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ART OF JAZZ ORGANIZATION AIMS TO RAISE JAZZ'S PROFILE IN CANADA



Saxophonist Jane Bunnett, along with musicians Larry Cramer, Howard Rees and Bonnie Lester want to expand the year-round audience for jazz through their multi-faceted Art of Jazz organization. PHOTO/IVAN OTIS

Flautist Jane Bunnett and singer Bonnie Lester want to make things perfectly clear. Even though their organization, the Art of Jazz (AOJ), is putting together a five-day celebration of jazz and its master musicians in Toronto in May, AOJ is much more than that.

While the celebration that takes place in Toronto's Distillery District May 17 to May 21 serves as an introduction to AOJ, the group is formulating ambitious plans for educational and outreach programs as well as regular concerts throughout the year.

Established in 2005, by flautist Bunnett, trumpeter Larry Cramer, pianist/educator Howard Rees and Lester, whose background encompasses marketing communications, AOJ plans to build the audience for jazz. Regular concerts are part of this, but so is an educational component that will see professional musicians—local and international—mentoring students as well as other musicians.

"We have a rich history of jazz in Canada and we want to raise its profile locally so that it's treated as an art form like opera, ballet and the symphony," explains Lester, AOJ president. Too much attention in the

Toronto area is directed towards once-a-year jazz festivals, with the music almost ignored at other times. It's to fill this gap that AOJ's outreach programs are directed, she adds. New mid-size venues are needed as well, adds Bunnett. "There has to be something between the Rex [jazz bar, in Toronto] and Massey Hall. Jazz should receive the same respect as [chamber ensemble] Tafelmusik."

That situation will be rectified during the celebration with concerts taking place in locations in the Distillery District, including the 385-seat Marilyn and Charles Baillie Theatre at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, home of the Soulpepper Theatre Company.

The first jazz ever to be performed at that venue, the initial tribute on May 18 is for pianist and educator Barry Harris, with performances by pianist Hank Jones, alto saxophonist Charles McPherson, bassist Earl May, drummer Leroy Williams and tap dancer Jimmy Slyde. The next night bassist Don Thompson is honored by a band featuring saxophonist John Handy, guitarist Jim Hall, saxophonist Phil Dwyer, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Terry Clarke. "This is the first time Jim Hall has been here in 26 years, and it's because of respect for Don," notes Bunnett.

Saturday night is an Afro-Cuban Dance Party with Bunnett's Spirits of Havana plus percussionist Ray Vega, tuba player Howard Johnson and the Ricky Franco Salsa Orchestra; while Sunday is the debut of the Art of Jazz Orchestra, featuring arrangements by Bunnett, Holland and others.

Jazz duos perform on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, with singer Shelia Jordan and bassist Cameron Brown plus saxophonist Sonny Fortune and drummer Rashied Ali on the first day and pianist Kenny Barron and trumpeter Eddie Henderson plus saxophonist Ravi Coltrane

and pianist Luis Perdomo on the second. Chicago guitarist Fruteland Jackson hosts Kids Can Swing Saturday afternoon and the Soul Rebels band headline a benefit performance for New Orleans musicians on Sunday. After hours jam sessions, projection of jazz films, readings and clinics take place in various venues during the week-end, including the first-ever piano clinic by Jones. A gala fundraiser May 17, with performances by Thompson, Harris, Jones, Slyde and vocalist Denzal Sinclair launches the celebration. (Details: www.artofjazz.org).

"This is the first time Jim Hall has been here in 26 years, and it's because of respect for Don."

Although the organization is committed to honoring one international and one local jazz master annually, that's just the beginning, explains Lester. Regularly during the year AOJ will host concerts featuring the AOJ orchestra, young artists, Latin jazz players, jazz vocalists and visiting jazz masters. Veteran musicians who are also educators will participate in clinics, master classes and other programs when they're in Toronto.

This fits in with the AOJ's objective of year-round education for students of jazz and the general public. These clinics/workshops will take place in the Distillery District as well as at selected school and community centres. Outreach to areas in which youngsters lack exposure to jazz will be a particular focus, notes Lester. Within a couple of years the group hopes to launch a summer jazz camp and a high school jazz orchestra.

Chartered as a not-for-profit charitable organization, AOJ began with seed money from private donors. Now it's seeking more funding, and so far the response from corporations has been positive, reports Lester.

Never losing sight of its dual goals AOJ will "lay the foundation for a strong home for jazz in Toronto and across the country," she states. **c**

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2006 Canadian Jazz Festival Guide

By DARYL ANGIER

One of the most encouraging developments on the Canadian festival circuit this year is not taking place during festival season at all. That's because an increasing number of festival producers are heeding the words of musicians and fans who have complained for years that the emphasis on summer festivals comes at the cost of maintaining a healthy year-round jazz scene. One of the primary reasons behind the formation of the Art of Jazz organization in Toronto, for example, was to address this seasonal imbalance (see story on page 8).

Consequently, jazz societies big and small have stepped up their efforts to present touring acts during the colder months. The Toronto Downtown Jazz Festival kicked off their 20th season as early as February with a series of concerts featuring Chris Potter, Randy Weston and The Bad Plus among others. Likewise, the producers of the Ottawa International Jazz Festival presented Winnipeg pianist Michelle

Grégoire and her quintet on her first national tour in February, and bring the Ab Baars Quartet to the National Arts Centre in early May. Even the small festivals in out-of-the-way places like Medicine Hat are nurturing the local audience for jazz on a year-round basis by bringing in national touring acts during the off season.

On the one hand, it might be a little unfair to place all the blame for the seasonal imbalance at the feet of festival producers. After all, jazz musicians are influenced by the same factors that put Lollapalooza or the London Symphony on buses in July, too: good weather for traveling, and bigger audiences with vacation time and discretionary income. But it's still good to know that for Canadian jazz fans, winters are getting a little warmer and brighter for reasons other than global climate change.

With a new summer comes the latest opportunity to see a number of major figures in performance. McCoy Tyner—one

of the most influential pianists alive—is touring extensively this summer, including stops in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Vancouver with his trio; and Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal with his Impulse Project Septet. Another pair of names closely associated with the legacy of John Coltrane, the duo of drummer Rashied Ali and altoist Sonny Fortune will appear at the Art of Jazz Celebration in Toronto and the Ottawa festival. One Canadian act not to be missed is the generation-spanning duo of clarinetist Phil Nimmons and pianist David Braid. The pair first came together for a 2004 concert of spontaneous improvisations in Dundas, Ontario. They have since released a recording of the concert (*Beginnings*, available at davidbraid.com), and are supporting it with a 10-city Canadian tour this summer as Nimmons 'n' Braid. So clear your schedule and call your travel agent. Here follows the second annual CODA Canadian Jazz Festival Guide.

TD Canada Trust Vancouver International Jazz Festival

Vancouver, British Columbia, June 23–July 2

Phone/Box Office: (604) 872-5200 or 888-GET-JAZZ
Ticketmaster: (604) 280-4444
E-mail: cjbs@coastaljazz.ca
Web: www.coastaljazz.ca

Now in its 21st season, the Vancouver festival has established itself as one of the most innovative of all the major jazz festivals on this continent. The event routinely features the biggest North American mainstream acts along with progressive European improvisers and a host of local talent. For musicians, a new element this year is the creation of the Vancouver Creative Music Institute (VCMI), by the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society and Vancouver Community College. This intensive 9-day program brings together 30 apprentice participants with some of the world's leading improvisers—including artistic directors Marilyn Crispell and Mark Helias—in a series of workshops designed to develop personal approaches to improvisation and composition.

Program Highlights: Seu Jorge, Esbjorn Svensson Trio (E.S.T.), McCoy Tyner Trio, Michel Donato's European Quintet, Pink Martini, Bobby Hutcherson Quartet featuring Renee Rosnes, OrkestRova "Electric Ascension," Belmondo Brothers with Yusef Lateef, NOW Orchestra with Marilyn Crispell, Jerry Granelli's "Sandhills Reunion," Andy Bey Quartet, Nels Cline Singers, Nils Petter Molvaer, Jim Black's AlasNoAxis, Joost Buis's Astro Notes, Mike Stern Band, Paquito D'Rivera, Roberto Occhipinti Quintet, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Neko Case.

Kaslo Jazz Festival

Kaslo, British Columbia, August 4–6

Phone/Box Office: (250) 353-7548
E-mail: kaslojazz@netidea.com
Web: www.kaslojazzfest.com

This small town of 1,000 on the western shore of Kootenay Lake in Southeastern British Columbia effectively doubles its population during this three-day festival held on the August 1 long weekend. The Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges make for a breathtaking natural amphitheatre, and there is limited camping next to the floating main stage site (patrons can even swim around the stage). After the main stage shuts down for the night the jazz jam continues at a local pub overhanging the bay.

Program Highlights: Michael Franti and Spearhead, Jane Bunnett and the Guantanamo Blues Project,

Dirty Dozen Brass Band, The Duke Robillard Band, The Tilden Webb Trio with David 'Fathead' Newman, Harry Manx and Friends, Ember Swift, Creaking Tree String Quartet, Jane Leroux Quintet.

JazzFest International – Victoria

Victoria, British Columbia, June 23–July 2

Phone/Box Office: (250) 388-4423 or 888-671-2112
E-mail: info@jazzvictoria.ca, boxoffice@jazzvictoria.ca
Web: www.jazzvictoria.ca

The Victoria Jazz Society has been producing this festival since 1985. JazzFest International attracts over 35,000 people from around Vancouver Island and beyond, to see over 300 musicians in 70 paid and free performances. The Victoria Jazz Society also produces the Vancouver Island Blues Bash, which takes place over the Labour Day weekend.

Program Highlights: Bobby Hutcherson Quartet, Kenny Werner/Claudia Villela Duo Baaba Maal, Mike Stern Band, Paquito D'Rivera Quintet, Joe Coughlin, Roberto Occhipinti Quintet, Dr. John and the Lower 911, Divine Brown, Jacksoul.

Medicine Hat JazzFest

Medicine Hat, Alberta, June 19–25

Phone: (403) 529-4807
E-mail: info@medicinehatjazzfest.com
Web: www.medicinehatjazzfest.com

Celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, this festival in Northern Alberta has grown from a grassroots community-based event, to one that now boasts an impressively diverse lineup of international touring acts. This year's edition also expands festival activities to a full week for the first time. Not bad for a town of only 56,000 people. Like the other big-city presenters, the Medicine Hat Jazz Society is also beginning to expand its activities beyond the festival season presenting spring and fall concerts from national touring acts like Jane Bunnett and Rich Underhill.

Program Highlights: Paquito D'Rivera, Bobby Hutcherson, Gospel Hummingbirds, Roberto Occhipinti, Carol Welsman, Ryan Cohan, Groove Society, Maraca.

TD Canada Trust Jazz Festival Calgary

Calgary, Alberta, June 16–25

Phone: (403) 262-1500
E-mail: info@jazzfestivalcalgary.ca
Web: www.jazzfestivalcalgary.ca

The Calgary Jazz Festival was founded in 1980 under the auspices of the province of Alberta's 75th birthday. After the original production

group folded in 1998, the Jazz Festival Calgary Society assumed production duties, and the festival gained stability through the TD Canada Trust sponsorship arrangement. Venues include bars and restaurants throughout the city, as well as two free stages.

Program Highlights: TBA

Yardbird Jazz Festival

Edmonton, Alberta, June 23–July 2

Phone/Box Office: (780) 432-0428
Ticketmaster: (780) 451-8000
E-mail: jasiiek@yardbirdsuite.com
Web: www.yardbirdsuite.com

When the Edmonton Jazz City Festival quietly folded under the weight of accumulated deficits last spring, it appeared as though the festival circuit in Western Canada would be left with a huge hole. But then the volunteer-based Edmonton Jazz Society came to the rescue. In the space of only 12 weeks the board and local musicians pulled together a plan for a back-to-grassroots event that featured a wealth of local Alberta talent and international acts including Dave Holland, Sheila Jordan and Matthias Lupri (see CODA 323). Having had a full year to plan the second edition must have seemed like a luxury to the organizers this time around.

Program Highlights: Mike Stern, Paquito D'Rivera, E.S.T., Alberto Pinton, Michael Bates's Outside Sources, Les Projectionnistes, Marc Atkinson Trio.

SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 23–July 2

Phone/Box Office: (800) 638-1211 (April to July) or (306) 652-4700
E-mail: saskjazz@sasktel.net
Web: www.saskjazz.com

Another festival marking a major anniversary this year (their 20th), the event is appropriately named for the province and not a city, as there are performances in Regina, Moosejaw, Prince Albert and North Battleford. The main stage in Saskatoon is situated on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in the shadow of the Delta Bessborough Hotel. This festival is a surprising gem in the heart of the prairies.

Program Highlights: McCoy Tyner, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Nimmons 'n' Braid, E.S.T., Roberto Occhipinti Quintet, Bobby Hutcherson, Michel Donato, Michael Kaeshammer, Harry Manx, Marc Atkinson Trio, Jesse Cook, Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings.