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Jazz Crosses Over

Hunter, Krall, Carlton go for pop success

In the middle of the last century when jazz ruled the radio and the charts, the distinction between pop musicians (especially singers) and jazzers was much blurrier than it is in these days of marketing-driven genres. By the 1960s, jazz had become specialized and marginalized. Periodically, though, jazz musicians tried to escape their pigeonhole, often to the derision of purists who reflexively condemned anything smacking of fusion, crossover or sellout. This month, Eugene will host several jazz musicians who've tried to make that leap.

On Aug. 3, jazz-pop guitarists **Larry Carlton** and **Robben Ford** play the McDonald Theatre. Carlton first made his reputation with the '70s group the Crusaders, whose funky, R&B-based jazz-rock fusion won fans across the spectrum. Carlton's tasty, blues-based sound also became a staple of '70s and '80s pop — the studio legend appeared on dozens of albums by the likes of Joni Mitchell (including the classic *Court and Spark*), Steely Dan (that's his sizzling solo on "Kid Charlemagne"), John Lennon, Jerry Garcia, Michael Jackson and literally thousands more records and film and TV (e.g. *Hill Street Blues*) soundtracks, garnering Grammys and gold records galore for his studio and solo work. Later, he joined the smooth jazz quartet Fourplay, earning the disdain of the jazz police while reaching a broader audience. Robben Ford followed a similar path, from working in a jazz group to stints with Joni Mitchell (playing Carlton's parts on the *Court and Spark* tour), George Harrison and Michael McDonald and forming a popular smooth jazz group, the Yellowjackets. However, he kept his jazz credentials, including a period with Miles Davis in the master's final, pop-oriented phase, and solo albums. He and Carlton recently recorded a live duets album in Japan, and their show at the McDonald should appeal to casual as well as some hardcore jazz fans, especially guitaraholics.

On Aug. 7, **Charlie Hunter**, another jazz-to-rock guitar legend from the generation after Carlton and Ford, brings his trio to the WOW Hall. Hunter emerged from the Bay Area with the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy (he later played with Garage a Trois, TJ Kirk and others) and won attention for his virtuosity on an eight-string guitar. Eventually signing with the ultimate jazz label, Blue Note, he issued a string of well-regarded rock and funk inflected CDs that appealed to a much younger audience than the typical jazz crowd, the kind of hip listeners who bought as many Bad Plus and Medeski Martin & Wood CDs as Mingus albums. His splendid new disk *Mistico* maintains his appeal to indie rock listeners who are as interested in crunchy riffs and catchy hooks as in tricky solo lines. But jazz guitar fans shouldn't miss him either.

Diana Krall, who plays the Cuthbert Amphitheatre on Aug. 8, may be today's best-known jazz crossover artist. The



Charlie Hunter Trio

Canadian pianist earned jazz credentials at the Berklee school and through studies with Ray Brown and Jimmy Rowles, but record companies soon focused on her ice-maiden singing and blonde glamour girl looks, and by the end of the 1990s, she'd collected a Grammy for jazz vocals and some of the biggest sales in jazz. She lately gained some street cred by marrying Elvis Costello and, at his urging, writing some of her own songs, but in concert she still mixes jazzy piano and sultry vocals on standards. In truth, her pop appeal, like that of fellow pianist/singer Harry Connick Jr., harkens back to the old days of Nat Cole and others who transcended category in the days before jazz and pop parted ways. Her opening act, smooth jazz trumpeter **Chris Botti**, exemplifies contemporary crossover. Born in Portland and raised in Corvallis, he studied with jazz legends Woody Shaw and Dave Friesen, then veered toward a mellower, pop-oriented sound (including an album with the Blue Nile), gaining plenty of work as a studio musician. Botti gained national notice when he headed Sting's touring band, after stints with Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon and other pop stars. TV appearances (including Oprah and a PBS special) further widened his mainstream audience, but Botti points to jazz legends like Chet Baker as precedent for his mellow-pop instrumental success.

You can hear some local jazz crossover on Aug. 4 when **Jesse Marquez** joins guitarist **Mike Denny's** trio in jazzy Cuban music at Luna. Cozmnic Pizza hosts the **Detrick/Swigart** jazz orchestra on Aug. 13.

World music fans have several strong shows ahead. On Aug. 8, Cozmnic hosts **Raquy and the Cavemen** playing Middle Eastern music featuring the Iranian kamanche fiddle and the dumbek hand drum, plus belly dance with **Sabine** and her **Tribalation** troupe. On Aug. 10, the **Mbira Masters of Zimbabwe** return to Cozmnic. For years, Eugene has been the fortunate recipient of frequent visits by two of the greatest mbira players in the world, **Cosmas Magaya** and **Beauler Dyoko**, whose fizzy duets on the Zimbabwean thumb spin glistening webs of interlocking melodies; Eugene's **Hokoyo** opens the show with lively marimba music. And on Aug. 11, on the heels of Aphrodesia's appearance last month, the WOW Hall hosts that other American descendant of Fela Kuti's world beat sound, **Albino!** The dozen-member Berkeley-based band features dancers, a bustling horn section, punchy percussion, political lyrics and a fierce, funky Nigerian groove laced with Cuban influences.

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