

Dorothy Ashby creates a bit of heaven

By JIM WINDELL

If the other 21 jazz musicians who perform this season at the Jazz at the Institute series are as warm and sincere both personally and musically as was Dorothy Ashby, the Kresge Court will be a music lovers' paradise this summer.

Former Detroit jazz harpist Dorothy Ashby returned to her home town last week to inaugurate the third year of the Detroit Institute of Arts summer jazz program. She was a perfect choice to begin this star-studded series of Thursday night jazz, as her light, swinging chamber jazz was as delicate and exquisite as finely etched crystal. "I am thrilled to be back home and especially to be playing back home," she said as she ended her second of two sets. There was no doubt she was excited to return home. Her music in a trio setting also conveyed her mood of joy. That she is still doing what she has always done so well was evident by the pleasant set with the veteran drummer

Roy Brooks and he long-time bassist Clarence Sherrill. With both Sherrill and Brooks contributing sensitive touches to complement Ms. Ashby's, the trio enchanted the roomful of listeners with a program that was beautifully varied.

"I REMEMBER APRIL" gave way to the romanticism of Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" and "What Am I Here For." A highlight was her floating harp work on "Portrait of Jenny." A beautiful picture of Jenny. Dorothy Ashby showed that she is a beautiful lady also. It was nice to have her back in

Detroit. Even for one night. Ms. Ashby left Detroit with her husband five years ago after being Detroit's resident jazz harpist for 15 years. Speaking from her home in Santa Monica, Calif., a few days before she came for this engagement, she explained why she left Detroit. "Mainly, I came out here to make a living. I wasn't able to make one any longer in Detroit. Both my husband, John who is a writer, and I wanted to see if we could better ourselves out here."

In the Los Angeles area, Ms. Ashby has found steady work. "I'm doing mostly studio work with some television work also," she said. "I guess I've probably recorded on most of the records pop artists are making out here in L.A. and Hollywood. Lately, I've recorded with Helen Reddy, Johnny Mathis, Stevi Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Donna Summers, Dionne Warwick and Barry Manilow."

When she arrived in Santa Monica, a suburb of busy Los Angeles, she began doing studio work with her harp because there was not much night club

work available for jazz musicians. However, getting started in the recording studios was not easy either. "OUT HERE, when I came, they didn't know who I was. The recording companies hadn't heard of me. They don't believe you exist unless you're a current hit-maker. Finally, it was the musicians, especially the black musicians, who were responsible for getting me into the studios and giving me a chance.

"The first one who really gave me a chance was singer Bill Withers. He didn't know me either. Rosetta Hines from WCHD-FM (now WJZZ) in Detroit was responsible for making Bill Withers aware of my presence. She introduced me by phone to Bill and that started a chain of events. He used me, and the word got around and the musicians began to call on me to work on albums."

When Bess Bonnier, music director of the Jazz at the Institute series and an old Wayne State University School of Music classmate, called to ask her to come to Detroit for the opening night, Ms. Ashby quickly accepted.

At times in California, being separated from her mother who lives in Detroit and her friends, she felt like she did not exist.

"I wasn't sure that anyone from Detroit remembered I'm still around. It's a pleasure for me to have people from Detroit say they're around and here I have heard 'no' so often, I questioned if I existed myself."

Horn player, trio perform

Trumpet and flugelhorn man Louis Smith will join the Bess Bonnier Trio for "Jazz at the Institute" in the Detroit Institute of Arts Kresge Court on Thursday, May 10. Two concerts are scheduled, at 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. Tickets may be purchased in advance through the museum ticket office (832-2730). Advance registrations are suggested.

Miss Bonnier has performed in most of the city's prestigious clubs and restaurants for two decades. In addition to the informal jazz concert in the continental cafe setting, Jazz at the Institute also offers wine, beer, soft drinks and snacks at additional cost. Reserved table seating is provided. For reservations and a complete Thursday evening Jazz at the Institute brochure, call the Detroit Institute of Arts ticket office at 832-2730.

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