

Jazz musicians come together to help eradicate polio

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Jazz lovers seem to agree that Venture Records has a hit on its hands with the release of its latest CD. Detroit Jazz not only spotlights a variety of big band, Dixieland, vocal, and straight ahead jazz but proceeds go to help eradicate polio worldwide.

Of course, that's what record producer George Bednar and Dearborn Rotary Club president John McDonald had in mind when they decided to put out a CD to raise funds for the cause.

Bednar, a Canton resident, was no stranger to the music business. He started Venture Records in Dearborn Heights in 1995 to primarily showcase blues groups like Mudpudding and The Alligators as well as a collection of artists like Albert Adams and Jim McCarty on his *Uncut Detroit* recordings.

"I didn't know a lot of jazz musicians because I'd primarily worked with blues groups," said Bednar, vice president of Adray appliance and camera stores in Dearborn, Canton and Troy.

"Then a friend put me in touch with Midge Ellis. Thank God for Midge. She was tremendous help in putting this together. She called back that same day and already had much of the music taken off CDs and we recorded the rest."

"I contacted JBL Sound, makers of acoustic speakers, and they underwrote the recording. We've already raised \$16,000 and the best is yet to come. It's really standards, old music people like and enjoy listening to. Bobby Brew of Windsor was recorded at a Rotary event. The Eastside Brigade is made up of musicians primarily from the east side of Detroit, and Sounds Incorporated played at Vargo's on Six Mile in Livonia for years."

"All of the proceeds go to a Polio Eradication Program. A lot of people have forgot about it. The goal is to rid the world of polio by 2005 but more also goes to Friendship Hospital's Cranio-Facial Institute and First Step (the Plymouth-based shelter for abused women and children.)"

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Ellis and artists like Matt Michaels, Johnny Trudell and Larry Nozero donated their time and talent to making the CD a success. The Michigan Jazz Festival lent its logo to accompany Anna Narusheva's red and black artwork on the cover. Ellis is on the committee which produces the annual free jazz festival at Schoolcraft College in Livonia every July.

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The Detroit Jazz CD spotlights veteran and upcoming musicians in the area. All proceeds go to eradicate polio worldwide.

bringing big band and all styles of jazz to the area since the 1960s.

"The CD makes a good stocking stuffer," said Ellis when asked about her contributions to producing the recording. Ellis wants no recognition for herself. "I didn't do anything. I just called some musicians and rounded them up. Everybody said yes. It's a good cause and exposure for jazz. It's a good mix - big band, vocal, trios."

Southfield pianist Matt Michaels was among the veter-

an musicians quick to jump onboard the project. The professor and director of jazz studies at Wayne State University is well known for his Wednesday night gigs at Ron's Fireside Inn in Garden City. Michaels plays on several of the cuts with legendary trumpeter Johnny Trudell, the smoky voiced Barbara Ware of Southfield, and his trio with bass player Dan Jordan (Troy) and drummer Jerry McKenzie (Farmington Hills). Over the years, members of the trio have performed with Stan Kenton, Stan Getz and The Temptations among others. They shortly plan to release their first two CDs *Matt Michaels Trio* and *Matt Michaels Trio with Friends from Detroit*.

"I enjoy being on the Detroit

Jazz CD and being with good people like Johnny Trudell and up and comer Barbara Ware. Vibraphonist Jack Brokensha is a legend in town," said Michaels. "Part of why I did it is it's a very good cause, plus it was going national."

"I like the diversity. There's Dixieland, not one type of jazz, a fellow that sings like Frank Sinatra. You don't have to be a jazz lover to enjoy the album. There's big band, something you don't hear that often."

Dale Grisa, a Livonia pianist, is another one of the up and comers and a former student of Michaels. He and drummer Alex Trujano and bass player Chuck Hall provide two of the cuts including an original written for Grisa's 3-year old daughter Chloe. Favela was a favorite with crowds at Sweet Lorraine's in Livonia where they played a long standing engagement on Tuesday nights. In addition to leading his own group, Grisa frequently plays with other musicians. He spent

most of last year traveling with the Michael King Band. This year saw him performing a concert in Mexico with flutist Alexander Zonjic and Angela Boffill after joining the Bacon Brothers on stage for Fash Bash, a fund-raiser for the Detroit Institute of Arts at the Fox Theatre.

"I thought the *Detroit Jazz* CD was a good cause," said Grisa. "I have a friend who has polio so the disease has touched me personally although second-hand. I saw how it affected him so I wanted to contribute what I could to help get rid of it."

The Detroit Jazz CD costs \$14. All proceeds go to Dearborn Rotary and Rotary International to help eradicate polio worldwide. The CD is available at most independent record stores, Adray Camera in Troy and Canton, Adray Appliance in Dearborn, Streetcorner Music, Birmingham, through the Dearborn Rotary or by calling Venture Records at (313) 438-2700.

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DRAGON

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the musician's second year with September Productions. Golden's also acted in community theater with Stagecrafters and Avon Players. "They feel my effects because they're subliminal. It adds a sense of comedy to the visual."

Jim Charles provides plenty of razzle and dazzle as he darts back and forth across the stage trying to make his character look smart, but rarely does. The West Bloomfield resident plays Lucius, manager of St. George the Dragon Slayer. St. George is summoned by the villagers to rid them of the dragon they fear will burn their village and eat them. Dragons, after all, have reputations that precede them.

"Lucius thinks he's the brains of the organization," said Charles, who earlier this year played the prosecutor in the Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford production of Berl Falbaum's *No Comment*. "Some of the cast said why don't you play it like Danny DeVito in *Taxi*, so I did. The kids love the schtick of running into each other."

"I like the singing. I'm happy to be in it. It's a musical. Kids need to be opened up to live theater and ticket prices are reasonable."

Slazey Griffin is having as much fun as Charles, but while he's only wearing the fancy hat of St. George's sidekick, she's tackling a number of jobs. The Garden City resident serves as producer, director and stage manager in addition to playing the role of Carl, the town but-

fool. Griffin studied theater at Oakland University in Rochester and now brings an after-school drama program to students in Garden City Schools.

"It's been a challenge being in it and being behind the curtain," Griffin said, "but we want to be able to provide quality family entertainment with slapstick and a few jokes for the parents as well."

Neil Pike might not know much about dragons and making audiences laugh, but he entertains them just the same with a model train display he's set up in the museum for more than 20 years. Children and adults enjoy watching the eight engines, cars and cabooses chugging along separate tracks.

"We started Oct. 7 to get ready by the Friday after Thanksgiving," said Pike of Garden City. "It's never the same. It changes every year."

Bugs Bunney and Yosemite Sam hitch a ride on one of the trains running on the O-gauge track. Pike admits the candyland buildings were conceived with children in mind. The out-house provides a chuckle for adults.

"It's geared to the kids," said Pike, who received his first train at age 6 and still puts it under his Christmas tree every year. He's lived in Garden City since 1966, but grew up in Livonia on a dairy farm where Schoolcraft College now sits.

"All the village buildings are by Betty Boren," he said. "There's a tunnel, farmstead and even a memorial park monument for names of volunteers who've died. The project is 100 percent volunteer. There's always someone at the

control and others to answer questions."

A building with the sign Neal Pike Farm Tractors pays tribute to the chief engineer who restores antique tractors as a hobby. Pike has a way with motors that comes in handy when setting up the 640-square-foot train display with 500 feet of track.

"Cabooses turn counter clockwise," said Pike, pointing to the spinning carved horses on one end of the display. "I had a hard time finding a motor because all of the motors turn clockwise. I had to take it apart and put it together so it would run backwards. It was a lot of work, but I enjoy every minute of it including wiring the 3,200 blue and white lights lining the tracks."

"We have all kinds of lights and pointsettias decorating the museum for the holidays," museum publicist Kim Johnson said. "There's the 25-foot Christmas tree that took five volunteers nearly two weeks to put up, Santa's caboose where kids can meet Santa, and for the first time this year we have trees and wreaths for sale."

We're hoping it becomes a holiday tradition for people to buy their greenery here and then come in and visit the museum. On weekends we have the *Sounds of Christmas*, a dramatic and musical presentation and you can sing-along to holiday favorites. And starting Christmas Day they can watch Disney's *The Lion King* in the IMAX Theatre."

Have an interesting idea for a story? Call Observer & Eccentric arts reporter Linda Ann Chomin at (734) 953-7245 or send e-mail to lchomin@oehomecomm.net

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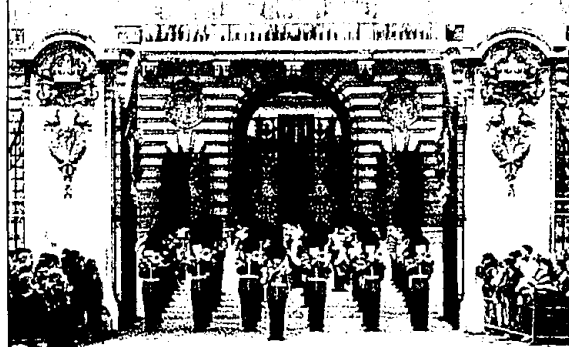
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