

## IN APPRECIATION OF ...

## JAZZ

STORY BY BARB CHURCHILL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT HANEY

Jazz has been called "the one true American art form."

But in recent decades, many Americans have treated jazz as a marginalized art form, encouraging many artists to emigrate to Europe in search of more receptive ears.

Dave Sharp is no such American. Sharp, a saxophonist and jazz instructor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, knows exactly why

Americans should appreciate jazz.

"Unlike other forms of music, the whole idea behind jazz is improvisation, which is both individual and personal," Sharp said. "A good jazz solo is all about emotion, which you can't really say about other forms of music."

Dan Bauer, manager of local jazz bar Rogues Gallery, 11<sup>th</sup> and O streets, agreed.

"Jazz is a universal language, much like other forms of music," Bauer said. "But what's going to draw people to it is the energy and the musician-ship."

One of the myths about jazz is that it is incomprehensible to the average listener - something Bauer would dispute.

"Jazz communicates a fairly broad range of emotions, which helps the novice listener understand or latch on to the music," he said.

Another popular myth states that jazz isn't economically viable

because most people seem to gravitate toward rock and hip-hop.

But Bauer, whose bar is partially maintained through the business of jazz aficionados, would emphatically disagree with this assessment.

As Bauer said, "Jazz isn't trendy. It's been around, and it will continue to evolve."

The best introduction to jazz, according to Sharp, is to listen to one of the many fusion styles. Fusion incorporates elements of music such as rock, funk and pop into jazz styles, making it more accessible to virginal ears.

Sharp also said it is easier to understand big-band jazz than small-group jazz.

"Listening to a large ensemble is easier for someone who doesn't know very much about jazz because there is a larger variety of timbres and sounds to hear," Sharp said. "Also, with a large ensemble, there is less improvisation, which tends to baffle the novice listener. It's much easier to

grasp written material."

Sharp said he is passionate about jazz because if people give it a chance, they will understand it.

"With jazz, the crowd gets more involved with the music," he said, "because you can move around in your chair, yell out stuff from the audience and clap at the end of improvised solos."

"And this really helps the jazz performer, because it helps him/her improvise more interesting solos if the audience is engaged in listening, rather than just sitting there acting like they'd rather be anywhere else."

Sharp had one word of advice for people who are interested in learning more about jazz: Listen.

"You need to open your ears in order to appreciate jazz, and granted, it can be difficult to listen to at first," he said. "But like anything else, the more you are around something, the more you accept it, and the more you appreciate it."

Miles Davis



## VENUES

Rogues Gallery, 11<sup>th</sup> and O streets

Rogues showcases a variety of jazz artists, from traditional jazz "torch" singers to acid jazz. Call (402) 475-2929 to get on their mailing list.

## University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music, Westbrook Music Building

The UNL School of Music currently hosts three jazz groups - Jazz Ensemble, Jazz Lab Band and Jazz Small Group. All three groups give at least one concert during the semester, and admission is free to all UNL events. In addition, jazz performers are occasionally brought to UNL to give master classes and concerts for students and faculty. Contact the UNL School of Music at (402) 472-2503 for additional details.

## Ramada Plaza Hotel, 141 N. Ninth St.

The Ramada hosts the Monday Night Big Band, which performs every Monday night. Admission is \$4. The Ramada periodically hosts the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra. Contact the Ramada at (402) 476-2222, or the NJO at (402) 477-8446 for further details.

## The Oven, 201 N. Eighth Street, Suite 117

The Oven periodically hosts jazz on Sundays. Call (402) 475-6118 for further details.

The Lied Center for Performing Arts, 301 N. 12<sup>th</sup> St.

The Lied occasionally hosts jazz or jazz-related events, such as the recent show by Latin jazz artist Tito Puente. Call the Lied at (402) 472-4747 for further information about any future jazz bookings.

## PRINTED MATTER

Although jazz is essentially an aural experience, several books and publications can be used to aid the quest to appreciate it.

**Down Beat** is the granddaddy of all jazz publications. Published monthly, it contains album reviews and several interviews with artists. The magazine's extensive archives also allow for the publication of classic interviews and features.

**Jazz Times** is a newer publication that takes a more irreverent approach to the music and its artists. Published monthly, it contains album reviews and profiles of new artists.

In the realm of books, one also has many options.

"**Jazz Styles: History and Analysis**" by Mark C. Gridley is a good place to start. This one is sort of a textbook that contains breakdowns of the many movements in jazz history and the artists who participated in them.

"**Hear Me Talkin' to Ya**" by Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro, first published in 1955, is an excellent collection of interviews with jazz artists.

Autobiographies by jazz artists are the best way to the heart and soul of the jazz movement. The best among these are "**Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper**" by Art and Laurie Pepper, and "**Good Morning Blues**," the autobiography of Count Basie as told to Albert Murray.

Other excellent biographies include "**Ascension: John Coltrane and His Quest**" by Eric Nisenson and "**Charlie Parker: His Music and Life**" by Carl Woideck.

## RECORDINGS

Dave Sharp, jazz instructor at UNL, was asked "if stranded on a desert island, and you had only 10 jazz albums to listen to, which 10 would you pick?" Sharp said he'd like a lot of variety, and would like one rock album (Frank Zappa) and one classical album (a Gustav Mahler symphony) to round out his collection.

So, in no particular order, here are Dave Sharp's "top 10 jazz albums."

- 1) Louis Armstrong, any Hot 5 or Hot 7 recording
- 2) Duke Ellington, "Far East Suite"
- 3) Charlie Parker, "Verve Recordings"
- 4) John Coltrane, "Impressions"
- 5) John Coltrane, "A Love Supreme"
- 6) Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue"
- 7) Miles Davis, "Miles Smiles" or "Nefertiti"
- 8) Webster - Blanton big band, "Cottontail"
- 9) Charles Mingus, "Mingus Ah-Um"
- 10) Thad Jones - Mel Lewis Big Band, any recording

The Churchill top 10 is a little different. In no particular order, here are my favorite jazz albums:

- 1) Art Pepper, "Saturday Night at the Village Vanguard"

Pepper is one of the best unsung West Coast alto saxophonists. His fiery, emotional style is prized by both serious jazz aficionados and novices alike.

- 2) Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue"

This album trailblazed the concept of modal improvisation, yet is easy to understand and appreciate by relative newcomers to jazz.

- 3) John Coltrane, "My Favorite Things"

Coltrane is a jazz legend both for his technical command of the tenor and soprano saxophones and unique harmonic inventiveness. "My Favorite Things" is my personal favorite among Coltrane's work because it uses the Julie Andrews song above as a vehicle for improvisation. This is an excellent Coltrane album to begin with.

- 4) Dave Brubeck/Paul Desmond Quartet, "Take Five"

This was the pioneer album of the "cool style," which is lighter and less emotionally passionate than Pepper or Coltrane. Novice listeners really seem to appreciate this album because it's easier to follow than some of Coltrane or Parker's work.

- 5) Charlie Parker, "Charlie Parker with Strings"

Parker is in fine form on this album, as the classical/jazz crossover format really helps his tone quality without abridging or inhibiting his melodic inventiveness one bit.

- 6) Lester Young, "Verve Recordings"

Young, a tenor saxophonist, is one of the jazz pioneers of the 1930s and 1940s. He has a lighter sound than Coltrane, with a more melodic style of improvisation.

- 7) Benny Goodman, "(Original) Carnegie Hall Concert," 1938 recording

Goodman's band energetically swings its way through this concert, proving that a form of jazz could indeed be popular music. For the novice, the best thing about this album is that most of the selections are short (three minutes or less), which helps digest and simplify the music.

- 8) Weather Report, "Heavy Weather"

Weather Report was one of the first bands to use a great deal of jazz-rock fusion, and this may be their finest album.

- 9) Miles Davis, "Sketches of Spain"

This is a third-stream crossover between jazz and classical music, which somehow perfectly illustrates the beauty of Spain through Davis' jazz improvisations.

- 10) Art Pepper, "Art Pepper Plus Eleven"

Here, Pepper was playing lead alto saxophone with a big band full of big-time players. Both the section work and the solo work are impressive and are worth many, many listenings.



JOHN COLTRANE'S "A Love Supreme" is considered by many critics and scholars alike to be one of the best jazz recordings of all time.

John Coltrane