

Making it Up as They Go

DIVA's IMMI Fest features new sounds, old pictures

Eugene has several festivals and organizations that celebrate old music, and that's fine as far as it goes. But a city that aspires to artistic excellence — a city that will draw and retain young (and not-so-young), creative people — also needs events that bring and stimulate new music. Maybe it's no accident that one of our youngest arts institutions, that upstart DIVA Center, had the nerve and the artistic ambition to create one. DIVA's annual **Festival of Improvised Music and Moving Image** infuses a much-needed young creative energy into a downtown that really needs it. IMMI Fest, which happens this year next Friday and Saturday, Dec. 14-15, draws on two of the hottest art forms, especially up and down the West Coast: indie film and video, and improvised music, and the synergistic interactions between them.

The music improvised by this year's hosts, the **Knotty Ensemble** (whose members hail from Eugene and Vancouver, B.C.) and various guests, isn't jazz, although some improv performers may have jazz backgrounds or even alter egos. Rather, the musicians improvise the structure of each piece itself as well as the melodies and rhythms that flow from it. It's an art form that demands potent listening ability, quick thinking, instinctive musicality, willingness to take risks and, usually, deep and broad musical experience; the Knotties (flute, guitar, bass, drums) have extensive classical music training but incorporate influences from tango to jazz to postclassical avant garde and more. It can be pretty scary to create collaborative sounds out of nothing; maybe that's why some improv musicians have found a common stimulus to respond to: accompanying old silent films whose scores — the music, if any, was performed live in theaters rather than on a recorded soundtrack — are either lost or were themselves improvised.

Friday's film is the great German expressionist filmmaker F.W. Murnau's 1922 classic *The Phantom*, a dark modern fable of obsessive desire. Saturday night features Rupert Julian's famous 1925 *Phantom of the Opera*, starring Lon Chaney. These ghostly visions are perfect for gloomy Oregon winters and intrepid improvising musicians. Friday night's film is preceded by **Very Stereo**, featuring the indefatigable Portland filmmak-

mixing in performance with award-winning Portland experimental filmmaker and video artist **Rob Tyler**, who specializes in abstract projections accompanied by live soundscapes. IMMI Fest is a terrific contribution to the Northwest arts scene.

Another welcome recent Eugene music tradition continues this Saturday, when Cozmic Pizza hosts the sixth annual **Benefit for Famine Relief for South Africa**, which benefits several nonprofit organizations (including Portland-based Mercy Corps and Eugene's Tariro) helping the people of Southern Africa. The headliner is one of Oregon's finest musicians,



Alfonso Maya

er/musician Matt, whose short, intense experimental documentaries have garnered numerous national awards, showings at prestigious film festivals and glowing reviews from *The New York Times* and *Artforum* on down. McCormick also founded the visionary video company Peripheral Produce and the Portland Documentary and eXperimental Film Festival and has worked with many of the Northwest's all-star artists: Sleater-Kinney, The Shins, Miranda July and more. He'll be doing live audio and video

guitarist **Paul Prince**, whose irresistibly danceable music draws on tonal and rhythmic influences from Zimbabwe, Hawaii and other non-Western musical cultures. The show also features **Pachi Pamwe**, a horn-fueled African electric fusion ensemble that blends Zimbabwean mbira, Afropop, hip hop and dancehall, and the pulsating danceable acoustic sounds of the veteran Eugene marimba and percussion group **Kudana Marimba**. World music fans can dance for a good cause.

Cozmic Pizza also has another fine

world music show Dec. 14 when it welcomes back **Alfonso Maya**, the Cuernavaca based singer-guitarist who showed his superb original songcraft here last summer. This time, he'll add covers of songs by diverse folk and underground musicians from Cuba, Argentina and Mexico as well as Spain. This is a great opportunity to encounter a wide variety of music by some of Latin America's finest though rarely heard (in the Northern hemisphere anyway) songwriters. On Dec. 9, Cozmic Pizza also hosts the up and coming postmodern jazz sextet **Reptet**. Jazz fans should give a listen to this Seattle-based aggregation of accomplished multi-instrumentalists who compose, improvise and perform in the jazz tradition.

For a more traditional jazz experience, it's hard to beat the knowledge and experience of clarinetist **Ken Peplowski** and pianist **Dick Hyman**, who play the Shedd this Saturday, Dec. 8. Hyman, the veteran New York master of pre-bop jazz styles who's scored so many of Woody Allen's films, was the first jazz adviser for the Oregon Festival of American Music, an American music institution. His extensive contacts in the NYC jazz world gave OFAM instant credibility and a stream of top-flight performers, including Peplowski, a sweet-toned clarinetist in the Goodman tradition who's succeeded Hyman at OFAM. His ravishing playing on ballads, especially, constitutes some of the most moving and stylish standards-based swing I've heard in years. With nearly a century of work at the highest levels between them, this pair can play anything, but this time, they'll focus on swing.

Finally, one of the city's most deservedly beloved old music traditions continues at Eugene's First Christian Church (Dec. 10 & 12) and Springfield's Ebbert Memorial United Methodist Church (Dec. 11) in the **Oregon Mozart Players'** annual all-Baroque holiday concert, featuring some of the finest music of J.S. Bach (his gorgeous Wedding Cantata, sung by Portland soprano Natalie Gunn) Telemann, Handel and Vivaldi performed by candlelight. **ew**

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