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French Kisses

From Gershwin to Zeppelin

Jazz may not get much attention from the big record labels or in mainstream media, but it's alive and thriving in Oregon. The annual **Portland Jazz Festival** has been winning solid audiences and growing strong; this year's edition, coming next month, features 2007 Pulitzer Prize winner **Ornette Coleman**, **Cecil Taylor** and plenty of other stars old and new. What's really exciting is the proliferation of programs in schools, colleges and community music institutes like those at The Shedd, which are turning out a generation of fine young musicians. Next week's **Oregon Jazz Festival**, the fourth representing the combined efforts of the UO and LCC jazz faculty, has become a major contributor to the state's musical development. This year's festival brings 32 Northwest high school and middle school groups to learn and perform in master classes, workshops and concerts. On Jan. 18 at LCC Performance Hall, you can see the LCC and UO jazz ensembles augmented by top notch player/teachers from around the U.S., including headliner **Luis Bonilla**, the trombone master who's played with legends from Dizzy Gillespie and McCoy Tyner to Tony Bennett and Mary J. Blige and now anchors the Mingus Big Band, Vanguard Jazz Orchestra and Jazz at Lincoln Center's Afro Cuban ensemble. On Jan. 19, Bonilla joins pianist **Randy Porter**, bassist **Dave Captein** and drummer **Gary Hobbs** along with the cream of the crop of festival participants. Anyone interested in the future of Northwest jazz should check it out.

Jazz energized American classical music as early as the 1920s, thanks especially to George Gershwin. His ever-charming "American in Paris" highlights the **Eugene Symphony's** Jan. 24 concert, along with other greatest hits of American 20th century classical music, including Samuel Barber's passionate, neo-Romantic *Violin Concerto* with soloist Stefan Jackiw. I wish the ESO had given us one of Aaron Copland's early jazz-inflected dazzlers, but instead we'll have to settle for his evergreen music from the ballet *Appalachian Spring*. The concert kicks off with the tango rhythms fueling the cinematic dances that Dominick Argento drew from his 1994 opera, *The Dream of Valentino*.

When Americans like Copland and

Gershwin actually went to Paris, they found elegant sounds that provided a welcome alternative to the overheated German romanticism that dominated concert halls elsewhere. Copland studied there, and Gershwin sought music lessons from Maurice Ravel, who asked the would-be student (already a massively successful Broadway songwriter) how much money he'd earned that year. After hearing the figure, Ravel replied, approximately, "Maybe *you* should be giving *me* lessons!" On Jan. 19, the **Oregon Mozart Players** play Ravel's limpid music from his ballet *Mother Goose*. Originally conceived as piano music for kids, this turned out to be one of the most purely beautiful scores of the 20th century — or any century. It's as magical as music gets, whether you're a kid or a grown up. The rest of this superb ~~cheese eating surrender monkeys~~ French program includes Gabriel Faure's lilting Pavane, Ravel's orchestration of Claude Debussy's *Danse* and Mozart's *Symphony #31*. OK, Wolfgang was Austrian, but he toured France and wrote this French-styled charmer during his stay there, hence its nickname: the Paris symphony. *Formidable!*

It's not just orchestras playing jazzy classics — other ostensibly "classical" aggregations have been venturing out of their gilded cage for years, such as Kronos Quartet's notorious Jimi Hendrix pastiche and Turtle Island String Quartet's excursions into jazz and bluegrass. This Friday, Jan. 11, the WOW Hall brings another adventurous foursome: L.A.'s **The Section Quartet**, who play only rock music that they arrange for their traditional two fiddles, viola and cello ensemble. And TSQ plays not just geezers like Led Zeppelin and David Bowie, but modern bands such as Radiohead, The Strokes and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

For some even more exotic sounds, try **Paul Prince's** show at Sam Bonds on Jan. 20, featuring the wide-ranging world music guitarist in new songs in Malagasy and West African styles. He'll also be joined by guests, including his former soukous-style compatriots **Ken Sokolov** and **Ian Smith**, in mostly acoustic duos and trios, and maybe another surprise or two. That same evening, Cozmic Pizza hosts the wild neo-Celtic band **Molly's Revenge**, which uses pipes, fiddles, bouzouki and more, along with the young local Scottish-Irish quintet **Tonn Nua**. **EW**