

Jazz, Present and Future Tense

Veteran pianist Joanne Brackeen and younger players jazz up the summer



Joanne Brackeen

Even if the name isn't immediately familiar, you can usually tell a great jazz artist by the company she keeps. So you know that anyone who's been chosen to perform or record with legends like Joe Henderson, Stan Getz, Art Blakey and many other jazz luminaries has got the chops, improvisational skill and sense of style to make the finest musicians want to play with

her. Since gaining attention as the only woman to play in Blakey's exalted musical spawning ground, the Jazz Messengers, **Joanne Brackeen** has recorded more than two dozen albums as a leader, winning acclaim for her distinctive, bustling, often eruptive style on both standards and her own supple originals, which have been covered by jazzers from Getz to Branford Marsalis. The 69-year-old California native has played every major jazz fest, garnered NEA awards and performed with most of the leading jazzers of the last few generations while teaching at Boston's prestigious Berklee School and raising a family. Never reluctant to explore new styles over her long career, Brackeen's recent turn toward lyricism hasn't sacrificed her trademark urgency — she doesn't sound like a grandma — nor has her unquestioned virtuosity come at the expense of swing. Brackeen's Aug. 17 solo concert at United Lutheran Church (22nd & Washington) is a late summer surprise and one of Eugene's major jazz events of the year.

Even with such stars flashing through, Eugene's homegrown jazz scene is certainly worth exploring, and downtown's Jazz Station is a great place to start. On Aug. 21-22, Eugene's **Douglas Detrick Quintet** opens for the young Brooklyn jazz collective **In the Avenues**. The DDQ (composer Detrick on trumpet; Hashem Assadullahi, alto and tenor saxophones; Justin Morell, guitar; Josh Hakanson, drums; Josh Tower, bass) plays straightahead, engaging contemporary originals with obvious echoes of Wayne Shorter and other modernist masters. On the 21st at 6 pm, the group will also lead a free pre-show clinic for high school and middle school students at the Jazz Station. In the Avenues' members met at the New School in Manhattan; the quartet (sax, drums, guitar, bass) favors probing, mid-tempo rhythmically adventurous originals. Such strong young bands show that jazz's future is in secure hands.

One source of jazz's recent vitality is the rock/funk influence apparent in jazz-jam bands like Medeski, Martin & Wood. Another new Eugene band, **Basin and Range**, who play a free show at Cozmic Pizza on Aug. 16 along with the **Freetones**, partakes of that danceable style. With Phil Allen's backbeat-heavy trap set, Xander Kahn's sparkling keyboards, Mark Macomber's raucous alto sax,

Allan McKinley's funkish bass and, most unusually, Linh Renken's violin, the band creates an upbeat sound as appealing to rockers as jazz listeners.

Another young Eugenean returns home from her studies at the Berklee school. Locals will remember **Lisa Forkish** from the acclaimed UO women's a capella group Divisi, the Oregon Bach Festival's Youth Choral Academy and musical theater productions. You can hear how her piano and songwriting studies are going at her show at Cozmic Pizza on Aug. 23. Finally, on Aug. 19, Cozmic Pizza hosts one of the more interesting fusion groups to come to town of late: Corvallis's **Ordinance** adds contemporary world beat influences, including didgeridoo and djembe drum, to the fiddle, bagpipes and guitars of Galician Celtic music.

And since I've got a little room left over ... in a letter to the editor last week, John E. Heintz correctly questioned my last column's characterization of the Shedd as Eugene's "most important" music institution. I didn't mean to slight the admirable UO music school, which hosts the most diverse and, yes, important array of concerts in Oregon; it's certainly dominated this column's coverage over the years, and more power to 'em. What I'm really trying to do is nudge the city's other music organizations to aspire to the kind of innovative and thoughtful programming that the Shedd and Oregon Festival of American Music have demonstrated over the years. Not that any institution here is perfect; all of them, including the Shedd, should be devoting more resources to the commissioning and performance of contemporary works by American and particularly Oregonian and Northwest composers, for example. But the people who run the Shedd really care about American music, history and education, and their dedication inspires the programming. They don't condescend to audiences; they're not afraid to break the mold or take chances. Certainly the Shedd enjoys many advantages, like ownership of its venue, but in an era in which conservative programming decisions are increasingly made on the basis of lowest common denominators, focus groups and timidity, the idiosyncratic passion that fuels the Shedd's shows has produced a tremendous and unique contribution to American music that Eugene and Oregon can be proud of. The city's other arts institutions can benefit from its example. **CW**

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