

Jazz

Jazz has finally come of age. The music that was once referred to as "black folk music" has now become big business. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly why jazz has reached the enormous heights it has in recent years but there is no doubt that much of the credit must be given to the music more often referred to as "fusion" and/or "progressive jazz."

Although jazz had been prevalent in the black community for years, it wasn't until the late '60s that the commercial potential of the music became rather clear. In 1969 legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis recorded his critically acclaimed lp, *In A Silent Way*. *Silent Way*, unlike any album that came before it, combined the raw energy of rock with the rhythmic and harmonic complexities of jazz. The result, as Miles humbly explained, was "a fusion of unexplored rock with non-liche jazz."

It was in 1970 that the effects of Miles's fusion music became evident. That year he released his *Bitches Brew* lp. The album was so destined to reshape the structure of jazz that noted critic Ralph J. Gleason wrote, "it will never be the same again after *Bitches Brew*. Listen to this. This music will change the world like the cool and walkin' did. . ."

In retrospect Gleason's foresight was almost frightening. Miles's strange conglomeration of jazz and rock did indeed change the shape of the music world. Most of the musicians used on *In A Silent Way* and/or *Bitches Brew* followed his lead and went on to produce a new era in popular music.

Saxophonist Wayne Shorter and pianist Joe Zawinul teamed up to form *Weather Report*. Drummer Lenny White and pianist Chick Corea later joined forces in *Return To Forever* which, in turn, introduced bassist Stanley Clarke and guitarist Al Dimeola. Woodwind virtuoso Bennie Maupin went on to do great things with Herbie Hancock and guitarist John McLaughlin went on to explore new territories with his *Mahavishnu Orchestra* (which boosted the career of drummer Billy Cobham).

These artists were important to the current jazz revival because their mixture of rock and jazz gave the masses some familiar hooks to hang on to when listening to the music. The music was no longer indigenous to the black community and, because of its widespread appeal, started to receive much more airplay.

Out of this jazz revival came the phenomenal success of guitarist/vocalist George Benson. Taking advantage of the changing attitudes towards jazz, Benson toned down the jazz, elements in his music and added vocal tracks. The result was his platinum lp, *Breezin'*. Benson's success was shocking because just ten years prior to his enormous success, it was an accomplishment for a jazz artists insist that what Benson and all the fusion artists are playing isn't jazz, the fact remains that they must be credited with the current jazz revival because they are still recognized as jazz artists. Thanks to these artists many of the top jazz acts today are artists who have been around for years but are just now beginning to enjoy the benefits of their enormous talents.

One such artists is Marlana Shaw. Marlana is currently riding the top with her new lp, *Acting Up*. Marlana toured four years with Count Basie before going solo in 1972. As a solo act the talented jazz stylist enjoyed moderate success until last year's crossover hit, "Go Away Little Boy", insured her of a long and fruitful career.

Mtume, the young multi-talented percussionist, keyboardist, composer and producer has also been propelled to new heights because of the current jazz revival. Mtume's latest lp, *Kiss This World Goodbye*, reflects his impressive jazz background.

Mtume has played with Joe Henderson, McCoy Tyner, Freddie Hubbard and, eventually, legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis. As with Marlana Shaw, it was his crossover hit, "The Closer I Get To You" (a tune he co-wrote with Reggie Lucas for Roberta Flack & Donny Hathaway) that catapulted Mtume to the forefront of the music scene.

Two of the more popular artists on the scene today are flutists Bobbi Humphrey and Hubert Laws. Both artists have made smooth transitions into the world of jazz/pop and have benefited immensely from their new directions.

Laws is currently on the charts with his moving lp, *Say It With Silence*. The album is an extension of a career which has seen Laws record and/or perform with such notables as Mongo Santamaria, Lena Horne, James Moody, J.J. Johnson, James Cleveland and Sergio Mendes.

Bobbi Humphrey is also on the charts with her lp *Free Style*. The album features a pulsating uptempo number called "Homemade Jam" which is highlighted by a spirited Stevie Wonder harmonica solo. Ms. Humphrey's impressive background includes appearing on stage with the likes of Duke Ellington, Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Cannonball Adderley, as well as performing and recording with Sly Stone and Stevie Wonder.

Further evidence of jazz's increasing popularity is the steady rise in attendance at the Newport Jazz Festival. This year some of the best jazz acts around have been assembled for the world renown festival.

Dexter Gordon, the masterful tenor saxophonist, will be one of the featured artist this year. Gordon became the idol of tenor players during the 40's when he developed his own style by synthesizing the sounds of Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins (via Herschel Evans) and Charlie Parker.

Another legendary tenor saxophonist to grace the festival's stage this year will be Stan Getz. Getz also established his reputation during the '40s by playing the "heavies" like Jack Teagarden, Dale Jones, Bob Chester, Stan Kenton, Jimmy Dorsey and Benny Goodman. Today, at 51 years of age, Stan Getz continues to be an inspiration to jazz musicians worldwide.

Marvel trumpeter Maynard Ferguson is scheduled to appear and he should create quite a stir after his recent recordings of the themes from "Star Trek" and "Star Wars."

The Newport Jazz Festival would not be complete without appearances by two of the most influential musicians of our time; keyboard wizards George Duke and Herbie Hancock.

Hancock will appear as a special guest on fellow pianist Chick Corea's show. Hancock's appearance has added interest because of his monstrous new lp, *Sunlight*. The album features Herbie making his vocal debut by singing through an electronic device known as a vocoder ("vocal coder").

George Duke, the multi-talented keyboardist, composer, vocalist and producer, has been enjoying enormous success lately. His last three albums (*From Me To You*, *Reach For It* and his current chartbuster, *Don't Let Go*) have seen him move from mainstream jazz to new-wave disco-jazz.

All in all, this year promises to be a good year for the ever-growing jazz revival. Jazz is indeed here to stay.

"The best answer to anger is silence." German proverb

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QUINCY MOORE

DOCTORAL FELLOW--Quincy Moore, director of the Office of Special Services at UNLV, has been awarded a fellowship to pursue his Ph.D. in education from the University of Iowa beginning next fall. The fellowship includes a \$4,000 annual stipend plus tuition costs. Moore has served as director of special services at UNLV for the past year.



Around Town

with Ed Brown

WELCOME TO WEST LAS VEGAS, WE'VE JUST BEGUN . . . This is the sign we see strategically placed at various locations as you enter the general West Las Vegas area. The sign reminds me of the song made so popular by the CARPENTERS and era ago. Some of the words, as I recall, were "We've Only Just Begun To Live . . . A Kiss For Luck And We're On Our Way". These signs are very encouraging and amply describe the general feeling and efforts now underway throughout the area. Great strides and progress have been made. There are many, many organizations and individuals who are working around the clock to make it so. We are very excited about the prospects. Along this line, I foresee a contest developing in the not too distant future where awards will be given to residents in the area blocks who are doing the most to beautify their respective areas. Watch this column for future details. In the meantime, I am giving the LAS VEGAS VOICE readers a chance to win a prize worth \$25.00 if you can give me the name of the person and/or persons who conceived the idea of the "Welcome" signs and you must give me the words to the mentioned also above as popularized by the CARPENTERS. Mail your answers to AROUND TOWN WITH ED BROWN, c/o LAS VEGAS VOICE, 616 North "H" Street, Las Vegas, Nevada 89106. The prize will go to the individual with the correct answer and words to the song-and with the earliest postmark. All entries must be mailed. Hand delivered entries are not eligible. The prize is a \$25.00 Savings Bond donated through the generosity of several merchants from the West Las Vegas Area. The names of the donors will be announced in this column along with the name of the winner. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THE DEADLINE FOR THIS CONTEST IS MIDNIGHT, JUNE 30. Winner will be announced here on July 6. Best of luck.

NORTH LAS VEGAS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE DAYS

This Friday, Saturday and Sunday will be hopping with activity at RANCHO HIGH SCHOOL during the Annual North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Days.