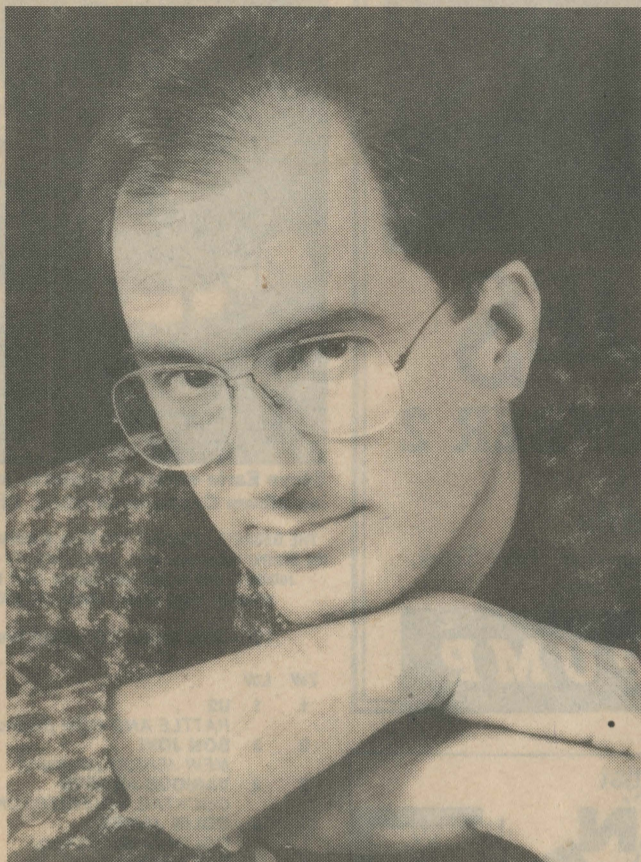


Jazz Fest Fever

Local musicians battle public inertia

By Alex Varty

Obsessed by the outdoors, and still young enough to be unsure of its musical tastes, Vancouver is not an easy city in which to promote contemporary music, particularly modern music without a strong commercial bent. So the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society, the people who bring us our wonderful summer jazz festival, and the New Orchestra Workshop, an artists' collective of some of our most talented and committed creative musicians, had a problem. The Society had a list of artists that they wanted to bring to town, all of whom represent the very best in their respective fields, but only one of whom was in any way "bankable" at the box office. The Workshop had a roster of member players whose work is strong and original and worthy of public support, but who didn't have a venue in which they could bring their art to the public.



Renowned saxophonist Michael Brecker will be a definite draw at the Time Flies music festival.

The solution? Vancouver's time-honoured way of battling public indifference and granting-agency inertia: a festival. Time Flies, an unusual meeting of the entrepreneurial and artistic spirits, will take over the city's musical agenda for the first five days of November, enlivening our cold and rainy nights with an eclectic sampling of international and local innovators, in what the organizers are billing as "a celebration of contemporary jazz and improvised music".

Celebration is an apt word: seems like everybody involved in this program will have cause to celebrate. The Coastal Jazz and Blues gang will be able to get some of their favourite visiting artists into town, in a situation where at least some attention will be paid to the more obscure of the immigrants. Vancouver's musicians, as represented by the New Orchestra Workshop's members and affiliates, will New Orchestra Workshop's members and affiliates, will get to show that they can hold their own on the same stages as the imports; and the listener will have access to a great variety of stimulating sounds during a time that is traditionally rather slow on the concert circuit.

So who's coming? The undeniable star of the festivities will be tenor saxophonist **Michael Brecker**, a remarkable musician who has consistently been able to strike a balance between massive commercial success (for a jazz artist, anyway...) and sustained critical respect. Brecker is no innovator, but he has been able to incorporate the more approachable elements of the great saxophone pioneers John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins into a personalized style that is warm and powerful, witty and serious. He's got a great sound and awesomely impressive technical abilities, and unlike most of his jazz-pop peers he can also improvise like mad. In full flight, Brecker can reel off chorus after chorus of impassioned, intensely human melodies: he works in an electric context, but keeps the spirit of post-bop jazz alive at all times.

Helping Brecker out will be a fine edition of his touring band, including Mike Stern,

probably the most bop-conversant of contemporary fusion guitarists, pianist Joey Calderazzo, and electric bassist Jeff Andrews, young faces who sound tasteful and assured on Brecker's most recent Impulse record release. Long-time John Scofield sideman Adam Nussbaun, always an impressive player, is on drums.

Opening for the Brecker band's Commodore appearance on November 1st will be **Lunar Adventures** possibly Vancouver's most creative fusion ensemble. Their fusion isn't the quiche-and-cocktails electric lounge jazz of the cabaret set, nor is it the crypto-metal bombast of the *passee* Mahavishnu clones. Instead, it's an attempt to fuse the harmolodic lessons of Ornette Coleman's challenging work with the spatial freedom of '60s acoustic jazz and the driving electricity of rock. Ron Samworth's deft manipulation of electronically altered guitar timbres, and Clyde Reed's rich-toned electric upright bass lines cushion the wilder flights of saxophonist Coat Cooke and drummer Gregg Simpson (a 20-year veteran of Vancouver's most probing jazz ensembles). The improvisations are chancy enough to encourage edge-of-chair attention, but the strongly melodic themes that trigger them are also sweet enough not to immediately alienate the more conservative listeners. There would be a place for this band in pop music if pop weren't so relentlessly dumb. Or is it deaf?

After the electrified rushes of opening night, things settle into a groove with a jazz party at the grunt gallery, featuring singer and New Orchestra Workshop organizer **Kate Hammett-Vaughan's** new band, and the latest version of saxophonist Bruce Freedman's **Chief Feature**. This should be a good opportunity for people interested in Vancouver's new jazz community to meet and socialize with its principals, while viewing some provocative contemporary art.

Bruce Freedman and Kate Hammett-Vaughan are both best known for things other than their creative jazz work. For years Freedman was recognized as the hot,

funky tenor saxophonist who fronted the latin-jazz dance band Rio Bumba. Hammett-Vaughan pays her rent singing standards with a Billie Holiday touch in various restaurants and bars. Working with the New Orchestra Workshop has allowed both artists to indulge their more individualistic aspects.

Time Flies then moves to the Vancouver East Cultural Centre for a three-day run, kicking off with an all-Canadian double-bill of local pianist **Paul Plimley** and the Montreal-based **Jean Beaudet Quartet**.

Plimley may well be the best performing pianist in Canada today. He's certainly the best I've heard, with a robust approach to the keyboard that might border on physical comedy if he weren't so compellingly intense about it. When he isn't pummeling the keys, though, Plimley mixes a quicksilver keyboard articulation that rivals Art Tatum's legendary dexterity with a 21st century melodic approach born out of Cecil Taylor and modern "serious" music, yet steeped in exclusively Plimleyesque eccentricities and flourishes. At the moment, he's probably the West Coast's prime candidate for international jazz acclaim, and he's always a rivetting performer.

Jean Beaudet, also a pianist, shares many characteristics with Plimley, although his individual style is not quite so fully evolved and his rhythmic sense is not as acute. He is, however, an equally gifted composer, a writer of powerful, moving melodic lines, and as a band leader he has assembled an ensemble of Montreal's finest, including the kinetic percussionist Michel Ratte, the extravagantly hard-driving saxophonist Yannick Rieu, and the big-toned bassist Normand Guilbeault. We missed their appearance at last year's jazz festival, but on the evidence of their recent LP release, they'll be an exceptionally dynamic live act.

All of the Time Flies concerts will have their intense

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