizon and the Latin jazz of Norman Hedman's Tropique. Without an infusion of new blood, the fine arts will die of arteriosclerosis.

Even under the best conditions, jazz festivals are a gamble that few are prepared to risk. In recent years, both the longstanding Kansas City Blues and



Among the greats who performed at the Topeka Jazz Festival are (clockwise from top left) bassist John Clayton and pianist Monty Alexander; bassists Jay Leonhart, Gerald Spaits, Hassan Shakur and Ray Brown with Karrin Allyson; and saxophonist Scott Hamilton. All of them played in 2001.

Jazz Festival and the KC International Jazz Festival folded their tents. If a metropolitan region of nearly two million people can't support an annual event, what hope is there for Topeka, a city of less than 125,000?

It is especially sad that some jazz festivals—and free concerts such as the Jazz in June series in Lincoln, Neb.—have attracted many people who couldn't care less about the music, who are there to exploit the social aspect of these gatherings with little or no financial support for the music, which is so desperately in need of funding. These dilettantes, dabblers, and amateur jazz fans do nothing to increase the survivability of the art form.

Worse yet is the increasing number of people who simply stay at home rather than patronizing live music and other performing arts. As vibraphonist



File Photos



Joe Locke said—in praising the popular Jazz in June concerts—Americans have “cloistered” themselves with their computers, televisions, CDs and DVDs to the point where the

nation is losing its humanity, its sense of community.

Let's raise a glass one more time and toast some of the great jazz artists who graced the stage of the Topeka Performing Arts Center with their magic since that first TJF in 1998: Ray Brown, Monty Alexander, Bobby Watson, Terry Gibbs, Junior Mance, Nancy King, Jeff Hamilton, Ken Peplowski, Karrin Allyson, John Clayton, Bill Charlap, Jennifer Leitham, Rebecca Parris, Scott Hamilton, Bucky Pizzarelli, Victor Lewis, Bob Kindred, Oliver Jones, Jay Leonhart, Paul Smith, Tiger Okoshi, Bill Watrous, Joe Ascione, Gerry Wiggins, Jackie Williams, Eldar Djangirov and all the stalwart Kansas City players.

Regardless of the reasons for its demise, we mourn the passing of the Topeka Jazz Festival. At eight years of age, she was just too young to die.

Topeka Workshop

Young jazz students learn from the masters

By Butch Berman

TOPEKA, Kan.—Nine semi-nervous, yet jazz-hungry young men and one lone female graced the halls of the Topeka Performing Arts Center late on the morning of May 27. They were accompanied by the hardest-working guy on the TPAC staff, Assistant Director Mark Radzieski, who led the jittery group to the large meeting room in the basement like a preacher taking the condemned to the gallows. But instead of getting hung, these eager stalwarts get to hang out with a group of professional musicians armed with caffeine and the sole intentions of teaching these kids something about jazz.

Mark had already screened these youngsters from a variety of high schools in the Topeka area. Reading their essays on why they want to pursue careers in music took me back to my early days of hopes and dreams. Mark and I had judged them weeks earlier, and I couldn't wait to see what the experienced teachers could do to help mold these pliable minds into some form of a group that in less than four hours would be performing on the TPAC stage.

The clinicians were supposed to be chaired by N.Y.C. drummer Victor Lewis, but for some reason ended up in the hands of another New Yorker, bassist Jay Leonhart, who along with the other panel members—guitarist Rod Fleeman, vocalist Giacomo Gates, pianist Misha Tsiganov, reedman Rob Scheps, percussionist Norman Hedman and trumpeter Claudio Roditi—joined forces to become a forum that gave these students a lifetime of invaluable musical instruction and encouragement.

Everything from how to stand, breathe, think, focus, listen, study and market “all that jazz” had these juve-



Clinicians (left) gather with high school students for the workshop. Below, Topeka Performing Arts Center Assistant Director Mark Radzieski stands behind some of the young musicians.



Photos by Rich Hoover

niles' heads spinning. After the brave hopefuls tried to play a tune for these cats, and were gently put in their places, the old pros took over their instruments and showed 'em how to really do it. No pain, no gain, as the teachers and pupils split up into small groups, including one-on-one training. If these kiddies ever want to feel their music swing, they first had to get their bells rung.

All's well that ends well, as their afternoon mini-set went over with no major snafus. Teaching the young adults a taste of the blues led way to a near-perfect rendition of “C Jam Blues” that got the audience of jazz fans', parents', and high school peers' toes a-tapping.

These youngsters hung around all weekend to soak up more of the incredible sounds their teachers were putting out. When one of them approached me to autograph the program and thank me,

all I could do was grin and let this talented bunch know that they may be the next headliners of the future, and were already an inspiration to their friends and families. The future of the Topeka Jazz Festival is in doubt, but no doubt about it, some of the musicians in this group are going places. Mission accomplished.

The players' names, instruments and high schools are:

Allegra Fisher, Perry Lecompton High, piano
Nathan Frost, Seaman High, guitar
T.C. Gomez, Topeka High, sax
Fritz Helbert, Topeka High, trumpet
Sam Hershberger, Topeka High, bass
Chris Maxwell, Seaman High, trumpet
Jason Pukach, Seaman High, sax
Charlie Stern, Topeka High, trumpet
Jordan Tennant, Seaman High, drums
Galen Zachritz, Topeka High, drums

Concert Review

Hersch interprets Walt Whitman in jazz suite

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—It was only a matter of time before the riffing, daring and energetic free verse of Walt Whitman, that most American of “modern” bards, was interpreted in the riffing, daring and energetic art form known as jazz, that most American of modern musical genres.

Indeed, it was exactly 150 years from the publication of Whitman’s 600-page masterpiece “Leaves of Grass” to the current tour by the Fred Hersch Ensemble, which performed its Whitman homage March 31 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in conjunction with a University of Nebraska-Lincoln symposium on the famous collection of poems.

A jazz pianist-composer in the lyrical, impressionist tradition of Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett, Hersch has built a reputation on solo and trio renditions of jazz standards in the recording studio and in concert. This is his most ambitious project, as he leads a 10-piece ensemble featuring vocalists Bradley Fox and Kate McGarry through a two-part suite of pieces he composed.

Hersch’s music served to elevate and enhance Whitman’s timeless words, eschewing long solos for an emphasis on the ensemble: Ralph Alessi, trumpet; Mike Christianson, trombone; Bruce Williamson, clarinet, alto sax and bass clarinet; Tony Malaby, tenor sax; Gregory Heffernan, cello; John Herbert, bass; John Hollenbeck, drums and percussion; and Hersch at the keyboard.

In the instrumental overture, “A Riddle Song,” expansive brass harmonies and dense colors vibrantly set the stage for the bold lyrics that followed.

McGarry leaped into the fray



Fred Hersch

with shimmering vocal flights on “Song of the Universal.” Brief instrumental breaks marked the segues between the many stanzas of “Song of Myself,” but the operatic Fox, substituting for jazz singer Kurt Elling, was more effective in his tenor vocalizing than in his occasionally awkward recitation and stilted phrasing.

Hersch used his gifted instrumental soloists to good effect—creating tension, conversational repartee and appropriate sound effects to further enliven Whitman’s words. Like the “talkers” to which the poet refers in “Song of Myself,” the trumpet and clarinet “chattered” at each other. Hollenbeck used sizzling brushes to keep time with the rhythmic recitation. At the moment of Whitman’s “dazzling sunrise,” Alessi’s trumpet leaped into a soaring solo statement.

The poet’s ear certainly was tuned to music, repeatedly emphasized by his phrases “bravuras of birds,” “all sounds ring together,” and “I hear the

violoncello, the keyed cornet.” Those references beg for musical accompaniment, and Hersch and his ensemble provided it tastefully and effectively.

McGarry returned for an emotionally resonant reading of “The Mystic Trumpeter,” pairing her vocal instrument with Alessi’s trumpet before the entire ensemble joined in a lovely brass chorale. “At the Close of the Day” was an instrumental ballad, introduced by Hersch in his most Evans-like mood, then adding bass and brushes.

Fox stumbled over the words during his sung recitation of “To You / Perfections,” but he quickly recovered his poise. Hersch on piano and Malaby on tenor sax teamed up with Fox for “The Sleepers.” McGarry lent her lilting, soulful voice to “Spirit That Form’d This Scene,” punctuated with a bass solo.

“On the Beach at Night Alone” was a Coplandesque brass chorale that led to the final piece, “After the Dazzle of Day,” featuring Fox singing the words, followed by Fox and McGarry on wordless vocals and returning to the timeless theme “I celebrate myself. I sing myself.”

For the 300 people in attendance, the performance served as a reminder of how far Whitman was ahead of his time. It also should inspire in listeners a return to that yellowed, dusty edition of “Leaves of Grass” for another glimpse of the author’s provocative genius.

The entire “Leaves of Grass” suite of nearly 70 minutes was released earlier this year on Palmetto Records and features Elling and McGarry on vocals.

Concert Review

Sutton endears herself to Brownville audience

By Tom Ineck

BROWNVILLE, Neb.—Early in her April 16 cabaret-style concert at the Brownville Concert Hall, singer Tierney Sutton endeared herself to the audience by revealing that she was born in Nebraska.

It was the second of three performances by the Los Angeles-based vocalist and her trio at the intimate, rustic venue April 15-17. Just an hour's drive from Lincoln, this modest concert hall has hosted dozens of great music artists in its 15-year history. I've made the trip for concerts by saxophonist Bobby Watson (1997), cornetist Warren Vache (1994) and KC pianist Joe Cartwright (1992) and for a classical piano recital by Ian Hobson (1993). The hall's performance series frequently includes top-notch cabaret singers, and Sutton proved herself one of the best.

Casually dressed in slacks and a camisole with bright flowers and sequins and accompanied by her longtime trio of pianist Christian Jacob, bassist Kevin Axt and drummer Ray Brinker, Sutton sang with a relaxed assurance that immediately put the audience at ease. Beginning with a hauntingly slow version of "Blue Skies," she showed her penchant for unconventional interpretations. Her great sense of time was obvious as she picked up the pace on "Cheek to Cheek."

Introducing the next tune, Sutton explained how a local fan, Merle, had loaned the band his Cadillac for three days with a CD player and his collection of Miles Davis discs. With Miles in mind, she scatting the intro to "Bye Bye Blackbird," which also featured a Miles-inspired piano solo. Sutton next leaped into a full-speed, a cappella scat intro to "I Get a Kick Out of You," aided and abetted by Jacob and drummer



File Photo

Tierney Sutton fronts a longtime quartet that also features pianist Christian Jacob, bassist Kevin Axt and drummer Ray Brinker.

Brinker using brushes to great effect. Charlie Chaplin's greatest hit, "Smile," received a slow, heart-rending duo reading by Sutton and Jacob.

Again playing against type, Sutton and the band performed a haunting arrangement of "Fly Me to the Moon," usually taken at a flying tempo. Introducing the next tune as the best song about lost love, Sutton backed up her claim with a wonderful rendition of "Haunted Heart." Not to end the first half of the concert on a depressing note, the band tore through "Ding! Dong! The Witch is Dead" at a scarifying speed, with Sutton scat-singing the entire verse to introduce tornadic solos by Jacob, Axt and Brinker.

The hot tempo continued in the second set with "Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise," featuring shifting tempos from shuffle to bop and baroque vocals. Their arrangement of Bill Evans' "Blue in Green" transformed the familiar tune with a bass pedal pulse. It was among

the music that Sutton and Jacob recorded for the critically acclaimed independent film "Blue in Green."

Sutton's versatile vocalizing was in full flower on a rapid-fire rendition of "East of the Sun (West of the Moon)." She and Jacob slowed things down with a vocal-piano duet of "I Could Have Told You" before the band settled into a bluesy, mid-tempo groove on "Route 66." Sutton and Axt performed duo on "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

Jacob took a solo ballad turn on "All the Way," setting the stage for a raucous, risky scatting rendition of "Caravan," which again illustrated Sutton's knack for perfect intonation. Finally, the band combined Dizzy and Bach on Gillespie's "Con Alma," with an a cappella fugue section.

Sutton clearly is capable of scat-singing virtuosity, but she also possesses the essentials of intonation, subtle swing and the ability to persuasively tell a story.

Concert Review

Locke kicks off Jazz in June with good vibes

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—The frequent return of the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra to the Jazz in June stage has become somewhat of a mixed blessing. While the NJO is comprised of many fine jazz musicians, they often sound complacent, trotting out the same tunes with the same arrangements year after year.

What brings out the best in these accomplished players is a dose of outside inspiration, such as the motivating kick in the proverbial pants provided by virtuosic vibraphonist Joe Locke at the June 7 performance. Locke's astounding licks and stylistic versatility urged the NJO to new heights.

But it was not only Locke's technical proficiency and wonderful improvisations that moved the NJO and the listeners. It was his ability to front the orchestra with confidence and good humor, addressing band members and crowd members as an intimate friend.

As Locke wandered backstage, warming up with his mallets in the air and chatting with people, the NJO warmed up with a short set that included Stan Kenton's "A Little Minor Booze," an NJO staple. Locke entered the fray on an uptempo version of Gershwin's "Summertime," taking an extended solo that put set everyone on their heels.

Early in the show, Locke took over the microphone, graciously emceeing the concert, introducing the numbers, and praising the audience and the popular Jazz in June series. Such events, he said, bring a sense of community to a nation that has largely "cloistered" itself with its technology—computers, CDs, DVDs, television—while losing its sense of humanity and social contact.

Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" was set to a slow, bluesy Latin



The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra



Joe Locke

groove and featured impressive solos by Locke, trombonist Pete Madsen and Ed Love on flute. Locke went directly to the familiar theme of "Body and Soul," with strong support from the rhythm section, including Tom Harvill on piano. Locke down-shifted the tempo, and ended the tune with a soaring cadenza on vibes. "On the Westside," a favorite NJO blues tune

by saxophonist Dave Sharp, received a much-needed transfusion from Locke, who deconstructed the changes in every way imaginable. Also rising to the occasion were Scott Vicroy, baritone sax; Sharp, alto sax; Pete Bouffard, guitar; and Ed Love, tenor sax.

The NJO opened the second set with Jobim's "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars," before inviting Locke back to the stage for a Rob McConnell arrangement of "I Got Rhythm," with shifting time signatures that stretched and contracted the song structure and allowed much freedom for improvisations by Locke and the rhythm section. Locke took the lead and first solo on the ballad "The Nearness of You," which had the brass section interpreting the bridge before Locke's return. A Don Menza arrangement of "Take the A Train" paired Locke with trumpeter Bob Krueger.

A world-class player at age 46, Locke proved both a consummate musician and an engaging and capable bandleader.

The evening's ideal weather guaranteed a crowd of several thousand for the outdoor concert. The "critical mass" of the audience also assured an enthusiastic response.

File Photo

File Photo

Concert Review**John Jorgenson joins gypsy jazz renaissance***By Tom Ineck*

LINCOLN, Neb.—By the time I witnessed the John Jorgenson Quintet at its June 14 performance, part of the Jazz in June series, I was thoroughly indoctrinated into the mysteries and wonders of “gypsy jazz” and its curious renaissance.

The Hot Club of Lincoln performed at my wedding reception just one month previous, and The Hot Club of San Francisco had been one of the featured bands at the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival over the Memorial Day weekend. Jorgenson’s approach was somewhat unique, but like all proponents of this exotic blend, it drew on the inspiration of Belgian gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt and his longtime partner, violinist Stephane Grappelli.

Like the fathers of gypsy jazz, Jorgenson and his colleagues made the music swing with gusto, both in ensemble passages and in solo statements. Guitarist Jorgenson’s instrumental virtuosity took center stage, but it is group effort that makes this rhythmic music work so well, and this band delivered.

Reinhardt’s “Belleville” got things off

to an energetic start, followed by Kurt Weil’s ballad “September Song.” Jorgenson’s own paean to gypsy jazz, aptly entitled “Franco-American Swing,” was followed by the swing-era classic “Dinah,” precisely as arranged and recorded by Reinhardt and Grappelli in 1934.

“Viper’s Dream” ventured into the shadowy world of the “reefer man,” often a theme with 1930s swing bands like those of Reinhardt, Thomas “Fats” Waller and Cab Calloway. Reinhardt’s “Appel Direct” (“Direct Call”) was the highlight of the evening, with Jorgenson displaying his amazing fretboard dexterity in all its glory. Violinist Stephen Dudash exhibited a lyrical, almost operatic quality on “Snowflake Waltz.”

Jorgenson paid homage to an influential guitar mentor with his ballad, “In Memory of Danny Gatton,” written on the day he heard of Gatton’s death. “Ultra Spontane” combine gypsy and flamenco influences in a tune that, indeed, sounded “very spontaneous.” Jorgenson even sang to good effect on the standard “Unde-

cided.” A blazing fast rendition of “Avalon” ended the first set with fire.

From Jorgenson’s days with the three-guitar band The Hellecasters came “Day of the Gypsies,” with a funky rock backbeat. Next was the Reinhardt favorite “Blue Drag,” Jorgenson’s version of which was featured in a recent film called “Head in the Clouds.” Another surprise was Jorgenson’s technical expertise on clarinet, which he featured on “Dr. Jazz” and “After You’ve Gone.”

The audience joined in on “Man of Mystery,” clapping flamenco-style to the tune, a 1960s hit by The Shadows. On “Ghost Dance,” the guitar and violin were synchronized in perfect unison. After a slow solo guitar introduction, the band entered at a furious tempo on the grand finale, the swing-era classic, “China Boy.”

Jorgenson was the undeniable leader and standout instrumentalist, but helping to give the music its essential rhythm throughout the evening were Argentine guitarist Gonzalo Pergalla, bassist Charlie Chadwick and drummer Dick Hardwick.

Concert Review**Kathy Kosins concert makes for an unpleasant evening***By Tom Ineck*

LINCOLN, Neb.—A Jazz in June concert is rarely an unsatisfactory performance and even more rarely a distasteful experience that has listeners hurriedly folding up their lawn chairs and scurrying for the parking lot. The June 21 appearance of Kathy Kosins was just such an unfortunate evening.

Everything about that night seemed to work against audience enjoyment, but especially for the true jazz fan. The stifling temperature hovered somewhere in the mid-90s, but it was the musical climate that made the concert unbearable for some.

Kosins, who was inexplicably wearing a black dress in the direct sun, lacked a sense of swing, struggled with poor intonation, over-emoted on every tune—even the ballads—and told lame jokes. The band was over-amplified, and Kosins’ voice tended to shrillness, causing some listeners to run for the sidelines.

The Dionne Warwick hit “Walk on By” was introduced with an incongruous comment from Kosins about Warwick’s bust a few years ago for possession of an illegal substance. Apparently unable to control her tendency to belt out every tune,

she murdered Russ Garcia’s ballad “Go Slow,” which is best remembered for Julie London’s sensitive and sensuous 1957 rendition.

“I Can’t Change You” is a mediocre Kosins composition from her 1995 recording, “All in a Dream’s Work,” a collection largely of her own tunes that is audaciously subtitled “A Collection of New Standards.” In fact, the only true standard on the CD is Miles Davis’ “Four.”

Like many others in the audience, I tuned out at this point, visited with some friends and headed home early.

Concert Review

Alaadeen ends 2005 jazz series on high note

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—Ahmad Alaadeen and Group 21 at their June 28 appearance for the final Jazz in June concert of the season sounded revitalized, working smoothly as a unit and playing inspired solos. Given two long sets rather than the brief one they performed at the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival, they had time to warm up and engage the audience. The choice of tunes was an excellent balance of familiar standards and original compositions.

Gershwin was the man of the hour, as the concert began with “Summertime” and “My Man’s Gone Now,” both from “Porgy and Bess.” But much of the performance was drawn from the band’s current release, “New African Suite,” featuring Alaadeen’s Coltrane-like tenor and soprano saxophone excursions, often venturing into modal riffs with a distinctive African flair.

In his introduction to the funky “Doin’ the Deen,” Alladeen joked that while New Orleans is the cradle of jazz, “when it came up the river to Kansas City, we made a man of it.” His vocal rendering of the blues chestnut “Driving Wheel” was heartfelt and contained just the



Tyrone Clark



Alaadeen and Group 21 perform at Jazz in June



Ahmad Alaadeen



Donovan “Big’un” Bailey

Pianist Christopher Clarke excelled on the soulful, mid-tempo “Wayne, Himself,” and Alaadeen exhibited his soprano sax style on “Beneath Where Rivers Flow,” also from the new release. The band returned to more familiar ground with a lively rendition of the standard “Secret Love,” launched with an excellent bass solo by Tyrone Clark.

With Group 21, Alaadeen has assembled a compatible coterie of musicians who are capable of creating some exciting music.



Christopher Clarke

right amount of ballsy wit.

“Grace,” Alaadeen’s loving tribute to Butch Berman’s Nigerian wife, contained the essence of that appropriate African feel so prevalent on “New African Suite.” It began with Donovan “Big’un” Bailey on drums and Ray Stewart (son of legendary bop drummer Teddy Stewart) on percussion setting the mood and the stage for Alaadeen’s graceful tenor sax. Like its subject, “Grace” was gentle, soulful and good-natured.



Ray Stewart

Photos by Rich Hoover

Photo by Rich Hoover

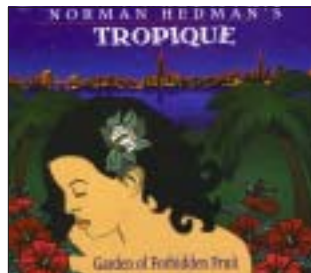
Photo by Rich Hoover

Photo by Rich Hoover

Jazz on Disc

Tropique scores another artistic success

By Tom Ineck



**NORMAN HEDMAN'S
TROPIQUE**
Garden of Forbidden Fruit
Power Light Records

Norman Hedman's Tropique has scored another artistic success with the band's latest release, an exotic blend of instrumental workouts and vocal gems. Yet to receive the popular acclaim it so richly deserves, this aggregation continues to grow musically with sheer persistence and a healthy dose of creativity.

Lending their continued support to the band's consistent sound are pianist Misha Tsiganov, bassist Ron Monroe, timbales wizard Willie Martinez, flutist Craig Rivers and alto saxophonist Sam Furnace, in his last recording with the group before his untimely death last year. Relatively new to the band is vibraphonist Alexei Tsiganov, who also contributed the spirited opener, "Rundadar Dance." Tropique's former vibes player, A.J. Mantas, appears only on the closer, Hedman's "Island Spice."

Hedman continues to write most of the tunes, and his talent for constructing memorable melodies and irresistible rhythms has not flagged. Among the best here are the lively "Cutting Loose," "Be-

cause I Can," "It's Just Not the Same," with a great contribution by Brad Mason on flugelhorn, and the romantic ballad "Walk in the Moonlight." Furnace contributes some marvelous playing on Hedman's "Feeling My Way."

Vocal duties are shared by several notable guest artists. Soulful songstress Ada Dyer raises the funk factor on "Closer," and singer James D-Train Williams caresses the lyrics of "Angel of the Night," written by Hedman and the late pianist James Williams and dedicated to Butch Berman and his wife, Grace. The rhythmic title track vocal is handled with an appropriate sensuality by Dani Stevenson, and Kendra Shank, a longtime BMF friend, contributes a wordless vocal on the breezy "Wherever U R."

With "Garden of Forbidden Fruit," Norman Hedman's Tropique maintains its strong ensemble sound. Hedman leads with authority, shaping the band's direction with original compositions and adding his own percussive spice on congas.



ALAADEEN
New Africa Suite
ASR Records

True to its title, "New Africa Suite" is rife with African rhythms.

That is evident from the percussion intro to the opener, "Grace," another recent composition dedicated to Butch Berman and his Nigerian wife of the same name. In all, Ahmad Alaadeen has written seven original tunes that hold together well and justify the "suite" designation.

On both tenor and soprano saxophones, Alaadeen's sound most closely resembles the African-influenced excursions of John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Archie Shepp and other progressive players of the mid-1960s. A funk element is added on "Beneath Where Rives Flow," with some outstanding piano work by Harold O'Neal, bassist Seth Lee and drummer Donivan Bailey.

Like Coltrane, Alaadeen's music contains a deep, warm current of spirituality and universal brotherhood, especially on the gorgeous "Salaam, Shalom, Peace." The initial tenor statement is beautifully expanded on by O'Neal at the piano. "The Burning Sand" is a propulsive, start-and-stop exercise fully utilizing Alaadeen's leaping soprano lines and piercing tone.

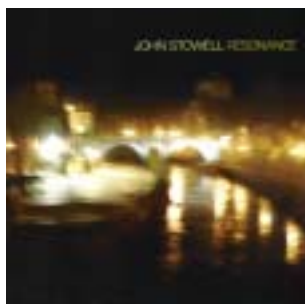
"Home Again" dances to the swaying, alternating rhythms of Alaadeen's full-bodied tenor, giving the tune the feel of a blues waltz. Again, O'Neal contributes a wonderful solo by building on the inherent finger-popping pulse. The funk element returns with "The Jannah Now," which features Alaadeen on soprano, fronting a slightly different but equally capable lineup that includes pianist Christopher Clarke, bassist Tyrone Clark and drummer

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Michael Warren.

Another unifying factor is the varied percussion work contributed by Ray Stewart throughout this very satisfying musical experience.



JOHN STOWELL
Resonance
Origin Records

In effect, “Resonance” is a collection of intimate, first-take ruminations by a master guitarist. Whenever Portland, Ore., luthier Mike Doolin created a new acoustic instrument, he invited his friend John Stowell to come over and give it a try, while the tape rolled. The resulting 13 tracks, recorded over five years on assorted six-string and 12-string models, make for fine listening in a gentle, relaxed mood.

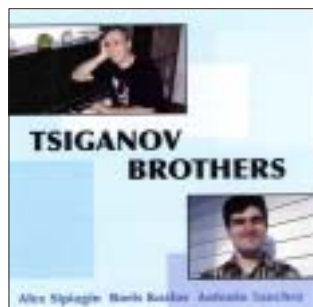
Stowell’s disciplined, classical approach is balanced by an adventurous spirit, especially in his choice of harmony chords and transitional melodic runs. He remains true to the spirit of such standards as Jerome Kern’s “Nobody Else but Me” and “Yesterdays,” Duke Ellington’s “Prelude to a Kiss,” and Sammy Cahn’s “I Should Care,” while stretching their improvisational potential.

John Coltrane’s “Equinox” gets a particularly lush and authoritative reading on 12-string guitar. Stowell, obviously liberated by this solo setting, turns Irving Berlin’s “How Deep is the Ocean” every which

way but loose. On an eight-minute treatment of Leonard Bernstein’s “Some Other Time,” Stowell makes the 12-string instrument sparkle and shine with shimmering bell-like tones. The lesser-known tunes “Picture in Black and White” by Antonio Carlos Jobim and “Peau Douce” by Steve Swallow are interesting program choices.

Stowell also contributes several original compositions to the mix, as if creating a new vocabulary with which to explore an instrument’s range and tone. “Ron’s Return/Eclipse,” shifts rhythmic gears midway through, and “Bolero Algorhythm” has the mathematical precision of its namesake. Stowell’s “I Wish” is romantically linked in medley with Cole Porter’s lovely “Everything I Love.” His brief tune “Maybe Later” ends the recording on a wistful note.

Kudos go to Stowell and Doolin for recognizing the inherent potential of recording these diverse pieces, and to Origin Records for releasing them.



TSIGANOV BROTHERS
Tsiganov Brothers

The brothers Tsiganov—pianist Misha and vibraphonist Alexei—have established a reputation in the rhythmic realm of Latin jazz as members of Norman Hedman’s Tropique, and they show no desire to break out of that mold on their debut, self-produced re-

cording, although here the influence is largely Brazilian.

It is a well-balanced affair. The brothers share and share alike, each contributing five compositions and both getting time for solo expression. Like Tropique, however, the brothers have created a recognizable sound that seems to favor the ensemble over the individual.

Helping to define the quintet’s group sound are Alex “Sasha” Sipiagin on trumpet and flugelhorn, Boris Kozlov on bass, and Antonio Sanchez on drums. Sipiagin is especially effective, often stating the melody in unison with Alexei’s vibes. His brassy horn cuts through everything else and sets the tone on such tunes as Alexei’s “Rio De Corea,” Misha’s “She Lives in Brazil,” Alexei’s gentle ballad “Just a Bossa,” and Alexei’s “My Brazil.”

“That Unpredictable Eugene,” was written by Misha and first recorded with Tropique several years ago. It maintains its Latin tinge even without the congas and timbales so essential to Tropique’s sound. “Don Arcadon” is another of Misha’s lively Latin excursions, featuring an irresistible rhythmic pulse and a soaring trumpet solo. Likewise, his composition “Passing By” is a fine vehicle for the flugelhorn, but also offers the composer a chance to show his piano skills.

Misha and Alexei are accomplished jazz improvisers, which makes for some lively interplay as they trade licks on their respective instruments. Essentially, the piano and the vibes are both percussive keyboards, so they allow the Tsiganov brothers to work closely, rhythmically and harmonically. Kindred spirits, indeed.

Discorama

Trumpeter McNeil remains "hipper than hip"

By Butch Berman



JOHN McNEIL
Sleep Won't Come
 OmniTone Records

Many years ago the great Oakland-based, horn-driven soul band Tower of Power wrote an anthem song/satire on hipness called "What is Hip?" Well, I'd always rather be considered hip over being "square," but when I think of "hip," or as they used to say "hep," three jazz musicians I've met or worked with over the years define this term. One is bassist Dennis Irwin, and another is vocalist Giacomo Gates.

However, if I'd had to pick the "beatest" of 'em all, it would have to be my old pal, and one hell of a trumpet player, John McNeil. And guess what? If I had to pick one of the best new jazz releases out in a long time that I can't get off of my CD player, it would have to be John's ode to insomnia, "Sleep Won't Come."

Recorded and produced by John on Frank Tafuri's wonderful record company, OmniTone, this stellar work of art only strengthens an already rich and deep catalog of jazz masterpieces.

I've always been a night person, and rarely have had long-term bouts of sleeplessness. My wife, Grace, however, does suffer from this dilemma, so I can relate and sympa-

thize with John's obvious dealings with angst and torment. Yet, as most artists of his magnitude do, he transfers his pain into a textured web of gorgeous, lush collection of personal stories/songs, mostly written by him.

Recording as a drummerless trio, his choice of bandmates fit this project to a T. Holding down the bass responsibilities, Kent McLagan moves, shifts, sways and swings within this framework like a bullfighter. Strong, masterful, yet tender when called for to lull you into the dream world that McNeil lives in during the wee, wee hours of the beautiful realm of madness he draws his creativity from.

Rounding out this killer threesome is the Denver-based keyboard wizard, Jeff Jenkins. Jeff wrote two of the wistful, ever-so-jazzy creations on this project, and joins forces with McNeil to pen two others. He's a stylist on the move, and a player to watch as his career continues to expand. He probably doesn't get much sack time either. Still, this lovely disc captures the interplay between these guys ever so cleverly. Not a caffeine-laden experience at all, as John's muted horn reminds you at times of Miles, but his own brand of genius continues to impress with each album he puts out.

It is possible that the twisted tune "Polka Party" might have had a pot of coffee brewing... or something. Their rendition of the traditional "The Water is Wide" may be my favorite track, but no foolin', as they say in the 'hood... It's all good. As a matter of fact, this collection of recorded music will stand the test of time as one of the great ones. Grab it!!!



THE HOT CLUB OF SAN FRANCISCO
Postcards from Gypsyland
 Lost Wax Music

Many imitators to the throne originated by Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli's first Quintet of the Hot Club of France proclaim to be worthy of the "Hot Club" title. There's probably a Hot Club of Peoria out there by now. Nevertheless, in my opinion, next to Django... there is only one true purveyor of this fine delicate art of gypsy jazz, and that falls into the most talented hands of "Pazzo," aka Paul Mehling and his Hot Club of San Francisco.

I invited Paul and his band with the coolest shoes in the world to be one of the headliners at the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival in Kansas. They took the Midwestern crowd of jazz lovers, not accustomed to their specific style of music, to the limit both sets, deriving deserved standing O's each time, a rare feat indeed in Topeka. When I told Paul between shows how righteously incredible this current crop of cats were to me, a fan of nearly a decade, he said this 2005 lineup, consisting of Evan Price, also an alumnus of the Turtle Island String Quartet, on violin, bassist Ari

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Munkres, and rhythm guitar maestros “Sammo” Miltich and Josh Workman, were indeed his best group ever.

I was in total agreement! When you hear their newest WAX release “Postcards from Gypsyland,” I’m sure you’ll go along with my statement wholeheartedly.

Capturing the same masterful

virtuosity, ultra warmth and subtle humor of their live performances, this CD conveys it all. Employing obscure originals from the Hot Club of France songbook, Paul and his merry men infuse carefully chosen standards along with contemporary compositions written mainly for this sparkling array of pros.

All songs included are lovely and memorable, with their ode to Victoria

Spivey’s, “Spivy,” “Zeppo” Price’s wedding gift of song to “Pazzo,” entitled “Alle Prese con une Verde Milonga” and their Ravel-inspired “Pavane Pour une Infante Defunte” standing out as my personal faves.

I love every CD they’ve put out, and “Postcards from Gypsyland” is no exception. Definitely a must have!

Odds and Ends

A grab bag of CD releases are recommended

By Butch Berman

Listening to music for the first time is kinda like trusting your original impressions you form when you first meet someone. Usually your instincts are on the mark, but occasionally it takes a second or sometimes even a third encounter to truly own your feelings surrounding whatever or whomever you come across. This same rule also applies to listening to music.

I probably receive more than 100 titles each year from mostly talented hopefuls requesting my time and consideration. I occasionally hit or miss the mark. The BMF may have been financially involved with someone who required our attention first, so again some artists who deserved more recognition got put aside for awhile, or left out altogether. I apologize to artists who fell into those categories.

Let me list several excellent CDs that I hope are still available by some very competent cats for your listening approval, and as additions to your collections.

Anything by Carol Duboc, a new sultry, sassy young lady who sings and writes jazz for lovers—and lovers lost—with a penchant for Latin grooves. I think she has three



Recommended CDs (clockwise from upper left) include “Duboc” by Carol Duboc, “Jeannie’s Song” by Tim Green, “Introducing Spencer Day” and “Quick Response” by Dom Minasi..

releases out, all good, but “Duboc,” recorded in 2002, touched and moved me the most. Formally a K.C. gal, info on obtaining her stuff can be found by clicking on www.carolduboc.com.

“Introducing Spencer Day” is a very soulful and jazzy CD by this San Francisco-based singer/songwriter/pianist. He truly covers the waterfront, putting his unique mark on a variety of styles and genres while gently sweeping you up

and enveloping you on his musical journeys. The incredible selection of covers chosen for this album wowed me completely with their stark contrast to each other, and all mixed in so cleverly among his own tunes (or should I say song-poems?) that prove to be deep and compelling. How often can we groove to “Blame It on My Youth,” “The Green Leaves of Summer,” and “Oh, Lady Be Good,” all on one sphere? Contact him at info@spencerday.com

“Jeannie’s Song” by Tim Green on OA2 22015 is the second wonderful CD this Illinois-based piano stylist has put out on this label’s ever-growing catalog of hot bops and swinging sounds. Backed again by his great rhythm section, consisting of my good friend Jim Cox (who’s getting hitched soon...major congrats to you and yours) on bass and drummer Phil Gratteau. The addition of guitarist Brian Wilkie to six of these nine all-killer, no-filler selections works like a charm. I loved the first trio album a whole bunch, and it took me a moment or two to get used to the quartet format. Wilkie, ever so much a demon of the strings, truly adds another dimension to this already-tight unit. Tim, I anxiously await your third artistic endeavor.

“Quick Response” by Dom Minasi on CDM Records rounds out this group of jazz recordings worth hearing and owning. Minasi’s a very astute New Yorker whose recorded guitar work stretches back to his Blue Note era during the ‘70s, three critically acclaimed “indie” outpourings, a stint with Dr. Lonnie Smith in the ‘80s, another decade of gigging and wood-shedding and now this extremely vibrant new CD with a very potent new band. Organist Kyle Kochler is the perfect foil for Dom and alto saxophonist Mark Whitecage to create their magic with. Kyle’s driving pedal work combining with drummer John Bollinger’s crafty propulsions create a jazzy canvas for Dom and Mark to paint their musical murals on. Most tunes are penned by Minasi and click immediately. I was totally taken aback by the insightful choice of the old rock ballad by Leiber and Stoller, “I Who Have Nothing” that showcases this band’s startling versatility.

And there, my friends and fans, you have it. Enjoy, and be happy.



Butch and Grace Berman

Inspired, by love, to write verse

By Butch Berman

A combination of yearning to find the “right” card to give Grace for our second (paper) wedding anniversary and the inspiration I received at my stepson Bahji’s graduation in June from the voice program at BryanLGH Medical Center—a program that helps mentally challenged kids prepare to enter a work world they can fit into, flourish and grow—led to writing the following poem that I would love to share with you, my faithful readers.

I was moved by all the enthusiasm and cheerful support...not to mention the pride and love shared by these wonderful young adults and their parents, who probably had their offspring pre-named and their futures planned for when God left them these gifts that weren’t exactly as they had hoped, but in the long run they meant so much more.

Hence, “Sometimes All They Were Given Was a Smile” raced through my heart and brain and leaped off the keys of my computer as soon as I arrived home that night. I hope it touches you in the same way that I felt that magical evening.

SOMETIMES ALL THEY WERE GIVEN WAS A SMILE (FOR GRACE)

Sometimes all they were given was a smile
Yet a smile can mend a broken heart
Warm a chilly day
Ease you into the night

Sometimes all they were given was a smile
Yet a smile is all they got
While we sometimes frown the day away
Wasting all that precious time

Sometimes all they were given was a smile
That can melt an icy stare

Bringing laughter from your gut
Maybe for the first time in a long time

Sometimes all they were given was a smile
While their eager parents mapped out a future
For a destination that was not to be
But maybe to even a better place

For
If a smile was all they could give
Their hearts must be so full of love
That there wasn’t enough room for anything else
Maybe they’re the lucky ones

Or
We all are for being in their world
Trying to keep it all together.

The Blues

Seattle club is “Buried Alive in the Blues”

By Phil Chesnut

Editor's Note: The following article and photos were forwarded to the BMF by Mark Dalton of Seattle. Dalton writes, “Butch, when Harvey Mandel introduced Barry Goldberg by saying ‘I call him the Blues Rabbi,’ I thought ‘I wish Butch was here!’ Great show! Both Goldberg and Mandel sounded great. Corky Siegel is apparently doing an acoustic ‘chamber blues’ schtick these days, according to Gravenites, but he was a decent harmonica player and a good showman. Gravenites was great. “Buried Alive in the Blues” never sounded better, and Tracy Nelson can still belt them out.”

SEATTLE—Last Sunday (July 10) at Seattle’s Triple Door, I was among those in attendance for a very rare and special blues experience with the Chicago Blues Reunion.

In the mid ‘60s, during the golden era of Chicago blues, emerged a group of talented white blues musicians who became a force in creating the first American blues bands and a new era of blues music. The Chicago Blues Reunion is a stellar collection of Chicago music treasures who defined the sound of their generation in the 1960s.

Although this group of musicians took separate paths, forming such seminal white blues bands as the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, The Electric Flag, Mother Earth, Big Brother & the Holding Company and Canned Heat, with many working with guitarist Mike Bloomfield, their paths have continued to cross through the years.

Among performers at the Triple Door from this special time and place were the following Chicago greats:

Barry Goldberg was keyboardist for Bob Dylan, Steve Miller, Mitch



Photos by Phil Chesnut

The Chicago Blues Reunion tour features (from left) Tracy Nelson, Corky Siegel, Nick Gravenites, Barry Goldberg and Harvey Mandel

Ryder and The Electric Flag.

Harvey Mandel was the brilliant guitarist who worked for the likes of Buddy Guy, Charlie Musselwhite, Canned Heat and the Rolling Stones.

Tracy Nelson, whose voice just keeps getting better, was first signed to a Chicago label at age 18 and soon turned into a Fillmore goddess with her band Mother Earth.

Corky Siegel, half of the 40-year-old Siegel-Schwall Band, this harp master’s range stretches beyond simply the blues, as he demonstrates with his new Chamber Blues project.

Sam Lay, considered everyone’s blues drummer, can be heard on those Chess classics from such legends as Howlin’ Wolf and Little Walter and white legends Mike Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield. Sam has also been with Siegel-Schwall since ‘65.

Nick Gravenites is truly every bluesman’s working-class hero. An alumni of many Bloomfield and Butterfield bands, Gravenites was also a founding member of The Electric Flag. Penning such blues classics as “Born In Chicago” and the group’s tour title “Buried Alive in the Blues,” Nick



Nick Gravenites and Tracy Nelson



Harvey Mandel and Corky Siegel

also wrote hits for Janis Joplin.

It was a great pleasure and honor for me to interview this fantastic collection of blues musicians who have done so much to influence the blues. It was also my chance to personally thank them for being such a huge influence on this old blues fan’s life, too. With only 14 dates on this rare tour, I’m grateful that the Triple Door had the only two-night booking.

Letters to the Editor

Fans and musicians offer opinions and praise

Talley expresses thanks for TJF

Butch and Mark (Radziejewski),

It was a pleasure to get the opportunity to play on the festival. I have heard nothing but good comments about the music. I'm sure that one of your primary objectives was to present a great product, and you succeeded beyond the shadow of a doubt. In this day, age and region of the country, where a jazz festival might include rap, hip-hop, reggae, adult instrumental (whatever that is), country, bluegrass, a tractor pull, mud wrestling and various sporting events, I applaud you for staying true to the art form!

*Doug Talley,
Kansas City, Mo.*

TJF fan offers two cents

Dear Butch,

My compliments on a great show. This may have been the best lineup yet. If you can stand one suggestion, here goes: I don't go to as many sessions as I'd like to simply because of the timing and the venue. What I mean is: If it's going to be held over Memorial Day weekend, it should be held outdoors. And if it's going to be held inside TPAC, it needs to be another time of year, preferably winter. During Memorial weekend, I don't enjoy sitting inside a cold, dark auditorium. This is a time for outdoor activities. On the other hand, during winter, an indoor concert is fine. Just my two cents, Butch. Thanks again.

*Larry Freeze
Topeka, Kan.*

Jazz fan bemoans human condition

Dear Mr. Berman,

I was out of town late last week, but I did get your phone message. I am really sorry you have had to deal with all of this bs. It sounds like a real nightmare. Jazz

needs people like you desperately, so please don't let all of this discourage you too much.

Part of it is just the human condition, which as I'm sure you well know ranges from the inspiring to mindless pettiness.

Sorry we couldn't hook up, but who knows, hopefully our paths will cross in the future. I wish you the best of luck. I hope something good comes out of all of the problems you are dealing with right now. That does sometimes happen, so let's hope this is one of those times.

David Einhorn (Dick Morgan Quartet)

Son of Cy Walter planning a website

Dear Butch,

My father was Cy Walter, a noted NYC pianist from the late '30s to the late '50s. He passed away when I was quite young (11). His circle of friends was extraordinary and ran the full range of entertainment society of the day.

I am working to archive and organize on a website a large collection of memorabilia of my father's career which my mother fortunately has retained (but of which I only learned a relatively short while ago). I hope to launch it (www.cywalter.com) later this summer. Keep an eye out!

I've also done a desktop-published songbook of my father's sheet music arrangements and compositions, although I've run out of copies at present. (I have to do another print run sometime soon).

Finally, I am having some rare radio performances of my father's and other pianists on an ABC program of the '50s called "Piano Playhouse" transferred from 16-inch transcription discs to CD and will share those as well if you like.

Took a look at your website. Very impressively done, and it is clear that your foundation's efforts are bearing fruit. Bravo!

Mark Walter

Susan Brecker asks for your help

Dear Family and Friends,

My husband, Michael Brecker, has been diagnosed with MDS (myelodysplastic syndrome), and its critical that he undergoes a stem cell transplant. The initial search for a donor (including Michael's siblings and children) has not yet resulted in a suitable match. Michael's doctors have told us that we need to immediately explore all possible options. This involves getting as many people of a similar genetic background to be tested.

The screening involves a blood test only. It can be done very quickly either at a marrow donation center or at a local lab. The cost is \$40 to \$75 and your insurance may cover it.

Your blood typing information can be posted on the international registry, if you choose, where it would also be available to others in need of a transplant.

A bone marrow donation is no more invasive than giving blood. Stem cells are simply harvested from your blood and then transplanted to Michael.

A match for Michael would be most likely to come from those of Eastern European Jewish descent. If you or anyone you know are in this category please make a special effort to immediately get tested. You would be doing something not just for Michael, but for so many more who are in a similar situation as my husband.

If everyone who receives this can motivate a bunch of their friends to get tested, and those friends then forward this message to get their friends, we will rapidly expand the pool of potential donors.

Any local blood center/Red Cross center can assist in organizing a drive for Michael, although it would be desirable if you can get a large group, e.g. a synagogue, to sponsor it. If you have any questions, contact Michael's management office at (212) 302-9200 or info@michaelbrecker.com.

Thank you so much for your love and support.

Susan Brecker



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Photo by Phil Chesnut

Guitarist Harvey Mandel was featured in a recent Chicago Blues Reunion tour, which visited Seattle's Triple Door for two nights in July. For more photos and a story by Seattle writer-photographer Phil Chesnut, see page 22.

How can you help the foundation?

The Berman Music Foundation is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)(3) private foundation, and your tax deductible donation is needed to help offset the costs of this newsletter and its programs.

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