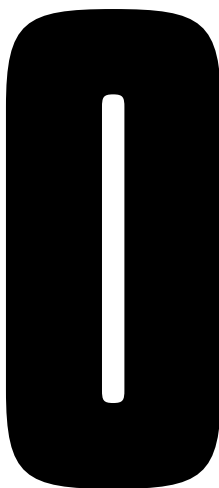

'Oh yeah. Cannonball had it all; he could wail like a blues singer or testify like a preacher. He could also play a tender ballad or swing like crazy.'

— Carl Woideck

SAXOPHONIST CARL WOIDECK IS A MUSIC HISTORIAN, AUTHOR AND PUBLIC RADIO HOST
PHOTO BY ERIN ZYSETT



On a Friday night, I watch as five musicians take the stage at the newly reconstructed Jaqua Concert Hall at the John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts. As the bassist plucks a few notes, the piano, saxophones and drums join in and flood the concert hall with the momentum of a train leaving a station. The song is “Nostalgia in Times Square” by Charles Mingus and if you’ve set foot in New York City, you can hear the song’s resemblance to the center of one of the busiest spots in the world.

All the instruments begin to quiet as each musician performs a solo, but the lenient humming of the background notes amplifies the song. This song sounds precisely like Times Square capturing the subway galloping below the grates on the sidewalk, taxi brakes squealing, traffic patrol whistles blowing, car horns erratically honking and thousands of feet shuffling. For me, jazz is transformative, chaotic and beautiful.

The Carl Woideck Jazz Heritage Project: Remembering Charles Mingus show is hosted and organized by saxophonist, author, professor, music historian and public radio music host Carl Woideck.

The band plays Mingus’ “Better Get it in Your Soul.” Woideck tells the audience that many of Mingus’ songs have a backstory, and this song was heavily inspired by gospel. Woideck tells the story behind every song. Mingus composed “Jelly Roll” based on early jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton. Mingus learned about Morton in elementary school, and the song, though released in 1959, sounds like a lively ’20s tune.

Woideck is a mainstay in the Eugene jazz community. On a Wednesday night, some days after The Shedd show, I join him as he sits behind a microphone at Eugene’s local NPR affiliate, KLCC, and loads CDs just before he goes on air to host the “Soul of Jazz.” Since 1975, Woideck has contributed historical tidbits about jazz musicians to the community, and his playlist isn’t limited to classic jazz greats.

“I like to play stuff from all eras,” he tells me. “Here’s Cannonball — I consider that bluesy as hell,” he says as saxophonist Cannonball Adderley’s “St. Louis Blues” begins to play and horns fill the studio. “Oh yeah. Cannonball had it all; he could wail like a blues singer or testify like a preacher. He could also play a tender ballad or swing like crazy,” Woideck says.

A jazz aficionado myself, I became curious about how, despite Eugene’s relatively small population, the jazz scene is vibrant. It’s composed of high school students, professors, local professionals and international acts. And it draws musicians from all over the world who stop to play shows in Eugene, where audiences fill living rooms and small clubs and venues.

Jazz pianist Torrey Newhart plays piano during the Mingus tribute. He began play-

ing violin when he was four, but he says he didn’t take it seriously until high school. He completed the jazz studies undergraduate and graduate program at the University of Oregon. Now he is an adjunct at UO, a high school teacher and a member of several bands.

“The area that I’m really focusing on a lot right now is the group Inner Limits — it’s a trio so I’m playing bass synthesizer and keyboards. We’re doing a lot of classic rock covers in addition to originals, and we’re adding back up vocals,” Newhart says.

Newhart is part of a core group of musicians that plays multiple venues throughout Eugene, from The Jazz Station, to restaurants, bars and places like The Shedd and house concerts.

Paul Bowdin retired as a public school teacher 14 years ago and, a few years later, reenrolled in school himself — in that same jazz studies program at the UO. There he began meeting musicians. “My wife and I after a while started connecting with a number of musicians who were local here, and some of them in fact went to places like New York City and have become very successful musicians,” Bowdin says.

“After a couple years of studying at the UO, we started using our living room as a venue for local jazz combos out of the University of Oregon,” he says, adding that it was quickly successful.

Bowdin says people outside the UO music community began contacting him, even musicians touring from overseas, and in 2009 the Broadway House Concerts were born.

“Now we’re kind of a mix of local groups and groups from out of town,” he says. “Along with The Jazz Station, which is a great place for listening, there’s us. I think we provide that extra concert style of venue that also has a very intimate acoustic space because it’s in our living room.”

The Bowdins own a 1920s house in downtown Eugene, and their living room seats 55, he says.

Central to Eugene’s jazz scene is the nonprofit club, The Jazz Station. The small space, with a maximum seating capacity of 60, hosts musicians from Eugene, Portland and Seattle, as well as international acts. The Willamette Jazz Society operates the club, and WJS President Ted Ledgard says they rely on grants and volunteers to take tickets, serve drinks and assist with the venue in order to pay musicians and rent the space.

“Time and time again bands have said after a performance, ‘Man we love coming here, because your audience is so great,’” Ledgard says. “They really understand what the musicians are trying to do. They listen to the music — it’s like a church in here when there’s a performance. And that’s good.”

The Jazz Station hosts performances paying tribute to the ’40s, ’50s and ’60s, but it’s also home to acts who push the genre, keeping the scene alive, relevant and fresh by incorporating fusions of hip hop and modern jazz.

On a rainy Saturday night, only a few seats were empty at The Jazz Station as the Wes