

Detroit

JAZZ

scene

City rich in jazz history

By Loraine McClish
staff writer



It is a myth that all jazz started in New Orleans, traveled up and down the Mississippi River and hit Memphis and Chicago to leave its stamp along the way.

Detroit used to be known as "Dynamic Detroit." It was a booming town, blooming with its own kind of music that was entirely independent of anything that came out of the South.

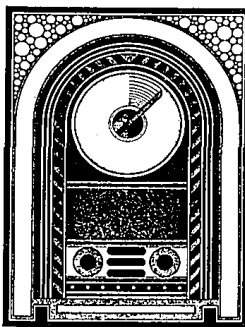
Detroit made a large contribution to the widely popular big band jazz scene that spanned the period between the two world wars. And although jazz changed to meet a lesser commercial demand after World War II, Detroit continued to be a center of jazz activity second only to New York and Los Angeles.

TODAY DETROIT and Philadelphia are the major suppliers of jazz talent to New York. And whether Detroiters know it, Detroit has a worldwide reputation as a jazz city.

The most popular of Detroit's jazz bands in the 1920s were Jean Goldkette's Band, an all-white band, and McKinley's Cotton Pickers, an all-black band. Both bands were rooted in the musical tradition that preceded them, the society bands, which played stand and popular music to all-white audiences.

The white bands played for white audiences and the black bands played for black audiences. But jam session time was another matter. The after-the-show, late-night-to-early-morning jams brought all of the musicians together.

Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey and Bix Beiderbecke all did stints with Goldkette's band and they could always be counted on to be at the jams.



AN INTEGRAL part of Detroit's black big band jazz was its solos, which made it entirely different from the black society bands or anybody else's bands.

Benny Goodman was the first white musician to successfully capitalize on this style — giving his musicians a solo — and he was the one who eventually made it the most popular form of music in the '30s.

By this time a large number of cabarets had opened in and around Paradise Valley, a theater in an all-black east side Detroit neighborhood, which remained the center of black entertainment in the city well into the 1940s.

All the while, the black musician was upwardly mobile, the yuppie of his day, the hero in his own home town. Simultaneously, the white jazz musician was the hippie of his day, openly spurned and rejected in many quarters.

The feelings toward the musicians at the time gave the black musicians the impetus to forge ahead as they did and keep forever in the forefront of jazz development.

Jazz suffered its knocks along the way. It was music sure to corrupt the young, some said. One story has it that Henry Ford was so outraged at the immoral music that he started a campaign to revive the polka.

But jazz in Detroit remains alive and well, all the way from the small piano bars scattered throughout the metro area to the annual week-long Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival that draws millions of listeners to Hart Plaza on the riverfront every fall.



The Walter White/Rick Margitza Quintet — White (left), Margitza, Gary Schunk, Ken Kellet and Danny Spencer — last week won the Hennessey Cognac Jazz Search nationals in Hollywood.

Quintet hits high note

By Loraine McClish
staff writer



Some jazz groups play cool. But the music of the Walter White/Rick Margitza Quintet is "on fire."

At least that's how contest judge Marcus Belgrave described their music after hearing it in the Midwest regional contest of the Hennessey Cognac Jazz Search.

And the group certainly is hot. After winning the regional, the quintet kept up its winning ways at last week's nationals in Hollywood. The group finished first there, thereby winning the right to play in last weekend's Playboy Jazz Festival, hosted by Bill Cosby at the Hollywood Bowl, and a recording contract with Cranberry Records.

White said he understands why someone would use fiery words when describing the band's music.

"That's because of the high energy level we generate, with a lot of imagination and a lot of emotions, the whole range of emotions," said White, who plays trumpet and sometimes doubles on keyboard or piano.

"Besides, we like one another," he said. "We make a cohesive group who talk to one another through our instruments."

All of the music the quintet plays is original, written and arranged by either White or tenor saxophonist Rick Margitza.

Ken Kellet plays bass. Danny Spencer is on drums and Gary Schunk at the keyboard.

All of the musicians had crossed paths many times before teaming last December for an appearance at Baker's Keyboard Lounge to bring to audiences what Kellet calls "a new listening experience."

"It is not unusual that we knew one another, played with one another before, or at least heard of one another before we started playing together as a group," Spencer said. "The musician's circle here is small, and the jazz musicians who are working to develop their own art form is even smaller."

THE QUINTET collectively thinks of itself as the vanguard that will usher in a new kind of creative music.

Spencer has dubbed the new sound "BePop of the '80s."

'The cause is to get our audiences away from the greasy kid stuff and give them some enrichment, some flights of emotion.'

— Danny Spencer
Walter White/Rick Margitza Quintet

"We make harmonies that are connected to a jazz tradition, but we had to go through all the forms and styles of the '50s and '60s to get where we are. So we have 20 years of various music that has all gone into the effort to get us to making the sound we are making now," Spencer said.

"And we're still improvising," Margitza added. "We play music for music's sake," Kellet said. "It's pretty close to a cause."

"The cause," Spencer explains, "is to get our audiences away from the greasy kid stuff and give them some enrichment, some flights of emotion."

"There's a place for the Top 40, except that conversations begin when that music is played. There's a place for the rain forest and the ocean waves, except that you can go to sleep when that sound is played," White said.

"We offer intellectual stimulation."

All five members of the quintet have backgrounds in classical music.

White studied at Interlochen and Julliard and met Margitza when they were both studying jazz in University of Miami in Florida.

Kellet studied jazz in Oakland University and Marcus Belgrave's Jazz Development Workshop.

Spencer got his jazz training traveling in Europe and playing with Denton Gordon in Paris. Schunk studied at Michigan State.

July is "look-for-work month for the quintet," White said, who is in the throes of arranging a tour through Japan in August.

In September they'll be back home and on Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival's payroll.

JAZZ

It's a hot summer for cool music

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer



here do you go to hear good jazz in metropolitan Detroit? Baker's Keyboard Lounge, Alexander's and the Pontchartrain Hotel, all in Detroit, are some of the favorite spots named by area jazz buffs. Others are Jamie's on 7 in Livonia, Murdock's in Rochester Hills and the Troy Hilton.

Jazz is more available in the warm weather, with the outdoor concert scene including Meadow Brook Music Festival in Rochester Hills, the Chene Park riverfront concerts in Detroit and the Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival at Hart Plaza.

"My favorite place is Baker's Keyboard Lounge," said Jim Windell, a Bloomfield Hills psychologist, who has written about jazz and does public relations for jazz musicians.

"Clarence Baker has always made that a listening room," he said. "You know you're going to get a good seat and hear the music well. He has always brought in outstanding musicians."

Call Baker's, 664-1200, for a recorded message



Flutist Alexander Zonjic will be playing at Murdock's in Rochester Hills this month.

with the upcoming schedule. The club is at Livonia and Eight Mile.

"I LIKE P.JAZZ," Windell said, mentioning the summer concert series at the Pontch. "It gets me downtown. The views of the old Detroit buildings are fantastic."

Besides the cityscape from the hotel's outdoor terrace, P.Jazz lures concertgoers with outstanding jazz artists. "They bring in a variety of performers, both local and nationally known musicians," he said.

The Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival is another of Windell's choices. "I really enjoy Montreux Jazz," he said. "I try to spend three or four days there. During the weekdays at Hart Plaza, you can have your fill of jazz without crowds."

The eighth annual festival, newly retitled the Strohs Montreux Detroit Jazz Festival, will be Thursday through Monday, Sept. 3-7. Nationally known groups will be highlighted in the all-free concert series for 1987.

Stars will include Dizzy Gillespie, Wayne Shorters, Sonny Rollins, Jon Faddis and Ruben Blades in his first Detroit appearance.

WINDELL HANDLES public relations for several area jazz musicians, including Windsor flutist Alexander Zonjic and Detroit pianist Bess Bonnier. Zonjic has been a popular performer in Detroit and southeastern Michigan since the late 1970s. "At the present time, he plays a circuit of sorts," Windell said.

Zonjic appears frequently at Alexander's (at Woodward and Canfield) Baker's and Murdock's. "In June, the only engagement he has is Thursdays through Saturdays at Murdock's. Between now and December he will play these clubs exclusively, aside from New Center Swings (summer concert series in Detroit's New Center Park) and P.Jazz," Windell said.

Longtime Detroit attraction Bess Bonnier performs Fridays through Saturdays in the Garden Court at the Hotel Pontchartrain and every Sunday afternoon in the Crystal Gallery at the Detroit Institute of Arts. "She will be playing in Montreux this year," Windell said.



Saxophonist Larry Nozoro plays at the Troy Hilton on weekends.

He also mentioned the Omni Hotel, where vocalists Ursula Walker and the Buddy Budson Trio appear Fridays through Saturdays.

Jazz doesn't limit its fans to the young, the middle-aged or the old. Windell agrees. "Jazz does cut across age groups." But "for a yuppie place to hear jazz, it's got to be P.Jazz. It's the downtown crowd after work Wednesdays and Saturdays. Also, New Center Swings, at the Fisher Building, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The same kind of crowd pours out of those office buildings."

The summer outdoor concert series at the Prudential Tower Center in Southfield has a similar appeal, he said.

ASKED WHERE to hear up and coming jazz artists, Windell said, "Occasionally a place like Alexander's will take a chance on a new group." He pointed out that bigger clubs like to present established groups, which have a lot of following. Smaller clubs and new clubs introduce the newcomers.

Area jazz fans can look forward to an important jazz club — Baker's Uptown — opening in Pontiac in the near future. Clarence Baker, who lives in Southfield, and internationally known jazz guitarist Earl Klugh, a Bloomfield Hills resident, are the owners.

A 120-year-old building on the corner of Saginaw and Pike streets has been renovated and is ready to open, as soon as the club's liquor license is approved.

There will be screens on each side of the stage, closed-circuit television and a sound booth to control both sound and lights. Entertainment will be a combination of local and nationally known musicians, and Earl Klugh will play there occasionally.

ANOTHER JAZZ aficionado is Midge Ellis, coordinator of special events at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, who at one time ran the Clarenceville Jazz Series at Livonia's Clarenceville High School.

Her favorite spots include Baker's, Alexander's, the Troy Hilton and Jamie's on 7. "Alexander's is almost all local," she said, describing the attractions presented there. "They bring in the better local artists."

Ellis also enjoys the "marvelous jazz brunch at the Pontch." Saxophonist Larry Nozoro plays at the Troy Hilton on weekends as well as at the Sunday brunch at the Top of the Pontch.

She said Clarence Baker, owner of Baker's, has sold his club two or three times and always bought it back. "Clarence seems to be the only one that can make things work."

BUT JAMIE'S on 7 (7 Mile and Middlebelt) wins hands down with her. "They bring in, whenever they can, big jazz. They've had all of them. Their next big thing is Stan Getz on Tuesday June 23. He was one of the original 'Four Brothers' with Woody Herman. At Jamie's, they've had Maynard Ferguson, and Buddy Rich — who died recently, and Woody (Herman) and Betty Carter."

"It's getting to be the place in Detroit to hear big-name jazz," said Livonia-resident Ellis about the Livonia club. "At Baker's, he can get 80 people in there soaking wet. Jamie's can get 300 people there. They charge \$15-\$18 a person, plus drinks on top of that. People are packing the room because they're so hungry for that."

To get the latest word on what's happening in Detroit-area jazz, Ellis suggested calling the Jazz Hotline at radio station WJZZ. The number is 871-JAMS.