

# arts/entertainment

## Band's original music defies classification

By Brian McManus

Although it is often called a jazz band, the Spencer Ward Quintet is a group that defies classification.

"Actually, we are a fusion group. By that I mean that we incorporate various styles—jazz, blues, classical, Latin, rock, and anything else that sounds interesting," said Spencer Ward.

Don't interpret this to mean that they play a wide variety to appeal to all tastes. Far from it—they play to suit their own creative instincts. The result is the best, tightest, most interesting local group I've ever heard.

"We can do what we like—new and experimental things, mainly because we don't rely on our music as our sole occupation," Ward said. "We aren't playing for a living. We all have other things going on. We're playing to have fun and express ourselves. Because of this, money isn't dictating what we play. We'll never turn into a cocktail lounge band just because that's where the money is."

*New Country* by Jean Luc-Ponty and *A Day in the Life of a Fool*, a Latin bossanova, are the only two songs in their repertoire that are not originals. Almost all their songs are written by Spencer Ward, with the band members contributing their own ideas on the arrangements of their instruments.

"WE HAVE A lot of freedom in the group," said Bill Hanlon. "And, although we improvise on tunes, we also rehearse quite a bit so we have a tight, coordinated sound."

The group members have numerous interests and occupations outside the Quintet. Spencer Ward, who writes the songs and plays an Ovation (an amplified acoustic guitar), is currently working on his doctoral dissertation in counseling psychology.

"Originally, we figured the group would play to a very limited extent, but people's response has been tremendous," Ward said. "It's kind of a drain; I'd envisioned it as a once a month thing, but now we're playing just about

every week. With rehearsals, promotion, bookings, and composing, it's become quite a bit of work . . . but I'm really enjoying it."

Bill Hanlon, who plays vibas and flute, is the other original member of the group.

"It all started about a year and a half ago. Spence and I met at a party of a good friend of mine. I had my flute with me and Spence had his guitar. We immediately clicked."

### review

WARD AND HANLON joined forces with Mehrdad Eman, who played the Table (an eastern Indian drum) and Rick Marsh, who played electric guitar. They formed a group called Mandala.

"We didn't quite have it together yet at that stage," Ward said. "We did a couple of things, like playing for a Christmas party at the Glass Onion, but the group wasn't doing anything remarkable, by any means."

Mandala disintegrated shortly after that. Eman moved to California and Marsh quit to join another band.

Ward and Hanlon decided to form another group. After many interviews, they hired Dave Burham, who plays violin.

Besides playing for the group, Burham is presently in school, majoring in music education. He has also played for the Lincoln Symphony.

The added element of the violin contributes to a fuller sound and takes the group into some interesting directions. Burham's style can be compared to Jean Luc-Ponty. He has a trained, exacting style, but can branch out into innovative and creative solos.

The group later hired John Scofield for drums and percussion.

"The great thing about John is his ability to blend into our style of music—whatever we're playing," Ward said. "It was difficult to find a drummer who fit with the rest of us. But John has worked out great."

The group had planned stopping as a four-man band. But Dennis Taylor, the bass player of the group, heard what they were doing and wanted to join them.

"AT FIRST, I was very skeptical," Ward said. "I thought an electric bass would add too much noise to the group. But Dennis convinced me to let him borrow a tape of the band. A week later, he came back, and could play almost everything. There was no question about it, he was a member."

The band has been together since the end of June. Their sound blends naturally, and one would think they've played for years with each other.

One of the most striking features of the group's work is the quality of Ward's songs. The range in style and moods is wide, but all songs show the expertise of the musicians to its fullest. They'll be playing a song with a strong Latin beat one moment and be jamming through a tune with a blues undercurrent the next.

BUT, MOST OF the time music can't be placed in any real category. It's not standard jazz, rock or blues, but an imaginative blend that combines many elements. Their songs are always different and intriguing, but they never get so diffuse that the average listener can't appreciate them.

Ward is the spokesman of the group, giving short histories behind his songs. He builds a rapport between the audience and the group, explaining the meanings of song titles, such as "Southbeach," "Genesis VI," "Shumway," and "Raphael Sabatini Lives."

"Playing in the group has made my life a lot more interesting," Ward said. "It's something we are all very excited with and enjoy doing."

The Spencer Ward Quintet will be playing at The Clayton House from now through Saturday.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

Woman dons samurai mask in *Onibaba*, showing at Sheldon Film Theatre this week.

## Two Japanese films at Sheldon

Sheldon's Japanese Cinema series has been well received with attendance topping 1,500 during the first three weeks, according to film curator Dan Ladely.

The fourth week of the series features two films: Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* and Kaneto Shindo's *Onibaba*.

*Woman in the Dunes* is an allegory probing fundamental questions of existence and the meaning of freedom. The tale of a man held captive with a woman at the bottom of a sandpit is influenced by the themes found in Beckett, Pinter, and Kafka.

An entomologist collecting beetles on the dunes misses his bus back to the city. Some natives offer him assistance, and he is lowered by a rope ladder down to a sandpit where he finds a woman willing to provide food and lodging in her shack. He accepts and the next morning prepares to leave. The ladder is gone and he is trapped. Slowly the implications of the trap are revealed. He has been put there to help the woman shovel and load the shifting sand in baskets that are hauled up from above in return for water and food.

*Onibaba* is about an elderly peasant woman whose son has gone off to war, and her daughter-in-law. They manage to survive the feudal wars by killing wounded samurai, stripping their armor, and selling it.

One day a returning neighbor, Hachi, tells the daughter-in-law that her husband has been killed. The old woman becomes jealous when she sees the neighbor and the daughter-in-law making love. Worried about losing the girl, who is her means of survival, she tries to scare the girl away from Hachi by donning a terrifying mask she has stripped from a dead warrior's face. To her horror, she is unable to remove the mask.

These films are showing at the Sheldon Film Theatre on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

*Onibaba* (105 minutes) is scheduled as follows: at 7 p.m. on Thursday; 3 and 9:15 p.m. on Friday; and 7 p.m. on Saturday.

*Woman in the Dunes* (123 minutes): at 9 p.m. on Thursday; 7 p.m. on Friday; and 3 and 9 p.m. on Saturday.

By Peg Sheldrick

In this superficial and highly image-conscious age, you are continually bombarded with advice on *Winning Through Intimidation*, *Pulling Your Own Strings*, *Dressing for Success*, etc. With the help of these inspiring tomes any 97-pound social weakling can achieve his or her own fulfillment of the Peter Principle and kick sand in the faces of peers on the great beach of life.

### humor

These books tell you everything from how high the back of your chair should be to what kind of hairstyle will get you a promotion. But they all neglect one vital area that might be holding back millions of would-be whizzes:

*'Eat to Be Neat'*  
to build success

the simple matter of eating.

Yes, friends, the very nature of your dinner and dining can be the key to your success. It's simply a matter of knowing how to turn the daily bread into an image-building gambit that will net you some *real* bread. But where do you learn? Well, that's where I come in. Believe me, I'm here to help.

That's why I'm presenting here for the first time the first chapter of my brand new book—*Eat to be Neat*. Oh no, don't thank me. Just buy the book.

Here's a little sample of what you'll be getting—just enough to whet your appetite, if you'll pardon the expression:

"Chapter 1—You are What You Eat (and Who You Eat It With and Where).

"In order to Eat to Be Neat, the very first thing you must do is forget that silly notion that food is for nourishment. Otherwise you will spend the rest of your life eating peanut butter sandwiches and wondering why your career is at a standstill.

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