



# Giacomo Gates, consummate artist, appears April 7 with Cartwright Trio

By Tom Ineck . . . . .

The consummate jazz artist is a collection of all that has passed before—in personal experiences and in the history of the art. He also has an ear always open to the present moment.

Singer Giacomo Gates is such an artist. He draws on a blue-collar New England upbringing, a natural inclination to song and a deep respect for the elders of the jazz vocal art form. When he launches his expressive baritone voice in the interpretation of a jazz standard, what comes out is pure Giacomo Gates.

Rather like the smell of grease-paint for the Broadway child actor, Gates grew up with the smell of grease and paint in his nostrils. His father was an auto body-and-fender repairman who operated his own shop in small-town Connecticut.

“My parents were married about eight or nine years before I was born,” Gates recalled in a recent phone interview from his home in the Bridgeport, Conn., area. “When I was going to be born, they built an apartment on the back of the garage. So, I grew up smellin’ thinner.”

Born in 1950, it wasn’t until his 40<sup>th</sup>

Giacomo Gates will perform in Lincoln April 7 at the Melting Spot, 227 N. Ninth St. Joining him will be the Joe Cartwright Trio of Kansas City, Mo., with pianist Joe Cartwright, bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Ray DeMarchi. The performance is presented by the **Berman Music Foundation.**

year that Gates turned his lifelong passion for music into a profession. Before that he had toiled, like his father before him, at a wide variety of blue-collar jobs, including a 14-year stint in Alaska. But the move to music wasn’t as sudden or unpredictable as it sounds.

“That transition was like a return, actually, because as a kid I grew up around my father, who played classical music around the house—records—and he also played the violin. And he played pretty well. Here’s a guy doin’ body and fender work but he played classical violin, and he played one of

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Photo by Rich Hoover

*Singer Giacomo Gates will perform April 7 in Lincoln.*

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## Prez Sez

## Spotlight's on Lincoln music and radio scene

By Butch Berman

## Dear Faithful Readers,

Here's comin' at ya on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of February, my least favorite month. It all started decades ago when, soon after purchasing these ultra-cool blue suede boots for my honey for Valentine's Day...she dumps me. (I probably deserved it, in those days.) Even now, married to a most tolerant and lovely woman, my darling Grace, this month still bugs me. Having to put my ol' 20-year-old doggie, Sherman, to sleep over the weekend didn't help much, either. You canine fanciers, like me, will hopefully dig my obit in this issue. Yeah, there's been some good shit happening too...and even on our home front. Get ready for the local scoop.

I came into contact with two different establishments within the past few weeks that hold great potential for more, and better, live jazz in Lincoln. I got a call from a gentleman named Cal Simmons, who now runs The Melting Spot, at 227 N. Ninth St. in downtown Lincoln, just around the corner from our historic Haymarket District. Before I had a chance to return his call, Grace and I ran into our old friend, Lincoln ombudsman Oscar Harriott, who is a friend and "consulting partner" in making this new African-American venture a success. After groovin' on the serendipitous nature of it all, Oscar got Cal on the cell phone, we met, talked biz, and have two shows booked at this lovely, two-level nightclub.

Local saxophonist Bill Wimmer brought his hot quartet to this club March 10, my 57<sup>th</sup> birthday. On April 7, a star-studded show features East Coast singing sensation Giacomo Gates, backed by the incredible Joe Cartwright Trio from Kansas City, Mo. These cats



Photo by Rich Hoover

Butch Berman (keys), Norman Hedman (conga) and Craig Kingery (bass) jam at Berman Music Foundation headquarters.

stole the show at the Topeka Jazz Festival last Memorial Day weekend, and have several nationally released recording behind them. A SHOW NOT TO BE MISSED!!! More info will be available and updated on our website, so you all can show up and help support big-time jazz here again in Nebraska.

Another beautiful room that runs jazz is also one of Lincoln's best new eateries. The Le Krem Bistro on the second floor of The Creamery Building at 701 P St., right next door to the Burkholder Project, which, among other local artists, houses our Berman Music Foundation office. Anyway, I was eating dinner there one night, loving the ambience and diggin' the cuisine, and I thought to myself, "This reminds me of Zino's (now defunct) in New York City. Wonder if they could use some big-city jazz to augment their already nice local music format?"

I then spoke to owners Kris and Emily Raasch about my ideas, and were

received warmly. We plan to meet soon to discuss plans for doing some jazzy stuff together this summer...which could coincide in positive ways with Jazz In June. Keep your fingers crossed for us all here, as this could turn into, let's say...something cool (homage to June Christy). As always, we'll keep you posted.

In reference to Jazz In June...aside from helping book Alaadeen and his wonderful band here last year, I had nothing at all to do with the musical choices or any of the politics and workings of that event, or this year's proceedings. I and the BMF wholeheartedly urge you to always support live jazz ANYWHERE.

I'm thrilled to be back on the radio again at our community station, KZUM 89.3 FM. I do a show called the "Tuesday Morning Soul Stew" that airs from 10 a.m. to noon every, yup, you guessed it...Tuesday. I figure "soul" music has these three major requirements—stories that convey truth, con-

viction and emotion that allow me to present a wide variety of musical genres. Check me out! I got a surprise call while I was on the air today from Norman Hedman in New York who was listening on his computer via streaming. Just go to [www.kzum.org](http://www.kzum.org) and press the "Play" button on the right.

Since I just mentioned Norman, this is a perfect lead-in to mention his visit here recently. The BMF just celebrated its 11<sup>th</sup> year in show-biz, so we had a great dinner and meeting at the Dish restaurant. Tom Ineck reports on the business side of our meeting in this newsletter. Besides Norman, Dan Demuth of Colorado Springs, Colo., also attended. He and Norman are consultants for our foundation.

Norman also was interviewed by Lincoln musician and deejay Bill Wimmer on his KZUM show, "Jazz Journey," which airs every Tuesday from 1-3 p.m. Norman's still active with his longtime band, Tropique, and gigs regularly with a wide variety of cats up and down the Eastern coastline, and is working on a new solo project to be announced. Norman Hedman and Tropique are in the process of planning their upcoming summer tour of Europe. Also on board for this excursion is saxophonist Chico Freeman and vibraphonist Roy Ayers.

In closing, let me shamelessly mention my slammin', rockin' r&b band The Cronin Brothers, who recently celebrated our 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of giggin'



*Bill Lohrberg (guitar) and Norman Hedman (conga) jam.*

Photo by Rich Hoover

together. We've developed a great, small but fervent cult fan base of folks led by perhaps my best oldest friend, or is it oldest best friend (oops, she wouldn't like that, but you get the picture) Joyce Latrom. She's been a loyal follower of every band I've ever played in, and herself ran the sound and lights and tour biz for one of Lincoln's favorite bands from the old days...Cricket. She's a big ballet supporter as well, working behind the scene of our annual "Nutcracker" Xmas concert at the Lied Center for Performing Arts, and usually chairing the now-consolidated high school reunion extravaganzas ever five years.

Anyway, the Cronins have found a new home to do our stuff in on a regular basis at a lovely new nightspot on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and O streets in downtown Lincoln called Christo's Pub, operated by a very nice fellow named Randy Christo, who really knows how to run a tip-top establishment with great drink selections, real decent bar food and a very pleasant wait staff. They're booking live music pretty much all of the time, and we will try to perform there the first Saturday of the month starting in April. Check our **Updates** page for all kinds of groovy musical adventures.

Swing into spring.

*Butch Berman*



Photo by Rich Hoover

*Dan Demuth, Bill Wimmer and Norman Hedman gather at KZUM Radio studio.*



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**Trustee:** Butch Berman

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

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those ‘crying gypsy’ violins. He didn’t play for a living, but he played very good.”

So early on, Gates was exposed to classical music, as well as the swing music of Basie, Ellington and Cab Calloway. His formal instruction in music began at age 8 on the guitar.

“I took lessons for about seven years. I could play OK, but I couldn’t play what I heard in my head. But I could sing what I heard in my head.”

While still in his teens, he sang for a few wedding gigs with a group of older guys, introducing him to the tunes of Harold Arlen, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart and other composers of the great American songbook. But, after all, Gates was a child of the ‘60s, so he also was hip to the soul music of James Brown, The Four Tops and The Isley Brothers and enjoyed the rock music of The Rolling Stones. Jazz, however, was never far away.

“I would play Dexter Gordon for my friends and they would say, ‘Who’s that? What’s that?’ I’d play Thelonious Monk and they’d look at me like, ‘Whaaa?’ But I was fortunate that I was aware of that music.” For a real education, the young Gates tuned in jazz radio stations based in New York City. Among his favorite singers were the trio of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross and Joe Williams. But his own leap into a jazz vocal career came much later.

“I went to college for about a year, and took civil engineering. Mathematics is not my strong point, so here I am in an engineering school, right? I was putting myself through school, working part-time. I was working really hard to just about pass, and paying for it myself, and I said maybe this is not for me.”

Always interested in the construction of things, he worked as a laborer, paving roads, installing catch basins, laying pipe. He drove everything from

trucks and tractor-trailers to bulldozers and loaders. In 1975, he took his accumulated skills north to Alaska, where oil pipeline construction had created an economic boom unrivaled since the Gold Rush days.

He landed in Fairbanks, but was unable to score a decent job. “It was the tail-end of the boom,” he recalled. So he hung sheetrock, clerked in a liquor store and even worked as a bouncer at an illegal gambling joint.

“It was great. I was 25 years old and I was having a hell of a time. I liked the vibe. It was like the last frontier.”

Eventually, his construction trade skills proved a valuable asset for Gates. He would be flown with a crew to a remote, isolated location, where barges carrying construction materials would be unloaded.

“You’d build a place to live, then you’d build a place to eat, then you’d start to build a road.” He would work wherever he was needed, including the North Slope, the Aleutian Islands and the Brooks Range. Sometimes, the closest settlement was an Eskimo village 80 miles away.

It wasn’t until the mid-1980s that he was introduced to the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival. There he attended a two-week vocal workshop conducted by cabaret singer Chris Calloway, daughter of the legendary bandleader Cab Calloway. Seduced by the possibility of a music career—and tired of life in the Alaskan wilderness—he returned to his home state, closer to the urban environment where his art could flourish.

“It was certainly culture shock, coming back here. It was crowded when I left, and it was more crowded when I got back. I still miss those open spaces and the solitude and the beauty of it (Alaska). But I went back up there to teach in ‘99, and it’s turning into America. It’s not crowded yet, but there’s McDonald’s and Burger King and Subway and 7-Eleven and Cinema 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.”



Photo by Rich Hoover

Encouraged by educator and jazz writer Grover Sales, Gates began to test the waters, singing locally and regionally. Sales, who died in 2004, was so influential in his support that Gates dedicated his most recent release, “Centerpiece,” to his memory.

“I was just trying to get heard. I made my own little cassette because you had to have a demo to give people.”

DMP Records liked Gates well enough to release his first recording, 1995’s “Blues Skies,” which was produced by Helen Keane, best known for her long tenure with pianist Bill Evans. The CD featured the reed virtuoso Jerome Richardson and the impressive rhythm section of pianist Harold Danko, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Akira Tana and accurately reflected the singer’s penchant for the hip, relaxed vocal style of Jon Hendricks and Eddie Jefferson, which few other singers are emulating. Gates even contributed lyrics to Monk’s “Five Spot Blues,” retitled “Five Cooper Square.” Also displaying his talent for vocalese and mimicking the sound of instruments, it was an impressive debut.

“That helped me get a little more recognition, and I started to travel a little bit, do some festivals.” A second recording, “Fly Rite,” followed in 1998 on



*Singer Giacomo Gates (above) will perform April 7 in Lincoln, Neb. He will be accompanied by (clockwise from left) pianist Joe Cartwright, drummer Ray DeMarchi and bassist Gerald Spaits.*



*Photos by Rich Hoover*

Sharp Nine Records. Again he was in very good company, backed by pianist David Hazeltine, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Ben Riley, with guest soloist Jim Rotondi on trumpet and flugelhorn. The repertoire drew heavily on standards and featured a Gates lyric to Lee Morgan's "Speedball."

The Origin label released "Centerpiece" in 2004. Harold Danko is back on piano, along with bassist Ray Drummond, drummer Greg Bandy, guitarist Vic Juris and saxophonist Vincent Herring. Its song list is a similar mix of familiar standards—"Summertime," "All of Me," "Route 66"—and more obscure gems, including "I Told You I Love You, Now Get Out," "Scotch and Soda," and King Pleasure's "Swan Song," a lyrical take on Gene Ammons' "Hittin' the Jug." Gates contributed new lyrics for "Milestones."

Gates also is featured prominently on organist Eddie Landsberg's 2002 release "Remembering Eddie Jefferson," even penning the opening track, "Mr. Jefferson."

Modest and cautious by nature,

Gates downplays his relatively rapid rise to success since his decision to go professional in 1990.

"I'm still trying to make something happen after 15 years, 16 years," he says. "It doesn't feel that quickly, but then again, when you're in it, you can't tell."

Gates is quick to recognize his influences and his respect for those who have gone before him. He recites a long litany of the great vocalists and instrumental "vocalizers."

"I'm certainly a Frank Sinatra fan, a great singer. I'm certainly a Dean Martin fan. Who's more relaxed and takes himself less seriously than Dean Martin? That's why he's fun, because he's just havin' a good time. I like Sammy Davis Jr., great pipes. I like Betty Carter and I like Carmen McRae, and I like Mose Allison and Nat Cole. I'm certainly influenced by Lambert,

Hendricks and Ross and Eddie Jefferson, Joe Williams, Joe Carroll, and Babs Gonzales, a great scat singer. I also think I'm influenced by the horn players who 'sang,' like Lester Young and Ben Webster and Stan Getz. Lou Donaldson is right out of Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt. They're very lyrical players. When I listen to somebody like Lou or Dexter (Gordon), I can hear the words. Moody, Miles is very lyrical, Chet Baker. I don't sing like Chet Baker, but I hope I'm influenced by him."

His ability to write vocalese—note-perfect and rhythmically faithful lyrics to difficult instrumental pieces often written many years before—is no mystery to Gates. He simply combines his vocal tendencies with his instrumental background. With near-missionary zeal, he explained the process.

"When I heard Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, when I heard Eddie Jefferson, to me they were singers who were in the band. They weren't in front of the band. They were in the band. That's what made it happen for me. And, you could tell the musicians were having a good time. The singer was having a good time. When you listened to that music, you couldn't help but have a good time.

"They weren't just singing rhythmically flat-footed melodies. They were singing the triplets and the dotted quarters, and there was a rhythmic pulse to their singing, and the story was always a little more involved than just the lyric to the chorus. I'm a fan of this music, so that's how I ended up doing it."

What drew him most to the sound of the jazz masters was the sound of an individual, a unique personality finding expression in song, whether as an instrumentalist or a vocalist. Whether a listener understands music theory is irrelevant.

"The people who don't know the theory of it still know what they like and know what they hear. I never play an

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audience cheap. Audiences know what they're listening to."

Gates has two recording projects in the works. One is a Gershwin tribute with a piano trio led by former Nebraskan Rex Cadwallader, now living in Connecticut. For many years a contributor of compositions to the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra's repertoire, Cadwallader returned in 2005 to perform with the NJO. Gates expects his next CD as a leader to see the light of day by the end of the year. As planned, it will feature a piano trio, plus three of four horns.

Like many jazz artists as his level of ability, Gates also is in demand as an educator, dividing his time between Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., the Hartford Conservatory of Music and New Haven's Neighborhood Music School. While on the road, he also conducts workshops and clinics. Students and school administrators appreciate the fact that he's a working instructor, but Gates says he also benefits from teaching.

"Every time I work with someone, I get something out of what they're doing, and I'm realizing something else myself."



*Giacomo Gates*

Photo Courtesy of Giacomo Gates



Photo by Rich Hoover

*Berman Music Foundation gathers for annual meeting at Dish.*

## *Annual Meeting*

# *BMF turns focus to local scene in 2006*

*By Tom Ineck*

When the **Berman Music Foundation** gathered to conduct its annual meeting Jan. 31 at the Dish restaurant in downtown Lincoln, it was with a cautiously optimistic outlook for the coming year.

Despite its business meeting agenda, the occasion also brought together many old-time friends and associates to celebrate the BMF's many accomplishments in its 11-year history. Musician and foundation consultant Norman Hedman had recently arrived from his home in New York City, and consultant Dan Demuth had driven from his home in Colorado Springs, Colo. Also on hand were BMF president Butch Berman and his wife and advisor, Grace Sankey Berman; assistant Ruthann Nahorny; photographer Rich Hoover; attorney Tony Rager; and yours truly—a writer, editor and website manager for the foundation.

Without dampening the celebrative mood, Rager said the BMF would continue to produce the foundation's online newsletter (currently publishing three or four times a year), but would turn its attention and financial focus more exclusively toward

working with local jazz artists and local venues, including two recent additions to the Lincoln scene—La Krem Bistro and The Melting Spot.

Aside from those plans, Rager emphasized, there are no large financial commitments in the offing for the coming year, a year of retrenchment in the hopes of brighter days ahead, as the BMF builds its asset base.

The foundation already has done much in its first 11 years. What follows is a partial list of jazz artists the BMF has presented in Lincoln since its inception in March 1995: singer Karrin Allyson, Claude "Fiddler" Williams, the Quintet of the Hot Club of San Francisco, saxophonist Greg Abate, trumpeter Claudio Roditi, singer Kevin Mahogany, the Kenny Barron Trio, saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Christian McBride, saxophonist Benny Waters, pianist Jane Jarvis, singer-flutist Andrienne Wilson, Norman Hedman's Tropique, the Mingus Big Band, Bobby Watson and Horizon, pianist Eldar Djangirov, pianist Monty Alexander, the George Cables Trio, singer Sheila Jordan, bassist Cameron Brown, and guitarist Jerry Hahn.

Concert Review

# Divine divas double the delight in recent KC visit

By Butch Berman

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—I don't know how I first discovered Carmen Lundy, but knew I dug her and had a few of her CDs. While I was in New York City, Fred Cohen, proprietor of my favorite East Coast record store, The Jazz Record Center, when asked if Grace and I should catch George Coleman at Smoke or Carmen Lundy at the now-defunct La Jazz au Bar, proclaimed, "Carmen Lundy's in town? She doesn't play here enough. You must not miss her," or words to that effect. We went. We were floored, totally mesmerized. Now I own ALL of her stuff, and hope to catch her stunning show again.

On the other hand, I grew up in the early days of Steve Allen, Jack Paar and Johnny Carson, so Marilyn Maye was no secret to me. However, being a youngster, regardless of how precocious I was, I really couldn't appreciate her greatness until I was ready to embrace jazz and the fine art of really knowing how to sing and entertain an audience, whether it's "old school," "new school" or no school at all. Early recordings with her fabulous pianist husband, the late Sammy Tucker, are simply splendid, timeless music by true professionals. Now back to her early roots in KC, I had yet to catch her magic, knowing this was also 40-some years later.

Moving ahead to the present...I flipped when I checked out the summer jazz calendar in a fine jazz rag from KC called JAM (Jazz Ambassadors Magazine) and saw that performing back-to-back in my current two most frequented KC jazz night



Marilyn Maye and Butch Berman embrace at Jardine's in Kansas City.

Photo by Grace Sankey Berman

clubs, Jardine's and The Blue Room, were Ms. Maye and Ms. Lundy. I was truly in jazz heaven, and quivered in anticipation approaching that magical weekend awaiting us. Let me tell you...all expectations were met in spades and then some. It was perhaps my all-time most memorable weekend in KC, and we're talking decades here.

First of all, I've always enjoyed Jardine's at 4536 Main St. Because Grace and I always stay at the Embassy Suites in KC's busy Westport area, Jardine's is a mere 10-minute walk to its front door. We're semi-regulars there, and were greeted warmly by Armida Orozco, their singer-manager, and later met Pat Hanrahan, who bought an interest in the club in November 2004.

When Ms. Maye does her incredible shows there, she turns the place into a mini KC version of the best NYC cabaret night clubs. A black curtain shrouds the stage, making the perfect backdrop for an intimate evening of entertainment. All

the musicians were in tuxes and her pinpoint lighting spotlights her beautifully. They even lock the front door after each sold-out crowd arrives to insure total attention upon the artists on stage. Even the wait crew serving the yummy menu items and drinks never get in the way or disrupt the performances. You get the picture...a great scene to appreciate one of the all-time pros in showbiz, and what a talent she is. Now in her late 70s, Marilyn is still a very classy, stunning woman dressed to the nines and ready to make you forget any troubles you may have brought with you to her concerts.

Marilyn did two separate shows nightly, one comprising her jazz roots with well chosen standards and ballads, and the other a very special tribute to the late, great Ray Charles, which is the set we chose to attend. After a rousing "Let the Good Times Roll," with a clever change of the original lyrics redone by herself to pay further homage to Mr. C., she tackled his songbook with loving enthusiasm, done in the style she's famous for. Every selection from, of course, "Georgia on My Mind" to more obscure tunes like "Busted" held the audience in rapt attention.

Her back-up musicians, led by the always-fabulous pianist, singer and arranger from NYC, Billy Stritch (on loan from Liza Minnelli), were perfectly on the mark. KC's own best of the best were as always...the best—Gerald Spaits on bass (always a gentleman with superb chops and intonation), Rod Fleeman on guitar

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*Divas continued from page 7*

(always a trip to hear and watch...this may have been the wildest gig I've ever heard him on, and he's always ON) and former KC homeboy, now transplanted to—I think—Ohio, sax-man Hal Melia. I'd never caught his playing before, and he was terrific on sax, flute and back-up vocals. Marilyn's long-time drummer, Jim Eklof of Des Moines, was on hand to propel this stellar band to lofty heights behind the main star of the evening, Marilyn Maye.

After a well-deserved standing ovation, a long line formed at the rear of the club for all of the folks in attendance to meet and greet her. Gerald led me and Grace to the head of the line to do our thing, and she was such a lady, and a total doll to boot, autographing a very old LP she was on before her career took off, called "Cool Sounds from Kansas City" on the Modern Jazz Workshop label. I had found it at the now-defunct Music Exchange record store in KC.

After the gig, I picked up her newest CD, called "Maye Sings Ray," recorded at Ron Ubel's Soundtrek Studios, and I highly recommend it to all Maye and Ray fans. You can hear the same killer band, along with help from Todd Strait, Danny Embrey, Everette DeVan, Matt Hopper and Kevin Frazee. To contact Ms. Maye for additional recordings, etc., you may call her at (816) 591-1114.

Still reeling from the feeling of the night before, Grace and I headed

out to our other fave jazz venue, The Blue Room, located in Kansas City's 18<sup>th</sup> & Vine Historic District. It would take pretty big shoes to fill for any performer to "follow" Ms. Maye, but Carmen Lundy in not just "any" performer. We were in for another tremendous night of magic. Lucky,



*Carmen Lundy and Grace Sankey Berman meet in KC.*

lucky us.

The Blue Room, run by another fine KC cat, saxophonist Gerald Dunn, also took good care of us. A perfect table for two right in front of their always well-tuned piano, and just underneath the microphone soon to be used to perfection by the main event, vocalist extraordinaire Carmen Lundy.

I knew we were in for a good night when Carmen strolled on stage, looking lovely as always, so poised and confident, and asked the not-yet-filled-to-capacity audience who owned CDs or records by her. One dude said he had two. She approached me with the same question to which I replied..."Uh...all of them?" Looking warmly into my eyes, she clasped my hand, smiled that smile of hers, turned to her band and proceeded to blow everybody's mind within moments of hearing her spellbinding golden voice.

Also a professional painter of merit, she projects each song she writes and sings like separate portraits, which change shape, evolve

and envelope you in a swirl of wonderment each time you're fortunate enough to hear her live. Choosing not to cover any standards anymore, she's now creating them, writing stark, thoughtful important stories through song that literally take you to other places in your mind. Akin at times to hearing the departed Betty Carter and Shirley Horn, you sometimes forget to breathe as their hypnotic zones of perfection overwhelm you. Carmen, singing you her life, is no exception...a true renaissance woman with an immense strength and divine spirituality.

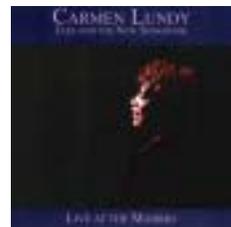
Her musical journey has carried her through 30 years of growth, hard work and enchantment. This current tour, called "Carmen Lundy: Jazz and the New Songbook," covers the best of her efforts and is now available on CD and DVD. Her sets from her Los Angeles show, "Live at the Madrid," was recorded Feb. 18, 2005, at the Madrid Theatre with a host of today's best jazz cats in the biz who have been down these same roads with her for all those years. Her brother, bassist Curtis Lundy, Bobby Watson, Victor Lewis, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, Mayra Casales, Steve Turre, Billy Childs and Rober Glasper, to name a few, were on hand, as well as bass player Kenny Davis, who was with her that memorable night in KC.

A new pianist, Jesse McBride, who Carmen recently discovered,

Photo by Butch Berman



*Marilyn Maye's CD "Maye Sings Ray"*



*Carmen Lundy's CD "Live at the Madrid"*

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*Divas continued from page 8*

was making his debut that evening in KC. An exciting young talent, who's moving from Houston to the "Big Apple" after losing his home in New Orleans, thanks to Hurricane Katrina, will be a cat to watch. Local drummer Michael Warren, I thought, did a great job in handling her sophisticated catalogue of material, most of which is on the aforementioned new releases. Obviously, in not having her own band with her that night, the evening had a couple of minor flaws, but you would've had to be a player to notice. She led the band through some tricky waters and kept afloat, sounding just as tight and solid as when I first saw her in NYC. So soulful, totally real, and passionate, with a sly, sexy demeanor that captures you every second she's on stage, yet never denies you the truth she generates.

We finally got to meet her after the amazing second set that convinced any first-time Carmen Lundy patron how unforgettable she is. It was no surprise to us that she came on so sweet, friendly and willing to take the time to "hang" with her adoring fans. We hope to catch her act for a third time in May, when she takes the tour to one of the best jazz venues in the United States, Yoshi's in Oakland, Calif. We hope to do a long interview with Carmen for the summer edition of *Jazz*. Even after 30 years, Carmen Lundy still isn't a household name, but I feel she is on the verge of becoming one of the all-time masters of her craft. Anybody that has experienced her heartwarming and thrilling artistic charms will testify to that.

KC is always a first class musical adventure destination, but it will be awhile before we'll be able to "get off" like the weekend we were blown away by Marilyn Maye and Carmen Lundy. Praise the Lord.

## Concert Review

# Newell and Basile help create communal ambience with NJO

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—The performance of Jan. 18 at P.O. Pears in downtown Lincoln exuded the fraternal mood of a high school reunion or a homecoming of old companions.

The occasion was the return to Nebraska of saxophonists Jeff Newell and Frank Basile, each of which has gone his separate way in seeking jazz opportunities beyond their home state. In their younger days, each had performed with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra, a venerable jazz ensemble with a 30-year history and a considerable roster of illustrious alumni.

Newell and Basile had appeared the previous night as guest artists with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra. But this more informal small-group encounter at P.O. Pears allowed them to stretch out and blow. Along for the righteous ride were guitarist Pete Bouffard, bassist Rusty White and drummer Joey Gulizia, all longtime jazz players in the Lincoln and Omaha areas.

Newell's edgy alto excursions contrasted nicely with Basile's brawny baritone. Both are generous players who exhibited an instant camaraderie with each other and the rest of the band.

The quintet took "It Could Happen to You" at a medium tempo and made it swing. Joe Henderson's samba "Recorda Me" received the appropriately percussive treatment, with White slapping the bass strings with gusto. The band applied a New Orleans-style, second-line rhythm to Juan Tizol's "Caravan." Playing his guitar synthesizer, Bouffard created a lush keyboard sound, Basile took a

driving baritone solo, and Gulizia laid down a percussion tour de force. His alto sax lines leaping and spiraling, Newell quoted "Sweet Georgia Brown" as he explored the horn's lower range.

Newell stated the familiar melody on "Body and Soul," with Basile answering on the bridge, a reprise of the melody and a baritone solo. Newell and Bouffard took solos before Newell returned to the melody and a soaring cadenza. "Whispering," also known in bop circles as "Groovin' High," finished the first set with an alto-baritone workout.

"Autumn Leaves" featured a Newell alto solo that cleverly quoted "Softly as In a Morning Sunrise." The dual horns stated the funky melody of Charles Mingus' "Nostalgia in Times Square," setting up solos for Newell, Basile, Bouffard and White, whose playing was especially soulful.

Liz Love joined the band on alto sax for a couple of tunes, including "St. Thomas," the Sonny Rollins calypso, with Bouffard creating the sound of steel drums on the guitar synth. With a three-sax front line, the band played Monk's "Straight, No Chaser," with bassist John Kotchian of Omaha capably sitting in for White.

Both musicians and audience members enjoyed a communal comfort level that is rarely achieved in the concert hall. As always, the ambience proved that a small club still is the best venue for jazz expression and interaction.

## Concert Review

*Stefon Harris & Blackout among today's best*

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—The best of the new youth movement in jazz was on display Feb. 23 during a performance by Stefon Harris and Blackout at the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln. Several hundred people were in attendance.

Still in his early 30s, Harris already has fronted five recordings on the renowned Blue Note label, touring relentlessly behind each. In the process, he has assembled a solid band of like-minded individuals who are willing and able to go wherever their fearless leader takes them. The current lineup of Blackout includes Harris on vibes and marimba; Casey Benjamin on alto sax; Marc Cary on keyboards; and the phenomenal drummer Terreon Gully. Substituting for bassist Darryl Hall at the Lincoln show was a very capable player from Kansas City.

Inevitably, most of the evening's repertoire was drawn from Harris' latest recording "Evolution," perhaps his best yet. But, as the leader explained, much was left to chance and the whims of the highly skilled jazz improviser. The opener seemed to rise out of nothingness, with Harris alternating between vibes and marimba for sonic effect. The free-form exploration finally evolved into the mournful melody of the gospel classic "(Sometime I Feel Like a) Motherless Child."

From the new CD came "Blackout," an uptempo, ever-shifting tour de force that pitted the polyrhythmic Gully against the flying mallets of Harris before segueing into an electronic keyboard



*Stefon Harris juggles mallets.*

excursion by Cary and an alto solo by Benjamin, all culminating in a flashy finale.

Harris introduced Sting's haunting waltz "Until" by saying he first heard it while the credits for the film "Kate and Leopold" were rolling. Not impressed with the "girl" movie, he was captivated by the tune, and it showed in his arrangement. Harris played the theme alone—again working dexterously between the vibes and the warmer, woody-sounding marimba. Cary then picked up the theme on piano, with subsequent solo statements by Benjamin and the bass player before returning for another round by Harris on vibes.

To illustrate the band's willingness to tackle any tune—no matter how mundane—Harris and company played variations on "Happy Birthday." Cary began with cascading chords, then the bass set a pulsing riff, and Gully entered using



*"Evolution" is the latest release by Stefon Harris & Blackout.*

mallets. Finally Harris joined the fray on vibes before turning it over to Benjamin, who used (but never overused) an array of electronic echo effects.

Monk's "I Mean You" was an excellent vehicle for Harris' virtuosity. Cary also proved a superb composer, contributing "The Afterthought." The beautiful ballad "The Lost Ones" got a finely tempered treatment, with Cary opening on electronic keys, and Benjamin soloing on alto sax (with effects), then switching to an electronic keyboard while doubling his solo with soaring, wordless vocals.

The band finished on a high note with "King Tut's Strut," a complex construction on which Harris delivered a driving solo on marimba. Despite the high level of musical difficulty, the band managed to infuse everything it played with soulfulness and crowd-pleasing passion, as well as astounding technique.

*Memorial***“Sherman, the Boy Wonder,” R.I.P.***By Butch Berman*

It's been so long, it's hard to remember...but I think I first met Sherman, an English Springer spaniel, unclaimed lost dog, at the Lincoln Humane Society around 1992

I was a suffering co-dependant in a relationship turning lousy, trying to find a pet for the woman's ungrateful pre-adolescent daughter. The little girl spotted Sherman first, and ended up taking him home. He was three and a half years old, and probably was lost on a hunt, perhaps being gun-shy or, like me, detesting hunters and hunting for the sheer sport of it. How would they like their heads mounted up on a wall? (I'm getting off the track here.)

He was a cute guy, but seemed scared of everything. Whenever he got upset, he'd roll over and pee on himself. Needless to say, Sherman's tenure with this mother-daughter team was pretty much doomed from the start. Since he and my main side-dog, Ben, got along, I kinda kidnapped Sherman from their back yard not long after I get wise myself and split the scene...and the rest, as they say, is history.

Shermy was a handful in the early days. He'd follow his nose, or be off after a rabbit or squirrel, and lose his way from where he started. Neighbors would always bring him over saying he appeared confused, but happy, hanging out in their yards, even if it was a block or so away. I think he might have been a horse in his prior life, as he could run like the wind, so swift and graceful...but usually end up in a pickle somehow. We had our moments, but certainly endured many wonderful years. Like the Alfred E. Newman of dogs, Sherman's "What,

*“Sherman, the Boy Wonder”*

me worry?” attitude is what kept him aloft for so long. Sherman's way, Sherman's couch, Sherman's house, Sherman's master...you get the picture. God bless him.

When I acquired Toby (*see his obit in the December 2004 newsletter*) from yet another girlfriend du jour who didn't last long, and literally flew the coop, the feared pack of Ben, Sherman and Toby was born, much to the chagrin of many undeserving puppies and their owners at our beloved dog run here in Lincoln. Sherman would pick out the intended victim for the day, bark, and Ben and Toby would run in and cause havoc like a scene out of a WWE wrestling event. I once had to give Sherman a kick to the ribs to defuse a situation that could have turned catastrophic. I felt guilty about that for years, but in the pre- “Dog Whisperer” days, I had to get as down and dirty as the “boys.”

Moving ahead to now, I figured Sherman to be approaching 20 years of age. That's an incredible number for most dogs, and especially for large guys like him (a 70-pounder, at least).

That translates to 140 years in human terms. Pretty fucking amazing, if you ask me (excuse my “French”). My most marvelous veterinarian, Dr. Stan Cassel, who's been taking care of my animals for nearly 30 years, said Sherman was the healthiest and oldest dog he'd ever dealt with. His blood work, done just weeks before he passed, was perfect for a dog of any age. Unfortunately, besides his hearing and seeing abilities becoming a bit compromised, the muscles in his rear legs were going fast. A Springer with no spring left is a sad situation. He just couldn't jump in the car anymore, or hop on the couch and bed to keep me company or, lately, just get up off the floor. Stairs were really becoming problematic, and he'd often fall, usually breaking my heart, thankfully, rather than his weakening bones.

When I heard him crying, stuck in the dog-door passageway trying to get back in the house in sub-zero weather, I knew it was time. If I hadn't been home when that happened, it could have been a horrible end to a great dog deserving a much more dignified journey to doggie heaven. Speaking of which...I feel that my old buddy may be heading back to this planet on two legs for a change. But for a short time I hope that Benny, Toby and now sweet Sherman are having a good old time somewhere out there. In closing, let me quote my long time ping-pong pal, artist and musician Brad Krieger, who said of Sherman's departure, “All the dogs up there must be thinking to themselves...’Oh no...there's a THIRD one.’”

R.I.P., big guy.

Photo by Butch Berman

*Tomfoolery***Non-jazz artists shed light on the creative process**

By Tom Ineck

Music artists not usually associated with jazz can occasionally shed significant light on the improvisational art form that we usually label “jazz.” This certain something is hard to define, but it usually contains elements of risk, adventure and openness to serendipity. Oh yes, it also requires a technical mastery of one’s chosen instrument.

In recent months, I witnessed two non-jazz performances in Lincoln, Nebraska, that rose to that level of excitement, unpredictability and virtuosity. Bluegrass guitarist Mike Marshall and fiddler Darol Anger appeared March 1 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts with young firebrand Jake Shimabukuro, a 29-year-old Hawaiian whose chosen instrument just happens to be his native ukulele. Back on Nov. 13, multi-instrumentalist David Lindley performed a solo concert at the venerable Zoo Bar.

These shows, by the way, had at least one thing in common with most jazz concerts. They were performed on acoustic instruments, giving the proceedings a distinctly organic sound and, not coincidentally, an intimate feel for artists and audiences alike. Shimabukuro played to more than 1,000 people and Lindley to no more than a couple hundred.

**Shimabukuro, Marshall and Anger**

With their veteran chops and maturity, Marshall and Anger provided a nice balance to Shimabukuro’s impetuous energy and precocious technique. Marshall, switching from mandolin to guitar to mandocello, helped to keep the sound balanced, too, by offsetting the uke’s characteristically thin, high-register tone. Similarly, Anger alternated between standard violin and a low-reg-

ister, cello-toned fiddle.

Longtime friends and recording colleagues, the duo began the concert with a varied 45-minute set that included the old ballad “Down in the Willow Garden,” a Brazilian choro, an Anger composition based on Bach’s 5<sup>th</sup> Suite for Cello, and the Marshall-penned tunes “Gator Strut” and “Borealis.” The rapport that Marshall and Anger have gained from more than 25 years of playing together was evident in their subtle cues and call-and-response interplay.

After intermission, Shimabukuro took the stage alone and launched into a respectfully tender reading of Schubert’s “Ave Maria,” immediately showcasing his amazing classical technique on the four-stringed instrument usually associated with the strumming of simple chords, ala Tiny Tim. But the young Hawaiian’s bag of tricks goes way beyond the classics. During an original tune called “Me and Shirley T.,” he broke into a rapid-fire quote from Deep Purple’s “Smoke on the Water.”

“Let’s Dance,” another original tune, had Shimabukuro showing off his faultless hammer-on technique and flamenco flourishes. He displayed super-fast finger picking on “Orange World,” inspired by his tours with banjo virtuoso Bela Fleck. A faithful rendition of “Over the Rainbow” was followed by “3<sup>rd</sup> Stream,” on which he alternated single-note runs and rhythmic chording patterns with amazing dexterity.

The jazz esthetic finally emerged full-blown when the trio joined forces, beginning with Wayne Shorter’s “Footprints,” with Marshall on mandocello and Anger on that odd “fiddle-cello.” The effect was that of a full-bodied string ensemble. With its complex chord progression and tricky timing, Chick

Corea’s “Spain” was a perfect platform for the trio’s sensitive jazz interplay. They finished off with a lovely version of George Harrison’s “While My Guitar Gently Weeps.”

It was not your typical concert—of any genre—but instead stretched the boundaries of genre and made pigeon-holes irrelevant.

**David Lindley**

Likewise, Lindley’s performance defied category. Always an iconoclast, he remains youthful despite his 60-plus years. He still wears his hair long (with muttonchops) and dons outrageous polyester tropical shirts for every appearance. More important, his approach to music remains adventurous, ranging from blues and roots rock to more the exotic song forms of the Middle East.

In fitting deference to the catastrophe visited on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, Lindley began and ended with Crescent City classics. He played lap-steel guitar on the bluesy opener, Professor Longhair’s “Her Mind Is Gone.” Also among the first set’s more interesting offerings were Steve Earle’s “Copperhead Road,” Bruce Springsteen’s “Brothers Under the Bridge,” which was culled from an obscure anthology of the Boss’s music, and “Seminole Bingo,” by Warren Zevon, with whom Lindley toured and recorded for many years.

Switching to the bouzouki, a stringed instrument popular in traditional Irish and Greek music, Lindley played the soulful “Soul of a Man,” written by Blind Willie Johnson. Supposedly inspired by the blues boogie style of John

*Lindley continued on page 13*

*Jazz on Disc*

# McNeil's pianoless quartet is a template for creativity

By Tom Ineck



**JOHN McNEIL**  
*East Coast Cool*  
OmniTone

Trumpeter John McNeil's latest OmniTone recording did not arise suddenly from a whim to mimic the legendary pianoless quartet of Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker, though the instrumentation is the same. Never interested in merely duplicating someone else's sound, McNeil used the format as a template for his typically uncompromising, contemporary approach.

It took nearly a decade to bring the project to fruition. Soon after Mulligan's death in 1996, McNeil was asked to arrange some of the baritone saxophonist's compositions for a tribute concert. In the process, he began

to imagine the possibilities of updating the sound with his own tunes and his own rhythm section. Finally, in January 2004, McNeil went into the studio with baritone saxophonist Allan Chase, bassist John Hebert and drummer Matt Wilson. The result, "East Coast Cool," contains faint echoes of Mulligan and Baker's so-called "West Coast Cool" style, while charting a new and exciting musical terrain.

The very nature of the pianoless quartet forces the players to create their own harmonic language, since they can't simply rely on the keys to establish a rich harmonic backdrop for their solo improvisations. This is where McNeil and company excel—working out harmonies with great discipline and empathy, or dispensing with them entirely, venturing forth with call-and-response phrases, occasionally swerving dangerously into dark side streets and back alleys, but always arriving at their destination intact.

So it is with "Deadline," the careening opener that quickly sets the pace and tone with stop-time precision, Wilson's inventive rhythmic punctuation and deft dialogue between McNeil and

Chase. "A Time to Go" is more reflective, almost introspective, and "Brother Frank" has an ominous loping gait, aided by Hebert's reliable walking bass line.

Bernie Miller's "Bernie's Tune," one of the rare tunes not written by McNeil, gets an off-kilter treatment that seems to alternately slow down and accelerate as Chase and McNeil trade solo statements. Wilson's spirited drumming is especially impressive here.

"Delusions" is a classic McNeil invention, simultaneously enticing and baffling the listener with its frantic changes. "Wanwood," on the other hand, is taken at a somber tempo that evokes sadness. On "Internal Hurdles," Wilson directs the trumpet-sax interplay like a veteran cop directing traffic in downtown Manhattan.

Don't try to dance to "Waltz Helios," a rhythmically precarious venture. "Schoenberg's Piano Concerto" bears little resemblance to the original, but illustrates McNeil's ability to adapt the concepts of other composers to his own unique sound.

East, west, north or south, this is cool.

*Continued on page 14*

*Lindley continued from page 12*

Lee Hooker was Lindley's hilarious "When a Guy Gets Boobs," a self-effacing, unflattering self-portrait of a man gradually turning into his father.

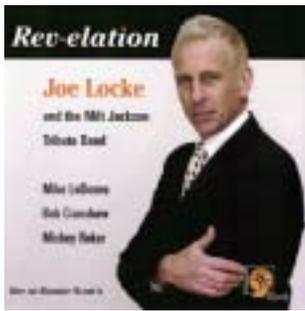
Casting back to that magical musical year 1969, Lindley performed two movements from "Seven-Ate Sweet," an instrumental masterpiece which first appeared in an 11-minute version on "The Incredible Kaleidoscope," the third release by the band co-founded in 1966

by Lindley and Solomon Feldthouse. The tune draws from Turkish music, among other assorted influences.

"Catfood Sandwiches" is Lindley's ode to backstage food. A sample lyric: "Sandwiches served backstage, made by a woman who looks like Jimmy Page." A great storyteller, Lindley related the hilarious tale of a Dublin concert he headlined with Ry Cooder, his son Joachim Cooder and Lindley's

daughter, Rosanne Lindley, a vegetarian. Served disgusting-looking head-cheese in the dressing room, they couldn't bring themselves to eat, even when Paddy Moloney of the Chieftains hungrily dipped into it.

For an encore, Lindley turned again to the Zevon songbook for "The Indifference of Heaven." A second encore concluded with the N.O. good-time dance tune "Bon Ton Roule."



**JOE LOCKE & THE MILT JACKSON TRIBUTE BAND**  
*Rev-elation*  
 Sharp Nine Records

The venerable Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London is the setting for Joe Locke's soulful celebration of the music of the late, great master of the vibraphone. For some 40 years, Milt Jackson's bluesy approach was the perfect counterbalance to pianist John Lewis' classical influences in the Modern Jazz Quartet. "Bags" died in 1999, but his music and "good vibes" live on.

For this outstanding tribute, recorded last April, Locke fronts an exemplary quartet that includes three former Jackson employees—pianist Mike LeDonne, bassist Bob Cranshaw and drummer Mickey Roker, who filled in for Connie Kay when that drummer's declining health prevented him from touring with the MJQ in the 1990s. Together, Locke and company lend credibility, wit and technical proficiency to this heartfelt project.

Jackson's soulful tune "The Prophet Speaks" is the fitting opener, giving everyone a chance to loosen up. Cedar Walton's hip arrangement of the standard "Young and Foolish" is the perfect mid-tempo vehicle for Locke's swinging pyrotechnics and LeDonne's breezy keyboard artistry. A Ray Brown arrangement gives a Latin tinge to Burt Bacharach's ballad "The Look of Love."

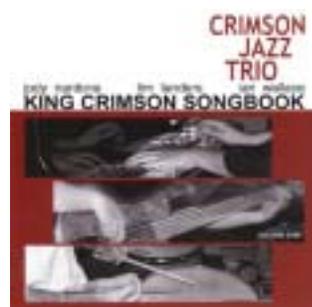
The title track, penned by LeDonne, is a reference to Jackson's gospel influences and to another of his nicknames, "The Reverend." The soul-

fulness remains even when the tempo increases on Horace Silver's "Opus de Funk," which also features a masterful LeDonne solo on the Fender Rhodes keyboard.

"Close Enough for Love" is the only other ballad on this recording. It gets the romantic treatment but, as always, the blues feeling is never far away. Locke's loping ode to Roker, entitled "Big Town," brings out the best in the percussionist's vast repertoire of licks, from subtle fills to intricate stop-and-go phrases. Ray Brown is credited with "Used to Be Jackson," an uptempo bop number that ends the set in style.

One hardly need mention the solid rhythmic support throughout this exciting live performance. It is a given that Cranshaw and Roker are in the upper echelon, masters of their craft. Otherwise, they—and LeDonne—would not have been so integral to Jackson's band for the last decade of his performing life.

Stepping into the void left by Jackson's passing was a daunting task for Locke, but he pulls it off with a combination of respect, class and his own inimitable sound.



**CRIMSON JAZZ TRIO**  
*King Crimson Songbook, Vol. 1*  
 Voiceprint Records

It's about time someone recognized the timeless quality of King Crimson's music and its relationship to cutting-edge jazz. The seminal progressive rock band of the late 1960s continues to record and perform under the

leadership of founder-guitarist Robert Fripp (2003's "The Power to Believe" is the latest studio release) and remains a viable contributor to mature, contemporary music. Of whom else can this be said?

With its recording debut, the Crimson Jazz Trio pays long-overdue tribute to the sophisticated sounds of the band that introduced "21<sup>st</sup> Century Schizoid Man" in 1969! It is fitting that the trio opens the recording with its own jazzy rendition of this classic.

Pianist Jody Nardone, bassist Tim Landers and drummer Ian Wallace are more than equal to the task, reinventing all the tunes here in their own style, without sacrificing any of the urgency, audacity, astonishing technique and twisted wit of the originals. Nardone's lushly harmonized chord progressions and straight-ahead bop lines set the standard for Landers' fluid and thunderous fretless bass ruminations and Wallace's stately, colorful and pungent percussion.

Landers' playing is especially lyrical on "Three of a Perfect Pair," from the 1984 release of the same name. The intensity grows as his booming lead statement is followed by a pounding piano excursion, aided and abetted by Wallace. "Catfood" is a quirky blues number from KC's second release, 1970's "In the Wake of Poseidon." The canine vocalizing of "Hagi the dog" adds the appropriate comedic touch.

From 1974 comes "Starless," a melodic gem that is given a gorgeous 10½-minute treatment here. "Ladies of the Road" is a swinging little number from the 1971 release "Islands." Nardone and the others really work out on this one. The trio slows down again for the ballad "I Talk to the Wind," also from "Poseidon" and perhaps the most beautiful melody in the entire KC songbook.

"Red" is an edgy, off-kilter 1974 tune that sends the trio into hyper-drive in a dazzling technical display. The closer is "Matte Kudasai," a lovely Adrian Belew composition from KC's

1981 release “Discipline.” Its exotic beauty is heightened by Landers in a soaring bass solo and by Nardone in a romantically lush piano solo, reminiscent of Keith Jarrett’s yearning sound. Wallace keeps impeccable time and adds powerful accents on the cymbals.

After listening to “King Crimson Songbook, Vol. 1,” King Crimson fans—and jazz fans—can only ask, “When can we expect volume two?”



**GREG ABATE QUINTET**  
*Monsters in the Night*  
Koko Jazz Records

Aside from their evocatively creepy titles, the nine tunes contained herein under the banner “Monsters in the Night” have little in common with the music of horror film soundtracks or other popular mythology. They are, however, representative of Greg Abate’s ability as composer, arranger, leader and player.

Whether on alto or tenor sax or flute, Abate always rides the hard-bop edge, and fans of his style will be pleased that he continues that tradition here with tunes like the driving opener, “Dracula.” Abate admirably shares the front-line with trombonist Artie Montanaro, while pianist Paul Nagel, bassist Bill Miele and drummer Vinny Pagano aide and abet the insistent rhythm. For contrast, Abate switches to flute for the gentle waltz tribute to the “Bride of Frankenstein.”

The combo is comprised of first-rate accompanists who also solo with taste and expertise. The title track is a swinging shuffle that is elevated by a

fine piano solo. Montanaro kicks off “Dr. Jekyll” with a brawny, confident solo, inspiring Abate’s lively entrance on alto sax. Miele shines while navigating the tricky changes of “In the Woods at Night.”

With titles like “Frankenstein,” “Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde,” “Bride of Frankenstein,” and “Pentagram, The Wolfman” some listeners may bemoan the single-minded thematic obsession with the horror genre and the lack of familiar jazz standards. Abate, however, knows the game well enough to vary tempo, arrangement and tone just enough to make things interesting. He also is a highly skilled composer with a quirky sense of humor, penning “Transylvania 6-5000” (no relation to Glenn Miller’s “Pennsylvania 6-5000”) and cleverly ending the session with “Igor’s Revenge,” another vehicle for Abate’s fluent flute-playing.

At more than 65 minutes, “Monsters in the Night” is a generous sampling of Abate’s post-bop inclinations, with all participants given ample room to move. Rather than anything spooky, the title must simply refer to these “monster” musicians at work and at play with the music they love.



**JOE CARTWRIGHT**  
*The Best of Kansas City Jazz, Vol. 1*  
Joe Cartwright Records

After years of leading the Best of Kansas City Jazz Series in the Oak Bar at the Fairmont Kansas City, pianist Joe Cartwright had compiled some 24 hours of live, recorded music. With “The Best

of Kansas City Jazz, Vol. 1,” he begins to share some of those memorable moments with those of us who were unable to attend.

Recorded between February and July 2004, each of the 10 tracks features a prominent KC jazz artist, with Cartwright himself confidently fronting the rhythm section with his impeccable keyboard work on all but one. For David Basse’s showcase, Lionel Hampton’s “Red Top,” the singer brought along his own outfit—pianist Oscar Williams, bassist Bryan Hicks and drummer Bill Goodwin.

Guitarist Rod Fleeman brings his ebullient style to “East of the Sun,” and virtuosic alto saxophonist Bobby Watson turns Charlie Parker’s “Little Suede Shoes” every which way but loose. With his soulful, urbane vocal style, Duck Warner turns Memphis Slim’s “Every Day I Have the Blues” into a sophisticated blues number. Trumpeter Stan Kessler expertly navigates Horace Silver’s difficult “Nutville” with brassy flair, taste and imagination.

Trombonist Paul McKee shows his warm tone and considerable technique on Bill Evans’ “Time Remembered.” Singer Sharon Thompson testifies with gospel-tinged soulfulness on “Teach Me Tonight,” which also features a bluesy solo by Cartwright. Kim Park caresses the wistful changes of “We’ll Be Together Again” with his fluent alto saxophone, and trumpeter Mike Metheny interprets Jobim’s “One Note Samba” on the EVI (electronic valve instrument).

Cartwright’s authoritative presence is felt throughout this recording, but he really gets a chance to shine on John Lewis’ classic “Django,” with bassist Gerald Spaits and drummer Ray DeMarchi. A veteran of late-night KC jam sessions, he can comp and lend harmonic and rhythmic support to any occasion, but his prodigious playing talents are often understated in his role as

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accompanist. The alternating tempos and moods of “Django” perfectly illustrate his technical accomplishment, sensitivity, and improvisational skills.

When the spotlight is on the featured soloists, it’s easy to overlook the essential rhythm players who make them sound so good. Spaits provides the bass foundation on five tracks, Bob Bowman on two and Tyrone Clark on two. DeMarchi’s solid and sensitive support on drums can be heard on nine tracks.



**DOUG TALLEY QUARTET**  
*By Request*  
Serpentine Records

With its fourth CD on the Serpentine label, the Doug Talley Quartet continues to expand its repertoire and its tonal palette, adding horns and strings in a live recording last year at Valley View United Methodist Church in Overland Park, Kan. Applied to a set largely comprised of familiar standards, the lush arrangements are reminiscent of similar projects, including the seminal “Charlie Parker with Strings.”

Utilizing tenor sax, soprano sax and bass clarinet, Talley creates subtle shifts in mood and color. Like a jazz Picasso, he dabbles in mixed media and paints in broad swashes of sound from the accompanying ensemble of brass, reeds and classical strings. But it is the core quartet of longtime colleagues that make it all work so well—Talley on reeds, Wayne Hawkins on keys, Tim Brewer on bass, and Keith Kavanaugh on drums. All contribute arrangements,

assuring that the group dynamic is always at work.

Cole Porter’s sophisticated “Get out of Town” begins with a lush backdrop of strings before Talley states the theme on soprano. Hawkins, Brewer and Kavanaugh all get a chance to express themselves before the tune comes to a close. Talley switches to tenor sax for an interesting take on “Take Five,” which is also a showcase for Hawkins. The lilting Bill Evans ballad “Very Early” gets a gorgeous lush treatment, as does Coltrane’s “Giant Steps,” with Talley again on soprano.

“Donna Lean” is, of course, a variation on Parker’s bop classic “Donna Lee.” The quartet draws on the Richard Rodgers songbook for “I Didn’t Know What Time It Was,” and Ellington is well represented by loving renditions of “In a Sentimental Mood” and a closing romp on “Caravan.”

The Talley quartet—augmented by trumpeter Al Pearson and alto saxophonist Gerald Dunn and backed by Shannon Finney on flute and piccolo, Elena Lence Talley on clarinet, Marvin Gruenbaum, Robin Prinzing and Brad Athey on violins, Monty Carter on viola and Les Mengel on cello—has taken another leap forward in its continuing exploration of jazz and all its permutations.



**BRYAN McCUNE**  
*Trumpet Rock*  
Microscopic Records

From his hometown of Lincoln, Neb., trumpeter Bryan McCune’s travels have taken him to Chapel Hill, N.C., Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Md.,

before his return to North Carolina, where he hooked up with a coterie of adventurous musicians to create a blend of jazz, folk and rock influences.

The result is “Trumpet Rock,” a fascinating collection of mostly McCune originals melding jazz instrumentation, a folk esthetic and an insistent backbeat. After an untraditional version of the traditional folk song “Wayfaring Stranger,” the band launches into a soulful “Revival on North Evergreen,” featuring Mark Daumen on tuba, Jim Crew on organ and McCune on cornet, flugabone (a cross between flugelhorn and trombone) and accordion.

The title track begins gently with acoustic resonator guitar, trumpet and Rick Lassiter on upright bass, and then launches into a fuzz-toned, electric rock rumble, McCune doubling on lap steel guitar. “Brudog’s Lament” is mournful, indeed, as it pits cornet, organ, sliding steel guitar and Wayne Leechford’s baritone sax in a slow, dirge-like anthem.

Cosmic allusions are obvious in “Martian Eyes,” with its farting tuba, spacey keyboards, and cornet loops. Its offbeat and audacious changes evoke the music of Frank Zappa. A gentle samba rhythm pervades “Ombah,” which comes closest to resembling a conventional jazz tune. Nearly 10 minutes long, it allows Crew to stretch out in a wonderful piano solo, followed by McCune on cornet, and Lassiter on bass. Francis Dyer is the versatile drummer throughout these sessions, which come to a soulful conclusion with “Apostle of Droll.”

By the way, besides being an excellent trumpeter and cornetist, McCune also plays assorted electronics, guitars, keyboards, accordion, percussion and that aforementioned flugabone. Much of this recording simply begs description, leaving this writer at a loss for words to either make stylistic comparisons or cite precedents. Whatever it is, I like it.

## Discorama

## Alex Graham's "The Good Life" is very good, indeed

By Butch Berman



**ALEX GRAHAM**  
**The Good Life**  
 Origin Records

Origin Records has been putting out a ton of stuff these days, and mostly good stuff...real good, in fact. It's more than I can ever listen to, and if you talented cats in Seattle are reading this...I really appreciate it. One of my favorite "new" guys is now with you, and his name is Alex Graham.

Hold on to this dude. He's truly on his way to making an indelible mark in the jazz world as on of the upcoming monsters. Yup, he's that good.

I very favorably reviewed his first CD, "Grand," in the November 2005 newsletter and found it to be so, like its title...grand. That was more of a New Orleans-styled jazzy r&b band with a cool singer and, as always, Alex's inspired signature horn, with such luscious tone and impeccable phrasing. It's not often that an artist's second effort will impress as much as my introduction to him or her, especially if it's really a killer debut out of the chute. With "The Good Life" and an entirely different back-up ensemble, Alex Graham has done it again, and in spades. Recorded back in 1998, this is truly a dynamite piece of work from beginning to end. I know that when, right after I listen to a new CD, I immediately have to hear it again before checking out another musician's hopeful entry lying in wait among so many others.

It's another no-frills, straight-ahead jazz album played to perfection, and a song selection to match. Alex on alto, flute and clarinet is brilliantly supported by this trio of solid senders. A newcomer to me, Rick Roe at the piano is simply a delight with his understated comping that still speaks mightily. That mega-chopster bassist Rodney Whitaker walks you into the next stratosphere and is so connected to drummer Joe Strasser on this session, you'd think they were musical Siamese twins...tight, man, tight. This triple-threat trio becomes this Hummer of a magic carpet for Mr. Graham to float and soar above...and does he ever!

There are two originals and four covers, including one of the prettiest versions of "I Had the Craziest Dream" that has ever been recorded. This is an above-standard standard, by all means. The average length of each track is nearly 10 minutes, enough time for these timeless cats to really stretch and blow and present you with one of best jazz albums of 2006, even if it was recorded nearly eight years ago. It's way better late than never, and "The Good Life" will be required listening for the ages.



**DAVID GIBSON**  
**The Path to Delphi**  
 Nagel-Heyer Records

Interesting...the two main CDs I picked out to review for this issue of

Jazz both have Joe Strasser at the drum helm. This cat's good, and if you're going to launch the beat behind the likes of trombonist David Gibson, you'd better be. Gibson's new creation, "The Path to Delphi," on Nagel-Heyer Records is a complete cooker, and besides his most ample chops, showcases the thought-provoking songwriting ability of Mr. Gibson. Like a rocket ship taking flight, the title track provides the first stage of motion, and by the time this wondrous work closes with David's "Prometheus' Peace," you're in orbit. This swinging crew of "jazz astronauts," including Randy Brecker on trumpet and flugelhorn, Wayne Escoffery on soprano saxophone, Rick Germanson at the keys, bassist Dwayne Burno and the previously mentioned drummer, Mr. Strasser, literally tear this puppy up. This is a true jazz experience, which these days is a pleasure to behold for some of us old be-boppish purists.

David, in his liner notes, speaks of searching for the truth in his music, and in this case that's no lie. Recorded in NYC in 2004, this release takes hold of all your pleasure centers. Yearning, urging and caressing your senses while keeping your feet moving, "The Path to Delphi" is truly a mind journey that you can also feel within your body. Everyone played their butts off, yet this musical story encompasses the usage of space, inner and outer, and everything just seems to fit. Try this one on for yourself, and beat a path to your favorite record outlet for "The Path..." Repeated listening will be mandatory.

A major league thank-you goes out to David Gibson for keeping the jazz tradition alive with his horn, for his musical outpouring, and for just keeping it so real. Truth...it is!



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### Stritch has 'em in stitches



Photo by Grace Sankey Berman

*Pianist Billy Stritch, bassist Gerald Spaits and Butch Berman share a joke at Jardine's in Kansas City, Mo., during a break in the Marilyn Maye performance. For more on Maye's appearance, go to page 7.*

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