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Jazz musician returns to keys

BOSTON (AP) - The slow strains on the piano suddenly picked up into a jazzy and unusual rendition of "You've Changed." Fingers around the elegant room at the Oak Bar began drumming the dark wood tables. The heads of a couple with gray hair and gray suits bobbed with the music.

When Dave McKenna finished the tune, the well-dressed crowd cheered. Some stood, hooting and yelling "Bravo."

McKenna didn't seem to notice. His hands just started gliding across the keyboard of the grand piano to play the next song.

Recently, after almost 10 years away, McKenna, who lives with his wife on Cape Cod, returned to the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston for five shows. His fans turned out in force.

Though not a household name, McKenna is known and sought after in music circles as an artist of rare talent and style. He's played with Charlie Parker, Benny Goodman and Stan Getz. He's Tony Bennett's favorite piano player.

"Dave is world class, there's no question about it," said pianist Ray Santisi, who said he's been a fan of McKenna for years. "He's able to do things with the harmony that was originally intended by the composers,

and is able to reshape it with some outstanding harmonic twists."

McKenna, 67, is a tall, lanky, unassuming type. He appears slightly embarrassed by lavish praise.

"I consider myself a song player rather than a jazz player. I really like playing old songs," he said. "Some of the songs I play are even older than I am."

It's the songs that keep his fans loyal. McKenna's admirers say there isn't a song he can't play, and music experts credit him with keeping the "Great American Songbook" alive.

McKenna was pianist in residence at the old Plaza Bar from 1977 until 1986, playing five nights a week.

"It's like having Larry Bird back, to see Dave McKenna on the parquet floor," said John Higgins.

He and his wife, Corrine Higgins, came to the Copley Plaza at least once a week during the years McKenna played regularly there. Since he left, they've seen him play all over the country, from Rhode Island to California.

Most of the people who filled the room and waited in line outside the door were hard-core McKenna fans. They couldn't resist coming to see him in what they think of as his rightful home.

He finished his first set with one of his signature theme medleys - songs about sweets, including "Candy," "Sweet Lorraine," and "Ain't She Sweet?"

McKenna, who was born in Woonsocket, R.I., said he never intended to be a career musician.

"I sort of intended to go to college but my marks weren't very good," he said. "I just drifted into music."

He started out playing in his home state. By age 28, he was playing in New York. A big attraction for him, when he played with a band, was not having to get up early in the morning.

Now, with the traveling he does today, that's changed. "You have to get up early in the morning and you're just like the other people," he said.

Ron Della Chiesa, a music critic for WGBH radio, said McKenna's sound is wholly his own.

"I had never heard a piano stylist like that," he said. "Dave's sound was more like he had a built-in bass player. He would accompany himself with this walking bass line. It sounded like he had two pianos going."

Though he's written and recorded a few original songs, McKenna said the only thing he wished he'd done was write one of the standards he plays and add his own page to the songbook he's helped keep alive.

Basket ready to show off new bassist

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together and practice together," Dunn said. "Our friendship has a lot to do with the band, and that shows when we're on stage."

Dunn said the band was happy to be playing again and that it was looking forward to releasing a new EP in March called "Monkey-like Strength." The EP is the band's first recording since its 1996 debut album "Rascal Basket vs. The Hordes of Venus," and Dunn said it was a way of reacquainting fans and prospective record labels with Rascal Basket's sound.

"The new one coming out will be a four-song little taste of us," he said.

As for the rest of 1998, Dunn said, people should look for some innovative changes to Rascal Basket's heavy, yet melodic, sound.

"We're trying about anything right now just to keep things new and interesting," Dunn said. "We want to let people know we can do a lot of different things, but most of all, we're having a good time."

Pepsi plans replacement soda for Slice

NEW YORK (AP) - Pepsi-Cola Co. is getting into the lemon-lime wars with a soft drink it hopes will steal some of the fizz of Sprite and 7-Up.

Pepsi, the nation's second-biggest soft drink company, is calling its new drink Storm and will test it early this year in Denver. Brad Shaw, a spokesman for Somers, N.Y.-based Pepsi-Cola, would not say Monday precisely when the test would begin.

Storm would effectively replace Slice, sales of which have been flat against Coca-Cola Co.'s Sprite and Cadbury Schweppes PLC's 7-Up.

Behind colas, lemon-lime beverages are second in soft drink sales, accounting for 11.2 percent of the market, said John Sicher, editor and publisher of the trade publication Beverage Digest.

Coca-Cola has been dominating the market with Sprite. Sales have been growing rapidly, fueled by an irreverent advertising campaign called "Obey Your Thirst" that appeals to teens by poking fun at commercials that suggest a soft drink can change your life.

Beverage Digest said Sprite was the fourth-biggest selling soft drink brand in 1996 (after Coca-Cola Classic, Pepsi and Diet Coke) with 5.8 percent of the soft drink market. Figures for 1997 are not available.

"Sprite has enjoyed tremendous success in recent years," said Polly Howes, spokeswoman for Atlanta-based Coca-Cola. "It's really not a surprise that others would want to try to capitalize on that."

7-Up was seventh in 1996, with a 2.4 percent market share, while the diet versions of Sprite, 7-Up and an assortment of store brands and smaller entries accounted for the remaining lemon-lime sales, Sicher said.

Some industry watchers said a stronger lemon-lime entry would also help Pepsi get more fountain customers, such as restaurant chains that often carry the whole range of Pepsi or Coca-Cola products. Coca-Cola has long dominated that section of the business.

There have been reports that Pepsi may include caffeine in Storm as a way to distinguish it from Sprite and 7-Up, which don't have caffeine.

Shaw declined to comment on those reports.

'Titanic' rules in box office, 'Firestorm' down in flames

LOS ANGELES (AP) - "Titanic" grossed more than \$20 million for a record fourth straight weekend and now appears headed to a domestic haul of close to \$300 million.

The film was expected to pass the \$200 million mark Monday night and faces no strong competition for several weeks.

It slipped a mere 14 percent from the previous weekend, when it enjoyed its single best day. The epic is also playing well in overseas markets.

The only new film in national release, Howie Long's "Firestorm," was sacked in its debut, finishing a distant seventh.

"Good Will Hunting" was popular in its first weekend of wide release, as was the political satire "Wag the Dog." "Tomorrow Never Dies," the latest in the James Bond series, passed the \$100 million threshold.

Kevin Costner's "The Postman"

Top Grossing Films

1. "Titanic"	\$28.7 million	(four weeks)
2. "Good Will Hunting"	\$10.3 million	(six weeks)
3. "As Good As It Gets"	\$9 million	(three weeks)
4. "Wag the Dog"	\$7.8 million	(three weeks)
5. "Tomorrow Never Dies"	\$7.5 million	(four weeks)
6. "Mousehunt"	\$4.6 million	(four weeks)
7. "Firestorm"	\$3.8 million	(one week)
8. "Jackie Brown"	\$3.7 million	(three weeks)
9. "Scream 2"	\$3.6 million	(five weeks)
10. "Amistad"	\$2.7 million	(five weeks)

SOURCE: AP JOHN FRANK/DN

continued its meteoric crash, playing to nearly empty theaters. "Mr. Magoo" fell sharply.

New record releases feature film soundtracks, love songs

RECORDS from page 9

Pictures."

And last, but certainly not least, a new compilation of previously unreleased "Love Songs" from the late king of rock 'n' roll, Elvis Presley, makes its debut.

New Releases for January 13, 1998:

- Backbone - *Backbone* (Grateful Dead)
- Ben Folds Five - *Naked Baby Photos* (Caroline)
- Various Artists - *Boogie Nights Soundtrack - Volume 2* (Capitol)
- David Crosby and Graham Nash - *Another Stoney Evening - Live 10/10/71* (Grateful Dead/Arista)
- DJ Shadow - *Preemptive Strike* (London)
- Flestones - *More Than Skin Deep* (Ichiban)
- Flourescein - *High Contrast Comedown* (DGC)
- Aretha Franklin - *The Delta Meets Detroit: Aretha's Blues*

- (Rhino) John Lee Hooker - *The Complete '50's Chess Recordings* (MCA)
- Gas Huffer - *Just Beautiful Music* (Epitaph)
- Various Artists - *Half Baked Soundtrack* (MCA)
- Mark Knopfler - *Wag the Dog Soundtrack* (Mercury)
- New York Undercover Soundtrack (MCA)
- New York Voices - *Sing the Songs of Paul Simon* (RCA Victor)
- Roy Orbison - *Combo Concert* (Orbison)
- Elvis Presley - *Love Songs* (RCA)
- Rammstein - *Sehnsucht* (London)
- Otis Redding - *Love Songs* (Rhino)
- Various Artists - *Senseless Soundtrack* (V2)
- Chris Stills - *100 Year Thing* (Atlantic)
- Bob Weir and Rob Wasserman - *Weir/Wasserman - Live* (Grateful Dead)
- Victoria Williams - *Musings of a Creeklipper* (Atlantic)

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