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(S.F. 5C, Ro-9A) OJD

Persistence pays off for Charles Rowland

Story and Photos:
JIM WENDELL

'I sound like a lot of people, but no one sounds like me.'
— jazz and cocktail pianist Charles Rowland

"It took me 25 years to develop discipline," declares pianist Charles Rowland. Something else he has learned is patience.

A quarter of a century of playing piano in night clubs and restaurants may do that for anyone. But, Charles Rowland exemplifies patience and equanimity.

He waited until he was in his '20s to teach himself to play the piano. Hiring into Ford Motor Company at the same time, Rowland began a career in the shipping department while watching friends and fellow musicians make names for themselves in the music field.

Now, after nearly 30 years with the auto maker, Charles Rowland, who looks far too young for it, hides his time to retire from the plant from building a separate career as a jazz and cocktail pianist. Recently he was, in the words of restaurateur Sydney Harris, "adopted" by Sydney's restaurant in Troy. Rowland performs solo piano on a console piano five nights a week at Sydney's in the Top of Troy Building, 1-75 and Big Beaver Road.

A TALL, GENIAL man, Rowland is serious about his music. At Sydney's he plays standard tunes, letting his slightly bebop fingers dance into flights of fancy every so often. He never strays far from the melody, with good tunes like "Satin Doll," "Take the A Train," "Stardust" and "The Nearness of You" being handled with loving care.

He swings away from the opening identifying chorus of "Try a Little

Tenderness" and has fun with left-handed chords as he lopes along in a swinging, bouncing improvisation.

"Misty" has a readily identifiable Erroll Garner touch. At other times, strains of Bud Powell and Ramsey Lewis come through.

After a set, sitting at the circular Sydney's bar, Rowland said, "I sound like a lot of people, but no one sounds like me."

As a teenager growing up in Detroit, Rowland played the clarinet. At 21, he taught himself to play the piano and read music. "It took me six months to learn the chords and scales," he said. "Then, I started to play professionally."

An amazing story sure. But, what about how the Rowland family got to Michigan from Talladega, Ala.?

"MY FATHER was caught selling corn liquor. At that time, black people were hanged for less than that. They let him visit his family and we all got on a train and came North. They gave him a break. I was only 2 years old."

Rowland's mother "could play the piano a little," but he and his two brothers some how wound up with the gift of music. His brother Sherrill is a singer and dancer while brother Eddie plays the saxophone.

Rowland said he was influenced by the people with whom he attended Northern High School in Detroit. "I went to school with Paul Chambers

(bass), Sonny Red (saxophone), Doug Watkins (bass) and Donald Byrd (trumpet)."

All of these men have become nationally known jazz figures. Another Detroit, pianist Tommy Flanagan, a long-time Ella Fitzgerald pianist until 1978, also had an influence on his style as did Oscar Peterson and McCoy Tyner.

"I was influenced by bebop when it seemed to be dying out," Rowland remarked, talking about pianist Bud Powell and trumpeter Miles Davis. "I saw Charlie Parker in person twice in Detroit. Once at the Graystone Ballroom and another time at the Paradise Theatre."

IN THE '50s, Rowland was a part of an active jazz scene at some of the best night spots. He led groups at the Hobby Bar, the Twenty Grand and the Playboy Club and also played with Detroit jazz greats at the Bluebird Inn and Kline's Show Bar. For the last 10 years prior to arriving at Sydney's in the spring, he played in St. Clair Shores at Danny's Copa Lounge.

Although he sees the conditions for music improving in the Detroit area, Rowland has some dreams he has patiently put aside. "I would like to explore the possibilities in the entertainment capitals like Las Vegas, California and New York in the future," he said.

In the meantime, he can be found Tuesday-Saturday night at Sydney's playing tunes by Cole Porter and Duke Ellington. "I like to play standards and Cole Porter is the best. Because of the chord structure. There are always enough changes in Porter to make it interesting."

But, Charles Rowland always puts his own changes and ideas into whatever he plays. "Whatever I play, I'm in there too. I put the melody down once to let the people know what it is they're hearing. Then, I play me for a while. At the end again, I play the melody to let them know what they've heard."



Charles Rowland is a regular at Sydney's in Troy, where he entertains five nights a week.

Actress heads 'Carnival' cast

Polly Rowles of New York has been cast in a leading role in the comedy-romance "Thieves' Carnival," which will open the Meadow Brook Theatre's 15th gala anniversary season Oct. 9, on the campus of Oakland University near Rochester.

Miss Rowles will portray an aristocratic English lady who knowingly invites a trio of thieves to a houseparty at her lavish villa in a fashionable resort in France to "break the monotony of another dull holiday."

Unexpectedly, her niece falls in love

with one of the thieves who plans to rob the villa.

Miss Rowles' extensive career has included performances in London's West End, on Broadway, in Hollywood and on television. Her many Broadway credits include "Forty Carats" with Julie Harris, "No Strings" with Richard Kiley and Diahann Carroll and "Look After Lulu," which was adapted and directed by Noel Coward.

SHE ALSO CREATED the role of Vera Charles in "Auntie Mame" with Rosalind Russell on Broadway.

Miss Rowles is remembered by Meadow Brook audiences for her performances in "Ring Round the Moon" and "The Show-Off." Last winter she was featured in the touring production of "Daisy Mayne" which starred Jean Stapleton.

Theatergoers who buy season tickets to Meadow Brook before the Sept. 8 deadline may see all eight productions for the price of seven.

For information about subscriptions to Meadow Brook's forthcoming season, call the box office at 377-3300.

Jerry Lewis Telethon broadcasts from mall

To help in the fight against Muscular Dystrophy, Oakland Mall in Troy will once again serve as an official Jerry Lewis Telethon Center on Labor Day.

Several events and fund-raising activities have been scheduled continuously from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Portions of the day's activities will be televised

live from the mall on Channel 2.

Entertainment will be provided by the Perfect Blend, featuring Orin Ross and Adele Meritt, playing pop and jazz music; the Oakland University Mime Ensemble; and local high school bands.

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