

File Photo

Chucho Valdes and Norman Hedman

Norman Hedman's tropical jazz to warm the Heartland

By Tom Ineck

Norman Hedman's Tropique performs March 24 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts, arriving like a warm, tropical breeze after a long, frigid Midwestern winter.

At the time of this writing, the New York City-based band's current release, *Taken By Surprise*, is riding high on the Gavin jazz charts, at the No. 6 position.

Recorded in August 1999 at Eastside Sound in Manhattan and released last November on Palmetto Records, *Taken By Surprise* is the second Tropique CD funded by the **Berman Music Foundation**. The first, *One Step Closer*, was release on Arabesque Records in 1999.

The **BMF** also is providing major funding for the Lied Center performance.

While the Gavin airplay barometer is not a gauge of record sales, it does mean people are hearing the CD. In turn, that means more fans of Tropique's light and lively, polyrhythmic music are likely to turn

out for concerts, Hedman noted in a phone interview from his home in New York City.

"It gives the band credibility for bookings, and bookings mean sales," Hedman said in his typically straightforward manner.

"...*Taken By Surprise*, is riding high on the Gavin jazz charts, at the No. 6 position."

Recent performances bear out Hedman's assertion that heavy airplay has an indirect effect on sales, at least among those who hear the band in the

flesh. Hedman said the popular response at Tropique concerts is heartening in the very competitive world of music.

"It's been excellent," he said. "The show that we did at the Jazz Standard (a Nov. 6 CD release party at the New York City jazz club) we sold the club out, and we sold about 130 to 140 CDs that night."

Appearances outside the group's hometown have been just as successful, Hedman reports.

"When we were in Barbados (Hedman continued on pg. 6)

Spring 2001
Vol. 6, Number 3

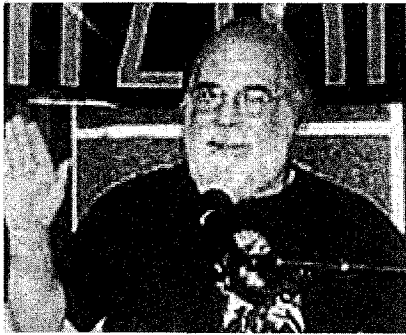
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Prez Sez

Hedman/Fort Apache--THE Jazz Show of 2001

By Butch Berman



Dear Readers, Friends, & Foes,

Spring has sprung, Fall has fell, jazz is cool, so what the heck. One thing for sure – at least for us Midwesterners – Winter sucks! We, at least, have our music to keep us warm – as well as a big thanx to Ken Burns for his great (no matter what critics may say) 20-hour jazz marathon. Just to educate the public with that much prime-time coverage and info on jazz is incredible

I was shocked and saddened to hear of J.J. Johnson's untimely passing. Guess he was suffering from cancer, and at 77 maybe he felt he'd done enuff – man, he did it all, revolutionizing the way he applied bebop to the trom-

bone as Charlie Parker to his alto – a Jazz Giant that touched all aficionados worldwide.

Also, after building you all up in our past issue I'm sorry to have called off the Valentine's Day show with Kendra Shank and Frank Kimbrough. Kendra's agent took solong trying to block book that the cost of air fare had tripled, making, on paper anyway, no chance at all of even breaking even as our budget was destroyed. Anyhow – we fulfilled our part of the contract as Kendra and Frank still got paid – and they promised to play here someday soon (we hope) when they're in the area. Subsequently, no hard feelings were directed towards the artists at all.

Taken by Surprise, the new Palmetto release by Norman Hedman's Tropique, has now climbed to #6 on the Gavin Jazz Chart. He's thrilled and we're very proud. His success only whets the appetite for his upcoming show at the Lied Center in Lincoln with Jerry Gonzales & the Fort Apache Band. This will probably be THE jazz show of 2001. Not to be missed!

In closing, and on an entirely different note, I want to happily report that my all-time fave band – Charlie Burton & Rock Therapy – not only had a ball reuniting at the Rock 2000: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Pla-Mor extravaganza, but have rebanded again to cut a demo of four (of many) new Bur-Toons. If my taste in rock and roll (whether I'm playing on it or not) is just – I feel that Charlie Burton's new stuff could propel CB & RT to another level of rockdom. No shit – we got along, had a ball, and sounded great. More news of this continuing odyssey – as well as all the skinny of our jazz Babylon to follow in our Summer issue.

By the way, you'll receive all the info you'll need to attend the best jazz party in the USA – I'm talkin' 'bout the Topeka Jazz Festival – set for Memorial Day Weekend in Topeka, Kansas. See the ad for the marvi cast of characters.

Ciao, *Butch Berman*

Butch Berman

Jazz in the venues

Compiled by Dave Hughes

Monday Night Big Band continues

The Monday Night Big Band is still playing every Monday night at P.O. Pears, 322 S. 9th St in Lincoln.

Every week features a different music director that leads the group in three sets from 7:30 to 10 p.m. Audience members are still encouraged to bring their own instruments and sit in with the band dur-

ing the second and third sets. The cover charge is still \$4, \$3 for students.

For more information, call 402-477-8008.

Jazz at The Oven

On Thursday and Sunday evenings at The Oven, 201 N. 8th St. in Lincoln, you can still hear the duos of either: Dave Novak & Dennis Taylor; Steve Hanson & Nancy Marshall; John Carlini & Andy Hall; or Peter Bouffard & John Carlini. Call 402-475-6118 for more information.

Jazz at The Five Reasons

On Friday and Saturday evenings from 8 to 11 p.m. at The Five Reasons Lounge in the Cornhusker Hotel, 333 S. 13th St in Lincoln, pianist John Carlini (occasionally with saxophonist Bill Wimmer) continues to play. Call 402-474-7474 for more information.

Brazilian Music Jam

The Brazilian Music Jam at 4 Friends has been cancelled until further notice according to the co-

Veteran Benny Powell shares talents with NJO

By Tom Ineck

Veteran trombonist and world traveler Benny Powell brought more than 50 years of playing experience to the stage Jan. 25 when he made a guest appearance with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra.

But for the program "Learning From the Master," the local musicians more than held their own in Powell's esteemed company, skillfully entertaining an audience of nearly 400 in the ballroom of The Cornhusker Hotel.

Learning the most during the evening performance were this year's crop of musicians in the NJO's Young Lions All Star Band, the group of handpicked area high school students that opened the concert. Under the direction of NJO saxophonist Scott Vicroy, the band began with Miles Davis' "Four," continued with Thelonious Monk's ballad "Round Midnight," featuring Bryan Ewing on flugelhorn, and followed up with the bluesy Count Basie tune "Front Burner."

Like a natural-born teacher, Powell took the stage to gather a small group of the young soloists together for an informal jam on Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa," an unscheduled treat that had Powell trading licks with two saxophonists, a trumpeter and a trombonist in a generous give-and-take performance. They returned to the program to conclude the first half of the concert with "Perdido" from the Duke Ellington songbook.

The second half was dominated by original Benny Powell compositions, though some worked better than others in the big band context. The NJO began with the Thad Jones tune "Ain't Nothin' Nu," a fleet, complex melody that featured solos by Bob Krueger on

trumpet, Todd Thatcher on trombone and a furious tenor saxophone duel between Rich Burrows and Stan Harper. Nat Adderly's "Work Song" was a great vehicle for Tom Harvill's probing, blues-inflected piano and Ed Love's versatile alto sax.

Powell returned to the stage to front a combo with Scott Vicroy on baritone sax, backed by a rhythm section. They nailed a swinging, midtempo rendition of the standard "There Is No Greater Love."

The full band rejoined Powell and the rest for several Powell-penned works, beginning with a lurching calypso composition written for the trombonist's "Aunt Babe." Mark Benson on alto sax and Harvill on piano gave the catchy tune some interesting twists.

"You Are With Me," a slow blues tune, was dedicated to Count Basie, in whose brass section Powell worked for 12 illustrious years. Trombonists Thatcher and Bryant Scott expertly traded phrases with Powell.

But the Powell compositions "Don't You Know I Care or Don't You Care to Know?" and "Lifelong Dream" were less successful, especially as concert closers. The idiosyncratic melodies and lyrics, and Powell's weak vocalizing, were a bit disconcerting.

Further recognition of Powell's long career with the greats – including Basie, the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, and Benny Carter – with a series of well-known tunes from their libraries would have been a more fitting finale and a tribute to the superb trombonist and his legendary employers.

Powell's appearance was made possible with support from the **Berman Music Foundation.**

Jazz is usually published six times a year by **The Berman Music Foundation**, 719 P St., Studio G, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Editor: Dave Hughes

Newsletter and computer consultant: Rebecca Kaiser

Contributing writers: Butch Berman, Rich Hoover, Dave Hughes, Tom Ineck, & Bill Wimmer.

Photographers: Butch Berman, Rich Hoover, and Tom Ineck.

For inclusion of any jazz or blues related events, letters to the editor, or suggested articles, you can either mail them to the office, phone us at 402-476-3112, fax us at 402-475-3136, or e-mail us at: bermanmf@inetnebr.com. Our website address is: www.bermanmusicfoundation.org

For advertising information, contact Butch Berman at 402-488-1398. A business card sized ad for one issue is \$25, a half-page ad for one issue is \$100. Discounts apply for six month or one year rates.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list, call us at 402-476-3112, fax us at 402-475-3136, or e-mail us at: bermanmf@inetnebr.com.

Jazz is printed by **PIP Printing** at 237 South 70th St. in Lincoln, 402-483-4166; and sorted and mailed by **All Needs Computer** at 5606 S. 48th St., also in Lincoln, 402-421-1083.

The Berman Music Foundation is a non-profit, tax exempt, 501(c)(3) private foundation recognized by the Internal Revenue Service and the Nebraska Department of Revenue. It was established in the spring of 1995 in order to protect and promote unique forms of jazz music.

Trustee: Butch Berman

Consultants: Dan Demuth, Norman Hedman, Dave Hughes, and Wade Wright

Tomfoolery:

Bobby Watson-NJO collaboration is tailor-made

By Tom Ineck

Saxophonist Bobby Watson's appearance March 1 with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra, entitled "New Horizons," is tailor-made entertainment and promises to be the highlight of the NJO's 25th anniversary season.

A full review of the concert will appear in the next issue of *Jazz*.

Watson, who has recently returned to his native Kansas City for a teaching position after many years based in New York City, is an ideal choice for guest composer, arranger and soloist with the NJO. He was musical director for Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers during his tenure with that groundbreaking, hard-bop group, from 1977-1981. He has been a major contributor in such diverse enterprises as the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet, the long-standing quintet Horizon and

larger ensembles such as the George Coleman Octet, Charlie Persip's Big Band and Dameronia, a tribute band specializing in the music of Tadd Dameron.

But it is his 1993 Columbia release *Tailor Made* that raises such high hopes for Watson's Lincoln appearance. Fronting a big band featuring the cream of the New York City jazz crop, Watson clearly articulated his unique artistic vision by writing and arranging for the larger ensemble.

Of the 12 tracks on *Tailor Made*, Watson penned 10, and his wife, Pamela, wrote two. On some tracks, Watson enlarges the tonal palette with the addition of tuba and French horn. The arrangements are skillful and original, and the performances are top-notch.

Watson is expected to share some of those *Tailor Made* arrangements with the NJO, including "Ms. B.C. (For Betty Carter)," "Old Time Ways," "Conservation" and "Lafiya." Other Watson favorites on the bill of fare are "In Case You Missed It," "Karita" and "Curious Child."

From the NJO's own library are such likely additions to the program as "La Parguera," arranged by John Fedchock, "Phil Not Bill," arranged by Rob McConnell, "Booke Ends," arranged by Tom Kubis, "On the Westside," arranged by Dave Sharp, "One More Time," arranged by Mark Benson, and "Hey, It's Me You're Talking to," by native Omahan and long-time Watson collaborator, drummer Victor Lewis.

In Memory of Milt Hinton

By Bill Wimmer

Milt Hinton, one of the elder statesmen of jazz, passed away last December 19 at a hospital in Queens, NY. He lived to be 90 years old and enjoyed a storybook life, playing in many different contexts and through major stylistic changes in the music during his long career.

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi on June 23, 1910, Hinton moved with his family to Chicago, where he started on violin but soon found a lot more playing opportunities on the bass. Hinton studied classical and jazz and was soon working with Jabbo Smith, Erskine Tate, boyhood hero Eddie South, Zutty Singleton and Fate Marable.

After a tour with South left Hinton in New York, he decided to move there.

In time, Hinton joined Cab Callaway's popular group, staying with him from 1936 until 1951 and gaining a lot of experience with the great players that passed through that band, not the least of which was Dizzy Gillespie, one of Bebop's founders.

By the time Milt left the Callaway band, he was becoming one of the busiest musicians in New York, with a hand in jazz gigs, commercials, pop dates, radio and later television work. Hinton, who was probably the first black to break into the major studio scene in New York, was just as much at home in the studio as he was onstage with the giants of jazz.

As a photographer and a jazz historian, Hinton had few peers, also. His fantastic book, *Bass Line*, was from someone who knew jazz and people like few

others behind a lens. *Bass Line* is so much more than just a walk through the past. Hinton is able to tell much about the hard work and personal integrity that came through every time he picked up the bass.

Hinton's discography reads like a proverbial who's who of jazz. He managed to play with so many musicians that influenced the music over the years. Armstrong, Ellington, Basie, Billie Holiday and Benny Goodman benefited from his support as did people as diverse as Charles Mingus, Elvin Jones, Aretha Franklin and Branford Marsalis. Hinton left us a great legacy of music, photos and words but many will miss most the person often considered one of the most popular men in jazz.

Jazz on Disc

"Taken By Surprise" takes Tropique to new heights

By Tom Ineck

**NORMAN HEDMAN'S
TROIQUE
Taken By Surprise
Palmetto Records**



It's difficult to remain objective about *Taken By Surprise* when reflecting on those three memorable days in late August 1999 when **Berman Music Foundation** photographer Rich Hoover and I observed the record-making process first-hand.

Percussionist Norman Hedman's band of seasoned professionals laid down the 13 tracks with meticulous care, but always retaining the "edge" (or "chicken fat") that makes this music so exciting. Hearing it packaged in CD form only solidifies the initial impression that I had witnessed jazz history in the making (documented in detail in the September-October 1999 issue of *Jazz*).

Tropique's concept is different from any other so-called Latin jazz ensemble. Drawing on Afro-Cuban, tropical and funk influences, it is a stimulating, even thrilling musical amalgam, pleasingly unpredictable in its polyrhythmic diversity.

The intense heat created by the sizzling percussion of Hedman's congas and Willie Martinez' timbales and the saxophone of Roger Byam is offset by the cooling breezes of Craig

Rivers' flute and A.J. Mantas' vibes, with Misha Tsyganov on piano and Ron Monroe on bass shaping the harmonic core that keeps it all together.

It is a tribute to the writing and arranging talents of several band members that *Taken By Surprise* holds together so well. Hedman penned most of the tunes, but among some of the strongest tracks are the opener "That Unpredictable Eugene," by Tsyganov, "Felicidad," by Martinez, "The One Left Behind," by Mantas, and "Maurice," Monroe's funky tribute to Maurice White of the band Earth, Wind and Fire.

This is unmistakably Hedman's gig, though. It is evident in the swirling percussion of the dance tune "Pa' Bailar," and in the infectious title track, which was written by Hedman and arranged by Chico Freeman and which features a soaring, Eastern-tinged soprano sax solo by Ahmad Alaadeen. Hedman and Martinez co-wrote "Soft Serenade," and Martinez contributed marvelous arrangements for Hedman's "Rudy's Mambo" and "Can't Sell a Secret."

Two other guest appearances are worthy of special note. Pianist George Cables co-wrote the stunning "Light at the End of the Tunnel" with Hedman and delivers a typically imaginative and driving solo on the tune. Cables returns for a similarly inspired contribution on the album's sleeper, the old Tony Bennett signature tune "Rags to Riches," which Cables has arranged as a slow cha-cha number. Last-minute addition Ronnie Buttacavoli lends just the right Mediterranean flair with his warm, romantic flugelhorn solo.

Taken By Surprise has enough vari-

ety, energy, brilliant musicianship and sensitive ensemble interplay to take the listener by surprise every time, a rare occurrence for most studio recordings.

**CHUCHO VALDES
Solo: Live in New York
Blue Note Records**

Fresh from his Grammy Award-winning quartet recording *Live at the Village Vanguard*, the astounding Cuban pianist Chucho Valdes follows immediately with a brilliant solo piano session, recorded live in January 1998 in Lincoln Center's intimate Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse.

Alternating between lush, romantic arpeggios and powerful, two-fisted flurries, Valdes opens fascinating musical vistas to the listener who has an adventurous ear. There are hints of classical impressionism, gospel and blues in his virtuosic playing, though the end result is undeniably Latin in tone.

For this very special program, Valdes chose to perform just two of his own compositions, the gentle, blues-tinged "A Mi Madre" and the fierier "Rumba Guajira." The rest of the repertoire is a diverse mélange of mostly Cuban standards such as "El Manisero," "Tres Lindas Cubanas" and "El Mancicero." From Mexican composers, Valdes chose "Mumequita Linda" and the familiar melody "Besame Mucho."

Less obvious a choice, but beautifully conceived and interpreted, is Valdes' performance of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." It perfectly illustrates his ability to juxtapose soft, melodic passages with dramatic keyboard pyrotechnics.

(Hedman continued from pg. 1)

recently, for the Barbados festival, we opened for (smooth jazz saxophonist) Dave Koz, and we were warmly received. I only brought 120 CDs and I sold them all. If I had brought more, I could have sold more. There were over 2,000 people there."

Hedman said he doesn't know what the overall sales figures are. Initial sales were sluggish because some CD stores were slow in stocking "Taken By Surprise," but most of those problems have been resolved, he said.

In the absence of a professional agent to promote Tropicque, Hedman is booking the band himself, and he admits it's been tough going.

"That's the hardest part right now, getting the band working the way I'd like to see us working. I'm getting the gigs, but they're not coming fast enough. I just haven't tied in with the right people, yet. The more write-ups I get, the more reviews I get, it helps me get closer to that goal."

Despite Hedman's long career as a versatile percussionist in demand across the musical spectrum from pop to r&b, soul and jazz (his jazz resume includes work with saxophonists Arthur Blythe and Chico Freeman and trumpeter Roy Hargrove), essential name recognition still eludes the soft-spoken bandleader.

"People still don't know who I am because there are not enough things in print. What I really need is a high-powered public relations person, and, frankly, we can't afford it. If we had somebody doing heavy PR, getting me a lot of press on the fact that the record is doing so well and the fact that we've played some key festivals, and if I had my name in the papers and magazines, then people would start to recognize."

Palmetto Records seems to be making an effort to heighten Hedman's profile. Ads in such popular jazz publications as *Downbeat* and *Jazziz* feature *Taken By Surprise* among the label's current releases, and include this blurb

from the Philadelphia Tribune: "Tropicque represents jazz with a Latin tinge, a sweet melding of jazz and Afro-Latin rhythms, with leader Norman Hedman's congas bridging the sound of three continents."

Hedman undoubtedly is the band's leader, but Tropicque is like a family, a group of dedicated musicians who believe in each other and in their ability to create a new sound and reach a wider audience. Hedman's longtime collaborators are timbales player Willie Martinez; saxophonist Roger Byam; flutist Craig Rivers; vibraphonist A.J. Mantas; pianist Misha Tsyganov; and bassist Ron Monroe.

Tropicque's Lied Center appearance is the band's only solid booking in the near future, although Hedman has raised some money for a longer tour. The economic realities of traveling with a seven-piece ensemble – airfare, lodging, artists' fees and other expenses – make it difficult to assemble block bookings, especially when club owners are leery of hiring a relatively unknown band.

"If you don't have a big name, they're afraid that you won't sell out the club. Therefore, they're not going to give you the top dollar or the prime night," Hedman explained. "You have to have a lot of press in that area to get people to come out on a Monday night to see you. It's hard enough in your own hometown."

By spring, Hedman hopes to have a string of dates that will allow Tropicque to reach the larger audience it needs for greater recognition and a successful future.

"Everybody is excited about taking this on the road. I get calls all the time, 'Where are we going? What's next?'"

At the March 24 Lied Center concert, Tropicque opens for Jerry Gonzalez & the Fort Apache Band, a hot Latin jazz ensemble also based in New York City. The double bill should give concertgoers a lesson in diversity,

contrasting Tropicque's lighter, tropical sounds with Fort Apache's harder edge.

"I know all the guys, but this is the first time that Tropicque and Fort Apache have taken the stage together, and we are so different," Hedman said. "I really refer to what I'm doing as not Latin jazz. I call it tropical jazz because I'm not trying to be traditional. Jerry Gonzalez is really in the Latin jazz genre. Their emphasis is more an Afro-Cuban influence, whereas we're definitely not in that genre at all."

Critics who equate Tropicque with Cal Tjader's vibes-oriented sound are closer to the mark, Hedman said.

"I'll take that. I think that's a great compliment because Cal Tjader was able to reach the kind of audience that I'm going after. That's the audience I want. That's the audience that really understands and loves music and gives it staying power. I believe in the integrity of our music but I don't want to say that it's traditional because it's not."

The Lied Center appearance should clearly define the differences of style and sound within the Latin (or tropical) jazz world.

"We're all looking forward to coming out there to play," Hedman said. "I think the audience will see how each band complements the other."

Eighteen months after *Taken By Surprise* was recorded, Hedman said he already has more than enough new material to go back into the studio.

"I have 30 pieces that I've written. I've also written a theme song for the band called 'This is Tropicque.' I've written what I think could be the title track of a new album called *The Magic of It All*.

But it's still the live performances that reveal Tropicque's true colors.

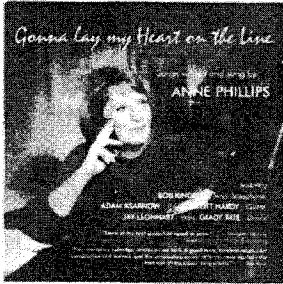
"I like the band the way it is because you still hear a lot of air in the music, but you feel the drive. There's something else that we have when we play live that somehow translates differently than it does on record. There's another energy that comes out live."

Discorama

By Butch Berman

ANNE PHILLIPS

Gonna lay my Heart on the Line Conawago Records



... You've barely had time to sit down, sip your wine and begin to listen when Anne stops you in your tracks, making you catch your breath to get so quiet that you actually lean into your speakers to capture each nuance – that's a singer, living her story with song.

That's how the first selection, also the title track of, *Gonna lay my Heart on the Line* – Anne Phillips new release – comes across at first spin. In a split

second, I'm thinking – is this a sequel to her 1959 masterpiece rarity *Born to be Blue* – torch songs to tear your heart out as you replay them over and over? Then track two – “Watching You, Watching Me” – takes you to Town Hall in New York City showcasing Cabaret and Anne's superlative writing, yet with such sophisticated delivery. I'm now figuring that this may take awhile and take me to many Anne Phillips places in such an enchanting way. An eclectic mix of torch (you gotta hear “Another Day Without Him” and “New York Night Time Blues”), cabaret, and pop, with a dash of whimsy thrown in for good measure.

Backed by her husband – the ever so sexy Bob Kindred – oozing soul and passion when called for; bassist Jay Leonhart – so multi-talented you sometimes forget what an imaginative bass player he is; and drummer Grady Tate

– always swinging, and his vocal entry on “Just When I Need You Most” takes you back to the days of Billy Eckstine – yet shows you that this is HIS song, even if Anne wrote it.

Adam Asarnow on piano and guitarist Scott Hardy round out this group most admirably – never overstating the songs but cleverly filling in all the needed spaces – making the group feel “live” even in the studio. Also, let's not forget the tasty drum work of Tim Horner on track one.

Another gem – you bet! Just a little different journey by a lady who's never really left the scene – but is now definitely making the scene – her own way – laying her heart on the line from start to finish.

To obtain this disc, contact Conawago Records at 170 West End Avenue, Suite 16D, New York, NY 10023, or fax them at 212-580-0180.

Blues Corner

By Rich Hoover

And the nominees are... I got my W.C. Handy blues awards ballot in the mail and here are the highlights of the nominees for your information:

Blues Entertainer

BB King – Bobby Rush – Little Milton – Rod Piazza – Shemekia Copeland – Taj Mahal

Best New Artist

Beverly Watkins – Calvin Jackson – No. Mississippi Allstars – Sean Costello – Willie King

Blues Band

Anson Funderburgh & the Rockets w/ Sam Myers – BB King Orch. – Johnnie Bassett & the Blues Insurgents – Magic Slim & the Teardrops – Rod Piazza & the Mighty Flyers – Taj Mahal & the Phantom Blues Band

Blues Album

Roots Stew/Big Jack Johnson – Vu Du Menz/Corey Harris & Henry Butler – Reservation Blues/Eddy Clearwater – Wicked/Shemekia Copeland – Lettin' Go/Son Seals

Acoustic Blues Album

Vu Du Menz/Corey Harris & Henry Butler – Home To Me/Eric Bibb – Butt Naked Free/Guy Davis – Many Miles Of Blues/Jerry Ricks – Delta Crossroads/Robert Lockwood Jr.

Contemporary Blues Album

Riding With The King/BB King & Eric Clapton – Reservation Blues/Eddie Clearwater – West Coast Party/Kid Ramos – I Wish I Was In Heaven/RL Burnside – Wicked/Shemekia Copeland

Historical Blues Album

Mo' Na'kins Please/James Harmon – Live On Maxwell Street/Robert Night-hawk – Last Call/Otis Spann – And This Is Maxwell Street/Variety Artists – Tip Of The Top/William Clarke

Traditional Blues Album

Roots Stew/Big Jack Johnson – Snakebite/Magic Slim – Double Shot/Snooky Pryor & Mel Brown – Lettin' Go/Son Seals – Jukin'/Willie Cobbs

There you have it, the tippy top of this year's cream of the crop. The awards show will be on Thursday, May 24 at the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis. The show will be available live on the web and a PBS show will air during the summer. But of course the thing is to “be there or be square.”

Unsung Heroes Von Freeman

By Bill Wimmer

Most of the musicians that have been featured in my column may not have been headliners, but they have all supported headliners for a large part of their careers. For this issue, we look to someone who's almost unknown outside of his hometown of Chicago, someone who most New York jazz fans consider "Chico's dad" more than the brilliant saxophonist he is.

Von Freeman, now 78 and still living in Chicago where he was born, is certainly one of the more interesting players in jazz. He has rarely recorded, he has never had any major promotion behind him, and he still plays every week at a jam session he leads at a local bar, just like he has for almost 20 years at The New Apartment Lounge.

Freeman was born in 1922 in Chicago, and grew up with two brothers who are also professional musicians, George, a guitarist and Bruz, a drummer.

Von was one of the many players who studied at DuSable High School under the legendary Walter Dyett. Dyett turned out such students as Johnny Griffin, Gene Ammons, Eddie Harris, Clifford Jordan, John Gilmore and others at a time when all of the finest local players went or tried to go to school there.

All of the above have one thing in common, and that is that every one of these guys is a complete individual on their horns, and each one has such a distinctive sound that you almost recognize from note one. It's been reported often over the years about how the first thing Walter Dyett gave aspiring wind players

was a mouthpiece—just a mouthpiece! Dyett stressed fundamentals, control, playing in tune and was a stern disciplinarian by all accounts.

By the time he was a teenager, Von had a group with his brother



Von Freeman

that was working regularly in Chicago. Although originally influenced by Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, Von came under the spell of Charlie Parker in the '40s, and was soon incorporating bebop harmonies and phrasing into his playing also. In the early '50s, Freeman played with Chris Anderson, Ahmad Jamal and Andrew Hill in his quartet and he worked as well with Sun Ra and some of the future AACM players. Freeman had by this time developed a very open approach to music.

Although he did a few recordings in the '50s, Freeman really was an unknown until 1972 when Atlantic, at the behest of producer

Rahsaan Roland Kirk, released the record *Doin' It Right Now*. This record is a good introduction to Von's playing, but although it was recorded in New York with excellent musicians, it didn't really catch the essence or the intimacy of his work with his Chicago regulars. John Young, the wonderful pianist who accompanied Von for many years, and Kirk's enthusiastic production still can't make this more than a decent record.

The middle '70s did usher in a new era for Von when he was able to record some really classic records with his quartet, and the reaction to these led to greater notice and a little notoriety outside of Chicago. *Have No Fear*, a cult classic on the Nessa label, was followed up with another album called *Serenade And Blues*. These records featured Freeman along with his quartet of John Young, David Shipp and Wilbur Campbell in top form.

In 1981, Freeman was featured on a live date for Daybreak Records called *Young And Foolish*. This record featured the same quartet with Charles Walton replacing Campbell on drums and really captures Freeman at his best, stretching out in front of a crowd.

This period of Von's career was also helped by the impact of his son Chico, who was making quite a name for himself in New York playing with some of the more forward-thinking younger musicians on the scene. A lot of people got interested in Chico which led to curiosity and discovery of Von, or Chico's roots. Chico's many recordings and critical acclaim at this time also led him to bring his dad to New York to play with him on occasion.

The high point of this association
(Heroes continued on pg. 9)

(Heroes continued from pg. 8)

of recognition has never been a huge problem in that he seems very comfortable with who he is and the choices he's made. While many musicians over the years have championed him and some call him the invisible modern master of the saxophone, Freeman has lived in the same house for the last 50 years or so.

One of the biggest reasons for Von's relative obscurity may also be his basic sound and approach to the horn. Freeman's sound is so unlike any other in jazz that it can take some getting used to, and it has to be given more than just a casual pass to really appreciate. He is the kind of musician who seems to be playing jazz's past, present and future simultaneously. He can call upon Hawkins, Young, Parker, and Coltrane's inventions into a completely personal sound. Freeman is at once whirring, buring and careening his way through the changes, with great hops and leaps.

Often his phrasing contains so many smears and sneaking up to notes that people think he's merely playing out of tune. Many of Freeman's lines are filled with such intricate flights including so many turnbacks and embellishments that come at a dizzying pace.

A few years back Von played at the Kansas City Jazz And Blues Festival with a pick-up rhythm section. A jazz musician friend of mine from KC sat with us, and about halfway through the set he turned to me and said, "You know, maybe it's just me, but I don't get it." My friend was one of the best trombonists in Kansas City, and I assured him that Freeman was serious and that given some time and hearing him in a better context he might come to appreciate him, but I'm not so sure.

Von Freeman doesn't play a way that everyone will like or really understand, but for many years he's been completely his own man. And for that, he certainly qualifies as an unsung hero.

Blues on disc

By Rich Hoover

PACKRAT'S SMOKEHOUSE

**Edge of the Swamp
King Snake**



This CD is full of smooth, syrupy rhythms, plaintive melodies, and lyrics loaded with verve and vitality. Needless to say, this CD can be listened to time and time again.

The boys in the band are: Anthony "PackRat" Thompson on vocals, harmonica, and guitar; Robert "Lightning Boy" Thomas on guitar and vocals; Kenny Sly on bass; Aaron "Pops" Watson on drums; Doug Bare on keyboards.

They are keeping up a reputation of being tight, economical, and intense. Not only are they on the *Edge of the Swamp* but they are on the edge of being discovered. This is their fourth CD release after *Let's Swamp Awhile*, *Swamp five*, and *Cadillac in the Swamp*, and they certainly are the Florida state swamp band to deal with.

For more info and sound clips check out:

www.kingsnakerecords.com

E.C. SCOTT

**Hard Act to Follow
Blind Pig**



E.C. is a relatively new gal on the blues scene and she is comin' on strong. Also, she is one of the nominees in the Soul Female Artist category for this year's W.C. Handy awards. With her gospel and soul background well intact, she is steppin' into the blues and going right to the fast lane from the San Francisco Bay Area.

Her band, Smoke, is a solid asset with Curtis Nutall on drums; Jay Goudeau and Kent Williams sharing duties on bass; Early Times, Tim Landis, and Yasutaka Nakajima covering guitar duties; David Halliday and Vincent Lars doing saxophone; Tim Hyland on trumpet; and Larry Batiste on trombone.

E.C. has also got the knack for lyrics with full credits on five tunes and shared credits on five more of the eleven tunes on this, her debut CD release.

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Summit Jazz is a mile-high experience

By Dan Demuth

Saturday, January 27, a snowy night in Denver, was the setting for some great mainstream jazz at the beautiful Donald Seawell ballroom in the Denver Center For Performing Arts. Having traveled up from Colorado Springs as first timers, we had the good fortune to have Juanita Greenwood assist us in choosing a close hotel, providing directions, suggestions and the like.

Juanita is the jazz maven of the Summit Jazz Foundation which sponsors and hosts these frequent programs. In an all too brief conversation with her, it is obvious she has a wealth of knowledge about the music as well as maintaining a working relationship with many of the greats over the years.

This was the second night and an excellent crowd was on hand (some of whom I spoke with had been there the preceding night) despite the not so appealing weather outside. The setting is a ballroom seating about 500 people comfortably at shared tables, with one wall windowed in its entirety providing a great top floor view. A small dance floor is near the stage, and libations from an amply stocked bar and a light food menu are available throughout the performance. But, let's get to the main course.

Performing were Ralph Sutton (if Colorado has a jazz godfather, he is the man); clarinetist nonpareil Allan Vache; the subtle but ever present playing of Don Mopsick on bass; Frank Capp, aptly transferring his driving skills from the Capp/Pierce Jugger-nauts to a small group setting; and Bob Barnard on cornet.

Resumes of the above musicians are not required, save perhaps Bob Barnard. Billed as the "Louis Armstrong of Australia," his prior

musical associations have included Wild Bill Davison, Dick Carey, Bud Freeman, Jack Lesberg, Peanuts Hucko, Dave McKenna, Milt Hinton, Jackie Williams, Earl May, Kieth Ingham and Ralph Sutton. He occasionally leads his own group and is a three-time winner of the Australia Gold Coast International Jazz Festival's Critics Award. Impressive credentials he wears easily. The Armstrong comparison may be fair as regards Australian notoriety, but his style is his own.

Three 45 minute sets were played with the musicians alternating calling sets. Barnard started things with the Hoagy Carmichael standard "New Orleans," the slow tempo featuring himself and Vache. Bam! Gears switched! Vache, who critics have compared to Goodman, got an early start on elevating the roof with "Stealin' Apples" which I felt was more in the Herman mode, but lets call it Vache ala mode - very tasty! Now slow down to a Barnard featured arrangement of the emotion tigger "Black and Blue." Then, back towards the roof on a dixieland elevator with "Take Me Out To The Ballgame." Quite a ride!

The second set was called by Frank Capp, who enjoys bantering with the band and the audience and very modestly downplays his skills. Capp said, "I'm the nominal leader of this group - I can play any song in any key." The tunes included "Love Me Or Love Me Not" and "Always."

Capp also said, "I was playing golf with Ray Brown and he related a story about the late great Milt 'Judge' Hinton.

"Ray and Milt were appearing somewhere and during an intermission Ray spots Milt in the lounge watching a World Series game. Brown inquires as to the score and Hinton replies 'Six to three.' Ray asks who is ahead and

Milt answers 'six.'"

The set continues with Handy's "Beale Street Blues," and in waltz time, "You've Changed." Capp again, "A waltz is a tune with one beat missing in every bar."

Closing out this round was "Tea For Two," a number that Capp and Sutton had performed many times on a European tour, and "I Got Rhythm," the lone solo in the entire show that Capp allowed himself.

Finally Capp added, "Milt frequently visited and stayed with us. My wife is Chinese. Milt would tell her he would shine her shoes if she would do his laundry."

Appropriately Ralph Sutton ordered the menu for the final set. Recovering from a recent serious back surgery, he is an amazing player, considering his career started with Jack Teagarden around 60 years ago. He found time to provide me with an autograph for the signed John Falter print (of Sutton) I obtained at the recent BMF sponsored exhibit at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

"I Found A New Baby," "Old Fashioned Love," "S'Wonderful," "Sweet N' Lovely," went first, with the traditionally great "Chicago" and "Swing That Music" closing out the evening. The great melody that flows from his right hand can't suppress the occasional ostinato of boogie woogie striding out of the left, sweet music indeed to this listener.

Summit Jazz has performances throughout the year. I hope to make the one in April featuring Dick Hyman, Howard Alden, Michael Moore and Ken Peplowski. For more info you can contact them at www.summitjazz.org - or - at PO Box 1150 Evergreen CO 80437-1150.

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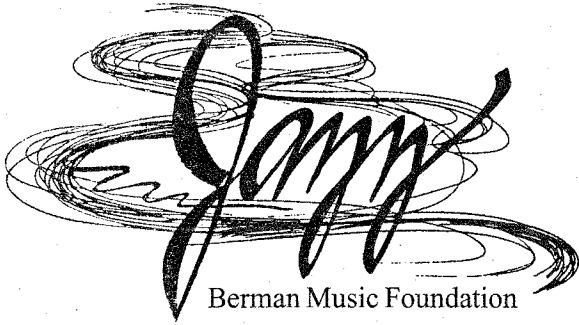
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