Looking Back ... and Ahead

By Tim Coakley

The 2007 season of A Place for Jazz was one of our most successful, both musically and in terms of attendance. The size and enthusiasm of the crowds made it clear that there is a vigorous and dedicated audience for jazz in the Capital Region. It was a season that would have pleased our founder, Butch Conn, who sought to build just such an audience over the years. We hope to continue to please and attract those listeners in the year ahead.

Remember these?

Among the highlights of the season was the amazing vocalizing of Mark Murphy, who, in addition to singing up a storm and bringing along some very talented young musicians, gave an informative and helpful clinic for three of the region's top vocalists: Nancy Donnelly, Perley Rousseau and Jody Shayne.

The dynamic pianistics of Jeb Patton made many take notice of this rising star, who had many informative and helpful things to say to Nat Phipps' improvisation class at Schenectady County Community College.

Baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan and trombonist Wyckliffe Gordon made October a memorable month; Gary with his vigorous, swinging quartet exploring bebop and beyond, and Wyckliffe with his inimitable playing and singing music from the whole spectrum of jazz ... and on a borrowed trombone, yet!

Wrapping it all up on Nov. 9 was the Keith Pray Big Soul Ensemble, which gave us a varied and absorbing concert of standards and originals. It was a chance for 17 of the best musicians in our region to show what they could do, and they made the most of it. They also showed that the Great Hall of the First Unitarian Society can play host to a big band, and give it the acoustic presence that I...

Focus on the future

As we move into 2008, our board of directors and our advisory committee are beginning to plan the next season of A Place for Jazz, and we will try to make it as varied and entertaining as the last.

As always, a great share of our success is due to the contributions of our members, who have supported us through the years. Your contributions played a major part in enabling us to mount the kind of series we had in 2007, and will be needed again this year.

Please take a moment to check out the membership form on Page 10, and find a membership level that is comfortable for you. With your support, we feel confident we can present another season of great jazz in 2008.

Check out our updated-monthly calendar on our website at www.aplaceforjazz.org or www.timesunion.com/communities/jazz.

The calendar is updated frequently and includes links to Jazz Festivals, clubs and concert series.
A Place For Jazz emcee Tim Coakley wasn't kidding in his introduction when he said, "We like to showcase local talent... and tonight, we have all of it!" Of the 17 players that make up Keith Pray's Big Soul Ensemble - and there isn't a time-waster in the bunch - 6 of them are leaders in their own right, well established in the community with CDs that have received national or international airplay. These guys didn't need to show up once a month at Tess' Lark Tavern, where Pray had gotten the BSE a "regular" gig; these guys had plenty of other fish to fry. And yet, there they were at the performer's end of the Whisperdome: Brian Patneaude, hunched over his tenor sax in the first chair on the front line, smiling at the sound of his composition "Change" translated into Big Band; Adrian Cohen, making the Whisperdome's grand piano dance to a lovely take on Rodgers & Hart's "Have You Met Miss Jones"; Lee Russo, blowing sweet tenor on John Dworkin's "Renée" and on the standard "I Got It Bad"; Terry Gordon and Steve Lambert, pairing their powerful trumpets on a wild first-set-ending mashup of Coltrane's "Syeeda's Song Flute" and Mingus' "Moanin"; and, of course, Pray, sitting in the middle of the front row, alternating between fiery alto and hypnotic soprano.

The graduate of SUNY Potsdam was living his dream and loving the shape it was taking, as this phenomenal collection of Capital Region talent put an exclamation point on a sensational APFJ season.

If you've seen Pray play around town, you've grown accustomed to him channeling his Inner Maceo Parker - and if you're like me, you eat it up with the biggest spoon you can find. With that in mind, you'd figure a band called "Big Soul Ensemble" would be an extension of that musical bent. You'd also look at this unit's musical throw weight and think that the Whisperdome was going to be an open-air theatre at the end of the night. You'd have been wrong on both counts. Those who weren't regular attendees of the aforementioned Lark Tavern gigs got their education early as Pray counted the band into Machito's "Congo Mulence", a mid-tempo, multi-layered samba that had the four-piece trombone section laying down the melody. Pray's Inner Maceo Parker had the night off; his Inner Gil Evans was driving the bus here.

The Big Soul Ensemble's stock-in-trade is nuance: The depth and color this group is capable of can bring an audience to its feet, and it has the orchestral ability to successfully tackle Pray's multi-part suite "The Gate: A Portrait of the Mohawk." Pray used the band's wide palate to simulate the sounds and colors of a Hammond B3 on Dr. Lonnie Smith's "And The World Weeps", and then flew us all to the Great Wall for Kenny Garrett's fractured "Ching Wen."

Patneaude bent into his ripping solo on the beautifully chaotic encore "Fables of Faubus" as Pray and Russo vocalized the support parts, adding color and humor to the outstanding moment. Trombonist Brian Kaplin's bouncing "Buck the Schmuck" was a smart, powerful ending to the regular set; the trombones served up several gifts on this night, including a great C&A session from Ken Olsen and Rick Rosoff to close "Congo Mulence." Scott Hall's baritone sax (sporting a patina that suggested its first owner played on the Titanic) brought serious heft to the proceedings, particularly on "Faubus" and on the Coltrane/Mingus mashup. Lou Smaldone was the subject of "Walkin' the Dog" (a Pray original, not the Rufus Thomas classic), and Smaldone responded with bridge-cable-thick bass lines. He and Cohen teamed with the always-amazing Joe Barna - the drummer in Pray's Soul-Jazz Revival - to create a rhythm section that was a creative voice all on its own.

The anchor leg of a series like A Place For Jazz is normally reserved for heavy national artists guaranteed to give a great performance. Keith Pray's Big Soul Ensemble may not be known outside the Capital Region, but they have home-run power many "big" acts would envy, as well as a dedication to deliver a rich, exciting sound that showcases both the talent and the spirit that lies at the heart of the local scene. If this is the result of a Keith Pray dream, let's hope nobody wakes him up.

J HUNTER is a former announcer/producer for radio stations in the Capital Region and the Bay Area, including KSJS/San Jose (where he was Assistant Music Director/Jazz programming), Q104 WQBK/Albany, and WSSV/Saratoga. He has also written music and theatre reviews for the Glens Falls Chronicle. He currently resides in Clifton Park.
Jazz Venues
Listed Alphabetically

9 Maple Ave, Saratoga Springs, 518-587-7759
The Bar at 74 State, 74 State St, Albany, 518-434-7410
The Basement, 21 Center St, Northampton, MA, 413-586-9030
Brandon's, 1725 Van Vranken Ave, Schenectady, 518-347-1329
Blue Plate, 1 Kinderhook St, Chatham, NY, 518-392-7711
Cabernet Café, 1814 Western Ave, Albany, 518-452-5670
Café Capriccio, 49 Grand St, Albany, 518-65-0439
Castle Street Café, 10 Castle St, Great Barrington, MA, 413-528-5244
Chameleon on the Lake, 251 County Rt. 67, Saratoga Springs, 581-3928
Chez Sophie Bistro, 534 Broadway, Saratoga Springs, 518-583-3558
Circus Café, 392 Broadway, Saratoga Springs, 518-583-1106
Comfort Inn, 37 Rte 9W, Glenmont, 518-465-8811
The Fountain Restaurant, 283 New Scotland Ave, Albany, 518-482-9898
Four Corners Luncheonette, 2 Grove St, Delmar, 518-439-0172
Freedom Park, Schonowee Ave, Scotia, 370-0662 (summer only)
HotSpot, 122 4th St, Troy, 518-268-1111
Jazz on Jay, in front of City Center (across from Proctor's), Schenectady, 518-372-5656 (summer only)
Justin's, 301 Lark St, Albany, 518-436-7008
Lark Tavern, 453 Madison Ave, Albany, 518-463-9779
Linda Norris Aud., WAMC, 339 Central Ave, Albany, 518-465-5233
Mo' Jazz Café, 7 South Main St, Wilmington, VT 802-464-2280
Moon & River Café, 115 S. Ferry St, Schenectady, 518-382-1938
Panza's Restaurant, Route 9P, Saratoga Lake, Saratoga Sps, 518-584-6882
Park 54 Restaurant, 54 Clifton Country Rd, Clifton Park, 518-688-1548
Parker Inn, 434 State St, Schenectady, 518-688-1001
Prime 677, 677 Broadway Albany, 518-427-7463
Proctor's, 432 State St, Schenectady, 518-382-3884
Provence Restaurant, Stuyvesant Plaza- Western Ave at Fuller Rd, Albany, 518-689-7777
Quarter Moon Café, 53 Main Street, Delhi, NY, 607-746-8886
Red Onion Restaurant, Route 212, Woodstock, NY 845-679-1223
Saratoga Gaming & Raceway, Saratoga Springs, 518-584-2110
Sarazen Student Union, Siena College, 518-783-4117
Sargo's, Saratoga National Golf Club, 458 Union Ave, Saratoga Springs, 518-583-4653
Scrimshaw Tavern, Desmond Hotel, Colonie, 518-869-8100
Spillin' the Beans, 13 3rd St, Troy, 518-268-1028
Stella's Lounge, 7 Main St, Catskill, 518-943-3173
Stockade Inn, 1 N. Church St, Schenectady, 518-346-3400
Wallabee's Jazz Bar, 190 Glen St, Glens Falls, NY, 518-792-8282
The Wine Bar, 417 Broadway, Saratoga Springs, 518-584-8777

Brian Patneaude with Keith Pray's Big Soul Ensemble
Sonny and Perley, with bassist Paul Oman, played for the Government Technology Conference & Exhibition at the Empire Plaza and Conference Center for state and local government technology executives and staffers on Wed., Sept 26 at its opening day afternoon reception for conference attendees.

Mark’s Men
Many of the musicians who play for us are kind enough to tell us how much they enjoyed the experience. Two of the musicians who backed Mark Murphy in his Sept. 14 concert sent us the following messages:

“I truly enjoyed playing at your festival for warm and receptive audience in the beautiful church with great acoustics. And hope to do it again with one of my groups.” — Dmitri Kolesnik, bass

“We all had a blast in Schenectady and look forward to performing at the church again. It really is a fantastic place to perform and the people really made it special for me personally.”
- Brian Newman, trumpet.

Another Loss
Alto saxophonist Frank Morgan died late in 2007. A disciple of Charlie Parker, the Minneapolis-born Morgan conquered his drug addiction to become one of the most respected and soulful performers on his instrument. Even a serious stroke in 1996 could only keep him off the bandstand for a couple of months.

His last disc was “City Nights” on High Note, recorded live at NYC’s Jazz Standard with pianist George Cables, bassist Curtis Lundy and drummer Billy Hart.

Many members of A Place for Jazz will recall Frank Morgan’s concert at the First Unitarian Society, during which he asked that the mikes be turned off so that he could savor the great acoustics. The sound of his alto floating through the Whisperdome is one that we won’t forget.

Way to go, Mark
Drummer and vocalist Mark Anthony was recently elected president of the Schenectady Musical Union Local #85-133. Mark is a member of both A Place for Jazz and the organization Swingtime, which presents local musicians in concert. He has also been instrumental in getting support for the summer noontime series Jazz on Jay in downtown Schenectady, and helped to spearhead last year’s musicians union celebration of Jazz Appreciation Month.

The seventh annual Jazz Cruise presented a very competent, well-received group of vocalists.

Ann Hampton Calloway – This multi-talented Chicago-born alto was easily the best-known vocalist, with 11 CD’s in 15 years and a starring role in the successful Broadway production “Swing.”

Her powerful, lush, wide-ranging voice was sensitively controlled on ballads, while driving and scatting on up tempo numbers. It was further enhanced with a commanding, entertaining stage presence.

All this, plus her swinging trio of pianist Ted Rosenthal, bassist Jay Leonhart and drummer Victor Lewis, made her a special favorite.

Clairdee – San Francisco-based soprano Barbara Clairdee, who doesn’t use her given name professionally, displayed a pleasing, effervescent and clear voice. She clearly showed potential to move beyond her current somewhat generic vocal approach to one that is more distinctive and compelling in its lyric interpretation.

Jamie Davis – Another San Francisco-based singer, in this case one with decades of experience, including work with the Count Basie orchestra, projected a strong, engaging bass-baritone presence. He evoked some memories of the great Joe Williams, with his very resonant, bluesy and swinging style. This was also distinguished with effective overtones of first-class R&B. Tenor Saxophonist Charles McNeal consistently delivered stirring obligatos and solos.

Patti Wicks – This veteran singer-pianist from Long Island and SUNY Potsdam was an excellent choice for the intimate late-night piano bar with her knowing, poignant, world-weary vocal expression. It also provided a stage for the superior musicianship that made her, for over 30 years, an outstanding soloist and accompanist to such renowned vocalists as Anita O’Day, Carol Sloane, Sheila Jordan, Rebecca Parris, Rosenna Vitro and Giacomo Gates. The last four of these, in addition to Ms. Wicks (2003), have all played the Whisperdome for APFJ.
Some Worthy CDs from 2007

Frank Morgan. “A Night in the Life” High Note HCD 7154. The great alto saxophonist Frank Morgan died last year. This live High Note CD is an excellent addition to his legacy. It was recorded in 2003 at the Jazz Standard in New York with a stellar rhythm section of George Cables, piano; Curtis Lundy, bass; and Billy Hart, drums. As you might expect from this Charlie Parker disciple, the fare is straight-ahead bebop, including a 10-minute version of Miles Davis’ “Half Nelson.”

Arbors ARCD 19352. Fans of traditional jazz and swing should enjoy this CD of compositions by clarinetist Joe Marsala, who held forth at the Hickory House in New York during the ‘30s and ‘40s. The tunes range from bouncy to ballads, with Bobby Gordon’s Pee Wee Russell-like clarinet contrasting with Randy Reinhart’s forceful cornet. Guitarist James Chirillo solos and accompanies nicely. Marsala’s pieces, probably new to all but devotees of the Swing Era, are easy on the ears.

Eric Alexander. “Temple of Olympic Zeus” High Note HCD 7172. The talented tenor man Eric Alexander, who played at the Lake George Jazz Weekend last fall, fronts what amounts to his working group on this vigorous post-bop outing. The disc features original compositions by Alexander like the title track, along with standards like Leonard Bernstein’s “Some Other Time” and Bud Powell’s “I’ll Keep Loving You.” Trumpeter Jim Rotondi, pianist David Hazeltine, bassist Nat Reeves and drummer Joe Farnsworth round out the excellent lineup.

Bobby Gordon. “Lower Register: Bobby Gordon Plays Joe Marsala” Arbors ARCD 19352. Fans of traditional jazz and swing should enjoy this CD of compositions by clarinetist Joe Marsala, who held forth at the Hickory House in New York during the ‘30s and ‘40s. The tunes range from bouncy to ballads, with Bobby Gordon’s Pee Wee Russell-like clarinet contrasting with Randy Reinhart’s forceful cornet. Guitarist James Chirillo solos and accompanies nicely. Marsala’s pieces, probably new to all but devotees of the Swing Era, are easy on the ears.

Jane Monheit. “Surrender” Concord CCD 30050. In the All Music Guide, Matt Collar describes this CD as “a ballads-heavy album that features a mix of jazz standards, reworked pop tunes, and several bossa nova numbers. What is different is the focus and presentation. Rather than featuring her simply as a singer fronting a jazz band, Surrender is a cinematic showcase, a Broadway-sized coming-out party that finds Monheit’s voice framed against sweeping orchestration and glossy, Technicolor arrangements. This is Monheit the vocal diva, the superstar.”

Gerald Wilson Orchestra. “Monterey Moods” Mack Avenue MAC 1039. Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Monterey Jazz Festival, Wilson brings his fiery big-band conception to this new album, with an all-star cast. The title composition is a seven-part suite, with sections titled “Allegro,” “Ballad,” “Latin Swing” and “Blues” among others. It’s a roaring big-band blast, with such soloists as Terrell Stafford, Antonio Hart, Renee Rosnes, Jimmy Owens and Hubert Laws. If you’re looking for some vibrant big-band music by one of the modern masters, this one should do it.

Recent CDs by Capitol District Artists

Contributed by Tom Pierce

Following are a number of well-received recent CD’s by various artists who reside and/or play in the Capitol District. For details on each, please reference: http://www.albanyjazz.com/cdreviews.html.

JOE BARNA/LEE RUSSO - “The Abenaki”
JEANNE O’CONNOR – “Something’s Coming”
MICHAEL BENEDICT JAZZ VIBES – “The New Beat”
BRIAN PATNEAUDE QUARTET – “As We Know It”
COLLEEN PRATT w/ THE EMPIRE JAZZ ORCHESTRA - “I Thought About You”
LEE SHAW TRIO – “Originals”
PEG DELANEY TRIO – “Hotline”
TERRY GORDON QUINTET – “Homeward Bound”
CHUCK D’ALOIA & ART BERNSTEIN – “Under The Hood” and “Christmas Time Is Gears”
KEITH PRAY – “One Last Stop”


It's Latin Jazz Again

For 2008, Professor Jose Cruz will again present his series of Latin jazz concerts at the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, 1221 Wendell Ave.

This year's schedule includes the Brian Lynch Quintet on May 2; Rumbanations with the Hilary Noble and Rebecca Cline Enclave Ensemble on May 9; and the Paolo Majias Quintet and Lo Que Dice El Tambor on May 16. For advance tickets and more information, e-mail info@jazzlatino.org

Jazz Foundation Helps Musicians

The Jazz Foundation of America is an organization, based in New York City, set up to help ailing and needy jazz musicians, most of whom don't get pensions or medical benefits. Wendy Oxenhorn is the foundation's executive director. She says that grants obtained by the foundation have helped musicians get numerous gigs in New York public schools.

The foundation often pays musicians' rents when needed, but by helping them get gigs, Oxenhorn continues, "they have a chance to pay their own rent and in the process educate and introduce children to jazz."

Jazz critic Nat Hentoff has written extensively about the foundation. In one instance, he wrote the following: "Many of these older musicians are reluctant to ask for help, so a friend calls the Foundation. One musician, nearly 80 and disabled, had been subsisting on two cans of Slim Fast a day for a year and a half. Wendy told him that Meals on Wheels could bring him hot meals every day, but he said he didn't want anyone coming to his place. After four weeks of calls from Oxenhorn, he relented, and she soon got a message from him on her machine: 'I feel like a new man, I got the life back in me again. Thank you for staying after me.'"

Anyone wishing to help can contact The Jazz Foundation of America at 322 W. 48th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. Telephone: 212-245-3999. Toll free: 1-800-532-5267. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Death of a Bebop Wife (Paperback) by Grange (Lady Haig) Rutan

Written by Al Brooks

Being a long-time jazz fanatic and avid reader of jazz biographies, I of course knew Al Haig's name and his association with the bebop era. However, after reading Death of a Bebop Wife by Lady Haig Grange Rutan, I now realize how little I knew about him previously. This great book tells the rich (and entire) story of Al Haig (who served as one of the seminal bebop pianists and an early member of the famous Charlie Parker/Dizzy Gillespie quintet) and the tale is a compelling one - told from the multiple vantage points of those who were there with him during that magical time in jazz music history. Among the many fascinating tidbits which overflow this important tome is that Al Haig was a highly sought after, but extremely selective accompanist who played with many of the legends of his time, was the favorite pianist of Bud Powell (himself, considered the greatest of all bebop pianists) and was an important contributor to the early fame of Stan Getz and Harry Belafonte. While these facts alone would qualify him for membership in the pantheon of greatest jazz musicians of all time, surprisingly he remains only a footnote to the era he helped define. Grange (Lady Haig) Rutan's book helps to correct this historical oversight and slight.

The central theme of the book is the background story of Al's indictment, defense and ultimate acquittal of the charge of murdering his third wife. In fact, the "murder/accidental death" of Bonnie Haig, a remarkably sad counterpoint in the life of this musician (not to mention that of the victim's family and friends), is sensitively told, and Rutan amasses and presents copious information in the book from which the reader can derive his or her own judgment as to Al Haig's probable guilt or innocence. I will not prejudice future readers by disclosing my own view of this matter here. Nevertheless, this book is so much more than a crime story. Rather, it is a treasure trove for the jazz aficionado - chock full of anecdotes, insights and, most importantly, direct testimonial evidence of the public and private lives lead by many jazz musicians of the fifties, as told by many of the musicians themselves. Within this milieu, as the book makes eminently clear, Al Haig stood out as a very complex, technically proficient and brilliantly-inventive (but perhaps also seriously troubled) musician - equally adept at both classical and jazz music - who more than passed muster with the greatest purveyors of the music of his time. Al Haig made his mark on the music and, because of this great book, his legacy will survive. No serious jazz fan should overlook this gem!
APFJ Membership Form

Date ____________________________________________

Name ____________________________________________

Address __________________________________________

________________________________________________

Phone ____________________________________________

E-Mail ____________________________________________

Membership Levels (Circle One)

- No Bread (But Want to Help) $20
- Individual $30
- Family $50
- Supporter (+1 Series Ticket) $100
- Patron (+2 Series Tickets) $250
- Underwriter (+4 series Tickets) $500
- Jazz Hero (5 Year membership +2 series tickets until 2011) $1,000

For information or suggestions, please call 393-4011, or e-mail coakjazz@aol.com. Checks for membership and tickets should be made out to

A Place for Jazz and mailed to PO box 1059, Schenectady, NY 12301

*************** Special Thanks ***********************

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Special thanks also to the Daily Gazette for their promotion of APFJ
A Place for Jazz is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to presenting the best in jazz. We receive funding from the Schenectady County Initiative Program as well as from our ticket sales and membership contributions.

Programs include concerts, public workshops, school-based clinics, a Jazz website, and general support of Jazz and its musicians. We welcome announcements and comments.

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Calendar can be found at www.aplaceforjazz.org

Jazz Cruise 2007
By Beverly Elander

Last November, ten members of A Place for Jazz headed for the Caribbean aboard Holland America’s Westerdam for Caribbean ports of call Nassau, St Thomas, St Maarten, and Half Moon Cay. Billed as the “World’s ONLY full-ship straight-ahead jazz cruise,” music was available 24/7 for one glorious week.

Local attendees were: Tim Coakley, Beverly Elander, Maggie MacDougal, Tom and Uta Pierce, Sue and Jerry Porter, Ruth and Al Sabo, and Chris Waldron.

Some of last year’s outstanding performers were: Shelly Berg, Wycliffe Gordon, Jay Leonhart, Victor Lewis, Ken Peplowski, Ann Hampton Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Band, and special guest Arturo Sandoval.

This year’s cruise heads for Key West, Belize, Cozumel and Grand Cayman. Performers include Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, Ken Peplowski, Pete Barbutti, Heath Brothers Quartet, Wycliffe Gordon, Eddie Higgins, and Tierney Sutton, to name a few. For more information, please go to www.thejazzcruise.com, or contact Beverly Elander at Elander7@aol.com.

Check out our website--- http://www.aplaceforjazz.org for Jazz in our community Printed by Parcel Post