

FESTIVAL

Hart Plaza hosts home-grown jazz fest

By MIKE MURPHY
SPECIAL WRITER

It's homecoming time this weekend at Hart Plaza, where some of the finest jazz artists from Detroit and other artists of world-renown will convene for four days of free music.

In honor of Detroit's 300th birthday, organizers of the 22nd Annual Ford Detroit International Jazz Festival have packed the festival's four stages with local talent.

Also along for the celebration will be a host of national and international artists, who'll know at least one thing coming into the festival - Detroit remains a great jazz town.

"It's a great thing, to be able to recycle and give back to the community," James Carter said. "And to let folks know that a cat doesn't leave here and that's it... At least this one doesn't."

The eclectic saxophonist lived in Detroit until 1990, at which time he took up residence in New York City and became one

of the hottest names in jazz.

He hasn't performed at the jazz festival since 1995, but he hasn't been a stranger to the Motor City either.

In the spring of this year, Carter set up with a recording crew for three days at Baker's Keyboard Lounge, where four generations of Detroit jazz artists and Motor City luminaries like Aretha Franklin pitched in to help Carter record a live album.

Carter said the album, tentatively called *Live at Baker's: J.C. and Friends*, is slated for January release and he's still glowing from the reception he received at the sold-out dates.

"We had Kid Rock, Natalie Cole and Anita Baker in the audience, plus family and friends and all that good stuff from Detroit," Carter said.

The 31-year old jazz artist was also in Detroit weeks ahead of his scheduled performances at the festival to celebrate his mother's 75th birthday. She was

the one who got him into jazz in the first place by playing and singing along to records by the likes of Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald.

There was always a sense of joy in her voice, and there was always a horn involved to take up the slack afterwards," Carter said.

Since Carter took up his own horn, he hasn't limited himself to mom's music. On Saturday, Carter will be playing acoustic jazz culled from his *Chasin' the Gypsy*, a work released last year that was inspired in part by the music of Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli.

The group will include Leonard King, drums and percussion, Marlene Rice on violin, Steve Kirby on bass, Peter Soave on accordion and Michele Ramo on guitar.

Ramo, a former Livonia resident who is now living in New York, also plays jazz violin and will be playing violin Monday with the National Jazz Orches-

tra of Detroit, when it pays tribute to Detroit jazz master Harold McKinney, who died earlier this year.

Carter will also be back again on Monday when he wheels out the James Carter Electric Project.

Carter said the funky, free-jazz group, which will include Ornette Coleman sidemen G. Calvin Weston on drums and bassist Jamaladeen Tacuma, as well as Kelyra Bell on guitar and Craig Taborn on keyboards, tends to hit on a pocket and take off.

"Once a groove gets started, it's hard to do a 45 minute set," Carter said. "Sometimes we feel like we played an hour and it winds up being double that."

Trumpeter Wallace Roney played the Detroit Jazz Fest three years ago with his wife, pianist Geri Allen, and he said from his home in New York that he's eager to return.

"In all my travels, that's the best audience I've seen and that's a town that really loves jazz," Roney said. "It seems like it's the only one from the old days that really appreciates pure music."

Roney's band will include saxophonist Gary Bartz, Detroit's own Bennie Maupin on tenor saxophone and bass clarinet, Clarence Seay on bass, Billy Drummond on drums and Adam Holzman on keyboards.

Informed that his performance at the Jazz Fest is being billed as a tribute to Miles Davis, Roney bristled a bit, but didn't take much offense.

"We're going to be doing my music," Roney said. "But I guess in reality every time I pick up my horn it's a tribute to Miles."

Escaping comparisons to Miles isn't easy for the 41-year-old horn player, whose breakthrough performance came in 1991 in Montreux, Switzerland. Roney was playing second trumpet alongside Davis just months before the maestro's death and was called on to finish solos that the ailing Miles was too weak to



Michele Ramo

complete.

More so than his associations with past Jazz greats such as Davis, Art Blakey, Tony Williams and Ornette Coleman, Roney is interested in talking about "the movement," or where jazz has been and where it's going.

"The whole history of jazz is like the whole history of life. You may draw great things from the Bible or the Koran, but did life end after they were written?" Roney said. "As for music, it didn't end after that last record you put on. It's still going on."

For Roney, the movement is back on track after a respite in the '70s and '80s when he said musicians got caught up in their virtuosity and lost the pulse of

jazz. "My generation wanted to play music that had less to do with bucket than exhausting your instrument, but I think music is better than just a display," Roney said.

"I like to think I play music in a way that celebrates human achievement. How well you make a chord can make you cry, or fall in love," Roney said. "Look at the masters. They were playing their soul."

As in the past, audiences at the jazz festival will have the opportunity to catch up with some of the local jazz talent, which is in abundance this year.

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