

Photo by Rich Hoover
Butch Berman and Norman Hedman in New York

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A Night to Remember - Norman Hedman's Blue Note Debut

By Butch Berman

I've had many opportunities in my music loving journey and career to hear and meet most of my idols from the mid-'50s to today. Historic moments galore have peppered the literally hundreds of shows and concerts I've attended. So when I say my night at The Blue Note in New York City to celebrate the release of the new Arabesque Jazz CD - "One Step Closer" - and debut my dear friend Norman Hedman and his star-studded band Tropique - was truly a night to remember, that's the bottom line (cuz Butch Berman said so!).

I've never felt more love in a room, proud of, and jacked at the same time as when Norman, with Tropique, tore up the joint - selling out the first show on a Monday night where 50 reservations are a standard, Norman had 240. A real buzz of a New York moment occurred, as the infectious Latin jazz combined with a group of people that truly adored Norman. The audience paid their respects to a man who graced such 45s as The Main Ingredient's "Everybody Plays The Fool," toured with Hall & Oates and The New Kids on the Block; and helped launch the careers of other talented bandmates such as Luther Vandross, as well as new Arabesque Jazz artist Andrienne Wilson.

What a group! Featuring Norman on congas and percussion, the line up for this evening was sensational. Briefly, the group was: Willie Martinez, on timbales; Ron Monroe handling the bass; flutist Craig Rivers; alto all star Vince Herring; Russian keyboardist Misha Tsiganov; and vibist A.J. Mantas grooved together like a band that has been on the road for ages.

Flanked by all the people who helped make it happen - Marvin Reiss, Danny Chriss, and Phil Cassese from Arabesque; recording engineer with ears extraordinaire Lou Holtzman and his wife Mimi from Eastside Sound; and myself with Foundation intact, made for a perfect pairing of factors all working together. Also, a big thank you to Chico Freeman's manager, Jill Newman, who made the booking possible. And, cosmic kudos also goes out to spiritual energy channeler Reginald Arthur for his universal guidance. It worked!

Norman played most of the selections from his current CD, but had a spent surprise. Paying tribute to
(A Night to Remember continued on page 3, col. 2)

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The Prez sez

Dear Readers,

This is my first letter to you coming from the half-century vantage point. Yup - turned 50 March 10th - life between "Prez sez's" has been a real gasser.

On a major league reality level - turning 50 and losing my mother after a long illness was a pivotal introspective milestone that I'm still dealing with. Liberation and loss, like love and hate, run so close within our emotions. Thank God for music.

Back to the BMF - the John Falter exhibit was truly The Event of the season. Mixing historians and jazz buffs alike was a clever matchup, as all went away abuzz.

Special thanks goes out to: Keith Heckman at Dietze Music House, for their fine piano John Carlini got to play so expertly; Hank Holtquist at the Violin Shop, for coming to the rescue to provide a more correct bass for jazz guest Jack Lesberg to play so brilliantly; Dan DeMuth, for giving the 250-plus audience a taste of the rich history that Nebraska offers in its jazz heritage; and from the Museum of Nebraska History - the host(s) with the most - Brent Carmack, Lynn Ireland, Steve Ryan, Dick Spencer, - and all the rest of the crafty artisans for collaborating on such a fab affair.

When it works, Lincoln, it works - dig it? Plus, having Jack hanging out at my pad sharing all those years of wisdom and road stories - he should write a book.

Onward to NY

The ultimate climax to this power-packed period was taking most of my Foundation - Wade Wright, owner of Jack's Record Cellar, from San Francisco; legal eagles Dan Stogsdill and Tony Rager; my editor Dave Hughes; and photo buddy/bodyguard Rich Hoover - east for an action packed trip - culminating with Norman Hedman's CD release party/debut at New York's famed Blue Note (see story and pics). Along with massage therapist Mikala Freitas, songstress/companion Kendra Shank, and Hot Jazz Management/consultant Russ Dantzler - we caught some great shows around town.

First, LA tenor legend Teddy Edwards at Iridium was so out of sight, I caught him twice! Next, Hilton Ruiz with Dr. Lyn Christie (piano-bass duo) at Zinno's was simply amazing, and a pleasure to get acquainted with. Thirdly, jazz brunch at Sweet Basil, always a must, featured trumpeter/vocalist Spanky Davis, who held down Doc Cheatham's 19-year helm admirably. Along with Chuck Folds (piano) and Friends - with bassist Frank Tate and my old buddy drum maestro Jackie Williams, were a sheer delight. Next up - Tommy Flanagan's trio at The Village Vanguard was like comparing a Lamborghini in performance to their (Peter Washington on bass - Louis Nash on drums) breathtaking set.

On a biz level - Arabesque Recordings hosted us to a great brunch meeting at their office as we mended all fences and are all so excited about Norman's new CD -

"One Step Closer." Top brass Marvin Reiss, Danny Chriss, and Phil Cassese are a decent bunch to do business with. Everybody's first choice in recording and engineering - Lou Holtzman with his wife Mimi from Eastside Sound, and Danny and Phil, were all The Blue Note to share Norman's warm and electrifying music (see "A Night to Remember" in this issue). 45 CDs were sold to cap off a very successful evening, which was also broadcast worldwide over the Internet.

Now back in the Midwest - we're all gearing up for Jim Monroe's wonderful jazz party in Topeka, Kansas as their Topeka Jazz Festival kicks off Memorial Day weekend with another legendary cast (see ad). Full review and pics next issue and a full rundown of the upcoming Kansas City International Jazz Festival June 25-27.

Enjoy this issue and let this be one hell of a jazzy spring/summer season ahead. Join us and "smell what the bebop man is cookin'!"

All my best,



Butch Berman

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Trustee: Butch Berman

Consultants: Russ Dantzler, Dan DeMuth, Norman Hedman, Dave Hughes, Andrienne Wilson, and Wade Wright



Photo by Butch Berman

Harriett Berman

Tribute by Butch Berman

I would like to pay tribute to my recently departed mother, Harriet Lee Berman. Along with my father, Alfred, who passed away 22 years ago, she helped pave my way (at the very tender age of about seven) toward the path of the world of music, from which I've never strayed.

Unfortunately, the liberating forces of "show biz" startled my parents into over-reacting and taking all measures to control my creativity as to not hit the road in my teen years with the shaggy-haired cats I was blowing with.

Nevertheless - many wasted (sort of wasted, but wild and fun) years of the rebellion followed, not to be sorted out and rectified until my 40s...and then flourished with the success of my Foundation today, which would have made them both proud.

So military academies and mental institutions aside - thanks for the early adult education into the realm of fine arts at all levels, i.e.,...catching Erroll Garner and Jackie Mason at Mr. Kelly's; Ethel Merman in the original cast of "Gypsy;" Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft in "The Miracle Worker" (all of the above in Chicago); and hearing and meeting Gene Krupa at East Hills as well as a great drum workshop at Dietze; all before my teens. Also not to be left out are all the years of piano and guitar lessons (the late, great Roger Ellsworth was a fuckin' genius!) and the help given to me to schlep my combo gear from Teen Canteen to 9 Hi, to Keen Time, etc. (remember Baby Boomers?).

Also, as a kid I was allowed to watch "American Bandstand" every day and would call lone, the clerk at Dietze Music House (they had a great record department then -see accompanying story about this fine store later in this issue) to get the latest 45s. Yes, I was spoiled rotten - but I still have the prized 45s along with my still-growing and massive record collection housed in my home, which is now officially a museum - all to be preserved and protected forever.

So, Harriett and Alfie - RIP - and thanks for what really counted the most - the wonderment and glory of music and the entertainment world surrounding it.

A Night to Remember

(continued from page 1, col. 2)



Photo by Rich Hoover

Bongoist Rudy Romero and timbales player Willie Martinez

ailing bongoist Rudy Romero - Norman set up a drum symposium with with heart, including the inventor of the talking drum - Carlos Pride - (yup - Charlie's nephew); Haitian Jimba player FanFan, and of course, Rudy, took this already enlivened audience and sent them into rhythm heaven with a 15 minute drum improv that took the whole show over the top.

DJ (and emcee) Maria von Dickersjohn said it best in her intro of Norman and his group, "they'll make your socks go up and down."

You're more than "One Step Closer" in my book, Norman - you're there!



Photo by Rich Hoover

Norman Hedman and his bongos at The Blue Note

New York Pictorial

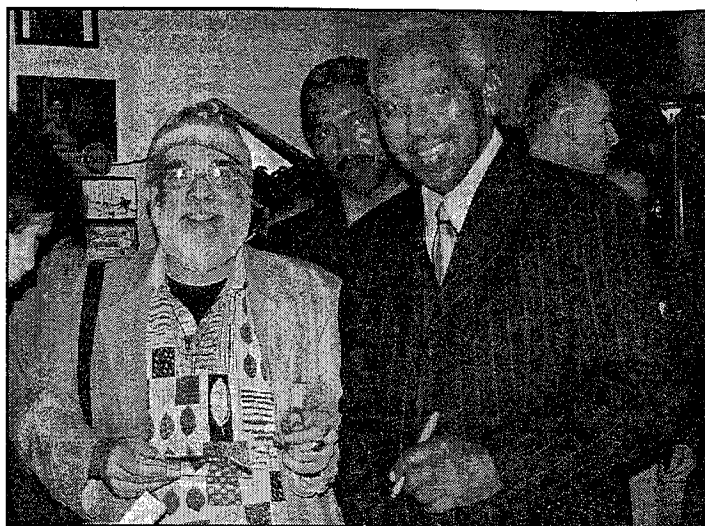
Photos by Rich Hoover



Kendra Shank and Butch Berman in New York



Foundation gang at the Belvedere Hotel: Dave Hughes, Tony Rager, Dan Stogsdill, and Wade Wright(back row); and Rich Hoover and Butch Berman (front row)



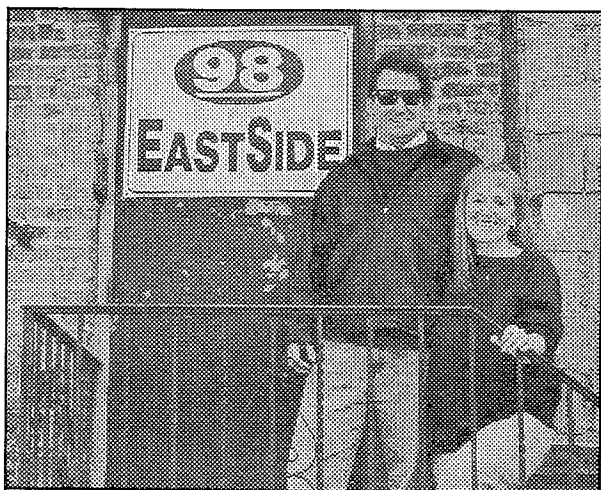
Butch Berman and saxophonist Teddy Edwards at Iridium



Marvin Reiss, Butch Berman, Phil Cassese (back); Danny Chriss & Norman Hedman (front) at Arabesque storeroom



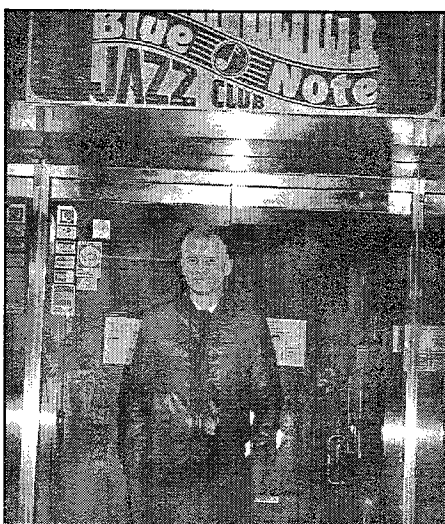
Norman Hedman, pianist Hilton Ruiz, & Berman at Zinno's



Lou and Mimi Holtzman in front of Eastside Sound



Rager, Stogsdill, Hoover, Berman, Wright, and Russ Dantzier at the Village Vanguard



Dave Hughes in front of The Blue Note



Craig Rivers , flute & Vince Herring, sax at The Blue Note



(From left to right) Chuck Folds , Frank Tate, Spanky Davis, & Jackie Williams at a Sweet Basil jazz brunch performance



Chico Freeman and Butch Berman at The Blue Note

Falter exhibit brings life to jazz history

By Tom Ineck



Photo by Rich Hoover

Special guest, bassist Jack Lesberg, at the Falter reception

The collaboration of the Berman Music Foundation and the Nebraska State Historical Society for "Drawing on the Beat: John Falter's Jazz Portraits" was a marriage made in jazz heaven.

And there were plenty of "angels" on hand when the exhibit opened in grand style March 5 at the Museum of Nebraska History, where it will continue on display throughout the year. The exhibit showcases the jazz-related work of artist and illustrator John Falter of Falls City.

There were historical society curator Brent Carmack and the rest of the agency's staff, who had carefully designed and installed the exhibit to emphasize the breadth of Falter's talents and to display them in the



Photo by Rich Hoover

Pianist John Carlini at the keyboard

best light. Carmack also served as master of ceremonies, making the audience of several hundred feel perfectly at home in this rather unconventional jazz venue.

There was Dan DeMuth, local record collector, radio buff and storyteller, who gave the audience an historical overview of jazz in Nebraska -- however tangential the relationship. The roll call included trumpeter Pee Wee Erwin (like Falter, a former Falls City resident), trombonist Jack Teagarden, band leader Glenn Miller, bassist Junior Raglin, saxophonist Preston Love, singer Jeri Southern, singer and dancer Fred Astaire, drummer Frank Butler, bassist Monty Budwig and composer-arranger Neil Hefti.

There was 79-year-old Jack Lesberg, legendary bass player and one of Falter's subjects. Born on Valentine's Day 1920, Lesberg has a heart to match. The gentle-spoken man paid his first visit to Lincoln especially for this occasion, and he won over his audience with a combination of wit, talent and humility.

Considering his long and illustrious career, it would not be surprising if Lesberg were jaded or less than enthusiastic about a March trip to Nebraska. After all, he

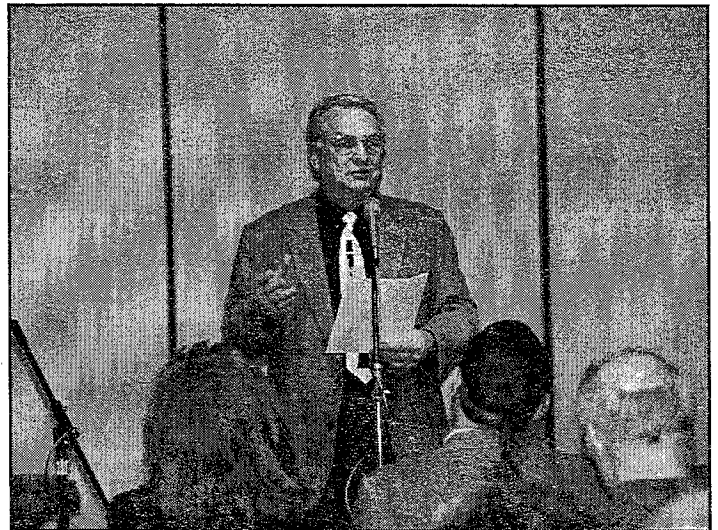


Photo by Rich Hoover

Local record collector, radio buff, & storyteller, Dan DeMuth

has toured or recorded with everyone from guitarist Eddie Condon and trombonist Jack Teagarden to organist Wild Bill Davison and alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, from Louis Armstrong and Sarah Vaughan to Benny Goodman and Sidney Bechet.

A classically trained violinist, he worked for three years with Leonard Bernstein and the New York City Symphony. He was in the orchestra when Milton Berle's program scored the first big success in television history in the late 1940s. A devoted jazz fan, Lesberg also served as music director of the Odessa (Texas) Jazz Party for many years.

There were pianist John Carlini and saxophonist Bill Wimmer, who joined Lesberg for a 45-minute demonstration of jazz at its most essential, forming a trio that held the audience in rapt attention with their sensitivity to each other, though Carlini and Wimmer had just met



Photo by Rich Hoover
Saxophonist Bill Wimmer

Lesberg, and the bass player was struggling with an adequate, but unfamiliar instrument.

Carlini and Lesberg began as a duet, later joined by Wimmer on soprano saxophone for such familiar tunes as Duke Ellington's "In A Mellotone," "There Will Never Be Another You," "Blame it On My Youth," "Bye Bye Blackbird" and "All of Me."

Lesberg's skill and sensitivity was evident from the start, as he locked into a solid four-four swing time and allowed Carlini and Wimmer plenty of opportunities to make solo statements. When Lesberg picked up the bow and took an arco solo, his classical training shown through, showing a great sense of dynamics and tonal control.

In fact, sensitivity was the byword for the whole evening. Asked afterwards about the bass and his playing partners he told me he had been a little nervous about the unfamiliar instrument and the unfamiliar surroundings, but that Carlini and Wimmer had put him at ease with their good ears and musical sensitivity.



Photo by Rich Hoover
Brent Carmack giving Lesberg a Falter print of Lesberg

Not least among the jazz "angels" present at the Falter opening was Butch Berman, who prefers the image of a jazz "Godfather." The Berman Music Foundation bankrolled the 10-month exhibit and helped foster a better sense of Falter's historical significance. The foundation also provided first-nighters with a top-flight introduction to the exhibit and the music that inspired the artist.

"Drawing on the Beat: John Falter's Jazz Portraits" features more than 50 drawings, prints and paintings by the Nebraska native. Born in Plattsmouth in 1910 and raised in Falls City, Falter became one of America's most famous artists, best known for his cover illustrations for the Saturday Evening Post. He also produced more than 300 World War II paintings of western American scenes.

After Falter died in April 1982, his wife, Mary Elizabeth Falter, donated his papers and numerous



Photo by Rich Hoover
Carmack giving Berman a Falter original of Bucky Pizzarelli

paintings and drawings to the Nebraska State Historical Society. The jazz-related works were drawn from that collection.

Most of the pieces included in the exhibit were done during the 1971 Colorado Jazz Party held at the Broadmoor Hotel near Colorado Springs. Also included are drawings Falter made at the 1974 jazz party held in Odessa, Texas, as well as several of his oil paintings of such jazz giants as Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden and Pee Wee Erwin.

Falter's technique, often combining a stark realism and a sense of movement conveyed by extended lines, captures the excitement of live jazz and the unique nature of each practitioner.

"Drawing on the Beat" bears repeat visits. While works of this nature are easily enjoyed amidst a throng of other jazz fans, they are best appreciated alone and in silence, so that the spirit of the music -- past and present -- can be heard in all its profound glory. I will be returning to the Museum of Nebraska History throughout the year to bask in that glorious sound.

Jazz art comes to life in local photo exhibit

By Tom Ineck

In the late 20th century, most jazz is experienced on recordings, if at all. With few clubs where listeners can see musicians up close, most of us can only imagine what it was like when the relationship between musician and music-lover was more intimate and personal.

We recently got a glimpse of that other world when the photo exhibit "The Art of Jazz Photography" spent the month of February at Lincoln's Haydon Gallery.

The show, which traveled to Hastings after leaving the Haydon, skillfully combines the images of 11 different jazz photographers, including legendary shutterbugs Herman Leonard and Bill Gottlieb, whose work graces many LP and CD covers. Freed from the artificial context in which we know them best, they become works of art that capture priceless moments in jazz history and resurrect jazz artists long gone.

In Gottlieb's skillful hands, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis are forever preserved in the moment of live improvisation. A young, care-free Frank Sinatra croons in the studio, and Billie Holiday (in the same photo that is on a U.S. postage stamp) holds a tender note for all eternity. Here also are Gottlieb's classic shots of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald, not really gone as long as these images remain.

Dexter Gordon wears a smoky halo in Leonard's familiar photo of the legendary tenor saxophonist, and here again are Billie Holiday and Miles Davis, looking beat and haggard. Leonard's skillful use of stage lighting to dramatic effect has no equal. Witness his shot of Duke Ellington at the piano, bathed in pinpoints of light.

Lee Tanner also must be considered among the top rank of jazz photographers, having captured such luminaries as the late saxophonist Eric Dolphy, Miles Davis and trumpeter Cootie Williams, as well as singer Abbey Lincoln and saxophonist Johnny Griffin.

The lesser-known French photographer Guy Le Querrec captures Gordon on the set of the film "Round Midnight." Also in his viewfinder are Dizzy Gillespie heading for the Nimes Jazz Festival and Miles Davis at the Paris Jazz Festival in 1989, the same summer that I caught Miles at the Birmingham (England) International Jazz Festival. In one haunting image, Le Querrec traps the blurred image of John Coltrane on a TV screen in Central Africa.

Bassist and jazz "insider" Milt Hinton, now 88, has shot more than 60,000 images of jazz artists in their natural habitat -- performing, setting up, traveling, resting and partying. Four Hinton photos are included here, including intimate portraits of saxophonist Ben Webster, drummer Cozy Cole, bassist Charles Mingus and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.



Photo by Patrick Hinely
Freddie Green and the Basie Band

Younger photogs like Detlev Schilke of Germany, Taylor Crothers of New York and Patrick Hinely of Lexington, Va., carry on the tradition of jazz photography. Schilke documents Berlin's jazz scene, and Crothers rides the edge of the modern jazz scene with shots of Matthew Shipp and Dave Matthews Band. Hinely's images range from veterans of the Swing Era, such as Hinton and Basie guitarist Freddie Green to veterans of the so-called avant-garde or "free" jazz movement of the 1960s -- Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry and Charlie Haden.

Hinely, whose energy-packed photographs have won him two Grand Prix awards in the Jazz Photo International, organized "The Art of Jazz Photography" with Turner McGehee, professor of art at Hastings College.

The gala opening reception on Feb. 5 was a typical gallery affair, with wine and hors d'oeuvres and an enthusiastic crowd milling shoulder-to-shoulder, trying to get a peak at the exhibit while socializing. The volume of conversation made it nearly impossible to hear pianist John Carlini and saxophonist Bill Wimmer, who provided the appropriate soundtrack for a wonderful exhibit.

It inevitably raises the question: Why is it that a crowd will flock to photos of dead jazz musicians, but they won't patronize performances by live musicians in sufficient numbers to make a club scene viable in Lincoln?

NJO pays tribute to kings of swing

By Tom Ineck

For its annual tribute to the Big Band Era, the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra was fronted by guest music director Bob Krueger, who also delivered his usual sterling work on trumpet and flugelhorn. The result was a refreshingly different approach to the repertoire and the band's collective performance.

Which is not to say that the Feb. 23 concert at Lincoln's new downtown Holiday Inn surpassed the best efforts of longtime NJO music director, saxophonist and master of ceremonies Ed Love, who seemed to be enjoying the one-night respite from the spotlight.

Krueger took the reins firmly in hand with a solid program drawn from the classic swing songbook. As though to recognize Duke Ellington in his centennial year, the NJO kicked things off with several Ellington numbers, opening with a rousing rendition of "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," featuring Love on tenor sax and Krueger on trumpet.

Borrowed from the Lincoln Southeast High School library of Ellington tunes (acquired from the Lincoln Center jazz program as part of its ongoing homage to Ellington) was the seldom-heard "Rockabye River," with Gene Smith taking the lead alto role in the soulfully expressive style of Johnny Hodges.

The Ellington tone poem "Main Stem" allowed several soloists to make statements, passing the scurrying lines from Brad Obbink on trumpet to Mark Benson on alto sax to Krueger on plunger-muted trumpet to Dutch Ode on trombone to Love on clarinet to Scott Vicroy on tenor sax to Todd Thatcher on trombone. Like the best of Ellington, each musician's contribution created a collective effect that exceeded the sum of its parts.

"Concerto for Cootie," initially written for longtime Ellington trumpeter Cootie Williams and later transformed into a vocal favorite called "Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me," was a showpiece for Krueger on plunger-muted trumpet, alternating between a warm, honey-toned opening statement and a growling solo passage.

Another rarity was Ellington's ensemble piece "Oclupaca" (the reverse of Acapulco), a bluesy, three-chord samba that rose from obscurity in the capable hands of Vicroy on tenor sax and Tom Harvill, who offered some marvelously moody piano playing.

Harvill returned to the spotlight, faithfully rendering Bix Beiderbecke's piano part from "In a Mist," which also featured a lush, complex orchestration creating the mysterious natural setting implied by the title. The reed section built rich harmonies with a combination of alto sax, flute, clarinet, soprano sax and bass clarinet.

A Kenny Berger arrangement of Fats Waller's

popular "Jitterbug Waltz" appended tricky waltz rhythms to an already difficult piece. Jeff Patton contributed a fluent flugelhorn solo and Chris Widga followed with a nice trombone solo.

"Struttin' with Some Barbecue," as arranged by Randall Snyder, featured the trombone section harmonized as one, lead voice, with the reeds and trumpets contributing a New Orleans-style rave-up as a nod to trumpeter Louis Armstrong, with whom the tune is associated. It was penned by Armstrong's first wife, Lil Hardin Armstrong.

Krueger wisely chose a modern swing masterpiece to open the second half, Charles Mingus' "Nostalgia in Times Square." The NJO did justice to this swaggering behemoth, with excellent solos by Vicroy on tenor sax, Ode on trombone, Peter Bouffard on guitar and Smith on alto sax.

Count Basie got his due with two numbers. "Moten Swing" had Basie's trademark sense of dynamics and that easy-swinging rhythm section, here replicated by Bouffard, Harvill, bassist Andy Hall and drummer Greg Ahl. Each brass section made its statement, with solos by Love on tenor sax and Obbink on trumpet.

"9:20 Special," written by Earle Warren for the Basie outfit, was given the full brass treatment with lots of punch and key contributions by Harvill on piano, Benson on alto sax, Krueger on muted trumpet and Love on tenor sax.

From Tommy Dorsey's songbook came the Swing Era staple "Opus One," featuring a unison saxophone lead and a fiery trumpet solo by Krueger. Love, Vicroy and Benson on tenor saxes and Mike Murphy on baritone sax substituted for Woody Herman's original front line on "Four Brothers." Led by Smith on soprano, in the role of Woody himself, they delivered an incendiary performance.

Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing" maintained its reputation as a flag-waving, swing anthem with Murphy on clarinet and Ahl impersonating the frantic drumming of Gene Krupa. Finishing the evening in grand style was Glenn Miller's "In the Mood." Smith turned in a double-time alto solo and Krueger came through with another fine effort on trumpet.

Krueger, in his debut as music director, showed ample poise and confidence in his leadership. He does not yet exhibit Love's sense of humor or his ability to connect with the audience, developed over 23 years with the NJO. But give him time.

In terms of the choice of material and the band's level of performance, the "Kings of Swing" concert ranks among the best I've heard in 13 years of reviewing the NJO.

The next NJO concert, "Kansas City Legacy," got a dual performance, first in Lincoln April 6, then in Omaha April 7 (see review next issue). The cross-generational concert featured Claude "Fiddler" Williams and the Young Lions Big Band, an all-star student jazz ensemble.

The NJO ranked among the top three jazz groups in the first annual KZUM Members' Choice Music Awards.

Tomfoolery

By Tom Ineck

We are frequently reminded of life's fragile nature, but occasionally we also see and hear examples of life's -- and art's -- resilience.

Last year, jazz lost the great bop song stylist Betty Carter to cancer. Benny Waters seemed to defy nature, playing saxophone and singing until his time ran out Aug. 17, at age 96.

Most recently, we learned of the sudden and tragic death of eclectic pianist and educator Jaki Byard, who performed in 1995 at Lincoln's Zoo Bar as part of an all-star jazz combo assembled and funded by the Berman Music Foundation.

Byard was found dead in his Queens, N.Y., apartment Feb. 11. Though he was killed by a bullet to the head, no gun was found and there was no evidence of a forced entry or a struggle. He was 76.

Like his most obvious influence -- Thelonious Monk -- Byard defied category by synthesizing everything from stride piano to bebop and the blues.

He rose to fame after joining Charles Mingus' group in 1962 and becoming known for his keyboard versatility. He appeared on the bassist's landmark recordings "Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus" and "The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady."

Byard's repertoire ranged from James P. Johnson and Earl Hines to the avant garde. He played in r&b groups, bop combos and big bands.

In the 1960s, Byard came under the influence of such adventurous players as Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Eric Dolphy and Sam Rivers. In the late '60s, he became a teacher, working at Bennington College in Vermont, the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and Mannes College of Music in Manhattan.

With his impish physique and his idiosyncratic approach to the keyboard, Byard created a dramatic on-stage persona. The 1991 live recording "At Maybeck" (Concord Records) is a great example of Byard in solo flight, performing an accessible program (including a "collage" of Monk melodies) on a good instrument in the acoustically glorious Maybeck Recital Hall, Berkeley, Calif.

Listen to him pay his respects to Fats Waller, James P. Johnson and Willie "The Lion" Smith on "Tribute to the Ticklers." Listen to his impressionistic rendition of "Hello Young Lovers," with hints of Debussy in its lush harmonies. Listen to his graceful take on "My One and Only Love."

Nearly a decade ago, in an interview with Larry Kelp of the Oakland (California) Tribune, Byard said, "I believe music is the best therapy for mankind. You got all that laying on couches, dope and medicines, but music beats 'em all."

Listen to Dr. Byard. His prescription is good for what ails you.

Jazz on disc

by Tom Ineck

NORMAN HEDMAN'S TROPIQUE

One Step Closer

Arabesque Records

"One Step Closer" is the knock-out punch of a powerful one-two combination by the Berman Music Foundation.

The second BMF-funded release on Arabesque, it has much in common with its 1998 predecessor, Andrienne Wilson's "She's Dangerous." The most obvious similarity is the important presence of both percussionist Hedman and flutist Wilson on both recordings. Both releases also rely heavily on the songwriting skills of their leaders. Hedman gets composer credits on nine of the 12 tracks here.

But the common ground goes deeper than that, all the way to the Latin roots that pervade the music of both artists. Hedman is at the helm throughout, always driving the rhythms with tasteful congas and percussion. He is ably assisted by Willie Martinez on timbales, Joe Gonzalez on bongos and Ron Monroe delivering inventive but solid bass lines.

Wilson, on flute, appears on seven tracks. Her playing is effectively augmented by flutist Craig Rivers on "I Caught Your Smile." Also lending strong support on nine tracks is Talib Kibwe on alto and soprano saxes. The young reedman plays with the confidence and imagination of a much older musician.

But, aside from Hedman's strong leadership, the most significant contributions come from vibraphonist A.J. Mantas and pianists Glen Pearson, Robert Aron and, on "Shades of Magenta," the great Hilton Ruiz. The two instruments -- vibes and piano -- magically blend in cascading showers of notes, always keeping the tone light, but lush, and contrasting nicely with the warm pulse of Hedman's congas.

The tunes are consistently high in quality and varied enough in tempo and tone to hold the listener's interest. From the romantic ballad "Michelline," dedicated to Hedman's wife, to the smoldering "Hed-Theme," with its furious percussion breaks, from the celebrative "Celebration" to the funky title track, Tropic's latest project is the band's best yet.

Clocking in at just over an hour, this session never seems to drag, as ballads alternate with mid-tempo and uptempo numbers.

"One Step Closer" brings Hedman and his compatriots one step closer to widespread recognition and respect among the public, a recognition and respect he already enjoys among his peers and a growing legion of Latin jazz fans.

Topeka Jazz Festival ready for round two

By Tom Ineck

If it ain't broke, why fix it?

That philosophy rules, as organizers of the 2nd Annual Topeka Jazz Festival prepare for the May 29-31 event at the Topeka, Kan., Performing Arts Center.

It's the same historic, art deco venue where jazz fans spent three wonderful days over the Memorial Day weekend last year. Like last year, the performances will extend over five sessions totaling 28 hours of music (actually one hour less than 1998's festival).

Like last year, a mix of national, international and regional jazz artists will rotate on and off the stage, mixing and matching players who may never have met before. As I predicted last year, this innovative plan yielded plenty of memorable moments.

Again, all artists will remain in Topeka for the entire weekend. In fact, most of them will play at all five sessions. It is a format that breeds fast friendships among musicians and between musicians and festival-goers.

At least eight of the headliners who graced the stage last year will return, including saxophonist Bob Kindred, clarinetist Ken Peplowski, trumpeter Bobby Shew, pianist Monty Alexander, bassists John Clayton and Jay Leonhart, drummer Jeff Hamilton and singer Karrin Allyson. Like last year, the spectacular Monty Alexander Trio (with Clayton and Hamilton) will perform separate sets, outside the rotation format.

Additions to this year's big-name lineup include trombonist Bill Watrous, trumpeter Tiger Okoshi, saxophonist Terry Harrington, pianists Oliver Jones and Derek Smith, drummer Frank Capp and special guest Claude "Fiddler" Williams. The Rob McConnell Trio -- trombonist McConnell, guitarist Ed Bickert and bassist Neil Swainson -- also will perform separate sets as a unit.

From the Kansas City area come such solid players as pianists Joe Cartwright, Russ Long and Paul Smith, guitarist Danny Embrey, bassists Bob Bowman and Gerald Spaits and drummer Todd Strait. While too-often unrecognized outside the Midwest, they are regional favorites and seasoned veterans.

Essential to the festival's consistency is its founder and artistic director, Jim Monroe. Again, Monroe chose the artists he would invite and singlehandedly mapped out the combination and sequence in which the musicians will take the stage.

One major loss to the schedule -- and to the music world -- was singer Trudy Desmond, who died recently when her cancer returned after being in remission for several years following a bone-marrow transplant. Rather than try to replace her, Monroe has arranged for a tribute to her memory, featuring guitarist Ed Bickert and bassist Jay Leonhart performing George Gershwin.



File photo

Tiger Okoshi

Monroe said last year's musicians worked well together, perhaps because most of them come out of the post-swing, pre-bop tradition that makes them compatible on stage.

After drawing 315 jazz fans in the festival's first year, Monroe would be satisfied to sell 400 three-day passes in year two. Passes are \$165 for reserved seats at all five sessions and \$300 for the best reserved seating in the house at all sessions, plus two CDs and an invitation to a musician reception.

The festival already has made strides in the sale of sponsorships, with \$1,000 commitments from 36 sponsors, compared with the 29 sponsors who put up \$1,000 each last year.

"I've only asked three of those people out of the 36," Monroe said in a recent phone interview. "The rest of them volunteered, which really pleases me, that they feel that strongly about this thing continuing."

With that much support, Monroe already is making plans for 2000, setting his sights on the Gene Harris Quartet and the Ray Brown Trio as possible headliners.

Monroe's confidence comes from years of experience. A Topeka resident since 1954, he organized the Topeka Jazz Workshop Concert Series, now in its 31st year. He has been president of the organization for 23 years, and in recent years he founded similar organizations in Kansas City and St. Joseph, Mo.

Festival sessions will run from noon to 5 p.m. and from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday and Sunday and from noon to 6 p.m. Monday. The Topeka Performing Arts Center is at 214 SE 8th St. in downtown Topeka.

For tickets, call 1-800-949-8722.

Jazz in the venues

Compiled by Nancy Marshall and Dave Hughes

NJO adds concert in Kearney

The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra has added a "Kings of Swing" concert in Kearney on Friday, April 23. The concert, a musical tribute to Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Woody Herman, will be held in the main ballroom of the Holiday Inn & Convention Center, 110 South 2nd Avenue at 7:30 p.m.

General admission tickets may be purchased in advance in Kearney at Pallas Music, 2023 Central Avenue, or Yanda's Music, 2220 Central Avenue. Or, tickets may also be purchased at the door on the night of the performance.

The NJO concludes its concerts for its 23rd Anniversary Season on Thurs., May 27, with "A Salute to Stan Kenton," featuring the 1999 NJO Young Artist Competition winner.

This concert will take place at the Holiday Inn (formerly the Ramada), 141 N. 9th St., and will begin at 7:30 p.m. Priority seating will be at 7:00, and seating for tickets purchased at the door will begin at 7:15 p.m.

For ticket info for both shows, call 402-477-8446.

Monday Night Big Band changes venue again

The Monday Night Big Band is still playing every Monday night, but now at another location.

Originally, the band played at The Ramada (now The Holiday Inn), but most recently met at The Top of the Rock (on the top floor of the Rock 'n' Roll Runza at 14th & P Streets in downtown Lincoln). However, since April 5 the band has been performing at P.O. Pears at 322 S. 9th St. They are slated to continue to perform there at least throughout the end of June.

They are still playing three sets from 7:30 to 10:00 p.m. (doors open at 7 p.m.), and audience members are encouraged to bring their own instruments and sit in with the band during the second and third sets. The cover charge still is \$4, \$3 for students.

For more info, call 402-477-8008.

Tuesday Tunes at the Star City Dinner Theater

The Star City Dinner Theater and Comedy Cabaret is one of Lincoln's newest venues for music (at least once a week anyway). The theater located at 8th & Q Streets (on the south side) features mostly plays, musicals, and comedy, but on Tuesdays they will feature live jazz, folk, or other things in a cabaret setting.

For more information, call 402-477-8277.

Jazz at The Oven every Sunday evening

On Sunday evenings at The Oven, 201 N. 8th St. in Lincoln, you can still hear the duos of either: Dave Novak & Dennis Taylor; Steve Hanson & Nancy Marshall; TBA (Dave Sharp's old spot) & Andy Hall; or Peter Bouffard & John Carlini. Call 402-475-6118 for more information.

Jazz at KiKi's in Omaha

KiKi's Crab House in Omaha has been featuring jazz for three days a week for some time now.

On Thursdays the Omaha Jazz Society hosts an open workshop and jam session. On Fridays, there are performances for the happy hour beginning at 5:30 p.m. And, on Saturdays the club features local artists from the Omaha and Lincoln area.

For more information, call 402-391-5454.

Jazz on the radio

By Dave Hughes

New jazz program on Nebraska Public Radio

Nebraska Public Radio, KUCV at 90.9 FM in Lincoln and at other frequencies around the state (except Omaha), offers two nights of jazz each week.

On Friday nights at 8:30 p.m. you can hear a new jazz music/interview program called "Jazz is...in the Arts" hosted by the great jazz vocalist John Hendricks. Hendricks and his special guests talk about the art of jazz on this weekly 30 minute program.

At 11 p.m. on Friday you can still hear National Public Radio's "Jazz Profiles," an audio biography of jazz artists. This spring and summer "Jazz Profiles" brings you a 10 part series on Duke Ellington (1999 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ellington). At 12 midnight, "Bohemia After Dark" with host Liz Chadwick features some locally programmed jazz.

On Saturday nights Don Gill hosts "Big Band Spotlight" at 8 p.m., followed by two other NPR programs, "Piano Jazz," with by Marian McPartland now at 9 p.m. and "Jazzset," with by Branford Marsalis, now at 10 p.m. Also, look for another series examining the life and music of Ellington to air at 11 p.m. on Saturday nights very soon.

For a free copy of NPRN's program guide "Members Only," call 472-2200, or 1-800-290-6850.

JAZZ PROFILES in Apr., May, & June (Fri. nights at 11 pm)

- 04-09 Duke Ellington: An Overview, Part 1
- 04-16 A special fundraising edition
- 04-23 Duke Ellington: An Overview, Part 2
- 04-30 Duke Ellington: The Bandleader, Part 1
- 05-07 Duke Ellington: The Bandleader, Part 2
- 05-14 Duke Ellington: The Composer, Part 1
- 05-21 Duke Ellington: The Composer, Part 2
- 05-28 Duke Ellington: Songwriter & His Singers
- 06-04 Duke Ellington: In Film and on Stage
- 06-11 Duke Ellington: The Pianist
- 06-18 Duke Ellington: The Legacy and Influence
- 06-25 Al Hibbler, or George Avakian

PIANO JAZZ in Apr. May, & June (Sat. nights at 9 pm)

- 04-10 20th Anniversary Show
- 04-17 A special fundraising edition
- 04-24 Ray Haynes
- 05-01 James Williams

05-08 Dianne Reeves
 05-15 Don Byron
 05-22 Mercer Ellington
 05-29 Loston Harris
 06-05 Les Paul
 06-12 Kenny Kirkland
 06-19 Marlene Verplank
 06-26 Jon Weber

JAZZSET in Apr., May, & June (Sat. nights at 10 pm)

04-10 WBGO Turns 20
 04-17 A special fundraising edition
 04-24 Carnegie Hall Duke Ellington Centennial Tribute
 05-01 Jazzset Clubhops in San Francisco
 05-08 Portrait of the Havana Jazz Festival, Part 1
 05-15 Portrait of the Havana Jazz Festival, Part 2
 05-22 Portrait of the Havana Jazz Festival, Part 3
 05-29 TBA
 06-05 TBA
 06-12 TBA
 06-19 TBA
 06-26 TBA

Jazz shows on KZUM

KZUM Community Radio, at 89.3 FM in Lincoln, offers some jazz programs Monday-Wednesday afternoons from 1 to 3 p.m., Thursday afternoons from 1 to 4 p.m. and some other days and times.

The weekday afternoon schedule goes like this: on Mondays, Dave Hoffman hosts "Jazz Divas;" on Tuesdays, Herb Thomas guides "Zero Street;" on Wednesdays, Dave Hoffman opens "Dave's Closet;" on Thursdays, Butch Berman, does "Reboppin'" from 1 to 2:30 p.m., and Rachel Principato, programs "Rachel's Jazz" from 2:30 to 4 p.m.

There are other jazz programs scattered throughout the schedule, including: "Dance Bands: When Melody was King," with Con Good from 8 to 10 a.m., "Jazz Journey," hosted by jazz musician Bill Wimmer, and "Hotter Than That" with Warren "Rude Dog" Rudolph from 8:30 to 10 p.m. on Mondays; "NightTown," with Tom Ineck from 8:30-10 p.m. on Thursdays; and, some western swing on the "KZUM Heyride" on Fridays from 7:30 to 9 p.m. with long time host John Schmitz is for you.

If you would like detailed information about the jazz programs on KZUM, or would like to receive a current copy of their program guide, give them a call at 474-5086.

Jazz and blues on KIOS (with Wed. changes)

KIOS at 91.5 in Omaha has jazz (and some blues) every weekday from 1 p.m. until 3:30 pm.

On Mondays at 1 p.m., "Riverwalk: Live from the Landing" starts off the week, then at 2 p.m. is "Blues in the Afternoon" hosted by Mike Jacobs. On Tuesdays, it's the "Brazilian Hour" at 1 p.m., followed by "Jazz in the Afternoon" with Chris Cooke from 2-3:30 p.m. On Wednesdays at 1 p.m. it's "Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz," then 90 minutes of "Jazz in the Afternoon" hosted

by Mike Jacobs. On Thursdays, "One Night Stand" with host Chris Nielsen kicks off the afternoon of jazz at 1 p.m., followed by "Jazz Junction" at 2 with Rick Erben. On Fridays "Jazz From Studio 1" starts it off at 1 p.m., followed by another "Jazz in the Afternoon" with Jacobs again that lasts until 3:30 p.m.

On Saturdays: "Marian McPartland" airs again at 8 p.m. on Saturday followed by "Jazz Junction" with Erben again at 9 p.m. and "Last Call" with Cooke again at 11 p.m.

For a free copy of the KIOS program guide, give them a call at 402-557-2777 in Omaha.

Discorama By Butch Berman

VALERIE CAPERS

Wagner Takes The "A" Train
 ERI

It was a dark and stormy night (really) a couple of summers back when playing to a mere handful at a small Midwestern college's auditorium to a vastly underpublicized gig that Valerie Capers and her magnificent band literally blew my shit away.

After meeting and "hanging" with this lovely refined woman and educator I thought to myself - Valerie Capers should be heard around the world - she's such a monster - and now with her new ERI release - "Wagner Takes the 'A' Train" - maybe her time to really shine has come.

This CD smokes - and backed by the same superb musicians I saw her in performance with - Val, owning the piano and singing with such charm and conviction; John Robinson on bass; drummer Earl "Boom-Boom" Williams; and Alan Givens on sax and flute; round out the aforementioned quartet, now with guitarist Mark Marino, are a BAND to contend with.

The title track - a daring merger of a Wagner opera - "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and Strayhorn's - "Take the 'A' Train," takes you on a musical voyage that leaves you breathless - anticipating the next cut.

And selections from Monk's "Round Midnight," Timmons "Moanin," and the romantic standard - "My One and Only Love" captivate. Capers two originals are on par sings are on par with other covers - which round out this top notch effort and show off her writing abilities as well. A triple- threat, four-star performer.

You can bet the next time I see Ms. Capers - unless I'm on a list, they'll be a waiting line to a sold-out show.

Friends of Jazz: Dietze Music House

(Editor's Note: Starting with this issue of *Jazz*, we'll recognize some of the friends of jazz who are helping to keep the music alive.)

By Tom Ineck

Doug Fenton has been quietly going about the business of making music happen in Lincoln for about 37 years now, since he began operating the elevator and selling clarinet reeds at Dietze Music House.

Now he's president of the company.

Fenton hasn't lost his enthusiasm for music or for the Lincoln music community that has been so profitable for his business. At every chance, Dietze tries to give something back to that community.

For example, the store loans a well-tuned piano for every Nebraska Jazz Orchestra concert. It sponsors the Lollipops concerts that the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra brings to Lincoln Public Schools. It is a member of the Ventures in Partnership program matching schools with Lincoln businesses. It underwrites programming on KZUM Community Radio and Nebraska Public Radio. And, it has helped with several Berman Music Foundation events.

"If you're going to be in business in a city, you have to give back," Fenton said. "If everyone takes from the community, eventually the well runs dry. We feel very strongly about that. Lincoln has been very good to us, and we're just being a good neighbor."

Hundreds of Dietze's customers are professional musicians, working in every style of music. For them, Fenton has a personal commitment to service.

"It's been my standard policy that I'm in the phone book, and though I hope nobody will call me at 12 o'clock at night to tell me that their guitar cord broke, we take care of ours."

Fenton said he and BMF president Butch Berman have been friends for many years. He admires Berman for his continuing support of live jazz in Lincoln.

"There always has been some jazz in Lincoln, but it has not been one of the mediums right at the forefront," he said. "I'm tickled that Butch is doing it. It's probably been the most successful venture like that that anybody has done. There have been a number of bars that started out saying, 'We're going to have jazz.' And, after about two months of no crowds, they had to give it up."

While he doesn't consider himself a jazz aficionado, Fenton has long been a fan of jazz guitar.

"I've been wild about jazz guitar players ever since I was old enough to know that they existed. In fact, most of my record and CD collection consists of jazz guitar players."

His love for the stringed instrument includes listening to them, tuning them, selling them and servicing them. To his regret, he has never learned to play one.

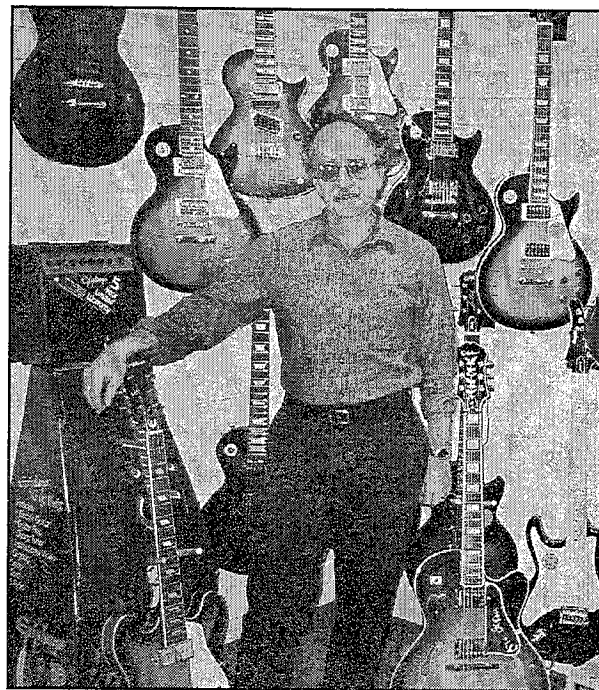


Photo by Tom Ineck

Doug Fenton in the guitar room at Dietze

"I'm one of these perfectionist kind of people. If I can't be good at something right away, it just drives me crazy. I would probably go into the closet until I got good at guitar, and no one would see me for three years."

Among Fenton's favorite fretmeisters are Wes Montgomery, Kenny Burrell, Howard Roberts, Pat Metheny, Mike Stern and Al Di Meola.

All three of Fenton's partners and several of his employees are professional musicians. Partner Keith Heckman plays bass. Partner Ted Eschliman plays keyboards and has recorded a couple of CDs. Partner Tim Pratt, who runs the Omaha store, has played in a number of bands.

"We have always had people working here that were working in bands," Fenton said. "It's a wonderful sales tool. They're out with the new product, on stage with it. It's amazing how many sales come from that."

Through the years, Dietze has sponsored numerous workshops and clinics where local musicians can meet and hear some of their favorites. After much coaxing, Di Meola conducted a guitar clinic a couple of years ago for about 300 fans.

It is that kind of extra attention to its customer base that has made Dietze a respected institution in Lincoln.

"We have a very firm belief in taking care of our customers," Fenton said. "I don't sell anything I can't service. I like happy customers."

Lincoln Southeast High School helps celebrate the "Year of the Duke"

By Russ Dantzler



File photo
Edward Kennedy Ellington, April 29, 1899 - May 24, 1974

"The music of my race is something which is going to live, something which posterity will honor in a higher sense than merely that of the music of the ballroom today," said a prophetic young Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. It is now a quarter century after his passing and long after the demise of most of those ballrooms. Duke should be proud of the way his music is living on today, being passed on to future generations nationwide if not worldwide.

Lincoln Southeast High School's band will arrive in New York City on April 29, the day of Ellington's 100th birthday. They were chosen from 1,307 high school bands from 50 states to be one of 20 finalists in the fourth annual "Essentially Ellington" band competition and festival. During the three-day visit they will participate in workshops, a birthday celebration and a final competition.

"This is a great opportunity for students to hear other top students and to work with the best professionals in New York City," Southeast's jazz band instructor Robert Krueger proudly said. Those professionals include trumpeters Wynton Marsalis, Jon Faddis and Terell Stafford, drummers Justin DiCioccio and Carl Allen and reed man/conductor Ron Carter. Watch this space to see how the band comes out!

Ellington fans world-wide will have many more ways to celebrate Duke's 100th birthday this year. Jazz at Lincoln Center's Ellington Centennial plans alone include hundreds of concerts, tours, lectures, films, the department's first book, a PBS special, a recording and more. They kicked it off with an evening of smiles on January 14 at Alice Tully Hall.

"Jazz Talk: 'Happy Reunion' -- Memories of Duke,"

was the name and description of that evening. At first glance it looked like a producer's nightmare. There were seventeen musicians with no instruments other than individual clip-on microphones on stage.

Of the surviving twenty-seven people honored to have been hired into the Duke Ellington Orchestra by the Maestro himself, these artists were able to attend. Trumpeter Clark Terry couldn't get out of a concert contract. Vocalist Betty Roche, who since just passed away, wasn't healthy enough.

Harold Ashby, Butch Ballard, Arthur Baron, Aaron Bell, Louie Bellson, Buster Cooper, Milt Grayson, Al Hibbler, John Lamb, Lawrence Lucie, Dolores Parker Morgan, Eddie Preston, Vince Prudente, Monsignor John Sanders, Joya Sherrill, Jimmy Woode and Britt Woodman were guided through reminiscences by author Robert O'Meally. The audience got to hear first-hand what it was like to have one of the world's greatest diplomats for a boss.

Aaron Bell spoke of a night when as bassist for Ellington they were to battle the Basie Band. Duke and Count decided to have fun with their musicians, and switched music books before it began. He said it didn't sound very good. Joya Sherrill told of writing the lyrics to "Take the 'A' Train" when she was only fifteen. Guitarist Lawrence Lucie, who is two months older than 91-year-old Claude Williams, recalled earlier days. He played in the orchestra in 1934.

Trombonist Art Baron said Ellington was both a master musician and a master magician. He explained that Duke would stand next to a soloist and admire him on stage, making that artist play better than he knew that he could. This seemed to be the common theme in each description, that he would make each person in his band feel appreciated for his or her specific talent. There was no competition, but admiration! Duke infused his musicians with confidence to be the very best, sometimes in the very unique roles he had created for them. And he could blend all of that carefully-chosen talent into one gorgeous sound.

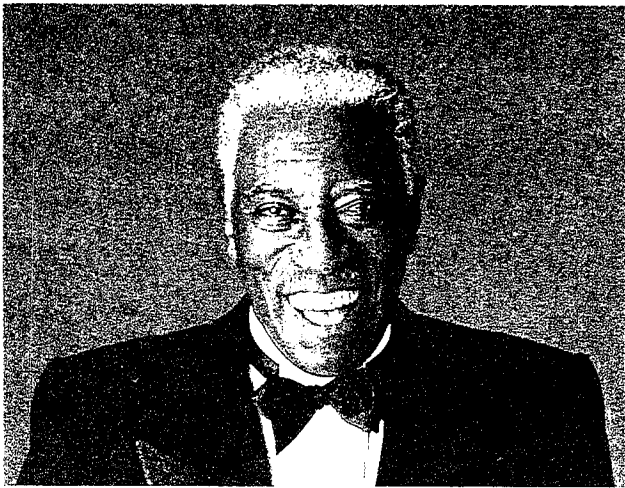
We were treated to the music of these veterans right after the event at a "House Rent" style party. Milt Grayson, Joya Sherrill and Al Hibbler sang as they were backed variously by Louie Bellson, Aaron Bell, Jimmy Woode, Britt Woodman and Butch Ballard, who allowed youngsters Wynton Marsalis and Wycliffe Gordon join in.

On April 17 Wynton Marsalis will lead the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra at the Folly Theater in Kansas City, the middle of a two-month tour of thirty-seven one-nighters. Lincoln Center's education outreach program has been and will be teaching Ellington to thousands of students all over the country.

Every jazz fan will likely celebrate Ellington's centennial in some joyous way. I'll be happy if Duke Ellington enters Y2K as more of a household -- and classroom -- name.

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<http://soho.ios.com/~hotjazz/HOTJAZZ.html>



Joe Williams in 1992

File photo

Big Voice, Big Man - Joe Williams

by Andrienne Wilson

The recent death of Jazz vocal icon Joe Williams was as indicative of his greatness, artistry and independence, as it was sad. I had the unique perspective of not only being a fan, but a friend and a witness to his very last performance a mere week and a half before his death. Please let me tell you, from a grateful recipient of his wonderful generosity, my perception of his legacy.

Joe Williams has long been regarded at the top of the list of great vocal Jazzmen. Surprisingly there have been relatively few in comparison to the females who typically gain more recognition. Jon Hendricks, Billy Eckstine, Chet Baker (in a back handed kind of way), Jimmy Rushing (for blues), and Mel Torme come to mind, and all have made their mark in truly unique ways, but Joe Williams stands out on several levels, both musically and humanistically.

Joe Williams started in Chicago in the '30s as a dance hall singer, performing the pop of the day with big bands. His facility for true blues singing (no pseudo-jazz enlightened imitation here), and deftly intricate scatting put him ahead of all of the singers who were limited by the pop tradition, and almost immediately singled him out as one who performed artistry. This reputation put him squarely into the "who's who" of jazz working alongside Duke Ellington, and singing for Count Basie for many years.

Unlike many of his counterparts who faded away from a hard life, and lost opportunity, Joe always remained at the top of his craft. His great sense of style, and total professionalism never waned, even as others lost their power to drugs, booze and hard times. This, as it turned out, would also be echoed in how he died. He prevailed when jazz was not popular, and he flourished as fans

returned -- most dramatically in the '70s when jazz education became a mainstay for many high schools and colleges. This is when I first got to know Joe Williams.

My first year in college was marked by a situation all too many vocalists are familiar with -- a big band, but no music. There aren't very many arrangements for fledgling singers, as affordable arrangements are hard to produce in the number of keys one would need to truly facilitate each individual vocal range. I, personally, depended on the student arrangers at the college to provide me with material. This was actually the reason that I was driven into the ranks of arrangers and composers -- there was no other way to get performable music. Until I met Joe Williams.

That freshman year he came to our school and performed a series of concerts, in order to earn money for us to go to the year's festivals, and as the band singer, I got to "open" for him. He was wonderful to me, and as our time together progressed, he informed me that he really liked my voice, but didn't like the material provided. He went through all of the arrangements that he had with him, and pulled out everything he felt a 17-year-old girl could possibly pull off. My voice at the time was a perfect octave above his, and nary a note needed to be changed. "Love You Madly" won me the Berkeley Jazz Festival, and brought me a standing ovation at the Reno Jazz Festival in front of 3,000 people -- live on radio. I was off.

The following year, as I was recruited for Edmonds College in Washington and their group headed for the Montreux Jazz Festival, Joe came to our aid and earned a huge amount for us through concerts, in order to send us to Europe. We had the joy of singing back-up for him, and the enormity of his influence hit me one more time.

As a professional composer, Joe came into my life again. I reacquainted myself with him seven years ago, only to find that he remembered nothing about what he had done for me, but remembered everything about me personally. A typical reaction from one who does things selflessly. He loved my compositions, and decided that Nancy Wilson should be singing them. He personally presented a package of CDs and songs to her, with the recommendation that she take me seriously as a writer. Lots of good advice, and caring follow-up was included, and for no reason other than "The future of the music," as Joe put it.

This last month, as I was finishing up a quarter of teaching 33 singers, when the Joe Williams experience hit Seattle. Everyone showed up, as this level of experience is not to be missed and as I admonished many students, at his age (reported between 78 and 80 depending on the bio), you can't afford to miss him. He won't be around that many more times.

When I got to the club I was horrified and amazed at the same time. It was clear, to me, that this was the last time any of us would see Joe. I cried with every note he sang. The most influential performer of many careers was getting ready to go. You could see it, feel it, sense it, taste it, and hear it. Joe (unknown to the audience), was on an oxygen tank in the dressing room before, and inbetween

shows. His emphysema, and asthma were exacerbated by a very nasty cold he got on the airplane, and the wet, cold dreary Seattle weather, complete with mold and pollen. It was just enough to push him over the edge. I only spoke with him a minute, but he still managed to remind me of loving my new CD, and of talking with me when I was on the radio in Las Vegas last summer. You see, he managed one more selfless act on my behalf as he gave me tons of credibility with a few well placed words to the radio audience. I held back the tears as we spoke, because he was clearly not okay.

Every show was met with an immediate standing ovation. I have never seen a gutsier performance in my life. It was professional, brilliantly laid out, replete with his famous humor, and deft scatting, and a complete exercise in pacing yourself. While he had a hard time holding out a note for very long, without creating a coughing opportunity, he simply made the notes shorter, and held himself back so that at the end of the second show he was able to hit those very high notes that he is so famous for. To the end, a five octave range. He went into intensive care at 3:00 a.m.

He was let out of the hospital in Seattle, so that he could go home to Las Vegas, and was admitted there after a couple of days of relapse. He went home one more time before the doctors insisted that he return to the hospital. On the only day that his wife, Jill, left his side, and for only a brief respite, Joe left the hospital of his own accord. The doctors tried to stop him, everyone said that he wouldn't make it, and Joe insisted on going home. They couldn't find his wife to stop him, and leaving common sense and arguments behind he walked away. They found him by the side of the road three hours later. He had almost made it home.

It has been said that he was having a panic attack. Three of his best friends had died in that hospital in the past two months, and he needlessly left care that might



Joe Williams in 1973

File photo

have kept him alive, in order to get away from a perceived death trap. Anyone who believes that did not know Joe, and is not paying attention to who he was. I saw his last performance. I saw the well from which he pulled out the last thing he could do. This was not a man who would ever be able to live plugged into a machine, not a man who would be happy unless he were able to give back to the community that had listened to his music for so long. He walked away, so that he could end his life the way he lived it -- on his own terms, and on his own two feet.

He is, and will always be, one of the biggest men I have ever known. An artist in every sense of the word that brings beauty, truth and light on to the planet. I wanted everyone who has ever heard his music to know just how big the voice really was. We are all better off because he was here.

Blues on disc *(cont. from page 19)*

CHRIS VINCENT

Long Blue Night
Front Porch Blues

When I first heard this CD I asked myself, "What is this? Can it be something really new that sounds so familiar?" The questions kept coming as I kept listening and I would wonder about something I heard and ask myself, "How do I put that in words?"

I have listened to this CD six or more times, and by my most succinct calculation it's something old, something new, something borrowed, and everything blue. The widest category that it would fit in would be folk/country blues.

According to the scant liner notes, "All songs are written, produced, composed, performed and published by Chris Vincent," and, "This album was cut completely live, and there are no overdubs used at any point during this recording." Now according to some info I found on the web, Vincent is gigging around New Jersey and drawing quite a crowd.

I still don't know what it is, but I do think this artist is important. I, however, do know it's still fun to listen to.

MICHELLE WILLSON

tryin' to make a little love
Bullseye Blues & Jazz

A sultry percussion lead-in starts off the title track of Michelle Willson's new release, "Tryin' to Make a Little Love;" it's an open invitation for cooperation. Followed by a jump blues tune, New Orleans style (kind of), in "Ay La Bas," then a nice ballad in "Life Goes On" she continues through a range of stylings, attitudes, and emotions with the style and grace of someone who has lived all those points of view and is here to tell everyone about what she saw and heard.

I have heard the CD a number of times, enjoy it very much, and I miss her once in a while.

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Blues corner By Rich Hoover

It's spring-thing time. It's poppin', it's hoppin' and most of us have already missed a couple of blues festivals in Florida. There is music in the air everywhere, so I have culled only a few of the blues fests in the next few months.

4/22-24 Swallow Hill Blues Fest Denver CO 303-777-1003

Henry Townsend, Roy Rogers, Mary Flower, and more. This one will probably be real purdy, with spring and all.

4/23-5/2 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Fest 800-488-5252

Dozens & dozens of groups, artists, workshops and fun, fun, fun. Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Irma Thomas, Taj Mahal, Los Lobos, Little Ed & the Blues Imperials, Eddie Clearwater, Earl King, and more, and more!

4/30-5/1 Tulsa Blues Fest@Cain's Ballroom 918-747-0001

Buddy Guy, Bobby Rush, Roy Rogers, R.L. Burnside, Carey Bell & more. Quite a lineup.

Livin' the Blues Cruise and Land Fest 407-799-4048

5/7-8 Lori Wilson Park, Coco Beach FL

5/9-13 Carnival Cruise

Bernard Allison, Kenny Neal, Bill Wharton, Sonny Rhodes, plus more in store. Tickets available separately for fest or cruise.

5/15-16 Chesapeake Bay Blues Fest Annapolis MD 800-555-SEAT

John Lee Hooker, Wilson Pickett, Koko Taylor, Son Seals and more good stuff.

5/22-23 Doheny Blues Fest Dana Point Harbor CA 949-262-2662

Wilson Pickett, Keb' Mo', Marcia Ball, Rod Piazza, Charlie Musselwhite, Joe Louis Walker, and more. Camping available.

5/28-29 W. C. Handy Blues Awards Fest Memphis TN 901-527-BLUE

All award nominees are featured in various clubs in the city. I would suspect it is a party hardy scenario.

6/3-6 Chicago Blues Fest 6 stages 312-744-3315

60 performances, featuring Bobby "Blue" Bland, Kim Wilson, Denise LaSalle, and Marcia Ball.

6/11-19 Riverbend Fest Chattanooga TN 423-265-4112 or 423-756-2212

Nine, count em', nine days of Blues, Soul, and Rock. June 14th is Bessie Smith day and gets extra Blues and BBQ.

6/25-26 Port Townsend Country Blues Fest Port Townsend WA 360-385-3102

A weeklong workshop precedes the fest. Headliners are Saffire - the Uppity Blueswomen, Cephas & Wiggins, Jerry McCain, Otis Taylor, and many more with clubs active, too.

Mourning the passing: Charles Brown (1920-99)

Starting piano at age five in Texas City, Texas, Charles Brown made his first hit in 1945 with "Driftin' Blues" with a group called The Blazer's. The group toured and followed up with nine more top ten hits, helping the newly forming r&b craze get off to a flying start in So Cal.

Charles then went solo and garnered another 10 hits between '49 and '52. He continued to be successful through the '50s and had another hit in 1961, a Christmas tune entitled "Please Come Home for Christmas."

He was unable to find work and was out of music for 25 years until he was rediscovered in 1987 by Danny Caron, who helped him restart his musical career which snowballed from accolade to accolade.

I was fortunate enough to see and hear several of his performances on a "blues cruise" several years ago. Charles had plenty of glitter, a great showman's personality, and he was an extremely talented artist. He may be gone but will not be forgotten.

Blues on disc By Rich Hoover

HENRY BUTLER

Blues After Sunset

Black Top

An ever-expanding artist of the piano is now delving into the blues.

Henry Butler, now 50, has been learning, playing and teaching with the piano since early childhood in New Orleans. At the age of 7 he started training his voice to accompany his piano talents. He has continued his formal education at Southern University in Baton Rouge with jazz luminary Alvin Batiste, then on to Michigan State for his Master's degree.

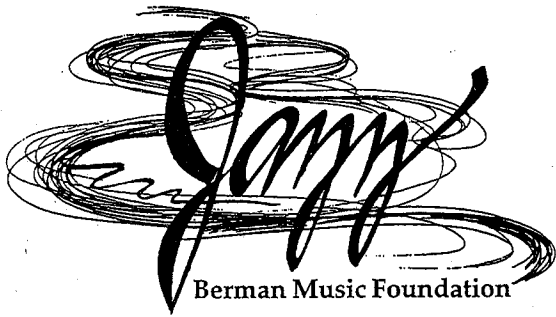
In 1980 he began working for Motown and the Stevie Wonder organization, where he met bassist Charlie Haden and made his first recording in 1986 with MCA, *fivin' around*, and shortly thereafter another entitled, *The Village* also for MCA, with both garnering critical acclaim and admiring fans while touring the country.

In 1990 Henry joined Windham Hill records and released *Orleans Improvisation*, followed with *Blues and More*, released in 1992. He then headed back home the New Orleans in 1996 and released *For all Seasons* on Atlantic Jazz. During all this time Henry is getting more attention and the accompanying awards such as the 1998 'Best of the Beat' award for Best New Orleans Piano Player.

This CD has a full ration of piano blues and soulful vocals in the many styles and influences of the blues. Henry is certainly no slouch when it comes to penning the lyrics on eight of the dozen tunes on this release creating poignant and contemplative remarks throughout. Add to this the occasional accompaniment of Snooks Eaglin, guitar and Mark Kazanoff, harmonica.

If you enjoy smooth blues piano and rich vocal stylings, you need this CD. Enjoy.

(Blues on disc continued on page 17, column 2)



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Address Correction Requested

Norman Hedman Soup

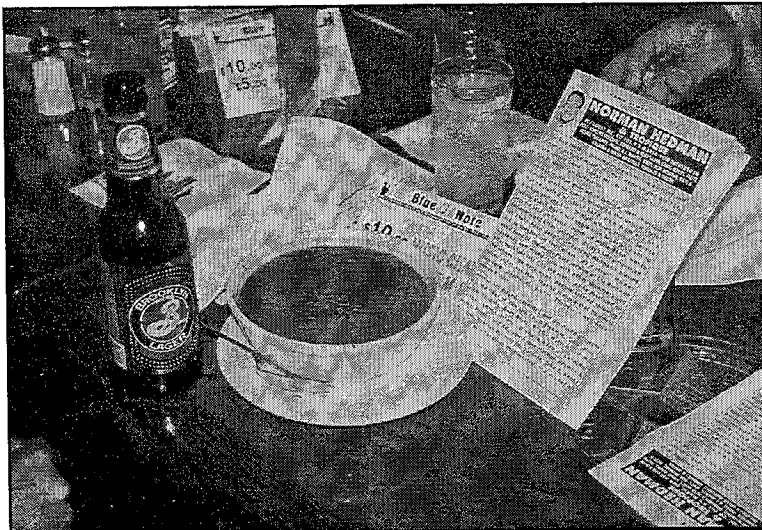


Photo by Rich Hoover

"Norman Hedman Soup" was the specialty at The Blue Note the night of the CD release party

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