

Benefit Will Jazz Up Subterranean Hall

It's not much, just a long, low, windowless room in the basement of the Cinderella Ballroom, a Depression-era dance hall. But to many of Vancouver's creative musicians and composers, the Glass Slipper, downstairs

Off Beat

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at 185 East 11th, has become home. It's a place where musicians with an explorational bent can stage concerts of music that is too unconventional for the clubs, where players can rehearse new bands and new repertoire, and where small festivals can be held at a cost affordable to those not lucky enough to have corporate backing. It's a real cultural resource.

The Slipper is home to the New Orchestra Workshop, Vancouver's artist-organized new jazz society, and to Pro Musica, a composers' collective whose brief is to present new work by up-and-coming figures in the fields of contemporary classical music.

Pro Musica's Sonic Boom festival plays at the Glass Slipper this week, from Thursday to Saturday (May 24 to 26). The Coastal Jazz and Blues Society, the organizers of the huge du Maurier International Jazz Festival, use the Slipper for some of their more *outré* productions and as a venue for their annual Time Flies ball series, a co-production with the New Orchestra crew. (And the Slipper will be the designated after-hours jamming venue for this year's Jazz Festival...who knows who all will turn up there between midnight and 4 in the morning.)

Canadian jazz legend and master drummer Claude Ranger conducts open rehearsals for his Jade big band at the Slipper every Sunday afternoon, and too many other musicians to name have their private rehearsals in the space—it's full of music, one way or another, just about every day. Without it, our city would be poorer.

Poverty, however, is no stranger to innovative musicians, and while the Glass Slipper takes only a mere

\$1,000 a month to operate, that money is dredged from the pockets of people who make the starving artist look healthily nourished. Music is seriously underfunded in this country, something that should be self-evident when one looks at the Slipper, friendly though it is, and then at the relatively palatial digs occupied by art galleries and theatre troupes, dance companies and publishing houses. It's a constant struggle just to keep the doors of the Slipper open, so to help defray its operational expenses, and to spruce it up a bit in advance of its jazz festival role, some of the musicians who use the venue are banding together on Friday and Saturday (June 1 and 2) to play two benefit concerts for the venue.

On Friday, Chief Feature, Jade, and the Taylor/Kane Explosion will perform, while on Saturday Garbo's Hat, Lunar Adventures, and the Sirius Ensemble will be the featured attractions. These

names may be as unfamiliar to most people reading this as is the venue itself, but just as the Glass Slipper is a valued part of this city's cultural life, the players who make up these bands do much to contribute to the health of the local music scene: the power and vitality of their playing in these avant-garde settings is absorbed, by osmosis, into the musical mainstream.

Roger Baird, drummer extraordinaire, leader of the Sirius Ensemble, and *de facto* caretaker of the Glass Slipper, hopes to raise several thousand dollars from the weekend benefit concerts. He says the money will be used to replace the room's excruciatingly uncomfortable tables and chairs (left over from its earlier incarnation as a bingo parlour), to install new lighting, and to clean and paint the floor, which will be decorated in a mosaic design by artist and jazz lover Tom Anfield. That's a move applauded by Chief

Feature bandleader Bruce Freedman, who says it's great to have a room devoted to experimental music but he wouldn't like to take his mother to the Slipper the way it is now.

With a new coat of paint, better fixtures, and the same spirit that animates it already, the Glass Slipper will continue to function as the place to hear exciting new music in Vancouver. Baird hopes to open the room on a more regular basis after the jazz festival—a Thursday-to-Sunday schedule would work well, he says—and that would be a welcome move. There are all too few places to play creative music in this city. While we really need—and deserve—a music gallery on the scale of the Vancouver Art Gallery's courthouse complex to serve the diverse interests of all of the city's unconventional musical forms, the work being done on and in the Glass Slipper is at least a start on building that dream. ■