



Dee Lippingwell

Four guys not named Moe: Local player **Bruce Freedman** is joined by the organizers of Vancouver's International Jazz Festival, **John Orysik** (left), **Ken Pickering** and **Bob Kerr**.

The previous two festivals, produced by promoter Dan Gugula for duMaurier, were scattershot successes. While they brought in challenging artists, like drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, from the razor's edge of the New York avant garde, they lacked the intimate flavour of the Montreal, Ottawa and Edmonton events. This year, administered by Roy Thompson Hall and directed by artistic advisor **Jim Galloway**, the festival will try to build on the good parts of the previous two festivals while establishing a much-needed sense of credibility.

Credibility is something the organizers of the Montreal International Jazz Festival don't lose much sleep over. From its beginning in 1980, the festival has done exactly as it pleases. Although, like the others, the festival is a non-profit business, it was started not by a volunteer jazz society but by the owners of a successful management and production company, Spectra Scène Ltée. Early publicity, which played on the commune-like attitude of the festival's staff, belied the savvy business acumen of president Alain Simard and vice-president André Ménard. Only when the festival continued to garner shoulder-to-shoulder crowds on St. Denis Street and rave reviews from American musicians and journalists, did it become obvious that Simard and Ménard knew exactly what they were doing.

While some people will tell you that you can't argue with success, others will say that it just makes you a bigger target.

Complaints about the Montreal festival had

been bubbling beneath the surface of the city's jazz community for a couple of years, but in 1986 they boiled over. The catalyst was the festival's bookings of singers Van Morrison, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Ginette Reno and James Brown as headliners. The local musicians who had long felt that the festival didn't do enough for them, were outraged, charging that the festival's inclusion of pop musicians under the banner of jazz not only meant less work for them during the festival, but also excluded them from work all year round by setting a bad example for club owners. Under the title Association pour la Diffusion de Musiques Ouvertes, the dissident musicians staged a counter-festival that received national attention from *Globe and Mail* jazz columnist Mark Miller.

But the complaints of the Montreal musicians

were a minor annoyance compared to the blow dealt the festival's considerable ego by the city's refusal—under then-Mayor Jean Drapeau—to help offset some of the festival's deficit of \$145,000. It took Simard's threat of pulling the plug on the festival to lure an additional \$110,000 from among its main public and private sponsors, as well as the defeat of the Drapeau machine at the civic polls to bring the city back into step. The festival is back in the black for '87, with Alcan as a plush new corporate sponsor, but the bloom is off for many of the festival's former devotees. For them, Montreal has grown too big. They point to the thuggish atmosphere on St. Denis Street during the festival's run to mean that—Katie Malloch's Yuletide analogy aside—the party's over.

In Ottawa and Edmonton, Elisabeth Bihl and Marc Vasey agree that slow growth and artistic integrity are vital to keeping their festivals true to themselves. Rather than stretch its resources trying to land too many top names, the Ottawa festival has aimed at a mix of proven stars like Wynton Marsalis and Oscar Peterson, extraordinary home-grown talent like **P.J. Perry** and **Whitenoise**, along with lesser-known stalwarts like Jaki Byard and Ray Anderson.

Oh yes, the music! It can tend to take second place when you're talking to the people who make the festivals run, which is a source of mixed emotions for festival veterans like Don Lahey, former managing director of the Ottawa show. A writer and editor who hosts a jazz program on CKCU-FM, Ottawa's community station, Lahey got involved as a volunteer with the festival in 1983 because of his love for the music. More often than not, after six months of waiting for agents to return his calls, hassling with Customs officials and helping Bihl beat the bushes for funds, he was in the mobile trailer sorting out the latest crisis while his favourite musician was playing onstage. At times like that, he might be found wishing for a major sponsor who wanted to call all the shots, but there are other times when all he could do was laugh.

Like Simard, Vasey and Orysik, Lahey can regale you with horror stories, like the time Oscar Peterson's limo caught fire on the way to the gig, or the time that saxophonist David Murray had to be rushed to the U.S. border by car because his visa had expired, or when an electrical storm stranded headliner Art Blakey in New York for the duration of his scheduled show.

Fortunately, they also all remember what it feels like when the music is just right, the hall is filled and the audience is happy. It feels like, well, Christmas.

James Hale is a freelance writer based in Ottawa. In recent years he has helped organize the Ottawa Jazz Festival.

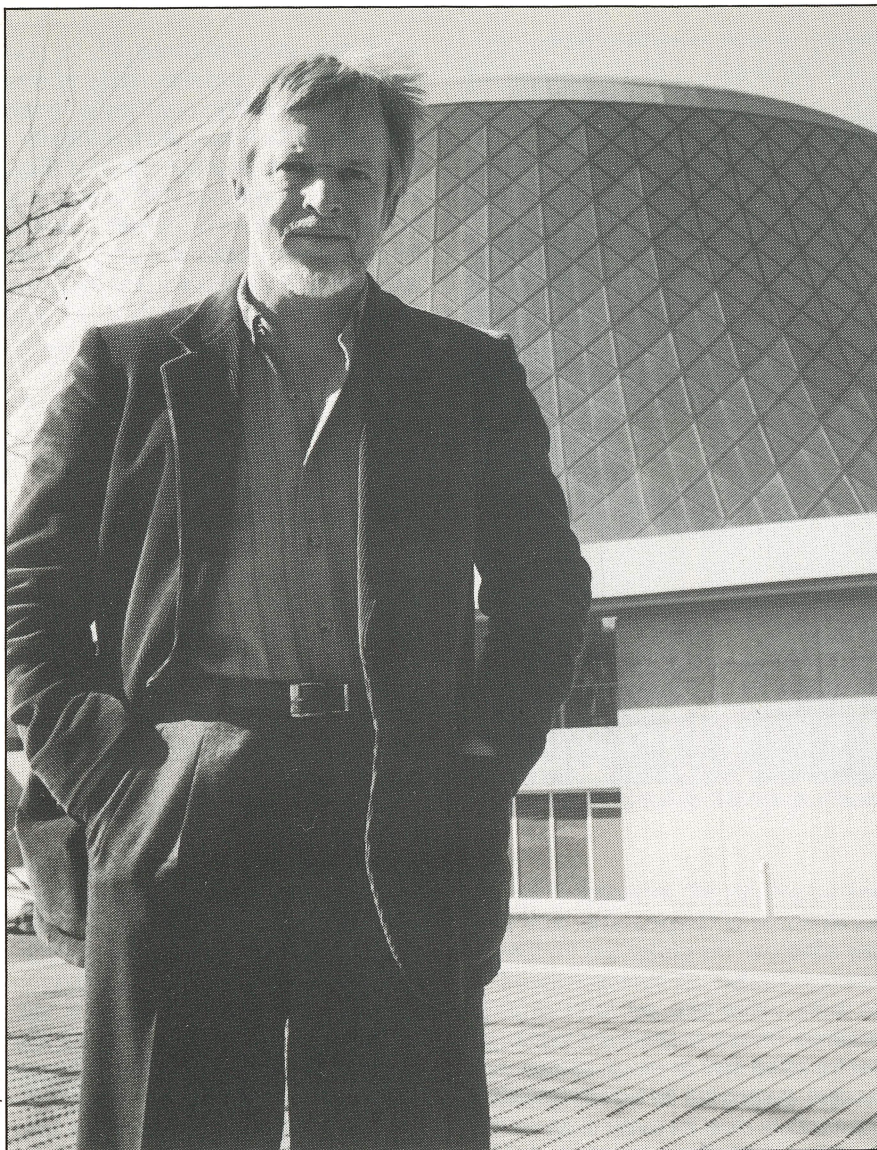
JAZZ Festival Calendar

Toronto.....June 21-June 28

Vancouver
EdmontonJune 26-July 5

Montreal

OttawaJuly 17-July 26



Mark Capronal

Toronto tries again with duMaurier Downtown Jazz: Artistic Director **Jim Galloway**.

The organizers will tell you that staging a jazz festival has more to do with money than music.

Take the Ottawa festival, for example. Its operating budget for 1987 is about \$300,000—money that will come from perhaps two dozen sources, public and private. The public funds come from the federal Department of Communications, Canada Council and National Capital Commission, the provincial Ontario Arts Council, and the cities of Ottawa and Hull, Quebec. The bulk of the private funds flow from Labatt Breweries, while companies like Ambience Communications—a local advertising company—and the accountancy firm of Peat Marwick Ltd. kick in goods and services. For festival president Elisabeth Bihl, a volunteer who holds down a full-time job with the National Arts Centre, the funding represents a three-year investment of hard work.

It was during planning for the 1985 show that two hard truths became obvious to the festival's 20-odd committee members. Started by three

local musicians as a weekend trad party in 1981, the festival had grown like topsy, landing artists like Jack DeJohnette and Sonny Rollins, on seed money from the three tiers of government alone. The festival needed more money to continue growing—something that was vital if it was to attract a major corporate sponsor—but the politicians were looking to start pulling away the supports. The fifth annual festival in July '85 was another artistic success, but halfway between the end of it and the beginning of the next, as the directors stood shivering on the banks of the Rideau Canal, the 1986 festival had no site, no performers and precious little funding.

A year later, Marc Vasey, the director of the Edmonton festival, says that's just the way it is for the Jazz City Festival. "We've been hard hit by Alberta's economic situation, but that doesn't change what we do, which is to bring in the best local, national and international musicians that are available for the money we have."

The province's economic crunch holds a particular irony for the members of the city's jazz society; it was 1980—Alberta's 75th anniversary and the peak of boom times in the oil patch—that boosted the Jazz City Festival into the big leagues. Still, the festival made a modest \$19,000 profit in 1986, and Vasey believes that his organization can withstand the funding cut that threatens to undermine his \$375,000 budget.

"Our festival is the result of long-term efforts by the jazz society," he says. "We've built up a strong base in the community. We run a full-time club as well as the festival, and on a per capita basis we have the most local content of any of the Canadian festivals. More than half of the 300 musicians who play at the festival are Canadian. I think we've become more than a music festival to Edmonton, and when push come to shove that's what will keep you alive."

Vasey doesn't hide his feeling that single-sponsor newcomers like Toronto and Vancouver exist by default. "They're somewhat artificial," he says. "I don't think it's in the best interests of a festival to be set up in business by a major corporation."

You would be hard pressed to believe that Vancouver's John Orsyk is public relations director for one of the festivals that Vasey is talking about. A former announcer for radio station CJAZ, Orsyk uses phrases like "grassroots" to describe his festival, just like they do in Edmonton.

"As the Coastal Jazz & Blues Society we had booked pianist Michel Petrucciani in the spring of 1985, and Bob Kerr, Ken Pickering and I decided to fund a festival out of our own pockets that summer using local musicians and some from Washington state. We took the risk and it paid off."

The pay-off was an offer in January, 1986, from Imperial Tobacco to underwrite the festival. Elisabeth Bihl and Marc Vasey would have killed for a deal like that after just one festival, and Orsyk doesn't deny that the World's Fair had more than a little to do with Imperial's offer.

"Everything in Vancouver last year was abnormal—the atmosphere was incredible, and we certainly benefitted from that. But the festival attracted a strong base in 1986, and this year we're going to focus in on that. If we heard one criticism last year, it was that there was too much going on. This year, we'll be trying to streamline, while maintaining a mix of adventurous and traditional music, free outdoor venues, concerts and nightclub settings."

In Toronto, where the festival is also going into its third year with a large endowment from Imperial Tobacco, much the same thing is happening.