



Photo by John Abbott

Kendra Shank will bring the music of Abbey Lincoln to Lincoln June 5.

Singer Kendra Shank pays tribute to spirited music of Abbey Lincoln

By Tom Ineck

With her new release, “A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln Songbook,” singer Kendra Shank has taken on a daunting task—interpreting the music of one of the most idiosyncratic jazz singer-songwriters in history.

She and her longtime ensemble will bring the music of Lincoln to Lincoln, Neb., June 5 in the opening concert of this year’s Jazz in June series.

In a recent interview, Shank talked about the recording and the years it took to bring to fruition.

Unlike many jazz musicians living in New York City, Shank has a regular gig where she and the band can work up new material and hone their music to a fine edge. One Friday a month, they appear at the 55 Bar, Shank’s home away from home for five years. Much of the music on “A Spirit Free” evolved in performances at the intimate Greenwich Village night club.

“A lot of the arrangements for



File Photo

Abbey Lincoln

this record were created there, on the gigs at that club. We would just try stuff and see what worked well and what didn’t work well,” she said, pretty much describing the creative process inherent in jazz music.

To Shank’s knowledge, no one else has ever attempted a full-length tribute to Lincoln’s very personal music, although some of her tunes have been covered by other singers, including Sheila Jordan, Cassandra Wilson, Mark Murphy

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Prez Sez

Berman foundation celebrates swingin' spring

By Butch Berman

Dear Readers,

Well the buds are a buddin' and the birdies are chirping and I guess this must be spring. I had a fun, active winter...but I know it was brutal for many around the country.

You just can't mess with Mother N.

Jazz goes and flows with the seasons. Cool when needed, and hot in usually (hopefully) the right places. Jazz always works for me, and I love working for jazz.

Speaking of jazz...one of the bright new talents out there, sax-man Andrew Vogt, wrote me recently from L.A. He's a former Lincolnite who honed his chops on cruise ships, set sail to Colorado to gig his butt off the past few years, and just cut his first CD, "Action Plan," this year (You can read my review in the January 2007 edition of *Jazz*).

He found himself sitting near another great player who's been around awhile, and is still moving upwards...Greg Abate. I've hired Greg a lot throughout the foundation years, and he gave a couple of private lessons to Andrew in the early days that made a difference in his development. Maybe these cats should get together and cut one another in the old tradition of sax players trying to blow each other off the stage and just tearing up the joint.

I caught Doc Severinsen recently at our Lied Center for Performing Arts, with his extremely talented and entertaining big band. I was hoping he'd have Ed Shaughnessy on drums or trumpeter Snooky Young, but no dice. Doc still looked and sounded great. He still processes that "old-school" charm and



File Photo

Doc Severinsen led the Tonight Show Orchestra for many years.

showmanship that a lot of bands seem to forget these days.

Playing ability is foremost, but seeing Doc lead these young lions through those great old songs, with those "Tonight Show" Tommy Newsom arrangements was a gas. The major star in Doc's house on this tour is L.A. jazz saxophone legend Ernie Watts. For me, he stole the whole show. I love all his stuff with Charlie Haden and others, and it was a thrill to see him still play so magnificently that evening. What a monster!

I turned 58 on the 10th of March, sharing a birthday with the likes of the late, great Bix Beiderbecke, and all-star pitcher Steve Howe, both lovers of life and its occasional excesses. When I was growing up during the 60s, most of my musical heroes didn't make it past 27. Luckily, I turned 40 at the Hazelton Clinic, which probably made it possible for me to be telling you this tale now. For the rest of the story...watch for the book.

Anyway, my rockin' Cronin

Brothers turned the usually groovy FAC at Lincoln, Nebraska's famed Zoo Bar into a really cool party for me, and a whole bunch of my Pisces pals. Mega kudos as always goes out to my old friend, Joyce Latrom, and all of the Cronettes for making for a fab birthday to remember, and my lovely wife, Grace, for everything else.

Another night to remember was a benefit for one of Lincoln's counter-culture leaders, who has suddenly taken ill, and is making his battle with the dreaded C, an adventure that only



Courtesy Photo

The Cronins, with Cronettes in attendance, play at Terrence Moore benefit.



Courtesy Photo

The crowd enjoys the Cronins at the benefit for Terrence Moore.

Terrence “Terry” Moore of Dirt Cheap Records could handle with such courage and curiosity. Visit www.dirtcheapreunion.com to learn of this cutting-edge record store from the early '70s and how it helped define Lincoln's always hip underbelly that later created our first community organic food market, Open Harvest, and its swell, diverse radio station, KZUM 89.3 FM, to name a few.

The Cronins, The Stringtown Castanets and Charlie Burton and the quartet version of his Lynch Mob brought a whole lot of folks from the old days together for



Courtesy Photo

Giacomo Gates

a beautiful, heartfelt evening that rocked, and help raise money to put a small dent in his mounting medical bills. Many fences were mended that night, as the reality of life, our mortality and uncertainty of anything beyond now crept through the hundreds of old friends that packed the Loft at The Mill.

If you want to donate to this worthy cause, the necessary info is also linked to the website mentioned earlier. Terry and I go back to the 8th grade, and his B-Day is just one day past mine, both in 1949. We had our ups and downs (mostly ups) over the years and always seemed to be supporting each other's stuff once Dirt Cheap started. We both ended up working for KZUM, and were really reuniting when his illness befell

him. Quite a guy!

I'm excited to announce that “the Gates” is returning. Good buddy, great singer, entertainer and educator Giacomo Gates is first returning with Kansas City's Joe Cartwright Trio (Joe on piano, Gerald Spaits on bass and Ray

DeMarchi on drums) which will perform at the Brownville Concert Hall in Brownville, Neb., April 6-8, and then here at the Embassy Suites Ballroom on Tuesday April 10 with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra. He's one of the hippest and most talented cats I've ever come into contact with

in my 12 years of jazz biz.

Be there or be square, and I'm not kiddin'. You can catch us both chatting about the gig, his career, and other bright moments on my KZUM radio show, “Reboppin' Revisited.” We'll be on 1-3 p.m. Tuesday April 10 on 89.3 FM, Channel 10 on local cable TV and via streaming at www.kzum.org. Should be a gasser.

Speaking of gas...I'm runnin' out, so gotta go. Back at cha by Jazz In June.

Later,



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Kendra Shank continued from page 1

and Freddy Cole. Shank herself included Lincoln songs on her last two releases, in 1998 and 2000.

Her latest homage to Lincoln, however, took the musical challenge to a new level.

“I can’t say enough about Abbey. She has been my idol; she’s been my friend and mentor. I just think the world of her, and she’s such a powerful musician and such a powerful individual,” Shank said. “She has her own voice and her own sound that is so strong. The challenging part was to find my own place in these songs because they are so associated with her, and I had been listening to her versions of them for so long that they’re etched in my aural memory. At the same time, it was also the most natural thing to find my own voice because that’s what you do as an artist. You kind of have no choice. I couldn’t sound like Abbey Lincoln if I tried. I have my own voice.”

As with any recording that Shank is contemplating, the early process was the same. She put away the Abbey Lincoln records, got the lead sheets for the music, sat down with her guitar, learned the melodies and “let them speak to me in a personal way and see what they mean to me in my life, related to my life experience and how I feel about the world.

“Abbey’s songs are so full of universal truths that anyone can relate to if you’re a human being on the planet, living here in the human experience. That’s what her songs talk about, so you can find your own place there about what you’ve lived through. The songs kind of dictated to me what the arrangement would be.”

She realized, for example, that “Wholly Earth” is composed in two “movements,” so she stressed that



Photo by John Abbott

Kendra Shank from the cover of “A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln Songbook.



File Photo

Abbey Lincoln is an innovator in words and music.

shift in lyrics and mood with contrasting changes in meter, ending with a swinging samba. “What the song had to say to me naturally expressed itself in musical arrangements.”

Co-producer Andrew Rowan helped Shank narrow the song list for “A Spirit Free.” But first, he sent her a list of every song that Lincoln had ever written.

“He brought some songs to my attention that I wasn’t even aware of, and gave me some recordings that I didn’t yet have in my collection,” Shank said. One of those was

“Natas (Playmate),” which appears on the record. Others were chosen for their personal impact on Shank and their relevance in a post-9/11 world, especially “The World is Falling Down.”

“She wrote it long before 9/11, but when 9/11 happened I was here,” Shank recalled. “It was a horrible experience for all of us and affected me deeply. I live not far from the site, and my neighborhood was covered in ash and I was wearing a mask to protect myself from the horrible air. On that day, the refrain from that song popped into my head. It was so poignant that when I decided to do this record I remembered that experience and how the song had affected me.”

“A Circle of Love,” with its universal message of peace, has similar resonance for Shank, who is not timid about her own anti-war position. While first playing it through, the Bush war still in its early days, she burst into tears and knew she must include it on the new CD. Even though she had recorded “Throw It Away” for a previous release, she decided it was time to do it again, as the arrangement had evolved significantly and now be-

gan with an improvised incantation, a “calling in of the spirits.”

“Being Me” closes the CD with a statement of individuality that is typical of Lincoln’s honesty.

“It sort of sums up, for me, what the album is all about, and what Abbey’s songwriting is about and what living is about, and being an artist,” Shank said. “In delving into these songs and finding my own voice in them, it took me through a whole process of who am I... as an individual, as a human being, as a singer.”

Of course, doing justice to Lincoln’s music also required a group of compatible musicians, and Shank has them—longtime bandmates pianist Frank Kimbrough, bassist Dean Johnson and drummer Tony Moreno. For the recording, she also added Billy Drewes on reeds, Ben Monder on guitar and Gary Versace on accordion. The core quartet has been together for eight years, a rare luxury in the jazz world.

“I’m so grateful to have an ongoing relationship with these guys, and to have played with them for so long. We have this chemistry and this connection and this intuitive interplay. We don’t even need to rehearse. We can just get up on the



Photo by Gene Martin

The Kendra Shank Quintet at the Jazz Standard club in New York City.

bandstand and play.”

As in Shank’s previous Jazz in June appearance in 2004, she will again be accompanied by Kimbrough, Johnson and Moreno.

Shank’s professional relationship with Abbey Lincoln began in 2000, when Lincoln asked her to play guitar on her recording, “Over the Years.” A former folk and bluegrass musician, Shank largely set aside the instrument when she made the switch to jazz.

“She was encouraging me to play my guitar more,” Shank said of Lincoln. “She kind of chastised me.” After an informal rehearsal

with the singer, Shank wound up in the studio performing on Lincoln’s swinging gospel version of the traditional folk tune “Blackberry Blossoms,” for which Lincoln wrote a new lyric.

“It was a beautiful example of what she had been trying to tell me, not to limit my music to genre classification,” Shank said. “I think that’s why I was drawn to her music. These songs just resonate with me, in such a personal way, as if I could have written them myself. This is roots music to me. And Abbey’s songs have such a direct narrative voice in them. Folk songs are storytelling songs. Her songs tell a story, with a lot of imagery, and relate very much to our daily lives.”

In response to Shank’s tribute CD, Lincoln offered support from the start and praised the result with a personal endorsement that is printed on the cover: “This album is a generous, wonderful gift. Thank you, Kendra.”

Likewise, everyone who loves the music of Abbey Lincoln will offer their praise and thanks for a monumental task well achieved.

“*A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln Songbook*,” is reviewed on page 14 of this newsletter.



Photo by John Abbott

Kendra Shank, like Abbey Lincoln, is a free spirit

Concert Review

Pizzarelli's charm and showmanship shine

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—Popular jazz guitarist and singer John Pizzarelli celebrated his 47th birthday with nearly 700 listeners April 6 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

A New Jersey native a long way from his current home in New York City, Pizzarelli brought along his wife—cabaret singer Jessica Molaskey—and their daughter, in addition to bandmates Larry Fuller on piano, Tony Tedesco on drums and brother Martin Pizzarelli on bass.

They were accompanied by some old, reliable friends—classic songs from the Great American Songbook by Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, Cole Porter and others. You can't go wrong with tunes like "Lady, Be Good," "I've Got You Under My Skin," "Pick Yourself Up," "You Make Me Feel So Young" and "How About You?" all expertly rendered in the first half of the show.

Leaning heavily on his most recent release, 2006's "Dear Mr. Sinatra," Pizzarelli introduced many of the performances with humorous stories, like the one about songsmith Cy Coleman performing "Witchcraft" for Ol' Blue Eyes for the first time. Then there was the one about a late-night session between composer Dave Mann and lyricist Bob Hilliard that produced "In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning." Giving it his own wistful twist, Pizzarelli played his guitar solo on "Wee Small Hours" using only harmonic overtones, a tricky maneuver with great effect.

Pizzarelli's interpretations of these trademark Sinatra songs was anything but slavish mimicry. Possessing a thin voice of limited range, he pitches it high enough to blend nicely



John Pizzarelli

with his swinging guitar rather than trying to match the master's smoky baritone. The arrangements, too, vary greatly from the Sinatra originals. "Under My Skin" and "Witchcraft" were reduced to gentle ballads, with Pizzarelli nearly whispering the lyric on the latter. On the other hand, the guitarist sailed through "How About You?" at breakneck speed, while Sinatra voiced it at a casual swing tempo.

He related his only meeting with the Chairman of the Board with self-deprecating humor. It was 1993, during a stop in Berlin on an 18-show tour opening for Sinatra. Hoping it would be the start of a great friendship, Pizzarelli confidently shook the hand of the great man, who only looked him up and down and said, "Eat something! You look bad!"

Molaskey, a wonderful singer with all the clarity and pizzas of the cabaret style, joined the band in the second half for a set that included "We're in the Money," "I Don't Know Enough About You," "Make Believe,"



"Dear Mr. Sinatra" is the latest release by John Pizzarelli.

"It's a Good Day," and "Cloudburst." The most unusual choice was Paul Simon's "Hearts and Bones," a re-polished gem from the early 1980s.

The most hilarious performance of the evening was a rendition of Pizzarelli's own youthful tribute to his home state, "I Like Jersey Best," in which he imagined various cover versions by doing impressions of Paul Simon, Bob Dylan, the Beach Boys (complete with surf guitar), Billie Holiday/Madeleine Peyroux, The Police, Neil Young, James Taylor, Jimmy Darin, Johnny Cash, Lou Rawls and, yes, Lou Reed.

For the inevitable encore, the band launched into a bravura rendition of Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." After sitting out much of the evening, the rest of the band got to solo at length, and they did it in style, especially pianist Fuller.

Already a seasoned veteran of the jazz circuit worldwide, Pizzarelli is a storyteller nonpareil. His deadpan wit is perfect for small clubs, but is somewhat strained in the larger confines of a concert hall. Nonetheless, his innate showmanship and charm won over the Lied Center audience.

Concert Review

Gates struggles with NJO sound problems

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—To successfully front a fully amplified big band, a singer needs not only a powerful voice—and a lot of courage—but a good mike, a sensitive sound engineer and a monitor level that allows him to clearly hear himself in the mix.

Giacomo Gates has long exhibited artistic integrity, courage and a brawny bass-baritone instrument that soars under the right conditions. But he was needlessly plagued and distracted by poor sound reproduction throughout his April 10 appearance with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra at the Embassy Suites in downtown Lincoln. Of the dozen or so times this writer has heard him perform—including many different small-group settings at the 2004 and 2005 Topeka Jazz Festivals, at the Jim Monroe memorial concert last July in Topeka, and with the Joe Cartwright Trio here in Lincoln last April—this was the most disappointing.

In the opener, Gates rose above the technical challenges to belt out a satisfying “Jeannine,” the classic Duke Pearson tune with lyrics by Oscar Brown Jr. Darren Pettit added a nice tenor sax solo. With a band reduced to trombones and rhythm section only, Gates then tackled Gershwin’s “Oh, Lady Be Good,” complete with the tricky Eddie Jefferson vocalise based on Charlie Parker’s alto sax solo of 1947 and titled “Disappointed.”

For Miles Davis’ “Four,” Gates was accompanied only by the rhythm players and tenor saxophonist Paul Haar, who also served as NJO music director in Ed Love’s absence. He navigated the Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson lyric with ease, but got only tepid support from the rhythm section. The only tune on the song list that wasn’t on the



Photo by Tom Ineck

Giacomo Gates fronts the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra

program, perhaps it would have clicked better with more rehearsal.

On “No, Not Much,” it became apparent that Gates could not hear himself well enough to stay on pitch when backed by three saxes, two trumpets, a trombone and the rhythm section. His intonation drifted even more with the return of the full band on Horace Silver’s “Senor Blues” and Thelonious Monk’s “Ask Me Now (How I Wish),” with lyrics by Jon Hendricks.

Harry “Sweets” Edison’s “Centerpiece,” with another Hendricks lyric, came off better, perhaps because it is a basic blues pattern that was easier to maneuver vocally. It also featured impressive solos by Scott Vicroy on baritone sax, Bob Krueger on plunger-muted trumpet and Pettit on trumpet.

At various times, Gates struggled with a mike that was too sibilant, too hot or too muddy, a particular problem for a vocal stylist who “uses” the mike so inventively. Like the professional that he is, he valiantly fought the technical glitches, but not always successfully.

The high point of the evening was an unexpected one—a four-tune per-

formance by the Metropolitan Area Youth Jazz Orchestra, an audition-only ensemble comprised of Omaha-area high school students and directed by Darren Pettit. They played with verve and surprising confidence in a set of great stylistic variety.

Beginning with “The Chicken,” a funky number by Pee Wee Ellis, they moved to “Count Bubba’s Revenge,” which had saxophones, trombones and trumpets performing separate soli sections before rejoining for a punchy give-and-take. Pat Metheny’s dreamy “Minuano” was beautifully executed in an arrangement by Bob Curnow. The grand finale was the swaggering take on the Charles Mingus composition “Gunslinging Bird,” from the Mingus Big Band arrangement by Steve Slagle. These youngsters gave it just the right mix of brash attitude, brassy power and musical ability.

As with most young jazz bands, the Metro Orchestra was more impressive in its ensemble passages and a little dicey in the solos, a natural weakness that is overcome with the experience of age.

Concert Review

Corea and Burton perform stunning duo concert

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—Pianist Chick Corea and vibraphonist Gary Burton lived up to their status as jazz elder statesmen in a stunning duo performance Feb. 14 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

They first established their separate careers as musical iconoclasts in the vanguard of jazz-rock fusion in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but after more than 40 years in the business, they remain at the top of their game.

Corea and Burton began their frequent duo collaborations some 35 years ago, a festival jam that led to the milestone recording “Crystal Silence.” Since then, they have released two more recordings and are planning another.

The first half of the Valentine’s Day concert drew heavily from their last collaboration, the 1997 Grammy-winner “Native Sense.” Aptly, they began with “Love Castle,” filled with shimmering arpeggios and a trademark cohesiveness that is the natural product of virtuosic kindred spirits.

The title track of “Native Sense” pitted Corea’s funky keyboard rubato against Burton’s flashy, four-mallet counterpoint. “Duende” perfectly reflected the Spanish term for “spirit,” a transcendent artistic statement in the flamenco tradition. Proving equally adept at more conventional jazz forms, the two blazed through “Bud Powell,” Corea’s tribute to the great bebop pianist.

The second half began with Steve Swallow’s lovely “Falling Grace,” from the afore-mentioned mid-’70s masterpiece “Crystal Silence.” Next came Corea’s “Tango ’92,” then a return to “Crystal Silence” for the title track, a work of



File Photo

Pianist Chick Corea (left) and vibraphonist Gary Burton have been performing as a duo, on and off, for some 35 years.

sheer poetry, with melodic lines that flowed seamlessly from one musician to the other.

For their current tour, Corea penned a new number, “Alegria,” another flamenco tune with typically complex changes. The duo performed it flawlessly, with mathematical precision and artful ease.

An encore included a nice rendition of “My Funny Valentine” especially for the occasion, Thelonious Monk’s off-beat blues “Four In One,” from the “Native Sense” sessions, and a spirited workout on Corea’s classic “Armando’s Rhumba.”

It is no wonder that Corea and Burton work so well together. They both have a penchant for Latin music forms, including flamenco, tango and rhumba. Their respective instruments have a similar tonal range and are equally percussive in nature. But their high degree of compatibility also can be attributed to mutual respect, long



Corea and Burton collaborations include releases from 1979 and 1997.

friendship and a certain unquantifiable magic.

Dressed casually and chatting easily with the audience, the two good-naturedly shared the announcing chores, with Corea cracking wise like a stand-up comic.

Only 600 people attended, perhaps because of the frigid weather and a conflicting Nebraska Jazz Orchestra concert.

Concert Review

Maria Schneider Orchestra lives up to reputation

By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—In just 14 years, the Maria Schneider Orchestra has established itself as one of the great jazz ensembles of modern times, rivaling the ground-breaking bands of Gil Evans and Oliver Nelson.

Schneider lived up to her considerable reputation in a performance Feb. 3 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

Like Evans, the 46-year-old composer and arranger draws from diverse influences, including classical, folk, Latin and other world music, and she carries it all off with a highly distinguished group of players. The 17-piece outfit is truly an orchestra, capable of myriad tonal colors and outstanding solos.

“Journey Home” began the evening with a flamenco flair and a breezy, open melody reminiscent of Pat Metheny. Guitarist Ben Monder burned with Hendixian heat through “Turk’s Café,” a tune that Schneider said was inspired by a sleazy diner where she once worked in her home state of Minnesota. Scott Robinson’s off-kilter



Photo by David Korchin

Maria Schneider

baritone sax solo added to the weird mix as the tune lumbered to a close.

A Brazilian choro followed, largely voiced by Rich Perry on tenor saxophone and Frank Kimbrough on piano. Percussionist Clarence Penn set the tone by drumming with his hands. The performance was almost classical in the precision of the ensemble, the lush harmonies, the rich colors and the shifting dynamics.

Schneider’s arrangement of “My Ideal” illustrated her sentimental side with a beautiful showcase for Greg Gisbert, alternating between flugelhorn and trumpet. The first-half closer also featured the reeds in a unison passage on flutes and clarinet.

Schneider introduced the second-half opener as a “fantasy fox trot,” the third movement of a suite from her “Concert in the Park” recording. After introducing each of her musical colleagues, Schneider described the concert finale, “Scenes from Childhood.” Consisting of three movements drawn from her own experiences growing up in Minnesota, it also exhibited the

composer’s sense of humor.

Monder poured on the heavy guitar fuzz and feedback to open “Bomb Shelter Beast,” followed by Robinson with an aptly apocalyptic baritone solo. The loping, funky second section featured Steve Wilson on soprano sax and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen with Miles Davis-style register leaps and pregnant pauses. Kimbrough opened the final movement, a sailing theme called “Coming About,” with some dreamy piano arpeggios, setting the stage for an astounding tenor sax solo by Donny McCaslin. For an encore, the orchestra offered the beautiful “Love Theme from Spartacus,” a showcase for Rich Perry on tenor sax.

The Schneider orchestra is a refreshing alternative to the swing tradition, with few references to the blues or to conventional big-band arrangement.

Schneider conducted the ensemble with a dancer’s grace and exhibited a Midwestern charm and warmth, with a healthy dose of fun.



Photo by David Korchin

Maria Schneider conducts.



Photo by Takehiko Tokiwa

Schneider has healthy dose of fun.

Concert Review

Mac McCune leads parade of guest soloists

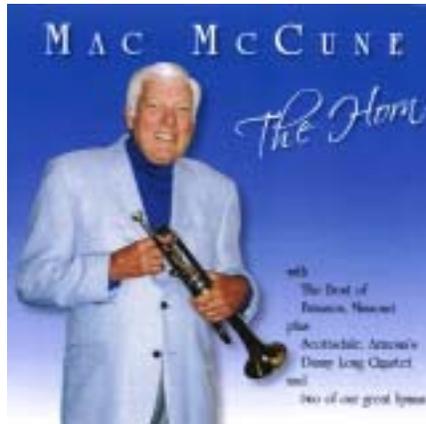
By Tom Ineck

LINCOLN, Neb.—The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra stage had a virtual revolving door on the evening of Jan. 11, as nearly 40 musicians of all ages moved onto and off of the platform at the Embassy Suites ballroom in downtown Lincoln.

The occasion was the NJO's annual "Learning from the Master" concert, in which a well-established soloist shares the stage with members of a select Young Lions All-Star Band. This year, the popular Lincoln trumpeter Mac McCune was the special guest.

But the fun didn't stop there. The NJO also had a chance to trade licks with McCune, and a special Dixieland segment featured guests Gary Gollner on clarinet, Todd Thatcher on trombone and Jim Williamson on piano, in addition to the NJO rhythm section.

As always, the Young Lions showed their greatest strength during ensemble passages while sounding a little less sure of themselves on solos. Some of the more promising players were trumpeter Tommy Krueger and tenor saxophonist Andrew Janak on Thelonious Monk's "Well You Needn't," alto saxophonist Andrew



File Photo

"The Horn" is one of several recent recordings by trumpeter Mac McCune.

Castro on "Gdansk," and trombonist Karl Lyden on "It's About Time," on which McCune demonstrated the professional skill developed over many years.

The NJO portion of the show kicked off with "The Crescent City Stomp," a bluesy second-line march featuring Bob Krueger on trumpet, Ed Love on alto sax and Peter Bouffard on guitar.

As arranged by Eric Richards, the standard "You Made Me Love You" was transformed into a slow Basie-style swing number with notable contributions by Tom Harvill on

piano and Stan Harper on tenor sax. One of the highlights of the evening was Bobby Timmons' bluesy waltz "This Here." Randy Snyder transcribed and arranged Cannonball Adderley's original alto saxophone solo for the entire sax section to play in unison, and they handled the difficult changes admirably. Harvill tagged on a suitably bluesy piano solo.

McCune and Gollner took the stage for a set of Crescent City swing, starting with the entire big band on Roy Eldridge's classic "Rockin' Chair," which was capped by a wonderful trumpet-clarinet cadenza. Most of the NJO members then departed to make way for the smaller combo, which launched into "(Back Home Again in) Indiana." Trombonist Thatcher sat in for Dan Strom, who was unable to travel from his home in Independence, Mo., due to a recent back injury.

McCune delivered a fiery solo, self-assured and devoid of the fluffed notes that usually accompany such risk-taking. Williamson followed with a solo before the front-line horns returned with that classic New Orleans polyphony.

"Just a Closer Walk with Thee" showcased the bluesy gospel tinge with McCune and Williamson combining on a cadenza that even quoted Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." "Bourbon Street Parade" featured a Gene Krupa-style barrage by drummer Greg Ahl and a brief but inspired bass solo by Andy Hall. "When the Saints Go Marching In" was highlighted by a fine Cully Joyce tenor sax solo.

The capacity audience gave the NJO a raucous standing ovation.

Musician Jokes

Buddy Rich still gets no respect

A letter, addressed "To the world's greatest drummer", arrives at the home of Louie Bellson. He takes one look at it, and says, "well, this is obviously not for me," and forwards it to Gene Krupa. Krupa takes one look at it, and says, "well, this is obviously not for me," and he forwards it as well. The letter makes the rounds of famous drummers' homes, until it

finally winds up at the home of Buddy Rich. He takes one look at it, and says, "well, this is obviously for me," rips it open, and reads "Dear Ringo...."

Them changes

How many jazz pianists does it take to change a lightbulb? Screw the changes, we'll fake it.

Tomfoolery

Jazz calendar an embarrassment of riches

By Tom Ineck

The recent spate of jazz concerts in the area is an embarrassment of riches for avid fans who seldom see more than a handful of worthwhile jazz concerts in a entire year.

The Lied Center for Performing Arts has been exceptionally generous with its jazz offerings, thanks to executive director Charles Bethea, who booked singer-guitarist **John Pizzarelli**, trumpeter **Doc Severinsen** and His Big Band, pianist **Chick Corea** with vibraphonist **Gary Burton**, and the **Maria Schneider Orchestra** in the last three months alone. It has been one of the strongest jazz seasons in the Lied's 17 years, and we hope it's a trend for the future.

The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra also built a strong concert series for its 2006-2007 season, with guest appearances by singer **Karrin Allyson**, singer **Giacomo Gates** and trumpeter **Terrell Stafford**, in addition to local area favorites trumpeter **Mac McCune** and baritone saxophonist **Kerry Strayer**.

We're especially looking forward to the May 25 performance by Stafford, perhaps best known for his five years touring and recording with Bobby Watson's quintet Horizon, which featured drummer Victor Lewis of Omaha. Stafford also has played with Herbie Mann, Shirley Scott, and Kenny Barron, among many others. He has five recordings as a leader, including, "Taking Chances: Live at the Dakota," which was recorded in 2005 at the famed Minneapolis club and was released this March.

Jazz fans also can set their



Upcoming concerts include appearances by (clockwise, from upper left) *The Hot Club of San Francisco*, Terrell Stafford, Kendra Shank and Stan Kessler and the Sons of Brasil.

sights on four fine offerings at this year's Jazz in June, the weekly series of free Tuesday evening outdoor performances in the Sheldon Sculpture Garden on the downtown campus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

On June 5, **Kendra Shank** brings her veteran quartet to the venue, where the audience is likely to hear tunes from "A Spirit Free," her new tribute to the music of Abbey Lincoln. The Berman Music Foundation brought the same band to Jazz in June in 2004.

The Hot Club of San Francisco will present its exemplary gypsy swing music June 12. The ensemble has a relationship with the BMF that goes back to 1995, when



File Photos

the quintet appeared with singer Barbara Dane at the Zoo Bar in Lincoln. They also played at Jazz in June in 2002 and as part of the 2005 Topeka Jazz Festival.

June 19 will see the return of trumpeter **Stan Kessler and the Sons of Brasil**, which also were featured in the 2002 Jazz in June season. Finally, the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra will return for its annual date, this time with Kansas City vocalist **Angela Hagenbach**.

All in all, things have been very, very good for local jazz fans.

Colorado Correspondent

Harry "The Hipster" Gibson: Forgotten progenitor of bop?

By Dan Demuth

Okay. Up front. This is not an essay on bop, which is best left to professionals. But it is about an individual who was there, on "The Street," at the birth; one who associated and performed with those stellar lights generally acknowledged as the originators. He should at least be mentioned in any discussion on bop.

Harry Gibson (real name Raab) is best remembered, if at all, as a singing pianist who combined outrageous antics with his self-penned lyrics. This often overshadowed the talent flowing from his fingers onto the keyboard. Into the mix, add an outgoing fun-loving, if irreverent personality, a love for the weed and perhaps other substances, and a live-for-the-moment attitude, and the portrait becomes well-brushed. Standing while playing, blond hair flying around, kicking away the stool, occasionally noodling the keyboard with a foot—all were part and parcel of his sets, usually performed during intermissions of the headliners at major jazz hangouts on 52nd Street in New York City. (His "shtick" may remind some of a certain rock 'n' roller, some 15 years later, named Jerry Lee Lewis.)

After studying at Juilliard and a stint as a teacher, Harry got his start while imitating Fats Waller's style, both in his keyboard work and his vocalizing, and playing with an otherwise all-black band known as the Chocolate Bars. He allowed the rumor to be spread that Fats had in fact been his mentor. Legend has it the jive ended one night when a large black man whom Harry didn't know approached the keyboard and asked him about his apprenticeship. After naming Mr. Waller as his teacher, he found out he was talking to the man. Waller opened some doors



"Boogie in Blue," a documentary about Harry "The Hipster" Gibson

and an enduring friendship was born.

While in the strictest sense not a bop pianist such as Al Haig or Bud Powell, a close listen to two Beiderbecke compositions he performs on a 1944 Eddie Condon Town Hall Concert (available on the Jazzology label) certainly displays some unique harmonic structures. Condon introduces him saying, "When I mention Juilliard its hard to imagine they would even get close to something like this."

His first recordings in 1944 on the Musicraft label, whose artist list included Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, and Boyd Raeburn, among others, display such fantasy flights as "Handsome Harry the Hipster" and "Get Your Juices at the Deuces." An opus he penned entitled "4F Ferdinand, the Frantic Freak" could perhaps best be de-



"4F Ferdinand, the Frantic Freak," on the Musicraft label

Photos by Dan Demuth

scribed as a self-parodied tone-poem.

On Sunday, April 12, 1944, after a typical late-night soiree, Harry went into the studio with bassist John Simmons and Big Sid Catlett and cut eight sides. Gibson says that at the session they were rather ill but well medicated and also claims there was a single take for each cut. Musicraft issued this four-record 78 rpm album entitled "Boogie Woogie in Blue," adorning each disc with a blue label rather than their standard red color, quite a tribute to any artist. In addition to the three above-men-



"Boogie Woogie in Blue," on Musicraft



"Rockin' Rhythm," on the Sutton label

tioned titles, it included "The Hipster's Blues Opus 6 7/8," "Barrelhouse Boogie," "The Hipster's Blues Opus 7 1/2," "Stop That Dancin' Up There," and "Riot in Boogie." Three of those were re-released on the el cheapo Sutton label in the mid '50s. In 1945 he could be found on some V-discs as well as transcriptions for the Armed Forces Radio Stations (AFRS).

Four more sides were issued on Musicraft in 1947, with two possibly becoming his best known sides. "Who Put the Benzedrine in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?" can be read as a humorous riposte to the self-righteous scrutiny he was undergoing. The flip side, "I Stay Brown All Year Round (at The Deuces)" he says relates to the company he keeps at The Three Deuces.

But, it was the lyrics he sang that so closely assimilated the wildness of his performing style. If one could convert scat gibberish into actual words, he was the man. Slim Gaillard, Cab Calloway and Louis Jordan had incorporated jive phrases and antics into their acts, but never to the degree that Gibson found to be successful. Calloway was reported to have said, "This guy talks jive even I can't understand." And, while never in the mainstream, he did paddle in some pretty fast current. "The Street" was the home of many legendary jazz spots with headliners galore. Harry's niche was in providing the intermission entertainment which had as

a positive, the captive audience of the main act, and as a negative the same thing. A unique performance was required of a little wiry ofay in the presence of the mostly black jazz cats topping the bill. But, pull it off he did for a number of years.

A few of the venues he gigged include Kelly's Stable (with Coleman Hawkins), The Hickory House (with Joe Marsala), The Famous Door (with Count Basie),

The Onyx Club (with Stuff Smith), The Spotlight Club (with Pearl Bailey and Billy Daniels), The Three Deuces (with Billie Holiday, and with the Art Tatum Trio) along with a myriad of others featuring Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Sid Catlett, Ben Webster and Thelonious Monk, the preponderance being black musicians. Certainly, if a Dorsey, Goodman, Shaw or someone of that stature wandered in, they were asked to sit in, perhaps as a courtesy, perhaps peerage respect, but Harry was there all the time. Unfortunately, he pigeonholed himself into a restrictive capsule of one type of entertainment, which—no matter of what type—quickly becomes passé.

It's not a stretch to think Harry enjoyed the notoriety that went along with his popularity. Press coverage at that time was predictable. He made the cover of Downbeat even as Time magazine railed against the bad influ-

ence that he and Slim Gaillard had on younger fans, specifically referencing lyrics that would seem amusing, but tame by today's standards. Their records were banned in some radio markets, and other stations reported calls from listeners wondering if Harry was black or white. Renowned author Arnold Shaw once said (when referring to Gaillard and Harry's undeserved censorship) that neither man really had anything to do with bop. I would humbly and respectfully disagree.

From the mid 1930s through the late 1940s, boogie woogie pianists could be found everywhere.



"Everybody's Crazy But Me," on Progressive

His antics had put him at the forefront, but nothing lasts forever. As "The Street" changed and virtually died about that time, also did Harry's star dim. He continued to perform and record sporadically throughout the next four decades, but as with many of his generation, there had to

be some obvious bitterness as rock 'n' roll became mainstream. Progress with the times or the phone stops ringing.

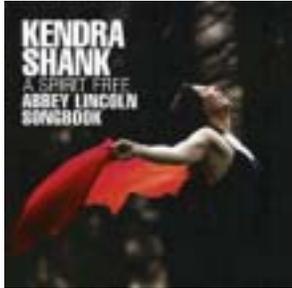
This, along with the aging of his once-attentive if not adoring public, eased him into semi-obscurity. In 1991, his daughter and granddaughter co-produced a 40-minute video of his life on Rhapsody Films, well worth the search to find and aptly entitled "Boogie in Blue." In it he relates numerous tales such as letting a blind Art Tatum drive his car, traveling alone with Billie Holiday in the South, and what perhaps would be scary to some, spending a day and night with Mae West. There are snippets of his frantic performances and an interview with him shortly before he took his life in March of 1991. It was a sad ending, but obviously his choice. Joe E. Lewis was quoted as saying, "You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough." I think Harry was hip to that.



"Opera in Vout," by Slim Gaillard

*Jazz on Disc***Kendra Shank pays loving homage to Abbey Lincoln**

By Tom Ineck



KENDRA SHANK
A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln
Songbook
Challenge Records

It must first be said that any singer who devotes an entire recording to the idiosyncratic songbook of the great Abbey Lincoln is either gutsy or downright foolhardy. Lincoln brings so much of herself to her compositions and performances that it is difficult to imagine anyone else doing them justice.

Then, along came Kendra Shank. With “A Spirit Free,” she establishes herself as a bold stylist capable of faithful (and inspired) interpretations of 11 classic Lincoln tunes, nearly all drawn from Lincoln’s 1990s Verve recordings. The performances are combustible, free-flowing affairs fired by the very compatible crew of pianist Frank Kimbrough, reed virtuoso Billy Drewes, bassist Dean Johnson, drummer Tony Moreno, guitarist Ben Monder and Gary Versace on accordion.

Shank deftly navigates the difficult chord changes, unusual time signatures and shifting dynamics inherent in these pieces. From the evocative, eight-minute opener, “The Music is the Magic,” the listener is aware of entering an exotic musical realm, “a secret world” where “the raging storm” is an everyday occurrence. Musically, it remains “outside,” floating on a rhythmic

riff without overtly stating the melody.

“I Got Thunder (and It Rings)” has all the swaggering confidence of the original performance on 1990’s “The World is Falling Down.” Shank shifts to a gentle waltz time for “Not to Worry.” Drewes switches to bass clarinet and Versace joins in on accordion for the haunting “Down Here Below.” To Lincoln’s “Throw it Away,” Shank adds her own chanted “Incantation.”

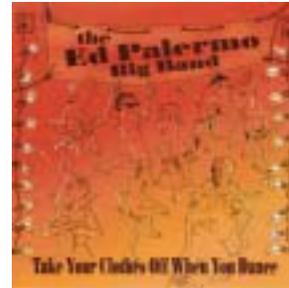
Johnson is Shank’s sole accompanist on “Bird Alone,” and takes a soaring solo that seems to mimic a bird on the wing. Appropriately set in a bouncy samba meter, “Wholly Earth” resounds with the joy of living. “Natas (AKA Playmate)” gets a playful reading pairing Shank with Versace’s accordion. The gorgeous ballad “Being Me” is the final track, summing up the individuality of Lincoln and, by extension, Shank.

Kimbrough is a key player here, guiding the others as they create the perfect atmosphere for each tune. But the true genius of these tunes is in their lyrical power, memorable lines like “I pray my soul will find me shining in the morning light,” from “Down Here Below,” or “The world is falling down, hold my hand,” written a decade before the collapse of the World Trade Center. A longtime political activist and astute social observer, Lincoln yearns for “A Circle of Love” and a world that is “Wholly Earth.”

Shank’s co-producer on the CD, as with the two releases before it, is Andrew Rowan, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln alumnus who was active in founding the Lincoln Jazz Society back in the 1970s.

With “A Spirit Free,” Shank has taken on a monumental task in interpreting Lincoln’s songs, and she has

succeeded admirably. No fool, she is a gutsy and passionate artist worthy of more recognition.



THE ED PALERMO BIG BAND
Take Your Clothes Off When
You Dance
Cuneiform Records

More than 13 years after the death of Frank Zappa at age 52, talented and adventurous musicians—with the requisite sense of humor—continue to mine the hidden gems in his sizable songbook. Players from the seemingly disparate realms of classical music, rock and jazz have attempted to do justice to the master. It is a tribute to the Zappa genius that his complex music inspires interpretations of every stylistic stripe.

Last year’s “Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance” is saxophonist Ed Palermo’s second collection of Zappa tunes in the big-band format, and it is another grand success, from the spirited performances to Palermo’s comical liner notes to the cover cartoon (by Palermo’s sister-in-law) depicting musicians in the buff, with instruments discreetly positioned. The first Palermo homage to Zappa, released in 1997, is sadly no longer in print.

Palermo himself kicks things off on alto sax with the swirling melody of “RDNZL,” which also features solo statements by trombonist Charles Gor-

don, pianist Bob Quaranta, organist Ted Koosian and drummer Ray Marchica. The whole band joins in on the stop-time shouts and the affair wraps up with a trademark Count Basie ending.

The title track gets a syncopated Latin treatment, perfect for the circular melody line. Trombonist Joe Fiedler and tenor saxophonist Ben Kono lend heat with their fiery solos, and Emedin Rivera adds percussion. "Dwarf Nebula Processional March and Dwarf Nebula," is a distinctly Zappaesque tune of quizzical, dazzling changes and intense alto sax work by Cliff Lyons.

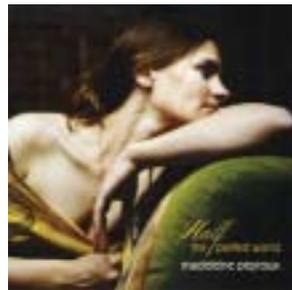
"Pound for a Brown on the Bus" fuses rock, jazz and classical motives to create a complex rhythmic journey driven by drummer Marchina and aided and abetted by soloists Palermo on alto sax, Koosian on organ and Bill Straub on tenor sax. "Sleep Dirt," from the 1979 album of the same name, is sort of like a twisted ballad, and lends itself well to the jazz treatment here featuring Phil Chester on soprano sax.

"The Gumbo Variations," which debuted on the classic 1969 album "Hot Rats" as an extended jam nearly 17 minutes long, here is reduced to about six minutes of funky bliss, with solos by Dave Riekenberg on tenor sax and the fabulous Carl Restivo on wah-wah guitar, sounding very Zappa-inspired. Restivo also sings the haunting first half of "Mom and Dad/Oh No," while most of the second half is performed as an instrumental with very jazzy alto sax by Palermo, before Restivo returns to sing the final lyric. Coming in at over nine minutes, this medley tour de force may be the brightest gem in the jewel box.

Palermo's arrangements take advantage of the entire 16-piece band, as the outfit passes the ball back and forth in typical Zappa fashion. Dead serious passages alternate with pure hilarity.

I was able to order "Take Your Clothes Off." online, but unless Zappa and his music get the widespread support they deserve, this Palermo recording may soon become as rare as his

first. Get it while you can. Then, grab a dance partner and take off your clothes! Frank Zappa would want it that way.



MADELEINE PEYROUX
Half the Perfect World
Rounder Records

On first hearing Madeleine Peyroux's 1996 debut "Dreamland," I heard a voice for the ages—a bit like Billie Holiday in her peculiar phrasing and limited range. There was little doubt that we would hear more from this native of Athens, Ga.

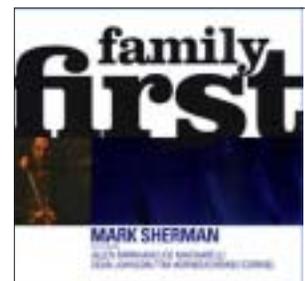
But, as with so many artists in the fickle recording business, Peyroux was denied a chance to repeat her first success for eight years, until 2004's "Careless Love." In comparatively little time, we now have her third major label release, last year's "Half the Perfect World," her second on the Rounder label. She continues to blaze an eclectic trail, melding jazz, blues, folk and pop influences in a style all her own.

Her choice of cover material is telling—the title track is by the weird and wonderful wordsmith Leonard Cohen, who also is represented by his "Blue Alert." Peyroux also tapped the sainted songbooks of Johnny Mercer ("The Summer Wind"), Tom Waits ("(Looking for) The Heart of Saturday Night") and Charlie Chaplin (the timeless "Smile"). "Everybody's Talkin'," the Fred Neil tune of alienation and desperate hope from the film "Midnight Cowboy," gets an aptly wistful reading with help from Sam Yahel on piano, and Peyroux plaintively pairs with k.d. lang on Joni Mitchell's classic song of regret, "River."

Peyroux's eminently compatible bandmates include guitarist Dean Parks, bassist David Piltch and drummers Scott Amendola and Jay Bellerose, in addition to tasteful contributions by Till Bronner on trumpet, Gary Foster on alto sax, and Larry Goldings on celeste and Wurlitzer piano. A string quartet is used to good effect on "Once in a While" and the lovely French waltz "La Javanaise."

About eight of the 12 tunes here are ballads, making this great late-night listening, although the themes tend to be pretty downbeat, if not downright depressing. On "I'm All Right," Peyroux philosophizes: "He got drunk, he fell down, he threw a few of my things around, but I'm all right, I'm all right, I've been lonely before." Or, how about this from "Once in a While": "Once in a while I'll wake up, wondering why we gave up, but once in a while, comes and it fades away."

After listening to "Half the Perfect World," you may want to turn to something a bit sunnier, but in your darker moods Madeleine Peyroux may seem like the perfect companion.



MARK SHERMAN
Family First
City Hall Records

"Family First" jumps with joy, the kind of spontaneous gaiety that comes from musicians of like mind who make their music sound effortless. Vibraphonist Mark Sherman already has proven himself a top-notch player and leader, with a handful of CDs

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Jazz on Disc continued from page 15

under his name in the past decade, including 2005's "One Step Closer," featuring sax giant Joe Lovano. A review of that release appeared in the November 2005 BMF newsletter.

Minus Lovano, Sherman has gathered the same bandmates for his latest endeavor—trumpeter-flugelhornist Joe Magnarelli, pianist Allen Farnham, bassist Dean Johnson and drummer Tim Horner, with conguero Chembo Corneil added on two tracks. Sherman penned half of the 10 tracks, revealing again his ability to create play-worthy pieces that never sound alike.

"Explorations," a tribute to John Coltrane, explores all the harmonic possibilities with a modulating pedal point over a driving rhythm. It's no surprise to learn that "Fantasize" was influenced by the spirited, melodic music of Pat Metheny. Its rock rhythms and folk-infused melody conjure the popular fusion sound of the guitarist without mimicking him. The lilting title track brims with exuberance, from the opening statement pairing vibes and flugelhorn to the inventive solo by Farnham and the solid support of the rhythm section. Horner and Corneil, both on congas, provide a gentle rhythmic cushion for the ballad "With Hope," which also features a definitive flugelhorn solo.

Paquito D'Rivera's "Wapango" is a perfect vehicle for the band's virtuosity and compatibility. They fly through the rapid, difficult changes with aplomb, generating considerable heat and excitement in this Afro-Cuban tour de force. "Lazy Autumn," a Sherman tune arranged by Farnham, has an appropriately loping, bluesy mood, and "Symmetrical" reflects its title in a swirling cycle of changes.

Joe Henderson's "Punjab" and the ballad standard "We'll Be Together Again" get new, revelatory interpretations, especially the latter, an-

other brilliant Farnham arrangement. "Family First" closes with "A New Blue," Jimmy Heath's infectious, fresh take on the blues. The whole band swings mightily on this one.

With most of the performances lasting about five minutes, Sherman eschews superfluous soloing in favor of tight arrangements alternating brief solo statements and interesting harmonic passages for multiple instruments. It is a formula that works to great advantage and truly makes this outfit seem like a musical "family" that plays very well together.



JEFF NEWELL'S NEW-TRAD OCTET
Brownstone
Blujazz Productions

Jeff Newell has always had a twisted sense of humor, which is not to say that he doesn't take his music seriously. He just approaches it from a slightly skewed perspective.

At times, "Brownstone" sounds as if someone slipped a tab of LSD into John Philip Sousa's lemonade. Truth is, this music is well grounded in Newell's knowledge of post-Civil War history, demographics, architecture and, of course, music past and present. As he writes in the liner notes of this attractively packaged CD, "As our nation struggled to pull itself together and continued to expand westward, waves of immigrants flowed into the cities, bringing new cultural influences."

So, the three Sousa marches that open the recording overtly draw from these ethnic influences, especially from the rhythms of the Caribbean. When

applied to "Stars and Stripes Forever," "The Lambs March" and "The Washington Post," these pulsing island beats and the modern jazz use of electric guitar, keyboards, bass and drums turns them into something entirely new. Yet, by employing many of the brass instruments of the period—saxophone, trumpet, trombone, tuba—Newell also harkens back. The result is a joyful celebration of familiar old tunes reborn in the modern era.

Newell also penned a six-part, 21-minute suite entitled "Hymn Pan Alley," which further explores ethnic rhythms that have been absorbed into the great American gumbo of jazz—march, bolero, mambo, waltz and zydeco. Newell has tied the rhythmic styles to melodic themes from nine different hymns written by five composers of Brooklyn's Fort Greene neighborhood. It is an audacious concept that only Newell could have pulled off, and it works beautifully.

"Brownstone" ends with two spirituals, the mythic "Amazing Grace" and Newell's own "Fill the Temple." Any overview of the vast panorama of American music would be remiss without the influence of the church. In Newell's eight-minute arrangement of "Amazing Grace," the New-Trad Octet again endows a well-known standard with new vitality, quoting from "Down By the Riverside" and featuring a stunning alto sax solo, the leader's brightest moment in the spotlight.

Newell's success on his latest project was made possible with the help of an ensemble of wonderful musicians of like mind. On the first nine tracks and the final track, they are John Bailey, trumpet; J. Walter Hawkes, trombone; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Dave Phelps, guitar; Tricia Woods, keyboards; Tom Hubbard, bass; and Brian Woodruff, drums. "Amazing Grace" features Orbert Davis, trumpet; Ryan Shultz, bass trumpet; Dan Anderson, tuba; John McLean, guitar; Karl Montzka, keyboards; Tim Fox, bass; and Rick Vitek, drums. The gospel soul of "Fill the

Temple” is expressed vocally by Karl Dixon and Janis Russel.



BILL BRUFORD AND TIM GARLAND
Earthworks Underground Orchestra
 Summerfold Records

Since its inception in 1987, Bill Bruford’s Earthworks ensemble has consisted of a tight-knit quartet driven by its famous drummer, a prog-rock alumnus of Yes and King Crimson. But for its ninth release, Bruford and saxophonist Tim Garland expanded the outfit to nine pieces, dubbing it the Earthworks Underground Orchestra, based on Garland’s London-based Dean Street Underground Orchestra.

The big-band debut, recorded live at The Iridium Jazz Club in New York City in December 2004, was released last year. Along with co-leaders Bruford and Garland (who plays tenor and soprano saxes, flute and bass clarinet), the band also includes Jon Owens and Alex Sipiagin on trumpets, Rock Ciccarone on trombone, Chris Karlic on baritone sax and flute, Steve Wilson on alto and soprano saxes and flute, Henry Hey on piano, and Mike Pope on electric and acoustic basses. Trombonist Robin Eubanks sits in on two tracks.

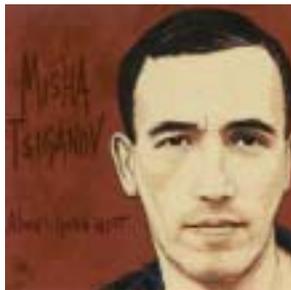
Although the material is largely a familiar sampling from Earthworks’ repertoire, these eight tunes have been given new heft with Garland’s arrangements for nonet, and the energetic performances are exhilarating. With seven horns and a rhythm section, the Earthworks Underground Orchestra combines jazz fusion punch with the

classic sound of a brass chorale.

Highlights include “Speaking in Wooden Tongues” and the rhythmic tour de force “Footloose and Fancy Free,” which features bravura solos by Garland on tenor sax, Eubanks on trombone, Hey on piano and Bruford on drums. From the band’s early years come the jaunty opener “Libreville,” the moody “Up North” and the gorgeous ballad “It Needn’t End in Tears,” written by former bandmate Iain Ballamy. Of more recent vintage are Garland’s Latin-tinged “Baja del Sol” and Bruford’s 13-minute extravaganza that closes the recording, “The Wooden Man Sings, and the Stone Woman Dances.”

In its maiden voyage, the Earthworks Underground Orchestra retains the distinctive edge and sound of its original British quartet, a tribute to Garland’s arrangements and the playing skills of the overwhelmingly American musicians.

A major fan of Earthworks since its first LP release, I highly anticipated this recording and made plans to travel to NYC for the sessions at the Iridium. Weather prevented me from flying, but this 70-minute document is the next best thing to being there. Here’s hoping that Earthworks continues to develop its trail-blazing sound for another 20 years.



MISHA TSIGANOV
Always Moving West
 Misha Tsiganov Records

In many ways, conguero and bandleader par excellence Norman Hedman gave pianist Misha Tsiganov the opportunity to realize a dream of playing jazz in America. Tsiganov took

over the piano chair in Hedman’s band, Tropique, in the late ‘90s, and has been making musical advances ever since.

Tsiganov’s latest advance is “Always Going West,” a forward-looking session combining bop and Latin influences with tasteful execution. “Anthony,” dedicated to legendary drummer Tony Williams, leaps from the starting gate with fiery bop insistence, while “Another Rainy Day” reclines in a tempo suitable for that titular rainy day.

“Roller Coaster” rises and falls with precipitous extremes, guided by the steady drumming of Gene Jackson. The gorgeous “Waltz for Olena” features some lovely bass work by Boris Kozirov. Alex Sipiagin’s virtuosic flights on trumpet and flugelhorn are elements essential to the record’s varying moods, including the title track’s relaxed Latin groove, where the flugelhorn soars.

Tsiganov pays homage to the late, great pianist Kenny Kirkland with the searching, mid-tempo bopper “Say Where You’ve Gone,” on which Sipiagin again plays a pivotal role. It is the leader, however, who drives the piece with his flashy keyboard technique. “Gone From My Mind” is the closing ballad, with Tsiganov and Sipiagin stating the melody in tandem.

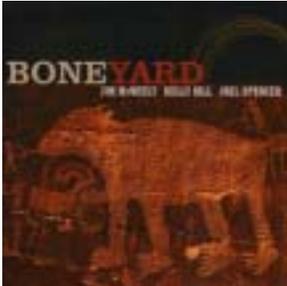
Perhaps most striking is Tsiganov’s generosity with his musical colleagues. He plays with admirable restraint and subtlety, while giving the others plenty of time and space to express their own interpretations of his compositions. Jackson’s drums are especially prominent.

Of the nine tracks, all are written and arranged by Tsiganov, except the memorable Russian folk melody “Dark Eyes.” A three-minute percussion barrage by Samuel Torres introduces the full band version of “Dark Eyes,” a brooding arrangement that finally releases into a wonderful keyboard exploration by Tsiganov, with powerful support by Jackson on the drum kit. This is not his father’s “Ochi Chiornie.”

Discorama

Trio's "Boneyard" is a bases-loaded homer

By Butch Berman



**JIM McNEELY-KELLY SILL-
JOEL SPENCER**
Boneyard
Origin Records

I was an only child born in Peoria, Ill., just a couple of stones' throw to Chicago, before we moved to Lincoln when I was one year old. My dad worked for my mom's family, selling jewelry and buying clothes for their store. He'd go to the market in New York semi-annually and fly to meet my mother and me in Chicago for our annual summer vacation. She and I would take the train to rendezvous there. When I was 10 and very much into baseball, they took me to see the White Sox and the Cubs back-to-back one weekend. I was thrilled most by seeing two of the best shortstops in the big leagues over those two days. Comiskey Park held Luis Aparacio and Wrigley Field was home to Ernie Banks.

I also got to go to a great club called Mr. Kelly's that year. I heard comic Jackie Mason one night and got my first taste of big-city jazz hearing Erroll Garner the next. Wow, baseball and jazz...I was hooked for life.

Move ahead nearly half a century. I'm sitting here reviewing another wonderful piano player from Chicago named Jim McNeely just a

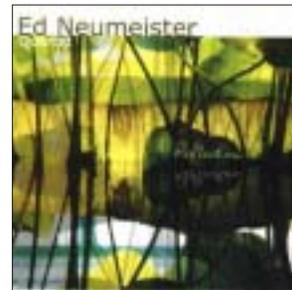
weekend away from opening day (sorry, Cubbie fans, but I've been a SF Giants devotee since the mid 1980s) and listening to a marvelous new CD called "Boneyard," which features a great McNeely tune called "Ernie Banks." Boneyard is a creek that runs through Champaign, Ill., which spawned a jazz scene that has thrived since the '50s.

Jim jumped in during the 1970s, and around that time met up with a now-legendary rhythm section consisting of Kelly Sill on bass and drummer Joel Spencer. These cats don't play together on a regular basis, but after 35 years of gigging, their foundation is rock solid, and is truly one of the best jazz trios in the biz when engaged at a gig or a superb recording session like this one.

My wife, Grace, and I honeymooned in the Windy City five years ago and caught, and met, Kelly and Joel at a jazz steakhouse in Evanston, a suburb of Chicago, backing another pianist. They were tight and terrific, as expected. I got to enjoy Jim's classic chops when he was performing at a jazz festival in Kansas. When Origin Records, one of my fave jazz labels out there, sent me this CD, I couldn't wait to put it on and hear these monsters blow. "Boneyard" is a four-star, sum-of-the-parts creation that not only should make Chi-town proud of its players, but jazz itself. This is really one nice piece of work.

Kurt Weill's "Speak Low" kicks off the album with a bang. Nine killer tracks featuring the works of Diz, Brubeck and Wayne Shorter all make it big time, as well as compositions of Jim and Kelly—of course, "Ernie Banks" getting me off the most. Ah

yes, baseball and jazz. Credit this talented threesome with extra base hits throughout. Cheer on your teams of choice, and rah, rah, rah for this special, all-star team of Jim McNeely, Kelly Sill and Joel Spencer. "Boneyard" is, without a doubt, a bases-loaded homer. Play jazz, play ball.



ED NEUMEISTER QUARTET
Reflection
ArtistShareOA2 Records

Jazz is created from many entities—heartfelt and soulful, emotionally charged, cerebrally intense, scholarly, and if you're so guided...spiritually inspired.

I've never met Ed Neumeister, although we share many friends in the jazz community. Upon the first sit-down listening to his recent expression of brilliance—"Reflection"—I was immediately drawn to its beauty, sadness, charm...yet ever so a thinking man's jazz of much substance. On this release, recorded in Vienna in 2006, trombone master Neumeister truly paints aural visions of deep feelings with his gifts and exquisite collaborations with his astute band mates, who share like minds and compositions.

Let me introduce you to this kinetic ensemble of fine musicians—

Fritz Pauer at the piano, Drew Gress on the bass and John Hollenbeck on drums join trombonist Neumeister to take you on an hour-plus excursion that will capture all of your senses. Reflection, indeed. This is beautiful, heady stuff, crafted in a variety of key changes, textures and wondrous hues that gently transport you to a magical

place that touches you inside.

It has some of the best production work I've enjoyed in a long time, especially the gorgeous, rich bass sound Drew Gress lays down. And, how wonderfully it was recorded—the drums, too. Hollenbeck's amazing, and the constant, clever interplay throughout, between the horn and piano, is sim-

ply enchanting. I've never heard a trombone sing, cry, and wail in the manner that Neumeister has mastered.

This CD is a work of art that jazz itself can be very proud of. It's definitely in my top 10 list for 2006-7. Reflect on this review, then pick up "Reflection" through ArtistShare Records today.

Letters to the Editor

Friends and readers offer salutations

More praise for Berman support of Russ Long CD project

I have become aware of you through Gerald Spaits. Russ Long has been my friend since he was in high school and we were good friends. Thank you for doing so much to help him and Joan and jazz.

*JoAnn D'Anna Greer
Kansas City, Mo.*

Editor's Note: For the Berman Music Foundation's full coverage of the Russ Long CD release party and a review of the CD, "Time to Go: The Music of Russ Long," see the January 2007 issue of *Jazz*.

Norman Hedman's agent sends thanks for BMF newsletter

Thanks guys—fantastic! I've saved a copy and will read during my plane ride on Thursday. We're trying to nail down an endorsement or two for Norman in L.A. at the NAMM show. All the best.

*Dawn K. DeBlaze
St. Louis, Mo.
deblazeandassociates*

BMF friend relates story about meeting another BMF friend

I am in L.A. this week and went to the jazz club Charlie O's to check out the Plas Johnson Quartet. Who was sitting next to me but Greg Abate. It was great to talk with him and, of course, we talked about the lesson I got from him at your place almost 10 years ago now. Crazy. L.A. is great, but the traffic and smog is insane. I am having some more luck with my CD and am selling a bunch in Japan right now. Take care.

*Andrew Vogt
Colorado*

BMF newsletter keeps an old friend connected

I love getting your newsletter. Keeps me just a little connected to you and I miss seeing you. It also helps to expand my "cultural views" from behind my doggy little desk here! (We are SUCH social butterflies, you know!) I do truly hope life continues to be good to you and that you are happy, happy, happy. When your nose is itching it's probably because Cindy, Maria, Suzanne and

some of the rest of us are talking about you! Be good...

*K. Q. Allen
Lincoln, Nebraska*

Saxophonist Andrew Vogt is in good company

Thanks for sending the hard copy of your recent newsletter. It's very cool to be reviewed near greats like Sonny Rollins and Eddie Daniels. I would love to put the review on my website in the media section, with your approval, of course. I am very saddened to see Mike Brecker pass on at such a young age. He has been studied and transcribed like Bird was. Millions of sax players, including myself, have copied his licks.

*Andrew Vogt
Colorado*

Editor's Note: To read a review of Andrew Vogt's CD "Action Plan," see the January 2007 edition of *Jazz*. The next issue of the newsletter will feature an interview with Vogt and bring readers up to date on what the former Lincoln resident is up to these days.



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Cronins help out at Moore benefit



Courtesy Photo

The Cronin Brothers band played to an enthusiastic crowd at a benefit for ailing friend and legendary Lincoln business owner Terrence Moore. The Cronins are (from left) Butch Berman, guitar, keyboards and vocals; Don Holmquist, drums and vocals; Craig Kingery, bass and vocals; and Bill Lohrberg, guitar and vocals.

How can you help the foundation?

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

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