



George Benson on saxophone shares stage with Don Mayberry sitting in on the bass.



Norman Purple plays the flute during set with the George Benson Quartet.



Sheila Landis is a singer who joins in at a jam session.

Photos by Labe Waddell

# Jam sessions take hold at Cafe Fior

By JIM WINDELL

Where can you find an honest-to-goodness jam session these days? In very few places.

Most recently, jam sessions have become a regular happening at the Cafe Fior, 29121 Northwestem, Southfield.

At the urging of public relations manager and professional singer Patty Haack, the art of the jam session is being rediscovered on Sunday nights. Ms. Haack has persuaded owner John Young to open his Italian food restaurant up to authentic improvisational sessions.

"I wanted to bring jazz back to Southfield," said Ms. Haack. She doesn't mind getting up and singing herself during a jam session. "The area lacks music in general, but it also is devoid of jazz and art in particular. I'd like to create an environment that will be fun and exciting, especially on Sunday nights."

THE JAM SESSIONS, which began March 16, have already attracted a number of people who brought musical instruments, ready to sit in with the regular quartet led by George "Sax" Benson.

Benson is a saxophone player who was around Detroit in the '40s and

**Between sets Benson told about what jam sessions were like 20 years ago. 'In those days you could sit in on a jam session somewhere in Detroit every night of the week.'**

— George Benson, jazz musician

'50s when jam sessions were still going on.

Beginning at 7:30 p.m. Sundays, Benson leads a quartet composed of pianist Gary Shunk, bassist Danny Jordan and drummer Larry Bell, in regular sets. Later in the night, young musicians can take their turns on the bandstand.

In opening sets, as customers drift in and get settled with pizza and drinks, the George Benson quartet shows its power. Benson improvises modern lines at breakneck speed. The ideas are stated and tossed off with cogency.

Shunk is a modern stylist who could blow away many a better-known piano player. Together, the quartet can unleash high quality creativity on a Charlie Parker tune, "Body and Soul," "April in Paris" or "I Got Rhythm."

MENTION THE BLUE Bird Inn,

the Parrot, the Flame or the 12 Horseman to some people who were around Detroit in the late '40s and early '50s, and one thing comes to mind — the jam session.

After 1945, the golden era of the big bands had dimmed. Jazz musicians, ever driven by creative ingenuity, were on the lookout for escapes from the strictures of these large ensembles. Musicians returned from duty during the war and everyone was ready to experiment with something new.

Some musicians with an ear for modern sounds were influenced by the bebop cues of Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie. A new way of exchanging free musical ideas needed an arena.

A smoky bar or night club for hours seemed to be ideal for what was innovative and new in jazz. The jam session was the medium for musicians coming together to try

out their new melodic lines and "sitting in" was the common practice. The result was a sometimes intense, sometimes relaxed, but always free-wheeling flow of musical energy that provided a good time for the audience and a superb training ground for the aspiring jazz musician.

BETWEEN SETS BENSON told about what jam sessions were like 20 years ago. Then, a musician had to contend with the like of Tommy Flanagan, Herman Wright, Alvin Jackson, Barry Harris, Billy Mitchell, Yusef Lateef and Thad Jones.

In those days you could sit in on a jam session somewhere in Detroit every night of the week, Benson said.

"Some were at the Blue Bird, the West Inn with Kenny Burrell, then there was the 12 Horsemen down on John R and Erskine. I remember they had a house band six nights a week, but one night a week all the musicians could come down and play," he said.

A jam sessions has no special rules, but it pays to be familiar with your instrument. "Usually," Benson said, "it was kept to the ones who knew they could play pretty good. The guys would remember if you

didn't know your instrument too well and they might not let you back up very soon."

The established musicians also had ways of letting a young musician know he had a lot more to learn. "They might give a new guy a hard time. If a song was written in a certain key, they might change it and play it in a strange key and, well, as you could imagine, they'd lose the new comer."

"BUT ALL A JAM session was was getting up and improvising. We'd play the melody in the first chorus, and after that it's all your own ideas. Everyone would take a turn and improvise for a few choruses," he said.

George Benson started playing the saxophone at age 11. Because his parents couldn't afford lessons, he picked up as much as he could about the sax from schools he attended.

"My first school was Columbian, an elementary school on the west side of Detroit. From there I went to McMichael Intermediate, and then to Northwestern High School. I just played around the city until I went into the service and played in the Army Band in 1952 and '53."

"After the service, I did club work around Detroit for quite a little

while. There was the Parrot, the Flame, the Royal Blue and the Twenty Grand. Those were some of the clubs I played at."

BENSON DID STUDIO work for Motown and played in the Austin-Moro Big Band and the New McKinney Cottonpickers. More recently, he has worked regularly with Jerry Penby Five, as well as teach jazz improvisation and theory at Henry Ford Community College. By day, his job is mail carrier.

As he was growing up, his own biggest influence was saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. "We would sit up and listen to his records all night," Benson said.

He adds some advice for younger musicians: "Listening is good. It gives a concept of how to play jazz. There are a lot of records, and once you listen enough to get the basic concepts, then you can formulate your own ideas."

The opportunity to create a jam session atmosphere at Cafe Fior was very appealing to the veteran musician. "My main goal is to give young people a chance to come out and hear jazz. Then to let them sit in with some professional musicians. That will give them an experience they'll never forget."

## 'Damn Yankees' Tigers find success in Franklin

By JOBY CUMMINGS

The Detroit Tigers created in the Franklin Village Players production of "Damn Yankees" are certainly faring better than the real ones.

The musical opened last weekend and continues Friday-Sunday at Franklin Elementary School in Franklin.

"Damn Yankees" is about Joe Boyd (Dave Roberts), a middle-aged baseball fanatic who sells his soul to the devil for a chance to be young again and help the floundering Tigers win the pennant over the Yankees.

The Devil, aka Mr. Applegate (Walt Urban), turns Joe Boyd into 22-year-old Joe Hardy (Mark Maccagnone) and poses as the boy's manager to get him a spot on the team.

THE SHOW, adapted from the book by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop, with words and music by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, is light and funny, and at times touching.

Phyllis Young is well-cast as Meg Boyd, the lonely but ever-faithful wife of Joe, who doesn't know why her husband has disappeared but determinedly believes that he will eventually return.

Her duet with young Joe, "Near to You," is poignantly beautiful. Their voices are strong and sure, and the re-

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view is a vocal masterpiece.

Mark Maccagnone is a competent Joe Hardy, a bit overzealous at times, but he nonetheless carries his part well. He perpetually wears a lost-puppy expression that shifts to surprised innocence when he is confronted by the seductive Lola (Debra Green).

Lola is Applegate's aide, sent by him to get Joe's mind off Meg. She does everything but actually seduce Joe and is discouraged but touched when he remains faithful.

DEBRA GREEN is a good Lola, and her voice is lovely, but choreographer Lisa Mathers could have made her dances more markedly sensual.

The best performance is turned in by Walt Urban as the smooth Applegate. He is a sly, enjoyable villain, with a diabolical laugh and good comedic timing. His one song, "Good Old Days," is funny and droll, if somewhat macabre.

There is a good supporting cast, including Bonnie Cook as reporter Gloria Thorpe and Soeren Gozmarian as

Coach Van Buren. The four ballplayers (Brad Perkins, Robert E. Buckley, John Lake and John Green) are especially amusing with their song about baseball discipline, "The Game."

The costumes are characteristic and effective, Applegate's in particular. He is primarily dressed in a grey suit with bright red accents — right down to his socks.

The Franklin Village Players doesn't have its own playhouse, and director Larry Coe has done an exceptionally good job of staging the production under such a disadvantage. The set is simple but workable, with the locker room and field scenes set up right in front of the audience.

THE WEAKEST aspect of the play is the choreography.

Musical numbers such as "Shoelace Joe from Hannibal Mo" and "What Lola Wants" could have been much more effective if there had been more movement in them.

Though technically flawed, the show is still a lot of fun.

The atmosphere is informal, and communication with the cast before the performance and during intermission adds to an enjoyable evening's entertainment.

## Gala feast awaits guests on Cranbrook School Quad

Continuous musical entertainment and intricate ice carving demonstrations will accent the second La Gala de Cuisine feast 3-7 p.m. May 4 at Cranbrook School in Bloomfield Hills.

The flower-decked, Eitel Saarinen-designed Quadrangle at the school will become creative food headquarters for 37 top area chefs. They will produce a panoply of dishes ranging from hors d'oeuvres and entrees to dessert, cheeses and fruit.

In addition, three chefs will demonstrate how to carve ice blocks for food

display and centerpieces.

Highlight of the musical entertainment will be a classical harp performance by Nicole De Vault of the University of Michigan and Berklee School of Music.

Also, there will be a winds instrumental concert by musicians Gail Scarnlett, oboe, Fran Dion, bassoon, Sarkis Halajian, clarinet, John Dion, French horn, and Carol Perkins, flute.

MORE ENTERTAINERS include the Cranbrook School Jazz Band, Cran-

brook Chamber Singers, Madrigal Singers and an upper school music group including Jeff Wells, violin, Martin Kim, flute, Kathryn Hunt, piano, Kim Nyles and Anne Parker, clarinet, David Randall, bass, and Barbara Breedon, French horn.

In addition to complimentary wine and champagne, there will be a cash bar.

Tickets, \$50 per person (\$40 tax deductible), are available by calling 645-3124. Proceeds will go to Cranbrook School.

## Sing offers pop, folk music

"Spring Sing," a concert of popular and folk music, will be given at 8 p.m. Thursday, May 15, at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward at Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills.

Proceeds from this event go to support the Community Youth Worker Program and Outreach at the Church.

Upbeat music is the key to the concert. Magic, a swing choir from Troy Athens High School, will open the program.

Specialty featured are Maureen and Rich DelGrosso, a local couple who have performed their rowdy British music at the Haven Gallery, the Clarkson Cafe and other area spots.

They use piano, guitar, mandolin, tin whistles and various other instruments to enhance their music.

THE GRUNIONS, a group of men from the Detroit area, will offer their approach to popular music. John Hammer, keyboard specialist with Brookside Jazz Ensemble, will perform with Gretchen Woods, who solos at Birmingham Unitarian Church and sings with the Kenneth Jewell Chorus.

Other performers include Dina Kessler and Maureen Conn of Troy and Kristin Oberer, Alvaro Bonino and Peter Nylan of Birmingham. The Community Youth Workers, who benefit from

this program, attempt to meet a variety of needs through contact with both youth and adults in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area. Through daily visits to local schools, the workers are available to young people who may need assistance, but are not likely to take the initiative to find help at an agency or youth-serving organization.

The workers are available on 24-hour call to the supportive listeners and friends. For more information about the program, call 855-9399.

Concert admission is priced for adults and for students and senior citizens. For further information, call 644-2987.