

NOW celebrates 20 years of flying time

By Slish

THE NEW ORCHESTRA WORKSHOP (NOW) IS celebrating its 20th Anniversary... 20 years of offering and developing the West Coast Creative music scene. Coat Cooke, founder of the NOW Orchestra, took the time to fill me in on what it is that NOW is celebrating with this weekend's Time Flies 10th Annual Festival of Jazz and Improvised Music at the Roundhouse, and their unique vision for Vancouver and the West Coast.

Coat: New Orchestra Workshops' mandate from '77 has been to establish the West Coast musical idiom, you know really develop the people that are here and encouraging folks to do original work that features improvisation... and doing workshops and educating the people to pass along the music. Because it's not taught in schools, this kind of music is taught through oral tradition.

Slish: Is the mandate working?

C: Oh ya! Absolutely! That's one thing that's been real consistent over the years is that we've been presenting local composers and encouraging people to develop themselves as writers, and then to use the community and develop the community by doing workshops and education. Teach this information to each generation of players that have come along since then.

S: Are you attempting to educate your listening audience?

C: We have workshops that are for musicians of all levels and for listeners... for anybody who wants to come... so we really encourage that and we do that for free. The presentation of original music and the presentation of workshops... those are two of our two strong cores that we've really built everything on to develop a West Coast sound... and there is a

West Coast sound. I've tried describing that but it's very difficult to describe because how do you describe sound? It's the pro and con of being isolated out here that you really do develop your own work, in spite of the fact that we're all influenced by the media and stuff. But it's the actual getting together and playing about three times a week for years... and if you're rehearsing

that much and you're really developing your writing and you're touring... you really do develop something. And there is something that is particular to the West Coast.

Some of the finest creative and jazz musicians in the world live here... right under our noses... creating and performing with little or no acknowledgment from the cultural community at large. Musicians like pianist Paul Plimley and clarinetist François Houle, whose International reputations have helped to forge the way for NOW around the globe.

S: What does the international creative music community think of what's going on here on the West Coast? You have a great reputation among musicians in town...

C: Our reputation outside of town is better. We're one of the few groups in the whole world that does what we're doing. The ensemble is really thought very highly of, we did a recording with Barry Guy from Britain. You know he's a great player and he came and it



Larry Svirchev photo

was part of getting our reputation more international... and then we have people in the band like Paul Plimley and Francois and various other ones in the group at large who've had CDs and international reviews... it's been a gradual building over time. We've been doing the work... we're doing it for the music, we're not doing it for the money. We really love the work and we're all dedicated... I'm dedicated to this work.

S: A huge component for me and obviously for the musicians is that spontaneous creation... that spontaneous communication between musicians.

C: Well, that's where the magic gets created... that's where you can get in touch with things in your psyche and your spirit and remind you of things... and you can go to different places you know.

S: How do you foster that in the rehearsal process, or is that up to each musician?

C: Well, I think people just have to trust that everybody is developing at their own pace... we all have very different experiences and different developments and we allow people to

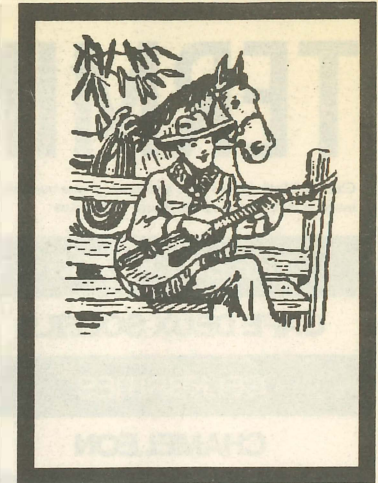
bring what they can bring.

S: In going out to jazz gigs lately one thing that I've found difficult to understand is that there are only two or three other musicians in the audience... it's bad enough that the local audiences aren't picking up on it... but other musicians don't seem to be fostering and supporting at the same time.

C: That was the thing at the [Glass] Slipper, out of seven nights of the week there would be five people in the audience, and none of those five would be musicians... it's not like in New York where clubs can have any music they want and if they've got jazz in the players take responsibility for making sure that the audience is full because if they don't the club owners will go, Oh, I guess jazz isn't working here... I guess we'll move on to something else. People are not taking that responsibility here as players. There's no sense of responsibility to the scene. It's very fractionalized, there's the classical musicians and there's the rock musicians and the country guys and the inside jazz guys and the outside jazz guys and all the different factions and nobody realizes that we're all in this together... that's how the Orchestra workshops work... a bunch of disparate musicians have more power when they come together as a collective in terms of lobbying government or as a voice. But it's a lot more work too, you have to have some people that are doing all the work or the organizing or the envisioning.

The NOW Orchestra 20-year celebration takes place over four days and nights at The Roundhouse Community Centre starting Thursday November 13. Thirty musicians playing new compositions along with unstructured improvisational collaborations.

C: Thursday night we've got Brass Roots opening... and there's the 10:30



show which is three small groups improvising... just improvising... no music. Friday and Saturday are both the Orchestra with different programs each night... the first night it's me, Paul Cram and George [Lewis]. Saturday, it's Ron [Samworth], Vinny [Golia] and another of George's pieces, so it's completely different each set. Each of those nights there's three small groups each. Sunday we have the Wild Card sessions which is from 1-5pm where all the musicians from the whole series are to come hang out the whole afternoon and people just play together as they feel like it. So we might have a solo piano or a two-clarinets duo or we just might have 30 people playing at once, we just don't know what might happen. I'm sure the unexpected will happen so I think it will be really fun.

Time Flies: Hear it NOW Festival of Jazz and Improvised Music happens this weekend at the Roundhouse Community Centre. Workshops on Nov 13-15 at noon are FREE. Brass Boots on Nov 13, 7:30 is \$15/\$12 students, seniors, jazz friends; NOW Orchestra on Nov 14-15, 7:30pm is \$15/\$12 students, seniors, jazz friends. Late Night Improv Nov 13-15, 10:30pm and Wild Card Improv Nov 16, 1pm is \$8/\$5 students, seniors, jazz friends. Big Time Pass for all concerts and improv sessions \$35. Tix @ Coastal Jazz & Blues Society: 682-0706.