

Out & about

A&E WEEKEND OUTLOOK

Monk continues jazz tradition

Editor's note: Thelonious Monk Jr. will not perform at the Lied Center this weekend because of illness. This article was written prior to the cancellation.

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

He started by playing on his bed with sticks and a pillow. Now drummer Thelonious Monk Jr., son of jazz great Thelonious Sphere Monk, blazes a new trail into the '90s with a performance style all his own.

Although his father was a quiet giant in the world of jazz, Monk said he wasn't pressured into his music.

"I floated in on my own," he said. "After a while, (my dad) knew I was pretty psychotic about it. He knew I'd been practicing like a dog."

"I have a pure love of music, and it's not because my father was Thelonious," he said.

Monk didn't run to fill his father's footsteps upon his entry into the musical world. Acid rock bands were his first home.

"My first cover tune was 'Wipeout,' like any other 15-year-old in 1965," he said.

Monk was in an acid/hard funk cover band until he turned 20 and went on the road with his father. The younger Monk said the real change came when he served as chairman for the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. On several occasions, Monk was asked to accompany famous jazz musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie at various fund-raisers. He didn't play the drums from 1982 to 1990, so he had to start practicing.

"Once I did start practicing, I said you know, there aren't many cats out here who could really play," Monk said. "I can do this. It's like second nature to me."

Scrutiny fell on Monk because he was entering the jazz world after his father's legacy, he said. Monk said he never was hurt by the shadow of his father; instead, it was a blessing.

"Everybody lives and dies trying to figure out a way of getting someone to remember his name," he said. "I was born with a name before I could say 'word.'"

Monk said his father was part of the dawn of the post-bop age, which came after the be-bop style of early artists.

"Be-bop was a transition between swing and modern jazz. New melodies and rhythmic concepts were brought up on a 50-year history," he said. "Along comes T.S. Monk. T.S. brought the harmonic foundation with which to rest these new melodic and rhythmic concepts."

The young drummer said since then, jazz had been stuck in a rut.

"Now, you've got this whole generation of young cats," he said. "The philosophy is lost. We are lost."

Monk said he was trying to find his own way out by taking a different path up the jazz mountain.

Something new cures winter blues

SARAH DUEY

Mr. Groundhog — such a cruel little creature. Because he saw his shadow earlier this week, Nebraskans are in for six more weeks of icy sidewalks, blustery winds, sub-zero temperatures, and nothing green.

Yeah, I know, winter in Nebraska is anything but pleasant. And battling the winter hum-drum is a never-ending uphill climb.

My solution: try something new. This weekend when you have a bit extra time, expose yourself to something you've never done before or accomplish something you've put off for years.

Go see a laser light show. Depeche Mode and Pearl Jam are playing at Mueller Planetarium on 14th & U

streets this weekend.

Organize a closet. Put together a photo album. Whip up a quick batch of Baked Alaska; (the flame will provide extra warmth). Learn to play chess.



A feeling of accomplishment definitely helps in battling the winter blahs.

Doing something you've put off may not trip that trigger. Hey — I know there are only so many times you can whip up that Baked Alaska without setting off the fire alarm.

So, why not treat yourself.

A few of my favorites — reading a book while warming up with a cup of hot chocolate at a coffee house. Building a fire. Seeing a good flick. (i.e. "Schindler's List") Checking out some local art galleries. Ice skating. Calling a long, lost friend.

The one, never-fail ingredient that's necessary in beating the weather is being good to yourself.

So whatever it is ... go out ... make time ... drive slowly ... dream of your favorite beach ...

Hey — this weather is for the groundhogs.

Duey is a senior news-editorial major and the Arts & Entertainment editor.

Smooth Vibes

Jazz veteran Burton to bring his mallets to Lied

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Always in a search for something different, musician Gary Burton wouldn't be satisfied with a plain piano, drums or saxophone. His love of music translated to a different kind of instrument, the vibraphone.

After making records with singers

k.d. lang and Rebecca Parris, Burton grew to be a pioneering force in the technology of fusion-jazz. Along the way, Burton has made a few changes to the faces of jazz.

"My older sister played the piano, so I wanted to pick something different," he said. "My parents took me around to things like school concerts."

One trip changed Burton's musical life.

"We went to see this performance of a local woman who played the marimba, and to a 6-year-old, it looked interesting."

Burton's initial interest in the mallet family led him to the vibraphone, which eventually led him to jazz.

"The vibraphone is exclusively a jazz instrument, and all the major players have been jazz players," he said.

He said the vibraphone was a little too soft to function in rock bands, and it never had much of an application in classical music.

An obscure Dixie jazz record s p a w n e d Burton's interest. Living in a small Indiana town, his access to jazz was limited.

"The nearest place that carried jazz was an hour away," he said.

"When we took trips to Evansville, I'd get my parents to drop me off at the record store."

Burton soon went beyond buying records to making some of his own. In the process, Burton changed the face of jazz itself.

"Well, I had been playing in traditional jazz settings in my first years on the professional scene," Burton said. He said when he started

his own group, he needed to determine his right style of musical identity.

A generation gap had developed in jazz, he said. Burton, in his 20s at the time, noticed something was wrong.

"I wanted to connect with my own generation," he said. "I noticed my audiences were middle-aged, older than me."

At the same time Burton was figuring out how he could connect with his generation, he discovered this newly arrived rock music in the mid-1960s.

In 1967, Burton discovered a guitar player experiencing the same desires to mix jazz and rock, and the Gary Burton Quartet was formed.

"We had longish hair and wore colorful contemporary clothing," he said. "Jazz musicians up to that time had only worn tuxedos."

"We were real barrier breakers," he said.

The term jazz-rock was coined. Burton said jazz-rock became popular with other groups down the line.

"Nowadays, it's all crossed over and mixed and so on," he said. "Jazz-rock was later termed fusion as it became more electronic and loud-rock style."

Burton's repertoire is a mix of straight-ahead jazz and contemporary jazz. He said more had changed in jazz over three decades than just music.

Burton's original goal started becoming a reality.

"The change I've observed over 30 years is the makeup of the audience," he said. "It has become much broader connecting to a broader range of people."

Urban areas were the limit of jazz when Burton first started playing.

"The people tended to be middle-aged and predominantly black," he said. "There seemed to be a defined jazz following."

"We wouldn't think of doing a gig in Lincoln," he said.

Thirty years and four trips to Lincoln later, Burton said times had changed.

"We play in Lincoln as often as we play in New York," he said. "There's also a much wider variety of age groups."

"You have the gray hairs, the kids and a mixture of appearances," Burton said.

Burton said some people thought this wasn't fair, because they believed jazz should remain predominantly black.

"Some people protest it's losing its roots," he said. "Unfortunately with music, it keeps revolving as it reflects society and its times."

Burton said jazz was moving onto the international scene as it filtered into Japan and Europe, previously unexposed to jazz music.

On his fifth trip to Lincoln, Burton will be performing with jazz vocalist Rebecca Parris. Parris and Burton recently recorded a release called "It's Another Day."

Once Burton heard Parris sing, he decided he wanted to do a record with her.

The kickoff to Burton and Parris' U.S. tour will begin at the Lied Center for Performing Arts this Saturday at 8 p.m. Student tickets are \$8.



James Mehlsing/DN

"It's like if you talked to someone about Mt. Everest," he said. "The guy would say, 'You know, there's a trail called K9X1. It's the most difficult, so nobody's gone up it.'"

"I'm going to take that trail," he said.

Monk said his venture centered on developing a new performance style, something to make jazz as audience-friendly and presentable as country or rock.

"You have to examine the dynamics. People like the combination of words and music," he said. "You can rap, sing or you can just talk between the music."

"If Bruce Springsteen, who might make \$2 million a night, isn't too big to tell his people he loves them, how did (jazz musicians) get too big to do that?" he said.

Making the audience part of the music is Monk's goal. Monk, pianist Ronnie Matthews and bassist Scott Collie blend with Don Sickler on trumpet and Jillie Williams on tenor sax. They have performed with several jazz greats

and even President Clinton.

"I'm here to entertain you, to make you smile," he said. "It's presentation that's going to bring jazz into the 21st century and compete with its rightful share of the entertainment dollar."

Jazz artists have to be more than just musicians to start this competition, he said.

"Once one asks John Doe public to lay down his money in an entertainment venue, you'd better be an entertainer, not just a musician," he said.

Monk said he was tired of people thinking jazz had to be associated with hazy, dimly lit rooms the size of a cardboard box. A more theatrical appearance is his goal.

"It's this stereotype pumped through the media and movies that's the reason we have a hard time," he said. "We need sophisticated music and highly positive endeavors to use the best lighting and sound systems possible."