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THURSDAY JUNE 21 • Doors: 8:00 pm • Showtime: 9:30 pm

FRIDAY

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For du Maurier International Jazz Festival Events at
THE COMMODORE from JUNE 27 TO JULY 1 See Page 5.

12 MEMBER SUPER RAIL BAND. Special Guests
KATHY KIDD SEXTET From Mali, West Africa, the band that launched the
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SATURDAY JUNE 23 • Doors: 8:00 p.m.

SUNDAY

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SUNDAY JUNE 24 • Doors: 7:00 p.m.

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TUESDAY JUNE 26 • Doors: 8:00 pm
2ND SHOW ADDED — WEDNESDAY JUNE 27

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THURSDAY JULY 4 • Doors: 8:30 pm

From Australia BMG Recording Artists
THE CHURCH with special guests MCA Recording Artists
BLUE AEROPLANES
THURSDAY JULY 5 • Doors: 8:00 pm

LGTS presents
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with special guests 2 SHOWS: FRIDAY JULY 6
• All-Ages: Doors: 6:00 pm/Show 7:00 pm
19 and Over: Doors: 9:45 pm

"A NITE TO REMEMBER" starring Enigma Recording Artists
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FRIDAY JULY 13 • Doors: 8:00 pm

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THURSDAY JULY 26 • Doors: 7:00 pm

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FRIDAY JULY 27 • Doors: 8:00 pm

THE LEGENDS & GREATS OF JAZZ CONCERT SERIES starring
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jazz
FESTIVAL 1990

Jazz Roots and Branches

The du Maurier International Jazz Festival is here, and just about every media outlet in town—including all the ones

Off Beat

ALEX VARTY

that routinely ignore jazz—are loudly heralding the most exciting 10 days of the musical year. But what it is that makes jazz—and this five-year-old festival—so enduringly vital?

It's difficult to say...almost as difficult as it is to pin down the meaning of "jazz" itself. Ask 10 jazz musicians what jazz is, and you'll get 20 different answers, ranging from "Jazz is an obsolete term that is no longer valid to describe today's creative music" to something along the lines of "Jazz is all there

is, man." But from this confusion, or vagueness, or search for a new definition, we can deduce that jazz is, in fact, anything and everything.

Or at least anything and everything that is musical.

Jazz began as a hybrid music, a blend of African and aboriginal rhythms and melodies with European instruments and notation... anything and everything that was at hand in New Orleans or Memphis or St. Louis or whatever other city wants to claim jazz as its birthright. Since those not-so-humble beginnings—not so humble, since the earliest recorded evidence of jazz seems to say that it was a great art form by the time it was named—jazz has gone on to incorporate just about everything that jazz musicians could get into their ears and out of their horns.

To grossly simplify its reach, we can say that Ellington brought jazz a symphonic sweep and grandeur, bop brought it a wholly modern harmonic vocabulary, cool jazz came in with a chamber music sensibility, and the '60s added their own pan-cultural ethos, so that jazz now incorporates a more conscious use of African elements, the interlocking melodic and rhythmic parts of Javanese gamelan, the dancing, breathy flute sounds of the Andes, even the spooky sustained tones of the Finnish hunter's horn. And once these things become jazz, they all swing, so as to take on the proper Ellingtonian quality.

What makes the jazz festival such a grand undertaking is that its organizers know that jazz is anything and everything, and they program the music accordingly. This Vancouver event has none of the stuffy puritanism of jazz festivals where those under 50 needn't apply to play (unless they possess the requisite suits), nor is it as exclusive as the new music events that all too often deny music its innate corporeality. If you can't get down to Mahlatini and the Mahotella Queens, you can always snap your fingers to the Concord All-Stars or boogie to Johnny Winter.

A few of the groups playing the jazz festival this year really seem to take that message to heart. Locals Lunar Adventures (Isadora's on June 23, and Jazz at the Plaza on June 30) mix up Celtic and (Ornette) Coleman influences, tossing a defiant caber at anyone who dares to suggest that there can't be such a thing as Druid Jazz. The Jazz Passengers (Vancouver East Cultural Centre, June 26) won fans here last year with their crazed narratives, Monkish angularity, rhapsodic violin solos, and New York City grit and grind.

Today, all of these acts answer to the call of jazz. In fact, they are jazz, as much a part of jazz as Joe Henderson, Joe Pass, Sheila Jordan, or Sweets Edison. And that they can share stages and spotlights with those elder statesmen and women should give us hope that jazz, its pure strains and its exciting adulterations, will continue as this century's most engaging art form. ■

Don Pullen

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

intuition. But Pullen turns what might seem a conflict into a synergy, and gets both forces working for him. He's had to fight against some resistance to his music, even within his own family. "When people do hear music that causes them to think, sometimes it can make them uncomfortable....I've had my sister say that when she listens to me she has to think too much," he laughs. "So she has to take me in small doses." But fortunately for Pullen, the world at large is beginning to wake up to his talents.

"The sounds that come from my instrument are no longer strange to people," Pullen comments. "The reaction that I got in 1960 or 1965 was one of surprise and eyebrow-raising and people checking their own value systems to see if what I was doing was valid. Now, I'm using some of the same techniques—and hopefully different ones, or more developed ones—and people are not amazed. They're not so surprised that those sounds can exist."

Some things remain to be resolved for Pullen: financial success and recognition at home. He's a star in Europe and can live comfortably on his income from touring and recording, but as a jazz artist his life is still economically marginal compared to

others of no more talent who are working in more mainstream disciplines. And when I ask him if he feels that he's getting what's due him, he snaps "of course not", and then laughs... ruefully.

"I don't think any jazz musician is," he continues. "There are a lot of forces out there that are working for jazz and for its recognition and acceptance for what it is: the American art form. And there there are a lot of forces that are opposed to its being recognized as an art form and as an American art form in particular, because of the racial overtones: it is a black creation. So racism comes into play, almost automatically. But jazz is the father and mother of all this music out now; its influence goes right across the board with all the music in the world. Jazz is always giving: the techniques we used to use 25 years ago are commonplace now, but that's not acknowledged."

"But I'm happy that things are developing for me, at the moment, even though I can say, 'This should have happened 25 years ago.' And, musically, I can say that my growth has been continual, that my evolution has been continual in spite of other circumstances, such as [a lack of] finance, recognition, and fame. The music has continued to be on a high level."

To which we can only add our sincere amen. ■

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FESTIVAL 1990

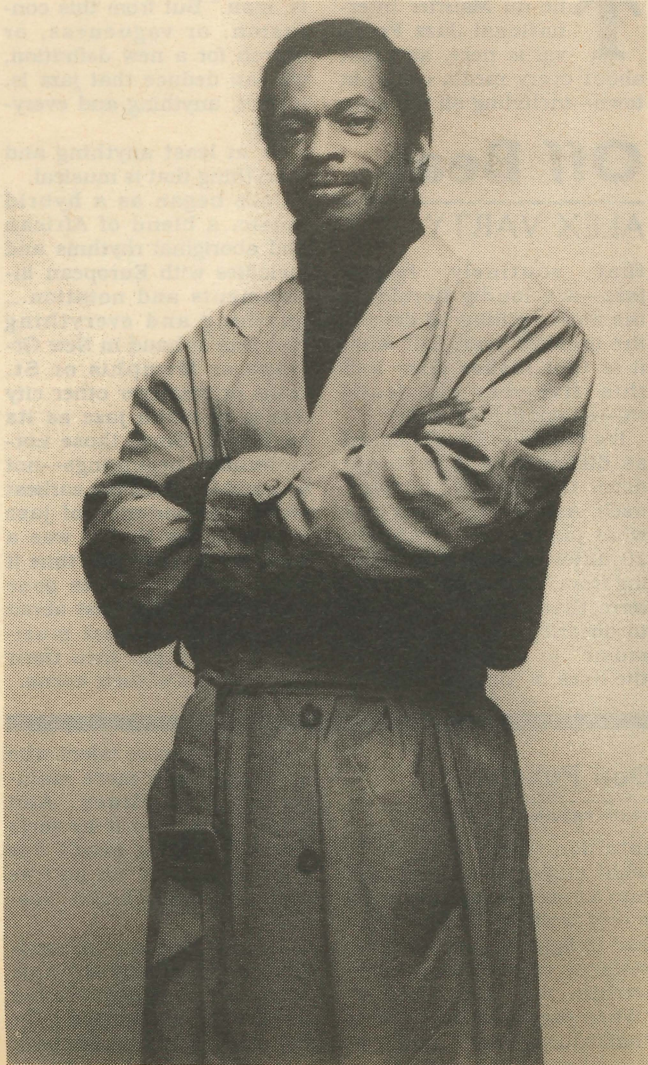
Pullen's Piano Surprises

By Alex Varty

Jazz is a music that delights in surprise, that revels in the unexpected twists and turns improvisation can take, and that celebrates the joy of discovery. And of all the exponents of jazz, few explore that side of the music as thoroughly as pianist Don Pullen. The 48-year-old musician, who will bring a trio to the Vancouver Playhouse on Monday (June 25) as part of the du Maurier International Jazz Festival, has an exceptionally vivid imagination, and all of the technical skills necessary to bring his visionary ideas into reality.

Indeed, Pullen's skills are so multifarious that, at times, three very different musical entities seem to be inhabiting his body. His left hand is a learned historian, celebrating the stride, blues, and gospel pianists of the music's black past, settling sometimes on a Latin pulse that in reality has its roots in Africa, elsewhere hammering on the chords with the unsuited energy of an early rock 'n' roll shouter. His right hand mixes the athletic and the intellectual with an attack that could crush steel, and a firm determination to avoid, or at least transcend, cliché. Lightning-fast, whiplash coils of melody spring from this hand, advance and retreat up the keyboard in guerrilla skirmishes of sound, and fold into more accessible passages of simple beauty. Pullen's third musical concentration is in his forearms and the backs of his hands, which he uses as deftly as his fingers to bring out skittering leaps of rough melody and great percussive clatterings of dissonance that serve to express all the things—truly great joy, truly mad rage—that can't be said with conventional keyboard technique.

That Pullen can harness all these personalities to a unified musical vision is emblematic of his deeply rooted musicality, his intelligence, and his perseverance in the face of considerable commercial pressure. And to understand Don Pullen's complex, challenging music,



Don Pullen's visceral piano balances the avant garde's wild explorations with the physical funk of his gospel upbringing.

it helps to look more closely at these three sides of his make-up.

His roots, as with so many of the best black jazz musicians, lie deep in the South, and in the rugged musics that his ancestors devised to act as a balm against the sting of American apartheid. Pullen was born in Roanoke, Virginia, into a musically gifted family. "My father sings," he notes, "and he used to dance tap-dance and play guitar. And so did his brothers—they all sang and danced a bit. My mother was the choir director in our church. In fact, everybody in our family sings except me. I started out as a singer, then when my voice changed, so did my singing." He laughs. "But luckily I had started piano by then."

Pullen learned about jazz when he was at college, and went on to a wide variety of working jobs, some of them typical of pianists of his generation, some of them not. He earned his keep playing in organ trios right up until 1970. He played piano for Nina Simone for a year, which is in itself a high compliment. He dived into the New York avant-garde in the heavy company of Albert Ayler, Milford Graves, and Sunny Murray. And he hooked up with Charles Mingus in 1972, and played with the great bassist/composer right up until Mingus's death.

"All you play is your experience, what your experiences have been," says Pullen. Presumably, the breadth and depth of his ex-

periences in jazz have contributed to the grand sweep of his music.

That music, and that scope, can be heard best on Pullen's most recent album, *New Beginnings*, a trio date (with bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Tony Williams) released on the Blue Note label last year. It's a brilliant album, strong, vital, and full of vividly expressed feelings. It sings, in short, and that is exactly the impression Pullen hopes to get across with his music.

"The idea is to get the instrument to sing," he says. "The voice is the first instrument, and, whatever instrument you play, if you can get that kind of singing, vocal quality from it, then you've reached a certain plateau."

Pullen's use of unconventional keyboard techniques reaches new heights on *New Beginnings*: One rarely hears a pianist do such unusual things and make them so gripping, so moving.

"For me, personally, I like to use all the dynamics, all the different kinds of sensibilities and expressions," says the pianist. "That makes the music more varied, and it keeps me from being bored if I have a lot of choices at hand."

"What I do at the piano is not really unconventional to me. It's just my way of self-expression, a way to express what I hear and what I feel. Usually I can do the same things with my fingers, but the sound and the texture are different when I do it with the backs of my hands and the knuckles, and it creates a certain effect. The trick is knowing how, and when, to use it, and putting things in their proper place. That, I think, takes a lot of time, and experience, and thought."

Conversely, Pullen also says that the success of his art depends on his ability to let things flow as much as it does on calculated effect. "The trick is just to be open, and to be secure enough to just play whatever comes to you without so much editing during the process of improvisation," he counsels.

Again, there's a split to be resolved—discipline versus

SEE NEXT PAGE

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Skaboam! plus guests State of Mind

Sun. June 24
Excited First Daughter plus guests First Aid

Mon. June 25 **CURIOUS GEORGE** plus guests

Tues. June 26 **Chances R** with guests Revolver

Wed. June 27

THE DEAD MILKMEN

Thurs. June 28 **SPUNK** with guests Rocket 88

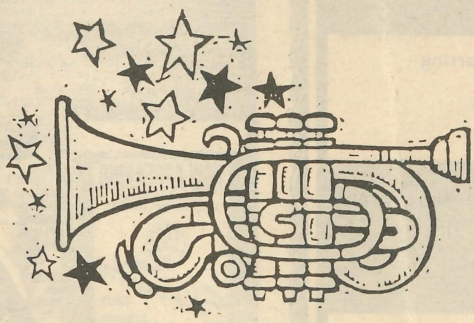
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Jazz On The Island

Granville Island will be a jazz mecca for 10 exciting days during the 1990 du Maurier International Jazz Festival. From June 22 through July 2, the Island will move to rhythms from all over the world, with free lunchtime concerts in the Market Courtyard, and evening shows at Isadora's restaurant. For more information call the Info Centre at 666-5784.



Granville Island

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