

# Pro Musica breaking down barriers

**I**t's not easy being on the cutting edge of music in Canada.

"It's either McDonna the Pop Tart or nothing," says Coat Cooke, an avant-garde jazz-oriented composer.

Cooke says this with a hearty laugh; the Vancouver-based saxophonist and composer — like others into new music — is doing nicely at what he likes.

Recently his fine compact disc, *Lunar Adventures: Live in Seattle*, made with one of several groups he's been part of for some years and given a quality pressing by a small Los Angeles label, got a rave review in a U.S. music magazine.

But when he and fellow musicians went on a Canadian tour with their unique blends of new (and cross-pollinated) sounds, no amount of persuasion — press packages, tapes, follow-up phone calls — could interest a single member of the national entertainment press.

Only CBC Radio, where Cooke has appeared, has shown much of an interest in new music in recent years.

So, with other musician-composers, Cooke enjoys and profits from, in part, participation in Vancouver Pro Musica, an artist-run society that brings together, supports and promotes artists such as himself.

"It encourages dialogue — keeps (the music) alive," he says of the organization. "There's so much that's dis-

couraging."

Cooke's Stellar Sax Quartet ("structurally quite different from a lot of kinds of jazz") will appear June 24 at the Community Arts Council on Davie Street with two other Pro Musica groups, New World Quartet led by Patric Caird, another sax ensemble, and the Robert Dyck Trio of piano, sax and bass.

The evening will wrap up a five-concert series, The Vancouver Composer's Showcase, organized by Pro Musica member, pianist and composer Mark Armanini.

Taking the pulse of Pro Musica isn't easy. Music styles range through jazz, electronic (some so bizarre "they're really soundscapes," says Cooke), world music and classical.

"And there's quite a bit of interaction — playing on each other's pieces," Armanini says. "We try to mix people up — to break down barriers between styles."

"We also try to bring more people into the fold — to get more people to contribute to the community," Cooke adds.

While the society was founded in 1984, it became a composer's organization in 1987 and is now unique in Canada.

In an area of music where there isn't much money to be made outside teaching, Pro Musica serves as an incentive, Cooke says, "to hustle and work.

"It's always struggling to make it along — but it is trying to provide a venue and opportunity and say, 'Here it is.'"



**The eclectic jazz-oriented musicians involved with Pro Musica hope to show Canadians there are alternatives to standard commercial fare such as 'McDonna the Pop Tart.' Laurie Hazell photo**

Adds Armanini: "I think composers since the '50s have existed mainly in universities. This is quite different than that. This is encouraging a sense of community rather than exclusivity.

"We're trying to encourage people to participate more — and hear what other people have written — and get it out to the public."

Pro Musica is tuned to the real world. When Armanini puts together a program, for example, he makes sure it's like "a variety show — a changing scene" not only so the music presented blends well, but so the audience doesn't get bored.

Pro Musica also encourages an exchange of ideas about business survival

skills — subjects ranging from writing a press release to marketing a recording (a first commercial tape or CD may serve, if not as a money-maker, a "calling card", Armanini says).

"We're out there trying to operate just like any other artist or business," Armanini continues. "It's not necessarily an academic thing

— it's entertainment."

The Monday concert, a Pro Musica salute to the du Maurier Jazz Festival, at 837 Davie, begins at 8 p.m. Tickets, \$9 and \$7 for seniors and students, are available at the door.

For more information about the organization, call Armanini at 222-9226.

— Alison Appelbe



# Fate smiles on Gastown's street jazz

**DANCING IN** the streets is an integral part of jazz festival programming in New Orleans, Montreal, Montreux, and other international centres. But it had never been tried in Vancouver until this year, when the organizers of the du Maurier International Jazz Festival and the Gastown Merchants Association teamed up to present **Gastown Jazz**, two afternoons' worth of live music in the streets in the popular tourist

## jazz ..... NOTEBOOK .....

district. Two stages were set up, with two Gastown blocks barred to traffic: the sun shone, the music soared, and the crowds poured in. Early estimates indicated that upwards of 10,000 people per day thronged to hear the music of blues guitarist Kenny Neal, Claude Ranger's Jade big band, the Boston trio the Fringe, and more. The crowds, the Gastown merchants, and jazz festival organizers were ecstatic. "When the Rebirth Brass Band played, that entire block was packed from one side to the other with people dancing in the streets," says jazz fest spokesman John Orysik, "I had never seen anything like it in Vancouver. And the crowds were very sensitive. They had come to listen to the music, and there was no rowdyism. But there was a whole cross-section of the public present: jazz fans, people who had never heard the music before, old people, families with little kids, all having a good time. "The success of the Gastown program means that it will certainly return next

year, and probably in an expanded form. "Its success has posed some interesting questions about how we'll set it up next year," said Orysik, who went on to suggest that festival organizers may shoot for even more of a street fair atmosphere, with mimes and other entertainers. "And it's brought down some barriers. We'd been trying to do a street festival for years, and we had always come up against some roadblocks with the city. Now everybody thinks it's a great idea, and asks why hadn't we done it earlier." ...**MILTON NASCIMENTO** opened the festival with a somewhat slick show that heated up steadily when he saw how enthusiastic the crowd—which included an unusually large and vocal contingent from his homeland—was about his highly personal brand of Afro-Portuguese folk-jazz-pop. The musician, as always wearing a trademark soft cap and loose sport clothes, came off stage with flowers and gifts, and excitedly proclaimed Vancouver as the absolute highlight of his current North American tour. He raved about both the technical set-up at the Queen E. and the carnival-like atmosphere created by his fans, old and new, and immediately started huddling with jazz fest folks about a return date. Current estimate: five months from now...**THE JAZZ** festival's designated after-hours room, the **Glass Slipper**, has changed considerably from the bare, utilitarian space that it was some months ago. Gone are the enormously uncomfortable bingo-surplus benches; in are comfortable chairs and a bright collection of artist/jazz guitarist Thomas Anfield's paintings. The music hasn't changed, though: the Slipper is still the place where you'll find the real Vancouver underground of advanced and adventurous improvisors. And during the jazz festival week they've been joined by some heavy international talent, too: one after-hours jam saw locals the Taylor/Kane Explosion joined by the Jazz Passengers and others. Music at the Glass Slipper starts at 1:00 a.m. through Monday (July 2). ■