

# Blues worth waiting for, though attendance light

By JIM WINDELL

The blues came to Birmingham Sunday afternoon. And if you weren't at the Bloomfield Theatre for that portion of the Winter Carnival, then you missed a unique attempt to try out authentic urban blues in this classic white suburban town. The blues — in the person of Bobo Jenkins, president of the Detroit Blues Club and a tireless promoter of the real blues — came to entertain a small and select audience. When the program actually got around to the blues, the results were worth the wait. The afternoon got off to a languid start with the local Straw Hat Band. Its July 4th brand of music was strangely juxtaposed with that of the Detroit Blues Club. In some areas of the country the urban blues may be slipping away, but in

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Detroit this music is being kept alive by the efforts of a small but hardy group of people. The gravel-voiced blues announcer and radio personality, the Famous Coachman, and singer Bobo Jenkins are among the vanguard of this effort.

**BOTH WERE** on hand Sunday and they brought with them some other blues men who show that the blues are alive, if not totally well. The Langston Hughes Theatre in Detroit is the place where members and audience of the Detroit Blues Club hang out each week-end.

Performing Sunday from this club were Clemmie Durell, a B.B. King-influ-

enced singer and guitarist, Brother Peter Rabbit, and Byr Roberts. Smith, with characteristic King vibrato, did King's biggest hit "The Thrill Is Gone" and his very popular "Why I Sing the Blues." Peter Rabbit did a short John Lee Hooker tune that was just building into a rocking blues when he abruptly stopped.

Roberts, a deep, smooth-voiced singer and glib blues poet, gave his version of the blues before Jenkins appeared. Backed by the four-piece Big Star Band, Bobo Jenkins showcased some of his own blues songs in an hour's performance that was simple, direct and powerful. Despite being away from the South — he is originally from Portland, Ore. — Jenkins has never lost his ability to sing and play the blues with a down-home quality.

JENKINS RAN away from home around 1925, going to Tennessee to

work. From there, he made his way north and arrived in Detroit in 1942 where he went to work in the automobile plants. From the various life experiences in his 64 years (his birthday was celebrated at the Sunday concert), he has formed his lyrics. He is a talented blues poet who has had his share of hard luck and trouble — the basis of all the blues.

His songs are sung in a strong, steel-voiced fashion. Titles of songs he wrote and performed in this concert tell about his life: "When I First Left Home," "I Love That Woman," "Playboy Blues," "Sharecropper's Blues," "24 Years" and "Retiree Blues."

The "24 Years" tells about facing his life in Detroit, finding he has put in 24 years in a factory and has been on the wrong road. However, he also realizes he is too far along that road to turn back.

"Sharecropper's Blues" reaches back to his first experience in a factory in the North and paints a vivid picture of the similarities between being a southern sharecropper and a northern factory worker. Jenkins' songs are simple blues riffs with a similar pattern and honest lyrics. They are all powerful statements that have the ring of truth, he has known the hard life and it may have been his creative outlets that helped him survive.

MAYBE BIRMINGHAM is not the

place to peddle his blues message. But then again maybe his themes have a universal appeal. Though the audience was sparse on Sunday, this was a brave experiment by the Winter Carnival and the Bloomfield Theatre. The effort to bring the blues to Birmingham should not be scrubbed after one time.

The poignant blues of Bobo Jenkins and the Detroit Blues Club, in time, may have a larger audience in the northern suburbs that anyone suspects. Bobo Jenkins is the type of artist who can convince you the blues will live on.

## Louis Arena draws crowds

The Joe Louis Arena in downtown Detroit opened its doors Dec. 12, with the basketball action of the University of Detroit and the University of Michigan as its inaugural event. This game drew more than 12,000 people.

After the first nine events in Joe Louis, ranging from college basketball to ice hockey to the Harlem Globetrotters, some 135,000 spectators

have entered the arena, averaging 15,000 per event.

Olympia Stadium Corp. president Lincoln Cavalleri said, "It's great to see so many people coming downtown for entertainment and sporting events. The Joe Louis Arena is lighting up the riverfront and it's tremendous to be a part of the renaissance of Detroit."

# Vibrant music reawakens past

By LAURA BUCH

In 1573, the Musicians of Swanee Alley was a lively and flourishing consort in County Sussex, England.

Last week at the Detroit Institute of Arts, its 20th century counterpart of the same name reawakened the music that once delighted 16th century ears. In a concert of works from Renaissance England and Italy, these six musicians proved themselves to be as musical as they are diverse, and as polished as they are entertaining.

In the course of the program, one heard not only music for Elizabethan broken consort but also works for a consort of viols, a consort of recorders, of crumhorns, of shawms and of voices. Immediately impressive is the group's tightness of ensemble. Cut-offs are precise and phrasing unified. The sudden rhythmic shifts one finds tucked within piece like Parson's "De la Court" were given the clear-edged definition that makes them effective.

SUCH CLOSE ensemble work is fertile ground for musical expressiveness. The lushness of much of the Italian music was enhanced by attentiveness to the changing shapes within a piece. Contrasts in mood and in texture were given full expression.

A fine example of crumhorn playing was found in Francesco Cortecchia's "Guardane almo pastore." Though crumhorns are frequently used to create bright, sharply articulated pieces, they explored an entirely different effect here.

Articulations were smooth, lines flowing, and the effect organ-like. And intonation — the undoing of many a crumhorn consort — was applaudable.

In any Swanee Alley concert, one can expect to hear a good deal of lute playing. This one was no exception. In the lute duets performed by Paul O'Dette and Lyle Nordstrom, as in O'Dette's lute solo, energy and control combined to create an artful virtuosity. In John Johnson's "Passamezzo moderno," a gathering complexity of variations in one lute flow over a repeated harmonic ground in the other. O'Dette and Nordstrom are well-suited to the improvisational character of the piece. Musical surprises and changes were brought off with finesse.

O'DETTE CAN FIRE off a rapid passage with amazing speed and clarity. That such a passage be also lyrical.

# Things looking up for Larry Nozoro

By JIM WINDELL

"I'm like a bubble getting ready to burst," says 36-year-old musician Larry Nozoro. "I've been bouncing around for 20 years now, and I think good things are starting to happen for me!"

Some of those good things include a successful concert last fall at the Royal Oak Music Theatre and an 18-week booking with his quartet at the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island last summer. At present he and his quartet are in the midst of an engagement at Dewey's in Southfield's Michigan Inn. They play there nightly from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. through Saturday.

Playing at the Grand Hotel was a revelation for the saxophone player who has had wide experience during the last two decades.

"Last summer we went up to the Grand Hotel and what we did was break the ice for Jazz U. It was a revelation to me in how to present music."

"There were times we played things people could dance to, but generally we did our own thing. People of all ages could enjoy our music. We were booked for two weeks and ended up staying 18 weeks."

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seems almost too much to ask — but O'Dette does that too.

"Cost mi guillemore" and Dowland's "Fantasia" gave testimony to that fact with lovely strings of running notes and smoothly placed phrases.

For many, though, the perhaps most memorable lute piece came with the O'Dette-Nordstrom performance of a Dowland piece for one lute, four hands. Looking rather like a mythical Renaissance two-headed creature, the pair converged upon the instrument to create a work that was not only an unmissable crowd pleaser, but a surprisingly musical one.

Virtuosity is not confined only to the lute in this ensemble. Another striking example came in Christel Thielmann's performance on lute and viola. A style of music that mixes numerous chords into the gamba's melody, it was executed here with both precision and grace.

In addition to "Bonny Sweet Robin's" profusion of bowed notes, others in the piece were plucked with the left hand on the fretboard. The effect was near duet-like in clarity. If virtuosic as instrumentalists, the Musicians of Swanee Alley are perhaps somewhat less than such as a vocal ensemble. But while individual voices are not all polished ones, one would hesitate to have them abandon such vocal works.

THE CONSORT of voices gave an additional pleasant dimension to the program. And what is lost in virtuosity by these musicians is more than compensated for in musical energy and vitality.

It is a pleasure to find a group of Renaissance musicians that considers both audience and artfulness when planning a program, that realizes that entertainment and musicality can coexist on the same stage.

In this concert, playfulness and passion each found their niche. Conductor Gary Crighton may rightly paint an Italian portrait of love's torment one moment and whimsically tosses a bawdy lyric the next. With this mixture of versatility, virtuosity and listenability, the Musicians of Swanee Alley emerges as a top-notch early music performing ensemble.

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flute, there is Ned Mann on bass, Joe Peretz on drums and a newcomer to the group, John Katalenic on piano. Nozoro is a native Detroitier who has traveled with Sergio Mendez, Andy Williams and the Henry Mancini Orchestra. He once got some good advice from Mancini. "Mancini knew I wasn't happy traveling in a band. One day we sat down and he suggested I go back home to where my roots were and get into self-expressing music and just 'hang in there,'" Nozoro recalls. And that's what he did. Returning to Detroit around 1970, he put together a band called Sphere. Sphere played a lot of original music and we didn't follow any trends. However, the band rarely worked; it was more of a woodshed band," Larry Nozoro says. Following Sphere, there was another local small band called Mixed Bag and then one called Time. At the same time, he was also playing his saxophone in Detroit clubs with such jazz stars as Sonny Sitt. He even made a record on the Jazz Masters label with the legendary alto sax performer. NOW, NINE YEARS later, he feels like he is getting closer to himself. "My music is becoming more clearly defined and honest," he says, "I understand myself better. Nozoro has been playing a musical instrument for 24 years, starting out on a clarinet perhaps to emulate his professional musical father who also played that instrument.