



File Photo

Russ Long visits Berman museum.

# Tribute to Russ Long at Jardine's a most wonderful night in KC

By Butch Berman . . . . .

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—Being sent to Wentworth Military Academy for my high school and junior college days in the mid-1960s, only 40 miles from Kansas City, I was privy to some wonderful musical acts at a wide variety of venues.



Photo by Ruthann Nahorny

Butch Berman outside Jardine's

I was diggin' the likes of a very young Stevie Wonder, the Rolling Stones with Mick Taylor, my first acid trip with Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan before anybody knew about him, Tracy Nelson, Elvis Costello, Al Green, etc. You get the picture. Regardless of where I lived, my musical ventures to KC continued through my rock years to my current involvement with jazz. The list is too long to mention, as I tried to catch everyone I could while living here in Nebraska—Joe Henderson, Herbie and Wayne, Shirley Horn, Charlie Haden, J.J. Johnson plus current stars like Karrin Allyson and Bobby Watson, to name a few.

With this kinda background, I knew the Aug. 6 tribute for everybody's beloved icon—pianist, singer and songwriter extraordinaire Russ Long—arranged by my dear friend, BMF consultant, and one of the best bassists

anywhere, Gerald Spaits, was going to be a gasser, and how! The magical evening of love and fabulous jazz surrounding this ever-so-talented, lovely man may have been one of the most wonderful nights I ever spent in KCMO. Special kudos goes out to the entire staff of Jardine's jazz club for working with Gerald to make this blessed event a reality.

Feeling a little like Perry Mason with his trusted secretary and assistant Della Street at his side, I took Ruthann Nahorny to accompany and assist me on this soulful sojourn. My

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## Prez Sez

## Life's joys and sorrows add to "Soul Stew"

By Butch Berman

Keeping cool, my late summer readers?

Well.... I'm not as hot under the collar as I thought I might be, considering the jazz scene as envisioned by moi.

Lincoln, Nebraska isn't NYC, or even close to KC as a Mecca for our beloved music. The former heavy-weight line-up of jazz monsters from coast to coast at the annual Jazz in June series fell to a more localized array of talent to fulfill a need to make a few more bucks, and the "Hey...it's free, so how GREAT does it have to be?" kind of attitude from the recent powers to be.

I had high hopes for the now defunct Melting Spot, which proved you can fill a cool night spot with jazz fans, bring in a great act like Giacomo Gates, backed by the Joe Cartwright Trio, for a wonderful night of superb entertainment—with hopes of more to follow—and then close the doors a week or so later, due in part to a few local acts overpricing themselves and drawing little, as the door price had to equal what we charged for Gates.

I also had high hopes that the Krem le Bistro, whom we did a little piece on in the last issue, would try to find some time to work with us on the dinner piano concerts or duos we had discussed. I know that starting a new eatery is a major nightmare, and I'll always try to be patient when it comes to jazz venues-to-be, but I'm beginning to have my doubts. Some of the local pianists advertised as "jazz piano" are fine music teachers who don't improvise, which in my opinion isn't jazz. Hey, they're doing a fine job with good food and regular music, so I'm only stating the reality, with all



Photo by Rich Hoover

*BMF gathers for dinner before Giacomo Gates concert with (from left) Ruthann Nahorny, Ray DeMarchi, Gerald Spaits, Joe Cartwright, Grace Sankey Berman, Butch Berman, Giacomo Gates, Mary Jane Gruba and Tom Ineck.*

my "I should know better" expectations. Maybe the past few lovely years with my wife, Grace, has had some positive effect on my occasionally passionate, but emotional behavior. I seem to take things a little more in stride and try to not burn every bridge I can't cross.

So between doing our web/jazz newsletter, my enjoyable work as D.J. on my "Tuesday Morning Soul Stew" radio show on KZUM, 89.3 FM in Lincoln, and rocking out with my band The Cronin Brothers, I'm livin' a life. If I knew during my younger days trying to "find myself" that I'd end up with a lifetime career of turning my hobby into my job, mostly on my terms to boot...Wow! I have too much to be thankful for to be pissed about stuff I'll probably never be able to change. You can't blame a guy for having deep principles concerning jazz. Onward.

Two incredible piano virtuosos whom I was extremely fortunate to have met and hung with on occasion,

and listened to in NYC when I was visiting, passed away suddenly a few weeks apart last month. I'm referring to the genius that was John Hicks and Hilton Ruiz. Thanks to my dear friend, percussionist Norman Hedman, who introduced me to both of these fine gentlemen within the past decade of my involvement in jazz. He attended both funerals and shares my sadness in dealing with the shock of their demises.

I caught John several times over the years, and cherish a ton of his recorded stuff...all inspiring, solid brilliant pieces of work covering a lot of jazz styles. From his "Live at Maybeck" concert to his stunning ensemble work with Bobby Watson, Victor Lewis and Curtis Lundy, as well as his classic tributes to Erroll Garner and Mary Lou Williams, his work was dazzling. His contribution on Norman's "Flight of the Spirit" CD showcased his artistry as well. The most memorable performance was at the legendary Bradley's several years ago, when

he did a double-piano concert with Larry Willis.

I only got to meet 'n' greet and hear Hilton once, in a duo at a spot called Zino's. His Latin tinged bebop tore up the place, and he made a hefty entry into my never-ending jazz LP/CD collection soon after witnessing his magic. We can be thankful that their vast catalogues of music will live forever beyond the too-soon departures of these special cats.

I also lost a new friend on May 14, on a much more personal level. Steve Alvis, the general manager at KZUM, while on a golf-and-fishing trip with his buddies, died instantly after a freak fall from a golf cart in Florida. I'd only been back on the air for a few months, but the depth of character and personality of this kind, jovial middle-aged man was apparent from the get-go. We bonded with a mutual love of the soul-tinged '50s and '60s soul music I play on my show. He was a devoted husband to his wife, Tammy, a master chef and avid sports enthusiast with a great rep from his many years putting a sports agenda together at Nebraska Public Television before taking over the helm at KZUM.



Muggles

Photo by Butch Berman

Our own *Jazz* newsletter editor and webmaster Tom Ineck, chairman of the board at the radio station, has temporally assumed Steve's position until his huge shoes can be filled. May all of these magnificent men's souls rest in peace...never to be forgotten.

On a cheerier note, my old friend Bob Popek, after many years at Dietze Music House as their string

instrument luthier, left to start his own private business, called CGSMUSIC, at 1244 High St. in Lincoln. Bob's work is world-renowned, as is his splendid website, showcasing the musical tablatures of his arrangements for guitar. His store will be an all-purpose, service-oriented music establishment featuring his repair capabilities as well as the selling of a wide array of interesting guitars, basses, violins, some keyboards, and world instruments, as well as musical literature. Tom Ineck will do a feature article on Bob's venture in the near future. We wish him the best. If you loved the way my guitars have sounded in all of my bands the past 25 years, Bob's the reason why. He's the best in the biz!!



Peanut

Photo by Butch Berman

In closing, I also want to welcome a new addition to my household with the arrival of a 3-year old English shepherd named Peanut that came from a farm in Gordon, Neb., where I was told an evil farmer named Leo Woodhouse brutalized this adorable dog, and caused the death of his brother. Shame on him and "Yea!" for Peanut. He joins my other fairly new adopted No. 1 dog Kaliber and even gets along great with the real boss—no, not Grace, but my cat Muggles.

This one big, happy and jazzy family wishes you all a swinging autumn.

*Butch Berman*



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**Trustee:** Butch Berman

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



*Russ Long continued from page 1*

dear wife, Grace, had not yet returned to the states after nearly six weeks visiting her African homeland, family and friends she hadn't seen in many years. She knew Ruth and I had our act together, and insisted we go when Tom Ineck had to pull out due to other commitments.

The joint, as they say, was rockin', swinging 'n' swaying, and packed to the gills. It was standing room only for the multitude of fellow players, fans and friends assembled there that evening. The program naming all of the tunes and astute cats that gelled perfectly can be found on the back cover of this newsletter. Gerald rounded up an interesting collection of musicians to showcase 17 of Russ' jazzy creations, including a four-piece horn section led by master of ceremonies and former KC trumpeter Gary Sivilis, with his "musical son" trumpeter Stan Kessler, new Westport Art Ensemble sax player Dave Chael, trombone veteran Arch Martin and the amazing reedman Charles Perkins, who I had never heard live before. I was blown away by his astounding chops.



*Ruth Nahorny is Butch Berman's "Della Street" on trip to KC.*



*Russ Long takes a turn at the piano at Jardine's.*

Photo by Butch Berman

In all, the horn arrangements came off so well that Russ even mentioned re-recording some of his tunes with this lineup and new charts. Drummers Ray DeMarchi and Tommy Ruskin split sets with Gerald remaining on bass, and Paul Smith on piano played his ass off as always.

Everyone stood when Russ got up to do a few tunes and reminisce about his 50-plus years in show-biz. Even though Russ carries oxygen with him when he leaves his home, he played and sang with strength and gusto, bringing his throng of teary-eyed followers to their feet several times. And if this wasn't enough of a treat, 50 years' worth of Kansas City's greatest divas were present to open their mouths and hearts and sing to the man who has provided such beautiful melodies and stories for them to sing, as well as accompany them, probably from coast to coast, covering over a half century—Karrin Allyson, Julie Turner, Carol Comer and Marilyn Maye.

Ruth and I were sitting within earshot of these legendary song-

stresses, which was a trip in itself, seeing everyone from so many eras having such a good time, together all at the same time. Each artist had her own little thing goin', remembering all the gigs with Russ, often resembling a roast, as the laughter and tears flowed like the wine that night...in abundance.



*Gerald Spaits and Russ Long visited the BMF museum in 2001.*

File Photo

By the time you read this, my foundation will have wined, dined and met with Gerald and the rest of the Nebraska consultants to discuss our involvement in seeing that all of Russ' compositions are copyrighted, published and

professionally charted to stand the test of time.

Even though the years and some health problems have taken some of the starch out of Russ Long, he's still the hippest of hip and the coolest of cool. The Berman Music Foundation will be eternally grateful to Gerald Spaits for getting us involved with helping to produce Russ' dynamite "Never Let Me Go" CD and, now, this tribute...a night to remember always.

*Photo Gallery*

# Snapshots of Russ Long tribute at Jardine's



*Stan Kessler*



*Songstresses (from left) Karrin Allyson, Julie Turner, Marilyn Maye and Carol Comer*



*Julie Turner and Tommy Ruskin*



*Karrin Allyson in conversation*



*Russ Long signs autographs during a break in the action at Jardine's in Kansas City.*

**Photos by  
Butch Berman**



*Leslie Spaits*



*Russ Long with his many fans*



*Marilyn Maye and Karrin Allyson*



*Ginny Coleman*



## Concert Review

## Monroe memorial concert draws audience of 600

By Tom Ineck

TOPEKA, Kan.—The purpose of the Jim Monroe Memorial Concert was two-fold—to pay homage to the late, world-class jazz promoter and to raise funds for a scholarship that would help ensure the continuation of Monroe's legacy.

In both respects, the free July 23 event at White Concert Hall on the Washburn University campus was a success. Some three dozen musicians from all over the country showed up to pay their respects and to play in the rotational-set format that Monroe perfected during his seven years as music director of the Topeka Jazz Festival (TJF). From 1 p.m. to after 8 p.m. on this celebrative Sunday, players and singers moved on and off the stage in various combinations, often performing together for the first time.

As always in such cases, results were mixed, sometime producing awkward moments of musical and personal incompatibility, but occasionally yielding surprising camaraderie



Gerald Spaits and Bob Kindred

among seemingly disparate players. As Monroe himself might have argued, it is that sense of surprise that is at the heart of all jazz improvisation.

Even before the concert, donations to the Jim Monroe Scholarship Fund had exceeded \$31,000, and an additional \$5,500 was collected at the door, according to Marcene Grimes, executive director of Topeka Jazz Workshop Inc. The fund was expected to net about \$26,000 after expenses, she said.

An estimated audience of 600 turned out for the memorial concert. An exact count was difficult since, like the players, they rotated in and out of the auditorium throughout the day. What follows is a recap of some of the most memorable musical moments.

Gary Foster was the perfect choice as the day's artistic director. The woodwind player, based in Los Angeles, was a longtime friend of Monroe's and a TJF regular. Foster and saxophonist Bob Kindred paired up for a wonderful rendition of "Beautiful Friendship." Boston-based trombonist Phil Wilson sat in on a couple of numbers before adding West Coaster Stacy Rowles to the mix on flugelhorn. They matched nicely on

Cole Porter's "I Love You," starting in ballad tempo then moving uptempo. Rowles proved a fine vocalist on "S Wonderful."

Rowles and Wilson later teamed up again with pianist Joe Cartwright, bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Tom Morgan—a very compatible quintet—for a very satisfying set that included "Time After Time" and Ray Noble's sadly obscure ballad "Why Stars Come Out at Night," with Rowles caressing the vocal and Cartwright interjecting a typically outstanding solo.

Bassist Jim DeJulio had the luxury of traveling from L.A. with his own trio, which also featured pianist Ted Howe and drummer Joe LaBarbera. After expertly essaying "How High the Moon," they turned to an off-kilter rumba version of Juan Tizol's "Caravan," an inspired rhythmic workout for the inventive LaBarbera. On "Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me," the piano and bass stated the melody in tandem.

Trombonist Dan Barrett tipped his hat to the Mills Brothers on "If I Didn't Care." The great young tenor saxophonist Harry Allen joined Barrett on Ellington's "All Too Soon." Barrett's take on "Besame Mucho" began as a rumba before shifting to a swing tempo and back.

Singer Julie Turner, with husband Tommy Ruskin on drums, Paul Smith



Artistic Director Gary Foster



Jim DeJulio

Photo by Tom Ineck

Photo by Tom Ineck



*Harry Allen and Dan Barrett*

on piano and Jennifer Leitham on bass, were impressive on Rodgers and Hart's "Where or When," and a fast rendition of "You Do Something to Me," with admirable solos by Leitham, Smith and Ruskin, whose brushwork was especially notable at this tempo.

In typical grandiose style, trumpeter Tiger Okoshi began with a bravura and dramatic solo reading of "Ave Maria," piercing the upper reaches of the auditorium without a microphone. He also exhibited his bright and brilliant, diamond-cut precision phrasing on "Some Day My Prince Will Come." Duetting with bassist DeJulio on "Days of Wine and Roses," Okoshi resorted to every trick in the book—including leaps, trills, valving and tonguing techniques. As if that was not enough, he set a blazing tempo on "Yesterdays," trading licks with drummer Ruskin as he reached for the stratosphere.

Baritone saxophonist Kerry Strayer fronted a fine six-piece ensemble whose front line also featured trumpeter Stan Kessler and trombonist Paul McKee, with pianist Paul Smith, bassist Bob Branstetter and

drummer Joe LaBarbera. "Alone Together" was followed by a wonderful arrangement of "Out of Nowhere," with an outstanding solo by Kessler and Strayer sounding a lot like his main influence, Gerry Mulligan.

Gary Foster on alto and Bob Kindred on tenor returned for a soul-searching marriage of "I Thought about You" and "Body and Soul." But it was tenor saxophone great Harry Allen who earned the day's most enthusiastic ovation, as he illustrated his technique and soulfulness on "Just One of Those Things," "I Get a Kick Out of You," and an incredibly fast-paced "The Man I Love," which challenged the rhythm section (pianist Roger Wilder, bassist Branstetter and drummer LaBarbera) to hold its own.

LaBarbera was most successful, tearing loose with a dynamic and driving percussion solo.

Allen's set would have been the logical high point at which to end the day's proceedings and send everyone home smiling. In a programming faux pas that Monroe never would have made, two male vocalists with similar styles—David Basse and Giacomo



*Tiger Okoshi*

Gates—were scheduled to perform consecutively. Programmed earlier in the day and in sets separated by instrumentalists, they both would have had a greater impact, especially Gates, who is one of the most underrated vocalists on the scene.

Instead, Gates had to follow a lackluster performance by Basse as time was running short. Backed by the compatible rhythm section of pianist Joe Cartwright, bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Tommy Ruskin, Gates instantly connected with the audience on "Lady Be Good" and the ballad "P.S. I Love You," proving himself a master storyteller of the heart. Gates and Cartwright share an affinity for the music of Thelonious Monk, apparent on the Monk tune "Well You Needn't." In a gracious gesture, Gates invited Basse back to the stage for a duet on "Centerpiece."

Overall, the concert lacked the "star power" of classic TJF programs, where (in 2001, for example) it was not unusual to encounter Ray Brown, Monty Alexander, Scott Hamilton, Eldar Djangirov, Karrin Allyson, Ken Peplowski, Jay Leonhart, Gerry Wiggins, John Clayton and Jeff Hamilton all in the same day.

As homage to Jim Monroe, however, it was fitting to have so many Kansas City-area musicians participate with such enthusiasm and genuine love for the man and the music.



*Giacomo Gates, Joe Cartwright, David Basse, Gerald Spaits and Tommy Ruskin*



*Tomfoolery**Monroe succeeded despite abrasive style**By Tom Ineck*

Jim Monroe's single-minded, authoritarian style as director of the Topeka Jazz Festival from 1998 to 2004 occasionally irked musicians accustomed to more artistic freedom. After recruiting them from all over the country, Monroe would then dictate who would perform with whom and even what tunes they would play.

It was a degree of micro-management that often worked against the spontaneity that makes jazz so unpredictable. It also anchored the festival in the staid style of the swing era, precluding attendance by a younger audience and, ultimately, dooming the festival to oblivion.

On the other hand, it is testimony to Monroe's dedication and determination that the TJF survived against all odds for seven years under his leadership and that the Topeka Jazz Workshop Concert Series that he helped to found in 1969-70 continues to this day. It is likely that nothing could have saved the festival, although Butch Berman bravely carried on as artistic director for its eighth and final year.

No one can dispute Monroe's love and enthusiasm for jazz. He became hooked on the music while growing up in Kansas City, Kan., and as a retired insurance agent he attended jazz festivals around the nation, befriending musicians and fellow jazz fans and luring them to Topeka for the annual festival. He tirelessly worked the phones, wined and dined



*Monroe at 2004  
Topeka Jazz Fest*



*Ted Howe, Jim DeJulio, Harry Allen, Tom Morgan and Dan Barrett*



*Gary Foster and Bob Kindred*

### Photos by Tom Ineck



*Julie Turner and Jennifer Leitham*

and pressed the flesh of prospective donors in order to guarantee that the Memorial Day weekend event was sufficiently funded, though it never made money. The **Berman Music Foundation** was a sponsor of the Topeka Jazz Festival from 1998 to 2002 and again in 2004.

Monroe was president of the Topeka Jazz Workshop Concert Series from 1977 until his death last year. He led the marketing effort to increase membership and oversaw the establishment and growth of several youth jazz scholarship funds to encourage more young musicians to study and play jazz. Along these lines,

the Berman foundation sponsored the Topeka Jazz Festival Academy in 2002 and 2004. The workshop has been supporting young musicians since 1966, awarding a total of 212 scholarships.

Monroe was vacationing in southern Africa with his wife when he suffered a fatal heart attack and died Nov. 7 at age 76. Net proceeds of some \$26,000 from the July 23 memorial concert will bolster the Jim Monroe Memorial Scholarship Fund and ensure that his legacy as jazz impresario and promoter will not be forgotten.



## Concert Review

# Christiansen and Trolsen best of Jazz in June

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—Overall, the 15-year-old Jazz in June weekly concert series has seen better days musically. The audiences and goodwill donations for the free performances, however, continue to grow.

I attended only the final two of this year's four Tuesday evening concerts, and by all reports they were the most musically satisfying of the lot.

**Rick Trolsen and Gringo Do Choro**, a quintet from New Orleans, fused European melodies and Latin rhythms in that infectious Brazilian song form known as choro when they performed June 20. Trolsen's intricate trombone lead lines blended nicely with Brazilian-born pianist Eduardo Tozzatto, mandolinist John Eubanks, bassist Peter Harris and drummer Wayne Maureau. The marriage of trombone and mandolin was especially interesting.

"Tico Tico" evoked memories of Carmen Miranda in its exotic exuberance. Jobim's "O Pato (The Duck)" also provided a firm footing for the evening's Latin motif. Trolsen took the melody on his composition "Medicine Lodge" before turning it over to a playful interchange between piano and drums.



Members of Gringo Do Choro are trombonist Rick Trolsen, mandolinist John Eubanks, pianist Eduardo Tozzatto, drummer Wayne Maureau, and bassist Peter Harris.



Rick Trolsen and Gringo do Choro

Trombone and mandolin merged on Jobim's masterpiece "No More Blues (Saudade)." Other highlights included Jobim's "No More Fighting" and the classic "Brazil."

Even more of a pleasant surprise was the relatively unknown **Corey Christiansen Quartet**, who appeared June 27. Based in the St. Louis area, Christiansen is adjunct guitar instructor at the University of South Florida and has authored more than 40 Mel Bay instruction books. Jazz in June committee member Ted Eschliman had recommended the young guitarist after seeing him perform last year at a Mel Bay workshop.

Adding to Christiansen's own considerable fretwork abilities were the combined talents of his cohorts—Swedish pianist Per Danielsson, bassist Ben Wheeler and drummer par excellence Danny Gottlieb, formerly of the Pat Metheny Group. It made for a volatile quartet of pros.

"Alone Together" got a swinging treatment, with Gottlieb sizzling on the cymbals and Wheeler providing some

very impressive bass work. Gottlieb showed his sensitive and skillful brush work on a ballad rendition of "Darn That Dream." The drummer reminds the listener of the great Shelly Manne, the ultimate in skill and sensitivity.

Christiansen arranged "All Blues" in a jazz shuffle beat that again illustrated Gottlieb's talents. The drummer improvised over a riffing pattern that led into an astounding guitar solo. Another original arrangement transformed "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise," in a minor key with a loping beat. With Gottlieb again using brushes, Danielsson took a bluesy solo that segued into a guitar statement that had echoes of John

Scofield's pinched tone and slithering lines.

Christiansen's excellent "Roads" was followed by Denzil Best's "Wee," a swinging tune based on the ubiquitous "I Got

Rhythm" changes. The guitarist soared on this one, alternating chords and single-note passages in an outstanding display of virtuosity, which in turn inspired a powerful drum solo in which Gottlieb gave a lesson in creating a one-handed roll on the snare.

Jazz in June will no doubt continue to thrive. The free event drew a record audience of 7,000 at its second Tuesday concert this year. Just as important, however, is to maintain a high standard of musical quality. Let's hope that the series organizers take that lesson to heart.



Corey Christiansen

Courtesy Photo

## Concert Review

*Planets aligned for Gates and Cartwright Trio*

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—Singer Giacomo Gates is a human barometer, able to instantly “read” a room and respond accordingly. He also possesses that rare personality trait that can bend an audience to his will, the gift of emotional interaction. No listener need feel “out of the loop.” All are made welcome to Gates’ very personal musical experience.

More than anything, that is what made his performance of April 7 at the Melting Spot in downtown Lincoln such a memorable event. That, and the fact that he was accompanied by Kansas City’s finest rhythm section, fronted by pianist Joe Cartwright and also featuring bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Ray DeMarchi. The planets were aligned that evening, and those lucky enough to be in the intimate company of such artists were blessed.

Their appearance was made possible by the **Berman Music Foundation**.

The Cartwright trio kicked things off with a stunning rendition of that bit of Latin exotica called “Poinciana,” most memorably associated with pianist Ahmad Jamal. Gates then channeled Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson’s instructive lyric to the sprightly Miles Davis melody “Four.” Thelonious Monk’s “Let’s Cool One,” with original lyrics by Gates, showed the singer’s penchant for Monk’s music and his ability to negotiate the composer’s difficult changes.

Even the standards of Tin Pan Alley find their way into Gates’ varied repertoire, as beautifully exemplified by his take on Cole Porter’s “You’d Be So Nice to Come Home To.” On Oliver

lyrics by Oscar Brown Jr., provided a very hip and swinging vehicle for Gates and his smooth baritone voice. Monk returned with “Ask Me Now,” transformed by the Jon Hendricks lyric into

“How I Wish.” One of the most satisfying performances of the evening was on “Five Cooper Square,” the Gates lyric to Monk’s “Five Spot Blues.” Cartwright and Gates proved their shared affinity for Monk’s music with Cartwright infusing Monk quotes throughout. It is obviously a tune with very personal resonance for



*Giacomo Gates and bassist Gerald Spaits at the Melting Spot*

Photo by Rich Hoover

singer and pianist alike.

Not even a technical glitch could darken the room’s spirits. Gates good-naturedly addressed the problem with the old saw, “When the speakers hum, it’s because they don’t know the lyrics.”

With consummate style and aplomb, Gates the storyteller introduced “Since I Fell For You,” establishing the mood and drawing the audience into the narrative circle. The Miles Davis-Oscar Brown Jr. standard “All Blues” was, indeed, very bluesy. For his rendition of “I Cover the Waterfront,” Gates turned to Eddie Jefferson’s lyrics inspired by the James Moody improvisation on the ballad standard, renamed “I Just Got Back in Town.”

Monk returned again to the program in the form of “Too Many Things,” a Gates lyrical transformation of “Think of One.” Feeling comfortable with the

Nelson’s “Stolen Moments,” Gates delivered a full-throated scat interlude containing yodeling effects reminiscent of the great Leon Thomas. Cartwright’s bluesy piano solo expanded on Gates’ primal emotive power.

More than any other singer who came before him, Gates is indebted to Eddie Jefferson, both for his lyrical wordplay and his phenomenal vocalise. Gates paid homage on “Lester Leaps In/I Got the Blues,” while establishing his own unique approach to the changes on “I Got Rhythm.” Spaits injected a suitably rhythmic bass solo.

Charlie Parker’s classic 1947 solo on “Lady Be Good” was the inspiration for Gates’ vocal gymnastics on the tune. Next, he whistle-mimicked a flute on Gershwin’s “Summertime,” even trading licks with Spaits. Cartwright took a brilliant solo before turning it over to Spaits for a bowed bass statement to end the first set.

Duke Pearson’s “Jeanine,” with

*Continued on page 11*



small, but enthusiastic audience in the intimate confines of the Melting Spot, Gates launched into a hilarious version of the soliloquy from "Julius Caesar," liberally laced with hipster jargon.

It's hard to imagine a more compatible unit than Gates, Cartwright, Spaits and DeMarchi. It is fitting that since this performance the singer and pianist have managed to collaborate on several club dates in the Kansas City area. We hope they will continue to work together whenever possible.



*Giacomo Gates conducts pianist Joe Cartwright, bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Ray DeMarchi.*

## Artist Interview

# Guitarist reunites with Twin Cities "home boys"

By Tom Ineck

Transplanted from Minneapolis to Lincoln a couple of years ago, guitarist Luke Polipnick reunited with a couple of "home boys" June 3 at the Zoo Bar, when the trio—under the name Luke Polipnick and Volcano Insurance—showcased some of the guitarist's many jazz compositions.

The concert was presented with the support of the **Berman Music Foundation**.

I caught up with Polipnick while he and his wife were traversing rural Iowa by car recently. From behind the wheel, he chatted by cell phone about his musical ongoing journey. At the tender age of 25, it already has evolved through numerous styles as he seeks a medium of musical expression.

A student of classical piano as a child in Minnesota, he first was drawn to the guitar by the sounds of late '60s icons Jimi Hendrix and Cream-era Eric Clapton. His ears were first opened to jazz in a big way when he got a copy of John Coltrane's "Blue Train" at age 15.

"That was a big revelation for me. From that point on, I started doing my own research. I got into a lot of the greats of the '50s and '60s, kind of by trial-and-error. I didn't have a lot of

people telling me, 'Oh, you should check this out.'" Among his serendipitous discoveries were Charles Mingus and the entire Miles Davis oeuvre, but jazz still was a "foreign language" to the musician in Polipnick.

"I always had a fair amount of facility, but trying to figure out what was going on with the harmony and how they would develop the melodies" took time, he said. "It was a really organic process. I didn't start trying to do it until I was ready. It's been a really slow process to get where I am now, and I'm still really working on it."

Polipnick moved to the Twin Cities area while still in high school to attend St. Cloud University, majoring in trumpet. He later transferred to Hennepin Technical College in suburban Minneapolis to study audio recording. But at age 19 he was ready to pursue his growing jazz impulses. He already had done some transcription, but had not devoted himself entirely to the effort until then. He soon dropped out of school, and made some important connections with like-minded musicians.

"I got in with a crowd of musicians when I was about 20. That's when I dropped out of college to just

practice. I was working in a restaurant and practicing all day. It was kind of the young Minneapolis vanguard," he recalled. "They inspired me to take it really seriously. It was the first time I really had someone to hang out with. They encouraged me to listen to everything." It was, as Polipnick says, a "real-world music education, rather than a conservatory education."

Among that Minneapolis vanguard that helped to shape the young guitarist's direction were bassist Chris Bates and drummer Joey Van Phillips, who joined Polipnick at the Zoo as Volcano Insurance. Bates, a decade older than Polipnick and a first-call player in the Twin Cities, first performed in Lincoln with The Motion Poets in an October 1997 concert at Westbrook Recital Hall, sponsored by the **Berman Music Foundation**. He returned last year with trumpeter Kelly Rossum for a BMF-sponsored performance Nov. 10 at P.O. Pears. Polipnick and Phillips are near-contemporaries who have been friends since their teens.

Minneapolis remains a music hotbed that welcomes all styles of jazz,

*Polipnick continued on page 12*

*Concert Review**Volcano Insurance explores new musical terrain**By Tom Ineck*

LINCOLN, Neb.—Jazz improvisers, and iconoclasts in general, are at their best when in the company of fellow free thinkers. Even more liberating is the opportunity to reunite with hometown friends who are equally open to mutual, musical exploration.

Such a rare opportunity was presented by the **Berman Music Foundation** June 3 at the Zoo Bar in Lincoln, where guitarist Luke Polipnick fronted the provocatively named trio Volcano Insurance. All three developed their jazz chops in Minneapolis, a musical hotbed that they still consider their home base. Bassist Chris Bates has been on the leading edge of that city's new music movement since his tenure a decade ago with The Motion Poets, who performed in Lincoln in 1997. Drummer Joey Van Phillips and Polipnick, now in their mid-20s, have been friends since their teens.

It was apparent that the three-

some was stoked and ready to burn when they took the stage around 10 p.m., and most of the audience of friends and curious jazz fans was receptive to experimentation. What follows are some random reflections on the evening.

"I-80 West" was inspired by Polipnick's many hours traveling that long stretch of Interstate highway. It was aptly explorative and apprehensive, sort of like the uncertain feeling of passing a loaded semi-trailer truck at 80 miles per hour in a roaring blizzard.

On "Miles Mode" the guitarist expertly utilized the volume pedal, creating intensity and a sonic bite while running through arpeggios. Switching to electric bass, Bates kept a funky, infectious dub rhythm going on his composition "3x3=8," which also had Polipnick dipping into dissonant chords and arrhythmic passages ala Bill Frisell.

"Legs on a Stick" employed com-

plex changes, stop time and a fuzz-tone fade for effect. Bates took off on a blues shuffle, detouring on a solo acoustic bass excursion. Local sax phenomenon Chris Steinke took the stage for several tunes, including the standard "Alone Together," performed in an unconventional manner with Bates on electric bass and Phillips showing his extraordinary skill in driving the trio while exhibiting frequent flashes of rhythmic brilliance.

The blues later emerged in its most elemental form when Polipnick dug into a fast and bluesy tune reminiscent of John Scofield. Lest the audience fail to recognize the blues progression as it flew by, the trio slowed down for a classic late-night blues improvisation.

Polipnick and his wife remain residents of Lincoln, but the guitarist will undoubtedly continue to explore new and interesting musical terrain.

*Polipnick continued from page 11.*

from the most accessible mainstream sounds to the free-jazz fringes.

"There's always been a strong patronage of the arts there," Polipnick said. "I don't know if it's because the winters are really harsh or what. There's always been a scene. It's a really hot spot right now because of bands like The Bad Plus," referring to the popular trio blending jazz with pop, hip-hop and rock influences for cross-over success.

It was the Twin Cities-inspired freedom of expression that impressed Polipnick.

"That was the real fire for me, getting to see these guys on a nightly or weekly basis, who were really pushing

it, that were working in all aspects, from the traditional to the avant-garde."

When Polipnick landed in Lincoln, word got around quickly that a talented young guitarist was in town. He met some of the city's longtime jazz players, including guitarist Peter Bouffard and pianist John Carlini, with whom he landed a few duo gigs. He joined the local funk outfit Electric Soul Method, appearing frequently in the area and playing on the band's debut CD. He has since left the ESM, but still explores musical ideas with some of the former bandmates.

Playing opportunities in Lincoln are rare, but Polipnick likes the city and makes the most of it. He does not con-

sider himself a prolific writer, but 90 percent of the tunes in the Volcano Insurance repertoire are originals and, of those, 90 percent were penned by him. Asked to describe the trio's music, he called it "really eclectic. It's modern jazz, for lack of a better handle on it, but we have some stuff that's fairly rocking." The band draws on dub, funk, blues, Latin and other influences, for a mix that's sure to keep listeners interested.

Among his favorite jazz guitarists Polipnick named modernists Bill Frisell, Wolfgang Muthspiel and Ben Monder, as well as the legendary Jim Hall.



## Concert Review

# "When Broadway meets Swing Street" in the Rockies

By Dan Demuth

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo.—Ed Polcer and his all-stars swung into Colorado Springs on March 25, leaving an SRO crowd in a swinging mood. Judging by the audience reaction during and after the concert, cornetist Polcer, vocalist Judy Kurtz and a hot quintet fulfilled all expectations. All of these musicians are at ease establishing rapport with the audience.

Perhaps mimicking too closely the touring days of yore, the "band van" suffered a breakdown in the wee hours of the morning en route to the Springs from Jackson Hole, Wyo. The venue, a large private room in Giuseppe's Old Depot restaurant (a beautifully restored turn-of-the-last-century railroad station) provided a club atmosphere not totally removed from what one could have found on "The Street" in New York City when the likes of Eddie Condon and Benny Goodman were holding court. A friendly and efficient wait-staff, good food and bar service surrounding the entire event added to the ambiance.

Selections ran the gamut of Broadway standards, swung in a jazz mode but still retaining their original flavor. The first set included "Softly As in a Morning Sunrise," "I Love Paris," "Getting to Know You," "Just One of Those Things," "I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face," "My Gal Sal," "In My Soli-



John Cocuzzi, Mike Weatherley, Tom Fischer, Ed Polcer and Tom Artin

tude," "I'm Beginning To See the Light" and "Strike Up the Band."

Some brief bios are in order. Trombonist Tom Artin worked with the Smithsonian Jazz Repertory Ensemble, Louis Armstrong Alumni All-Stars, the World's Greatest Jazz Band, Wild Bill Davison, Mel Torme's big band, and Bob Wilber's Benny Goodman revival big band, plus years as the house sliphorn at Eddie Condon's in New York. John Cocuzzi on piano and vibes (who can also hit the skins) worked with Jim Cullum's Jazz Band ("Live from the Riverwalk Landing"), performances in the D.C. area, and was the piano driving the Big Joe and the Dynafloows jump blues group.

Drummer Kevin Dorn, who is also an alumnus of Cullum's band, has been featured with Vince Giordano's Night-hawks, The Flying Neutrons, Leon Redbone, The Manhattan Rhythm Kings and TV exposure on "After Breakfast" and "Good Day New York." Tom Fischer, doubling on clarinet and sax, teaches jazz clarinet at the University of New Orleans. Well known at festivals and clubs in the Big Easy, his resume' includes recording dates with Al Hirt and Banu Gibson.

Bassist Mike Weatherley has honed his chops on gospel, swing, Cajun and jazz. Mike has been featured in off-

Broadway productions, a gospel series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and performances for Nelson Mandela and the late Pope's anniversary celebration.

Cocuzzi opened the second set, sitting solo at the keyboard, vocalizing and playing a great version of "Embraceable You." Showcasing his blues background, he then asked for—and received—a few "amens" and jumped into a great rendition of "Caldonia," with the rest of the band gradually segueing to a driving finish.

"I Guess I'll have to Change My Plans" and "Write Myself a Letter" followed. Judy Kurtz continued the occasionally interspersed vocals with "Lucky So and So" and a rollicking version of "Them There Eyes." Her background includes many performances at centers, summer stock productions, the Lance Hayward Singers, New Horizons Vocal Jazz Ensemble and Stan Rubin's Swing Orchestra. Her delivery reflects this training with a light jazz touch and just a smidgeon of cabaret style blending nicely.

Ed Polcer has a lengthy and all-encompassing portfolio, of which two experiences of note are outstanding. He was manager and co-producer of Eddie Condon's club in New York for 10 years and performed with the Benny Goodman Sextet.

The set continued with "Careless Love," then two requests "Chicago" and "Cabaret," followed by a stunning jazz version of "America the Beautiful," the writer of which was inspired by Pikes Peak, which dominates the skyline of Colorado Springs. "After You've Gone" closed out the set with the requisite encore of "When You're Smiling," very apropos, as it reflected the mood of the crowd.



Tom Fischer, Mike Weatherley, Judy Kurtz and Kevin Dorn

## Colorado Correspondent

**Jean Reldy: Reminiscences of a jazz patriot**

By Dan Demuth

*Author's note: Jean Reldy, as of this writing, is a friend, historian of both jazz and WWII, jazz writer, jazz booster, and a jazz record and memorabilia collector, all at 87 years young. He has had numerous articles and photos published in jazz publications. In the last few years I have had the pleasure of many great conversations with Jean as they relate to the above topics. At my suggestion he agreed to let me put some of them in writing to share with others.*

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo.—With bullets and shells exploding all around, a young man seeks a safe haven during the Japanese battle against the Americans' push to retake Manila. While running to safety, he is hit in three places with grenade fragments but survives, only to see hundreds of other men, women and children ruthlessly shot and killed by the retreating, angered Japanese soldiers.

It is January 1945. Just three short years earlier, Jean Reldy, a young Frenchman living with his father in the Philippines, was enjoying what had to have been one of the most sublime lifestyles anywhere in the world. Linen suits, broad-brimmed hats, two-hour lunch siestas with evenings alive with clubs, bars and shows. Lazy days enhanced by balmy breezes, a now long-forgotten lifestyle that could be enjoyed by everyone—not reserved for just the rich and famous. In 1941, with the Japanese takeover, Jean becomes an unwilling guest of the Japanese for the duration of the occupation.

His earliest recollections go back to 1924, living in his native France, and listening to English dance bands such as Jack Hylton and Ambrose via the



Photo by Dan Demuth

*Jean Reldy sits in his office in Colorado Springs surrounded by jazz memorabilia.*

BBC. His first record was a copy of Louis Armstrong's "Take It Easy" b/w "Jubilee Stomp" (on the English Parlophone label), where his affinity for jazz and Louis in particular had its start. This record remains in Jean's extensive collection. His serious study of jazz was encouraged upon acquiring a copy of Hugues Panassie's "Le jazz hot" and their paths were to later cross.

He was also able to attend several jam sessions, some organized by the Hot Club de France and featuring such musicians as Django Reinhardt, Frank "Big Boy" Goody, Bill Coleman, Benny Carter and Coleman Hawkins, musicians who were currently touring or living in Europe.

But around 1936, Jean began his Philippine odyssey. A brief interruption in 1939 found him in the French Army in Saigon prior to returning to Manila, during which time he had his first jazz article published—of which he still has a copy.

Curiously, during the occupation, the Japanese allowed the showing of American movies, as well as jazz per-

formances by local musicians. Jean recalls attending a jazz program sponsored by the Red Cross (a black revue named "Drum Boogie"). He recognized Bill Coleman and met up with him afterward at a party that lasted until those fabled wee hours.

Manila was eventually liberated and around 1950 Jean immigrated to the states, living in California, then Texas and finally settling in Colorado Springs. Once in the states, he quickly took advantage of the music available at live performances, while continuing to enhance his burgeoning record and book collection.

In L.A., he met up again with Benny Carter, and as a guest at his home he was surprised to find out that Carter was also an excellent pianist. Guitarist T-Bone Walker was another of the first musicians he recalls meeting, followed shortly by some personal meetings with Duke Ellington, a man he describes as an absolutely extraordinary and beautiful person.

In 1954 he attended a concert in Texas and met Armstrong for the first



time. He relates that the band included Trummy Young, Billy Kyle and Barney Bigard. 1957 found Jean living in Houston. Also there at the time was Lightning Hopkins, to whom Jean gave a guitar as a gift. Arnett Cobb was another acquaintance who frequently had Jean as a house guest.

"Freedom" still had a price at this time for some less-fortunate citizens. One of Jean's earliest recollections has him and a visiting friend from France attending a Lavern Baker performance in Houston. The audience was racially mixed, but with segregated seating—unbeknownst to the new citizen and his guest. With the program ready to begin and some seats closer to the performers in the "colored" section still empty, Jean and his friend attempted to move to them, only to be told by a burly bouncer that "... they weren't allowed to sit with the niggers." But, such a display of intolerance didn't dim his enthusiasm for this country.

He again met up with Ellington, becoming friends with Russell Procope, and recalls going to a night club with Ray Nance and Cat Anderson, who both got up and played trumpet "...beautifully for a couple of hours." Another acquaintance was jazz writer and critic Stanley Dance, whom Jean interviewed in Brownsville, Texas, for publication in the Hot Club Bulletin newsletter. At another of Duke's appearances, Jean met up with Johnny Hodges and Russell Procope, chauffeuring them to the concert. Buster Bailey and Tyree Glenn were also recipients of Jean's "taxi" service when all three attended a private party.

As Jean reminisces, names of other jazz celebs with whom he socialized are casually mentioned—Clark Terry, Jo Jones, orchestra leader Milton Larkin, Ray Bryant (at Arnett Cobb's home), Milt Hinton, Billy Taylor, Ellington introducing Jean to Freddie Jenkins. Trumpeter Willie Cook, who was working in a music store, was another acquaintance.



*Reldy's poster of the Monterey Jazz Festival signed by many famous artists*

Blues are also a part of Jean's life as evidenced by his meeting such luminaries as Cleanhead Vinson, Gatmouth Brown (who became a good friend), John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Big Mama Thornton and Koko Taylor. His tastes defy his age—Roomful of Blues is another favorite.

In 1978, Jean moved to Colorado Springs, promptly joining the Broadmoor Jazz Club and the Pikes Peak Jazz and Swing Society. He has lent his recordings and knowledge of Ellington's music to local radio stations for programs commemorating Duke's birth date. During this period, he again caught up with former Basie sidemen Sweets Edison, Lockjaw Davis, Jimmy Forrest and Al Grey, resulting in another published interview for the Hot Club Jazz Bulletin.

During one of the Dick Gibson jazz parties at the Broadmoor Resort Hotel, Jean and his charming wife, Georgette, hosted at their home, Jackie Williams, George Duvivier, Doc Cheatham, Scott Hamilton, Al Grey and Johnny (Otis) Johnson. Others he met at these parties included Jay McShann, Vic Dickenson, Ruby Braff, Ralph Sutton,

Gus Johnson, Kenny Davern, Joe Newman, Zoot Sims, Teddy Wilson, Peanuts Hucko and Trummy Young. A subsequent interview with Young was published. Gibson also presented a series of programs at the Paramount Theatre in Denver during the winter months, which Jean would attend. He has dozens of cassette tapes recorded at these sessions—perhaps surreptitiously.

During all of this time, Jean kept up a correspondence with Hugues Panassie and in 1974 while in Marseille he was invited to be a house guest of Panassie and his wife, Madeline Gautier. This was just three months before Panassie's death. Later, the Hot Club of France was to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Jean suggested to the Montauban (France) civic leaders that a street be named after Panassie and a plaque placed on the home where Hugues and Madeline had lived for so long. They embraced the idea and invited Jean as the keynote speaker at the dedication.

"This music (jazz) has occupied in my life a tremendous place (and) permitted me to meet with jazz aficionados in the Far East, in Indo-China, in the Philippines, in California, Texas and of course here in Colorado," says Jean.

As would be hoped and expected, Jean has a vast collection of photographs taken during these events, of which he is justifiably proud. He has written for jazz reviews in Spain and in France (the Hot Club newsletter), as well as newsletters in Houston, New Orleans, Denver and Colorado Springs.

As to the word "patriot"—Jean is as serious, conscientious, unabashed and ebullient a patriot of the U.S. as one will ever meet. He will long remember the Japanese occupation and the subsequent liberation by American forces, which ultimately provided him the opportunity to participate in this wonderful amalgamation of talent we call jazz.

Photo by Dan Demuth

## Concert Review

**Benefit for Curtis Salgado a huge success**

By Phil Chesnut

PORTLAND, Ore.—On June 13 bassman and promoter John Lee and I were the guests of **Curtis Salgado** at a very special benefit concert at the Theater of the Clouds in Portland's Rose Garden. The event was a fundraiser to assist Curtis with the massive medical bills incurred while battling the recently diagnosed liver cancer.

With the support of so many friends, fans and artists, the Concert for Curtis was a huge success. Proceeds not only came from tickets, but from a silent auction with some high-dollar prizes that did very well. With the clout of this great blues city, and the help of so many, the benefit was truly worthy of this great bluesman. There have been many other locally-based benefits for Curtis recently, including ones from Seattle, Eugene, Ore., Fremont, Calif., and Omaha, showing how far this master soul man's influence has spread.

I got to meet with Curtis for a short time before the show. He was in great spirits and was a bit taken aback by the huge support shown on this special night. Later, Curtis put on his usual masterful performance, demonstrating why he is truly one of the world's greatest soul singers. As a true showman, Curtis also demonstrated great courage and strength, considering his situation. In response, both fans and artists

*Curtis Salgado and Steve Miller*

showed their love and support to a person who has done so much for both the music and the people.

Opening the show was the Curtis Salgado Band, with a five-piece horn section and four-piece choir, the band showed off their huge sound. Curtis and his crew certainly set the high-spirited, soulful mood for the night. Following this great soul set came the familiar

*Taj Mahal*

### Photos by Phil Chesnut

blues of **Little Charlie & the Nightcats**. Fronted by guitarist Charley Baty and vocalist and harp man Rick Estrin, the band continued the essence of things to come. A loud MTV rock band named **Everclear** played next, which gave me a chance to mingle in the halls, catching up with old Portland friends and checking out the many auction items.

John Belushi's widow, Judith, took the stage next with some heartfelt stories of two friends who came together and how they forever influenced the blues. Following these tales of the REAL Blues Brothers, came—for me—the highlight of the night, **Taj Mahal and the Phantom Blues Band**. Flying in from Europe to perform at this benefit, Taj and band put on a superb performance to the delight of the multitude.

Next to perform was Curtis' old bandmate, **Robert Cray**. Cray demonstrated his own blues-based pop music that has made him popular with more than just blues fans. Following

*Salgado continued on page 17**Little Charlie Baty and Rick Estrin**All-star jam led by Curtis Salgado*

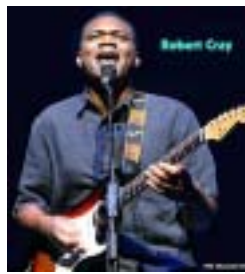


Cray came Northwest rock icon **Steve Miller** and his band. After performing a few Steve Miller gems, Curtis came out to finish this long set. This Miller-Salgado set was truly magical and worth the price of admission by itself.

If that wasn't enough, Cray came back out, along with various other band members, to create one killer all-star jam that lasted way later than the planned time. Although it was only a

Tuesday, no one seemed to care.

Although Curtis still has a tough row to hoe, he can rest assured that he is a man who is greatly loved and appreciated by thousands. At every perfor-



Robert Cray

mance of his I've ever seen, he always took the time to make the point about love and respect towards each other. After my experience at this special event, his healing words and insight carry more weight than ever.

*Phil Chesnut, a former Lincoln resident now living in Seattle, is an occasional contributor to the BMF newsletter.*

## Concert Review

# NJO gathered friends for Latin music fiesta

By Tom Ineck

The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra gathered some of its longtime friends for a Latin music fiesta May 25 at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln.

Entitled "Caliente," the celebrative concert had the big band decked out in tropical shirts for a loose and exotic blend of island rhythms and bravura brass, as the featured guests took the stage in well-rehearsed rotation.

"One Mint Julep" got things off to a refreshing start, with Dave Sharp on alto sax and Bob Krueger on trumpet providing just the right dollop of spice.

Krueger's trumpeter son, Paul, this year's winner of the NJO Young Jazz Artist competition, was featured on three tunes. A mid-tempo rendition of "Just Friends" proved the younger Krueger a mature player with a good sense of articulation, intonation and the value of space. For Gerry Mulligan's bop classic "Line for Lyons," Krueger and tenor saxophonist Paul Haar teamed up with the NJO rhythm section. The smooth blues shuffle "How Sweet It Is," from the pen of Basie favorite Sammy Nestico, displayed Krueger's skill as he alternated between a muted and open horn. NJO saxes joined in with an impressive section soli.

Pianist Broc Hempel lived up to the promise he showed as a teen in the

late 1990s, returning to his hometown for this special appearance. He was featured to good effect on Mark Benson's "The Sapphire Necklace," and Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower," which was further flavored with flutes and clarinets in a Dave Sharp arrangement. A year in Brazil and several years studying with jazz masters James Williams, Harold Mabern, Don Braden and others have given Hempel additional depth, confidence and a feel for Latin rhythms.

In presenting the annual John Tavlin Award to longtime jazz educator Dennis Schneider, Tavlin gave a very personal testimonial to the Lincoln trumpet legend, recalling his own younger days as a student trumpeter under Schneider's tutelage and the teacher's lasting influence on the city's jazz scene.

The first half ended with the lively Brazilian bossa "O Pato." Hempel on piano and Ed Love on soprano sax created the appropriate whimsical tone.

Christ Varga took the spotlight on vibes for a lovely rendition of Horace Silver's "Song for My Father." Varga and the band returned to Brazil for Jobim's standard "Corcovado (Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars)." His background as a multi-percussionist provides Varga with the skills to easily maneuver

through the subtly shifting rhythmic patterns of the bossa nova and samba.

Haar's emotive tenor sax lead voice on Billy Strayhorn's melancholy "Chelsea Bridge" contrasted dramatically with the band's brassy counterpoint. Jobim's "Triste" brought to the stage trombonist Loy Hetrick, who played with the NJO in its infancy nearly 30 years ago, as Hempel provided the solid Brazilian pulse.

Juan Tizol's "Caravan" is a sure-fire crowd pleaser. This version began with a percussion intro from guests Doug Hinrichs, Joey Gulizia and Chris Varga, in addition to solid regular Greg Ahl on traps. Great solo statements by Hetrick and Bob Krueger were followed by a final percussion barrage.

That set up the grand finale, in which 23 musicians crowded the stage for a rousing rendition of Tito Puente's "Machito Forever." An alto saxophone conversation between Dave Sharp and Mark Benson, in which they cleverly seemed to finish each other's thoughts, set the mood for good-natured jousting among 16 horn players, four percussionists, bassist, guitarist and pianist, making for a thrilling conclusion to the 2½ hour concert, attended by nearly 350 people.

## Memorial

*Late bluesman Sam Myers was multi-talented*

By Phil Chesnut

*Author's Note: Sam Myers died July 17 at his home in Dallas, after recent throat cancer surgery. Myers was diagnosed with cancer in February 2005 and had been unable to perform since December 2004. Fronting Anson Funderburgh's band since 1986, Sam was well known for his brilliant harmonica*

*playing and unmistakable vocals. I was very proud to call Sam Myers my friend. I enjoyed many enlightening conversations with this articulate, scholarly man, whether at a blues venue or when I'd call him at his home in Dallas. The blues world will miss Sam Myers for what he gave. I will miss him because he was my friend. What follows is an article that I wrote on Sam last year.*

Texas guitar slinger Anson Funderburgh and his band, the Rockets, are always a huge crowd pleaser during blues festival season. With Anson's superb guitar, along with the tight ensemble playing of the Rockets, this band by itself would be a treat for any blues fan. But the band has a ringer. That ringer is Sam Myers.

Sam Myers is a truly unique personality in the blues community. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Myers is very articulate and scholarly and is known as the "Deacon of the Delta." His mid-set sermons are an experience in themselves. He's always been very free with a story or

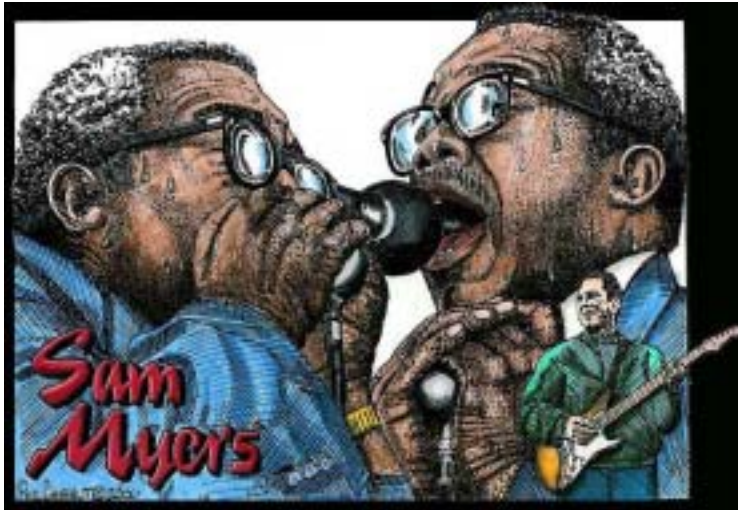


Illustration by Phil Chesnut

with his own wisdom, including his encyclopedic knowledge of the interstate highway system.

Sam's harmonica is a brilliant combination of Chicago and dripping Mississippi mud, which complements the impeccable phrasing of his vocals. At 69, Sam is not only sharp as a tack; he's also one of the truly nice guys in the business.

Born in Laurel, Miss., in 1936, Sam showed his musical talents early, earning him a scholarship to the American Music Conservatory in Chicago. This move was the genesis of his life in the blues. Sam was soon showing his multiple musical talents on the south side with the likes of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Hound Dog Taylor and Robert Jr. Lockwood. It was, however, with the legendary Elmore James that Myers first created blues history. These days, Sam is the frontman, with his finely honed harp style and unmistakable vocals, but back then, he was an equally adept drummer. From 1952 to 1963, through the golden era of Elmore James' career, Myers was his drummer. That's

Sam's smooth shuffles that one hears on virtually all of Elmore James' classic recordings. After Elmore's death in '63, Sam became a true itinerant blues musician and fan favorite on the Chicago and chitlin' circuits, until 1986. That's when Sam met Anson.

Playing the same venue in Jackson, Miss., Anson asked Sam to join his band. Thankfully for the whole blues world,

Sam said yes. This was the beginning of one of the most prolific partnerships in blues history. Since then, Sam and Anson have toured the world many times over, spending 300 days a year on the road. I figure they've done close to 6,000 performances together! And they just keep gettin' better, as Sam, Anson & the Rockets proved last year, winning a Handy Award (their 10th) for best traditional recording for their CD "Which Way Is Texas?" on the Bullseye label.

The Rockets, with a super solid rhythm section, and the hot B3 and piano of John Street, along with Funderburgh's true blue guitar, set the perfect groove for this legendary bluesman, Sam Myers. After a three week tour of Europe, ending in June, this Texas-, Chicago-, Delta-influenced band will begin another American blues festival tour, to the delight of the many blues fans lucky enough to see them. Sam Myers, along with Anson and his Rockets are a testament to how a band can be successful and still true to the blues.

*Jazz on Disc*

# One-name wonder has lost nothing in technique

By Tom Ineck



**ELDAR**  
*Live at the Blue Note*  
 Sony Classical Records

We at the Berman Music Foundation can say we knew Eldar when he had a last name. Since he hit the big time, the young, hyper-virtuosic pianist has dropped the second half of his moniker—Djangirop—presumably for easier audience identification, at the behest of big-label executives.

“Live at the Blue Note” is Eldar’s second release on the Sony Classical imprint. He may have lost a last name, but he has lost nothing in technique or jaw-dropping speed. Recorded here at age 18, he remains as astoundingly precocious as he did at his Topeka Jazz Festival debut in 1998, at age 11.

Backed by longtime sideman Todd Strait on drums and bassist Marco Panascia, Eldar roars out of the gate like a young thoroughbred on the opener, “What Is This Thing Called Love.” His sense of time and touch never falters as he drives the tempo with amazing keyboard pyrotechnics.

In recent years, Eldar has also proven himself an accomplished composer, and there are four such originals here. “Someday” is a gor-

geous ballad that allows the pianist to explore the lush changes for nearly 10 minutes. “Daily Living” bounds lightly over expansive chords, with arpeggios accelerating wildly, then segueing into a drum solo before returning for an exhilarating climax. “Sincerely” is another heart-wrenching ballad distinguished by its stately, classical voicing and sustained waves of sound.

Eldar demonstrates his affinity for percussive, soul-jazz riffs with his lengthy variations on Bobby Timmons’ bluesy “Dat Dere.” He begins “Besame Mucho” at an appropriately dreamy tempo, gradually stepping outside the familiar melody for some extended harmonic improvisations as the trio ratchets the intensity, Strait switching from brushes to sticks and Eldar synchronizing two-fisted block chords. It is an object lesson in dynamics.

“Chronicle” is the most extraordinary example here of Eldar’s composing and playing abilities. Full of complicated stop-time passages and taken at a precarious tempo, it harkens back to some of the more mind-boggling feats of the young Keith Emerson, blurring the lines between classical technique, jazz exploration and rock audacity. Strait also contributes some stunning drum work.

The live setting is given a more informal ambience by the interspersed guest appearances of two trumpeters, Chris Botti on the romantic ballad “You Don’t Know What Love Is” and Roy Hargrove on Monk’s “Straight, No Chaser.” But, let’s face it, the reason we’re here is Eldar, last name or no last name.



**JESSICA WILLIAMS**  
*Billy's Theme*  
 Origin Records

Jessica Williams, the underappreciated piano master of the San Francisco Bay area, has taken a unique approach in her solo tribute to fellow piano giant Dr. Billy Taylor. Rather than simply playing variations on Taylor’s compositions, she has fashioned a very personal homage with eight Taylor-inspired originals.

The stately chords, the gentle stride in the bass register and the gospel feel of “Finally Free” opens the proceedings with the dignity appropriate for Taylor’s own graceful élan. Williams effortlessly varies tempo and mood, telling a story rather than simply going through the motions.

“Billy’s Theme No. 1” is built on a series of chords and modulations reminiscent of Ellington’s orchestral motives. Stretching beyond nine minutes, it allows Williams to range widely in variations before returning to the main theme. “The Soul Doctor” is a bluesy rumination pitting a comping left-hand pattern against searching right-hand flurries. Even more elemental is “Blues for

*Jazz on Disc continued on page 20*



*Jazz on Disc continued from page 19*

BT,” a mid-tempo shuffle in which the left hand remains anchored in the lower regions of the keyboard while the right hand roams freely. Williams sensitively explores the minor-key waltz motif on “Taylor’s Triumph,” with lovely descending lines and occasional dissonant touches that are as refreshing as a summer rainfall.

More than 20 minutes of this generous CD is taken up by “Spontaneous Composition and Improvisation No. 1” and “Spontaneous Composition and Improvisation No. 2.” These tunes are so well conceived, so carefully constructed and so brilliantly developed that it is hard to believe they sprang full-blown in the moment. The closer is “Billy’s Theme No. 2,” a return of the earlier melody and an ideal showcase for Williams’ deft arpeggios and ringing tones at both ends of the keyboard.

To give it the concert hall fidelity that both Taylor and she favor, Williams placed the microphones farther from the piano, allowing the keyboard’s full transient overtones and deep bass tones to be heard.

As Williams says in the liner notes, she intentionally chose a “less is more” approach over the “flying fingers” style of so many contemporary keyboard virtuosi. The dichotomy is immediately apparent when you compare this relaxed, evocative outing with the more frenetic display by the young Eldar Djangirov on his latest recording, reviewed above. Perhaps the realization that less is more is a lesson learned only with age and maturity.

I was first made aware of Williams when she played a trio date at Yoshi’s back in the early 1980s. Despite her relative obscurity outside the Bay area, Williams has nearly 30 CDs still in print. You are advised to check them out.



**JOEY DeFRANCESCO**  
*Organic Vibes*  
Concord Records

“Organic Vibes” gallops out of the gate like a Roman chariot race, with musicians charging ahead while firmly in harness and working together. Joey DeFrancesco’s “The Tackle” is the riotous, swinging opener, an indicator of more good things to come.

Always energized, organist DeFrancesco has rarely had an unsatisfactory recording, but this is one of his best in years. Chalk it up to the inspired collaboration with legendary vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, who is much too rarely recorded in recent years. The light, ringing tone of the vibes seems like the perfect soundmate for the brawnier Hammond B-3. And these two leaders on their respective instruments seem ideally compatible.

Add to the mix Ron Blake on tenor and soprano saxes and flute, guitarist Jake Langley and longtime DeFrancesco sideman drummer Byron Landham, and you have a formidable ensemble of musical giants. The capper is George Coleman, who lends his classic tenor sound to two tracks.

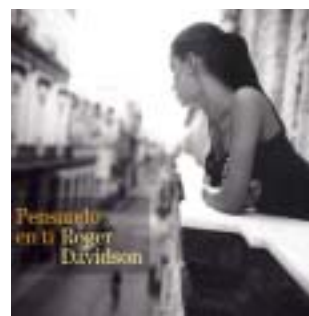
Hutcherson’s familiar melody “Little B’s Poem” is a nice vehicle for the front line of vibes, flute and organ as they leap through the changes with obvious glee. The 65-year-old vibraphonist carefully delineates the beautiful changes of “I Thought about You,” then hands it off to

DeFrancesco, who contributes his usual jaw-dropping variations before returning it to Hutcherson for the conclusion.

Everyone gets a workout on the mid-tempo “Somewhere in the Night,” which is Coleman’s first appearance on the CD. In his solo, he proves he still has a powerful presence at age 71. DeFrancesco follows, in his full Jimmy Smith-style mastery of the keyboard. “Down the Hatch” is bluesy DeFrancesco burner that illustrates the rhythmic rapport that the organist has with Landham after 16 years working together.

The standard “Speak Low” is taken at a frightening clip and serves as a showpiece for Coleman, who deftly maneuvers through the rapid changes. The drummer contributed the romantic ballad “JeNeane’s Dream.” DeFrancesco holds back as Hutcherson and guitarist Langley introduce the waltz-like tune in tandem.

“My Foolish Heart” finds organist and vibraphonist pairing up in an exquisite reading of this evergreen. DeFrancesco is especially sensitive to Hutcherson’s long sustained passages and echoing tone.



**ROGER DAVIDSON**  
*Pensando en ti*  
Soundbrush Records

A classical pianist with an eclectic interest in world music and Latin dance, Roger Davidson brings off this collection of boleros and rumbas with aplomb and sufficient authenticity to silence all doubters.

It certainly helps that Davidson has surrounded himself with superb musicians, including drummer Ignacio Berroa and bassist David Finck, in addition to flutist Marco Granados, guitarist Francisco Navarro, trumpeter Kenny Rampton and percussionist Pernell Suturnino. Together, they create the irresistible rhythmic drive and melodic romanticism inherent in these Latin song forms.

Recorded like a jazz album rather than a classical session, the mood is relaxed and the arrangements are uncomplicated, giving the musicians plenty of space to express themselves. For example, Navarro delivers a stunning guitar solo on the bolero "Somos Novios," by the famous bolero composer Armando Manzanero. "La Gloria Eres Tu," by Jose Antonio

Mendez, has the muted trumpet passing the melody to the flute, then to Davidson at the piano. The flute and guitar improvise the introduction to "Mi Amor."

Osvaldo Farres' "Tres Palabras (Three Words)" was a rare hit for the bolero genre back in 1946, when the English version, retitled "Without You," with lyrics by Ray Gilbert, was sung by Andy Russell in the animated film called "Make Mine Music." Here it is accelerated to a rumba tempo, getting the respectful treatment with Davidson stating the theme, followed by an open trumpet passage and a stately piano solo.

Another classic of the genre is "Mi Dolor," a tango written in 1931 by Carlos Marcucci. Here it is transformed into an intoxicating bolero for

piano and guitar. Both bassist Finck and trumpeter Rampton (on muted horn) take exhilarating solos on the uptempo "Rumba Feliz," with Rampton delivering an especially dazzling statement before Davidson wraps it up with a nice piano solo.

Davidson owes melodic and stylistic allegiance to Bill Evans, expressed here in his version of Armando Manzanero's "Esta Tarde Vi Llover," which Evans recorded in its American version, "Yesterday I Heard the Rain."

Davidson himself penned nine of the 14 tunes here, proving his affinity for the rumba and bolero. The similar song forms provide the perfect vehicles for his lyrical keyboard style.

## Discorama

# Allyson scores a bullseye with latest release

By Butch Berman



**KARRIN ALLYSON**  
**Footprints**  
**Concord Records**

**BULLSEYE!!** That's exactly what this NYC songstress scored with her newest release, "Footprints," on Concord Records. When they first signed her around a decade ago, they knew they had someone special in their midst. With this wonderful new CD, it's apparent that Karrin has become their pre-

cious little gem, and I mean that in a good way, as she deserves all the acclaim she receives.

I've adored her music, and I have enjoyed my schoolboy crush on her since we first met in 1995. You bet she's cute and sexy, but it's her swingin' confidence behind her immense talent that really turned me on the most. Watching her growth musically, on stage and personally, has been a pleasure to behold. Yep, she's that good.

Being a true player and bandleader, besides her lovely voice, has gained Karrin much respect in this biz from her peers as well the multitude of fans the world over. Some have criticized her occasional outspokenness towards her audiences regarding not conversing during performances, but I've always thought she was right on. Some-

times you have to teach people how to listen to jazz, not only for those surrounding these rude-niks but for their own good, as an appreciation of jazz is a proven healing entity worthy of their attention. Karrin has earned her right to preach for what's right, most evident on "Footprints," which I stand on record as stating is her BEST ever, setting her own bar even higher. Now dig this.

You can't go wrong when:

1. You bring on board one of, if not THE savviest jazz singers in its history, Nancy King.

You can't go wrong when:

2. You add the legendary Jon

*Discorama continued on page 22*

*Discorama continued from page 21*

Hendricks to the mix, recreating the lost art of vocalise in the traditions of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, or France's Blue Stars featuring Blossom Dearie.

You can't go wrong when:

3. You use drummer Todd Strait, who has been with Karrin from her early KC days, despite his move to Portland, Ore., and can probably out-swing any of the NYC cats that she could have picked from. Her solidarity with Todd makes for one tight recording unit, as Todd can pick up on all of Ms. Allyson's nuances and take it home in spades. It's a wise choice, indeed, by either Karrin or her astute producers Nick Phillips and partner Bill McGlaughlin.

One of the city's premier bassists, Peter Washington, blends with Strait to lay down a dynamite rhythm section augmented by pianist Bruce Barth, who's really come into his own in the past few years and just totally cooks. Karrin found lyricist Chris Caswell, formerly with Paul Williams, at Feinstein's, a Big Apple cabaret hot spot, and his clever new lyrics to some of the classic tunes chosen for this project are just brilliant.

I may have placed the first track, "Something Worth Waiting For (Con Alma)," in a different slot, as I tend to like the first cut on all albums and CDs to jump out at me a little more instead of being a little laid back. It's still a very pretty number, and all of the rest not just shine brightly, but truly sparkle. Her stuff with Ms. King is picture-perfect throughout. Frank Wess, as always, blows his tenor sax to perfection. His signature tone captivates the songs he's on, as well as his flute

playing on "But I Was Cool."

I'd love to see this whole album done live with this same lineup. It's truly a work of art. Once you pick up "Footprints," you will know you stepped in the right place at the right time. My wife, Grace, said she thought Karrin looked the happiest she could remember on the cover and all the rest of her photographs on the CD jacket. If I had just created a masterpiece like this one, I'd be feeling mighty serene myself. Bravo again.



**LAURA CAVIANI**  
***Going There***  
**Caviani Music**

The piano trio is a delicate thing, kinda like cooking. Too much of this, not enough of that... For all things created to come out right, sometimes it's what you leave out that makes it delicious. That's exactly what composer, arranger and pianist Laura Caviani has accomplished on her new Minneapolis-based CD "Going There."

A stunning photo of Laura graces the cover, and her jazzy, self-produced tunes are as lovely as is she. When I noticed she hired her dear friend and top-notch musician in her own right Karrin Allyson's rhythm section of Topeka-born, Kansas City-bred bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Todd Strait, I knew this puppy would fly. As a matter of fact, it not only flies, it soars.

Caviani cleverly crafts each selection, knowing how to use space and dynamics to perfection. Todd and Bob are stone pros who weave in and out of Laura's nifty keyboarding, and set up a mosaic of sound. They've gigged and recorded with the best—and each other—for decades, and it shows. Their stone-cold accuracy in providing the perfect accompaniment for the wide variety of fine compositions written by Caviani is most admirable. Being on the playing side of the biz for years, I can attest to the fact that no matter how "great" you might be, if your band sucks, you suck. On the other hand, if they cook you feel propelled to excel. In the case of this aforementioned trio, when they're all that hot... look out.

"Going There" isn't a CD that blazes, but of the "cool jazz" variety with just a touch of a wistful melancholy that makes me wonder if Laura was going back somewhere, visiting a musical reflection of days past. My fave track, showing off her well-honed beboppish licks, is "In the Interim," which should have been the lead-off cut, for my money. All other selections are enjoyable listening, with a catchy vocal number entitled "Between the Lines," utilizing a back-up horn section for a nice change of pace.

The band really hits their groove in a zone-like fashion on "The Gilded Cage," which will by then have you, the listener, in the palms of its hands on this rather dreamy, but spirited jazz journey. Matthew Zimmerman's recording capabilities at Wild Sound Studios, in Minneapolis, and Ms. Caviani's production skills, are totally copasetic and in sync. Contact her at [www.lauracaviani.com](http://www.lauracaviani.com) to purchase your own copy of "Going There" and you'll be "where it's at," too.



## ***Letters to the Editor***

# Friends and fans offer greetings and salutations

### **Jazz fan goes “nutty” over Giacomo Gates**

Please send me the newsletter. I didn't know you all existed until I fell nutty over Giacomo Gates and found that he had been in Lincoln just prior to my “going nutty” over him. I am interested in your group. I have long been a jazz and blues fan and collector.

Many thanks,  
*Sherrie (The Land Lady) Gregoy*

### **Crimson Jazz Trio is big hit with BMF reviewer**

Butch & Tom,

We just discovered your kind review of the Crimson Jazz Trio's first CD and wanted to write to thank you for your generosity and support!

We've added the review to our site with a link to your foundation!

Best wishes,  
*Marjorie & CJ3*

PS. CJ3 was in the studio in June to record Volume Two!

**Editor's Note:** *Tom Ineck's review of the Crimson Jazz Trio's debut appeared in the March 2006 issue of the BMF newsletter.*

### **Kudos and best wishes for the future of the BMF**

Hello,

Please let me know when future newsletters are published online. Kudos for a tremendous organization! May your work continue uninterrupted.

*Greg Waits*

**Editor's Note:** *If you or someone you know wants to get on the Berman Music Foundation e-mail list, just send the e-mail address to [bmusicfoundtn@neb.rr.com](mailto:bmusicfoundtn@neb.rr.com).*



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*This is the program for the Russ Long tribute at Jardine's. It showcased 17 original compositions by Long. Organized by bassist Gerald Spait, the tribute featured more than a dozen singers and musicians.*

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