

# Heartfelt music has jazz and Hebrew roots

The Jeff Haas Trio with special guest Marvin Kahn will perform jazz classics from Gershwin to Coltrane and original music from their CD "Jazz & Hebrew" on Friday, Jan. 23, at Borders Books & Music, 34300 Woodward (just south of Maple), Birmingham. Call (248) 203-0005 for more information.

By KERRY WOODKIN STAFF WRITER

Some music is contrived with market potential in mind, but when pianist Jeff Haas started combining centuries-old Hebrew prayer and folk music with jazz rhythms, audience was the last

thing on his mind. "My heart led me to it," said Haas, whose trio, which includes alto saxophonist Marvin Kahn of Southfield and Chuck Hall on bass, will be appearing at Borders Books & Music in Birmingham Friday. "I was making music I enjoyed playing, and it's gratifying that people enjoy it."

The music has director hard to categorize. It's jazz, soulful, and improvisational, almost haunting. A lot of it is obscure and centuries old.

"I grew up with my dad preaching equality to all kids and the belief in celebrating ethnic diversity," said Haas. His dad

in Karl Haas, an internationally acclaimed classical pianist who served as musical director and organist for Temple Israel in Detroit for 25 years. Haas is also known for his long-running National Public Radio program "Adventures in Good Music," still on the air but not in Detroit. The music Haas plays was inspired in part by his father who brought traditional Jewish melodies to the United States from his hometown of Spoyer on the Rhine River in southern Germany. A child prodigy, by age 12 Karl Haas was an apprentice organist at his hometown synagogue. He left Germany for the

United States in 1936. "My dad documented the music prior to leaving Germany," said Haas. "These melodies are typically chanted or sung, they're fragments."

Much of the material his father played at Temple Israel was music he recalled from his youth in Spoyer. As a child, Jeff said he developed a passion for music of Jewish origin, and classical music, which he has studied and performed since the age of five.

He fell in love with jazz as a teen after discovering his sister's copy of "Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane: Live at the Five-

Spot."

Haas continued classical studies with his father, "I loved growing up in Detroit," he said. "We went to the symphony every Thursday. But when I was old enough, I started sneaking into Baker's Lounge to hear jazz."

In college he studied music composition, theory, psychology and physical rehabilitation, heeding his mother's advice to pursue "something with financial security." After graduating from Michigan State University he opened a fitness center for the disabled in Traverse City.

"I continued my love affair of music in my living room," he said. That changed in 1989 when he performed in a benefit concert with his father to raise money for a rehabilitation center.

"Once I got started I just couldn't stop," said Haas. Passionate about jazz, Haas couldn't forget the melodies of his youth.

He wrote "Faith/Lonnie's Lament" - "which combines a traditional 15th century Hebrew melody with John Coltrane's 1963 masterpiece."

His "Adventures in Good Music," led to over 10 years of intensive research to establish the authenticity and historical contexts for many of the traditional folk and prayer melodies he fuses into jazz.

"I also researched the folklore surrounding these melodies in order to develop contemporary arrangements that honored the integrity of the original melodies."

Bassist Chuck Hall has worked with Haas since 1992. "He brings years and years of professional experience," said Haas. "He has spent countless hours with his father in his living room working on these arrangements. I wanted these

melodies to have some depth."

Marvin Kahn of Southfield has been with the trio for the past two years. Kahn was born in Detroit in 1917 and organized a big band in the 1930s, which was featured on national radio broadcasts, 1938-41. After serving in the armed forces, a career in retailing and raising a family, Kahn began performing again in the mid-1960s.

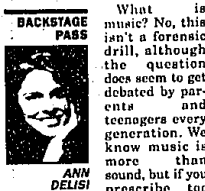
"He takes a contemporary approach to the alto clarinet," said Haas. "He has continued to grow. Using an alto clarinet instead of a B flat clarinet puts this music in a contemporary, accessible context that's different from klezmer."

Audiences at Borders on Fridays will hear jazz standards, which Haas and his group enjoy playing and they'll also hear the music he has created that defies categorization.

"The more we play this music the more I realize that it really transcends any ethnic barriers," said Haas.

His trio, with Kahn and Marcus Belgrave recorded another CD in September that combines jazz with traditional Hebrew prayer and folk music. Haas said this recording focuses on music in the Sephardic tradition. It's due to be released in March or April.

## What is music? Try these examples



**BACKSTAGE PASS**

What is music? No, this isn't a forensic drill, although the question does seem to get debated by parents and teenagers every generation. We know music is more than sound, but if you prescribe too rigid a structure

expand the definition of theater. Their current show results from a couple of swapped residences. Walk & Squawk is invited to be artists in residence at the University of Natal in South Africa. There, Walk & Squawk artists perform to develop the show "Inlanzi Ishelwe Amanzi," literally meaning "the water dries up around the fish," of the English equivalent, "As Fish Out of Water." The show caused quite a stir in the charged climate of South Africa, where the expression of personal experiences constitutes a political statement.

Now, those students from South Africa are in Michigan for a six week residency that includes workshops, performances, community sings and discussion. Tonight, they'll join us in the Detroit Public Television studio to treat us to an a cappella rendering of some traditional South African music, and Zola will discuss the residency with Mr. Block.

From traditional sounds of South Africa, we'll turn to the traditional "old style" blues of the Mississippi Delta - with a Detroit flavor. Uncle Jessie White moved from the cotton fields of Mississippi to Detroit more than 30 years ago. A contraption he fashioned from scraps parts hangs around his neck holding microphone and harmonica in place, a testament

to his days as a junk man. But it's as a blues man that we're hosting him. In 1991 as the age of 70, Uncle Jessie released his first CD, title "Uncle Jessie White and the 29th Street Band." The band name recounts Uncle Jessie's home on 29th Street in Detroit, where he hosted visiting blues men - including names like John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters - for house parties and jam sessions. The disc is the work of Royal Oak's Blues Factory, and in an important documentation of a unique Detroit voice. Not that his age has slowed him down - Uncle Jessie plays the Attie Bar in Hamtramck every Saturday night.

From Delta Blues we switch gears to classical music. A pared down version of the Rackham Symphony Choir will join us in the studio to promote their "Hearts and Voices for the Homeless" concert Jan. 23 at the First Presbyterian Church of Royal Oak. The concert will benefit Doeper's Homeless Shelter, which is dedicated to providing shelter and support for people in desperate economic situations.

Our own Dave Wagner will host Suzanne Acton, music direc-

tor of Rackham and Chorus Master of MOT, plus 30 singers from the 85-member choir. They'll perform a selection from their benefit program, which itself will cover music from opera to Broadway. This will be the largest group we've ever hosted in our studio, and we can't wait!

Traditional South African a cappella, Mississippi Delta blues, a symphony choir. I don't know how far tonight's show goes to defining music, but it sure offers a broad sampling! We have treats for your eyes, too. David Rau will take us to the Detroit Institute of Arts to see "Changing Spaces," an exhibit of artists' projects from the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia.

The artists, many of whom don't normally work with fabric, were commissioned to develop works using materials, techniques and concepts associated with fabric. The resulting work offers a slow of fresh perspectives.

That's on Backstage Pass on Detroit Public Television, tonight at midnight and repeated Friday at 7:30 p.m.

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7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)	7:00pm (2)
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