

# HAPPENINGS



AL GRANT

## Jazz Man

by Dick Bogle

Back in the 1940s and '50s when jazz lovers were looking for that certain record, more often than not they headed to the corner of N. Williams and Broadway where "the" city's record store, the Madrona, was located.

It was owned and operated by Al Grant, a jazz lover in his own right, pianist and former vaudevillian dancer. If you were to have looked closely, you might have seen a small dark-haired boy helping out and sometimes listening to the endless supply of good jazz records.

The boy was Al's son Tom, now one of Portland's premier jazz pianists and vocalists. No doubt about it, that early exposure to jazz and the day's popular black music heavily influenced what Tom Grant is doing musically today.

In a recent interview, Grant said, "Errol Garner was one of the earliest and most powerful piano influences on my style. I also listened a lot to John Coltrane, Thelonius Monk, Horace Silver and all the Miles Davis bands."

Grant took his first piano lessons from his father and then moved toward the classical side taking lessons for several years from Elizabeth Tressler. After that it was back to jazz and lessons from well-known Portland master Gene Confer.

A lot of time has passed and the old Madrona is gone but its influence is still strong in the playing of now 36-year-old Tom Grant.

Tom is one of many Portland-based musicians who has recorded both as a leader and sideman on national labels.

His first-ever recording was with Portland tenorman Jim Pepper done in a New York studio. His second came with reed player Charles Lloyd. He says, "It's called 'Manhattan Skyline' or something like that. I heard it's very good but I haven't heard it myself. But I keep looking for it in stores so I can hear it."

He has two albums on which he is the leader. The first, recorded in December, 1975, is titled "mystified" and features tenor player Joe Henderson, Portland drummer Ron Steen and New York bassist Rick Laird. Pressed on the Timeless International label, the album contains several original Grant tunes plus some jazz standards. Reportedly the album is still selling well, particularly in Europe where it was first distributed.

The second album, although an artistic success, has left Grant in the dark as far as the financial rewards go. Recorded on the now defunct WMOT label, it featured a flock of Portland musicians including trumpeter Dick Burdell, drummer Gary Hobbs, bassist Lester McFarland and tenor player Dennis Springer. In addition Patrice Rushen sang and world renowned drummer Tony Williams appeared on one cut. As did Portland pianist Jeff Lorber.

When asked how well the album was selling, Grant says, "I'm having trouble getting my royalty checks. When a company goes out of business, they can get pretty ornery."

Grant's on-the-road tours have taken him to Europe several times. His first came with Joe Henderson. That one started in Canada and went to ten

European countries. During two-year period, he was with Henderson in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and some Canadian cities.

He also went to Europe three times with drummer Tony Williams. Some of those tours included Portland musicians, Pat Ahearn and Todd Carver.

Another album is a distinct possibility and Grant says he already has material for it. He is looking for a label or a backer and until he lines that up he is hesitant to say much about the album's instrumentation or personnel. He does say it will be a true representation of himself and what he does. Like many other Portland musicians with national reputations, Grant likes it here and has no plans to leave. He says in the past ten to twelve years he has seen a gradual increase in interest in jazz.

"There is nothing comparable to Portland this side of Chicago," he says.

"In an absolute sense there's more jazz here than in Seattle and on a per-capita basis there's more here than in Los Angeles and San Francisco."

He doesn't rule out moving away but says he and his wife of 13 years are very happy and comfortable in their Portland home.

He feels Portland musically and culturally is a nurturing community. He says, "Any setting in America can have excellent players, but here there are excellent teachers, a school like Mt. Hood Community College and good in-

fluent musicians to nurture other younger players. This goes back to the '50s when there was lots of jamming and inexperienced musicians could listen to and pick up from more established players."

When it comes to goals, Grant certainly has established a high one for himself. He would like to do more writing but not just fluff tunes. He would like to write music that will endure much like Duke Ellington's, music that will span generations.

Currently, Grant is working six nights a week in Portland.

I caught his act at Cousins last week with bassist Brad Herret and drummer Gary Hobbs. The audience was delighted by the performance.

Grant was using an acoustic piano and it was evident that they were very well rehearsed and tight. Grant's interpretations of jazz standards were sensitive and soulful. On some of the tunes, the group reminds one of the Ahmad Jamal Trio in that it was like six hands controlled by one brain, and a very creative one at that.

His vocals showed a great maturity and improvement. His phrasing is impeccable.

The group appears at Delevans Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and at Cousins Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

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