

L.A.'S ONLY JAZZ PAPER

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JAZZ

SCENE

DOUG WEBB



photo by Peter Sherman

Mr. Lucky!

Doug Webb Mr. Lucky!



Doug and Richie Cole

L.A. Jazz: Where were you born? How old were you when you got attracted to music? Who encouraged you the most?

Doug: I was born April 25, 1960 in Chicago. My parents are both from Champaign, IL and my dad was getting his PHD in mathematics at the University of Chicago when I was born. We moved to Woodland Hills in 1962 and to Orange County in 1968....I guess I always liked music. My mother was a piano teacher and gave me lessons when I was about five. In fourth grade I started playing the clarinet but I never really applied myself until I switched to the saxophone when I was a sophomore in high school. In 8th grade I studied clarinet with Don Hawkins. I don't know that I learned that much from him mostly because I never practiced enough. He was however, instrumental in my decision to become a professional saxophonist. He must have been a pretty good teacher. Some of his other students were Eric Marienthal, Brandon Fields, Matt Otto, Alex Zapeda and Mark Isbell.

L.A. Jazz: Tell me about your formal training: What was most helpful, the daily lessons and practice or the interactions with other musicians?

Doug: I graduated early from high school and went to Golden West and Orange Coast Colleges for a year then attended Berklee College of Music in Boston for four years where I received a degree in jazz composition and arranging. My greatest inspiration was (and is) the music of John Coltrane. I first heard Coltrane when I started playing the tenor sax at age 15. Shortly after that I read the book *Chasing the Trane* which inspired me to practice pretty heavily (10+ hours a day) for a few years. At Berklee, all I did was jam all of the time. I think that both practicing and playing (interacting) with other musicians were equally

important, and to a lesser extent schooling.

L.A. Jazz: How old were you when you got your first paying gig? Was it encouraging or discouraging?

Doug: My first paying gig was Christmas time in 1974 when I was 14. I played a Christmas show for a church. I made 15 dollars a night, four nights a week for two weeks. I've always done almost every gig that I've gotten called for. I feel that there is something to learn from every gig that I do. Even from the worst possible gig imaginable you can learn humility.

L.A. Jazz: You've been a professional musician for a long time. What's the most difficult thing about being a musician? What's the most rewarding?

Doug: I really love being a musician. It is rewarding on many levels. Music can give people great joy. I feel very fortunate to have a job that makes people happy. What could be more satisfying than bringing joy and beauty to the world. I also appreciate the bond and friendship that I have with other jazz musicians. When you interact playing jazz with other musicians, there is an intimacy and connection that takes place that truly is unmatched with other art forms. To play jazz on the highest level with a small group you become part of something greater than yourself.

Of course I'm primarily known as a Jazz tenor player. I have worked with Freddie Hubbard and Stanley Clarke and Horace Silver. But I played the theme on *Law and Order* on the soprano sax and I play clarinet and bass clarinet on the TV show *Family Guy*. I play flutes, clarinets and saxophones of every size. I also play a little oboe (I played one cue for *Family Guy*) and English horn and bassoon (badly). I also collect and play unusual woodwinds and ethnic woodwinds from all over the world. Some of the more strange ones I play are the contra-bass sarrusophone, octavin, slide saxophone, stritch,



Larry Goldings, Bruce Ricker (academy award winning documentary film maker), Kyle Eastwood and Doug Webb

straight tenor sax, F mezzo soprano, saxello, sopranino and soprillo saxophones, recorders, penny whistles clarinets, baroque and renaissance instruments. I did all of the ethnic woodwinds in the movie *Gran Torino* and I enjoy working with film composers, finding new and unusual sounds for film scores. The tubax is a contra bass saxophone pitched one octave below a baritone sax. I most recently played it in the movie *The Smurfs*.

L.A. Jazz: In the recent past, record companies would take care of the "business part" of making recordings, take care of the distribution and promotion, etc. That's changed a lot in the past few years and more musicians have to do most of that work themselves. You mentioned that you have a new CD coming out soon, so how are you handling that? What did you have to do to get the CD done?

Doug: I am very fortunate to be signed to one of the few remaining great jazz labels, Posi-Tone Records, www.posi-tone.com. They have good distribution and have been very successful in getting my records reviews and air play. I am currently their only West Coast artist. They primarily record jazz musicians from New York. It has been wonderful having a record company take care of the "business part" of making records. Marc Free, the creative director and co-founder of Posi-Tone is extremely dedicated to making mainstream jazz records that will stand the test of time. My newest recording for Posi-Tone is

called *Swing Shift* and it features Stanley Clarke on bass, Gerry Gibbs on drums and a trio of piano players Larry Goldings, Mahesh Balasooriya and Joe Bagg. It is the last of three recordings recorded April 24 2009 which also produced the records *Midnight* and *Renovations* both of which I'm happy to say have done very well. All three records are recorded live in the studio with no over-dubs, edits, fade outs,

automation, and very few second takes. We also didn't listen back to anything on that day. I've grown up career wise in an era of the over-dubbed solo, and while if given the opportunity to fix or improve your solo most musicians will do just that and try and play a better solo. It is now my opinion that while this might produce a better solo for the individual, the music overall sounds worse. Jazz to me is about the way a soloist AND the rhythm section interact with one another. Can you even imagine Coltrane playing an over-dubbed solo with McCoy, Elvin and Garrison? Jazz is an imperfect art form, it's imperfections is what give it its humanity. Maybe that is why most of my favorite recordings are recorded before it was possible to over-dub a solo.

L.A. Jazz: There are a lot of young musicians who are very excited about jazz and they proceed as though this was a very good career choice. If you could start over again, would you still choose jazz?

Doug: I think they should be very happy about their career choice. I can't imagine doing anything else. Most musicians I know are very happy people. Music (especially jazz) isn't always the most lucrative of professions but can be among the most rewarding. Of course hind sight being 20-20, there are a few ill advised decisions I might do a little differently but I've been extremely lucky and blessed to be able to make a living and get paid for something that I would gladly do for free.

L.A. Jazz: I am a bit concerned about the future of jazz in L.A. We have lost some venues, clubs etc. Are you experiencing a slow down for musicians in general? What would help the jazz community the most right now?

Doug: Actually while a club closes there is always a new one opening. While I'm writing this Richie Cole just

called me to work with him at Typhoon on February 28th. I'm also playing with the great Bob Sheppard on Feb 5th from 11-3 at the Lighthouse. Feb 8th (Lighthouse) and 9th (Crown Plaza) with Al Williams Jazz Society and with Stanley Clark (Feb 23-25) and Johnny Mandel (Feb 10-11) at Catalina's. I've always worked a lot and almost every year of my career has been better than the last. Jazz seems to be more and more popular world wide and every year I get better gigs. Any one can check the LA Jazz Scene or my web site dougwebb.us to check out where I'm playing.

LA Jazz: What's the best advice anyone ever gave you and who was that person?

Doug: A long time ago when I first started to record for people I'd heard that studio musicians make a lot of money so I asked my friend Ernie Watts what he charged for a recording session. He said, "what ever is in their budget." I've sort of used that advice as a template for my career, doing all kinds of gigs and recordings for what ever people can afford. Sometimes I make a lot of money, sometimes not so much, but I always have a great time. Thank you Myrna for your time and continual support.

LA Jazz: Thank you Doug, for being so enthusiastic, hard-working and cheerful about your job. Maybe I hear too much of the negatives and not enough of the positives about our jazz scene here in L.A. I'd say that you are extremely lucky to have chosen so well.

OPINION

NARAS RIPS OFF LATIN JAZZ

**Elimination of Latin Jazz
Grammy & 30 Others
Marginalizes Minority
Contributions to American
Music
A report by Bobby Matos**

By now, you may be aware that there is a growing controversy about the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences' (aka NARAS) decision to downsize the Grammy Awards. 31 award categories have been eliminated. Most of them are reflections of minority contributions to the American scene. Latin Jazz, in addition to such categories as Cajun, Hawaiian and blues have been targeted.

Right now Latin Jazz musicians in New York have filed a law suit against NARAS and the California Attorney General is looking into NARAS alleged misconduct and violation of their non-profit charter's rules. It seems this ill founded decision was made by a secret committee, completely ignoring regulations of non-profit entities.

Without a presence in the Grammy Awards highly publicized telecast, Latin Jazz and the other categories are

marginalized. They become invisible (and inaudible). Countless well known artists, many former Grammy winners and other entertainment personalities have voiced protests to NARAS, including Carlos Santana, Herbie Hancock, Eddie Palmieri, Oscar Hernandez, John Santos, Bill Cosby, Bobby Sanabria, Kevin Eubanks and more.

Naras is recognized as the organization that awards excellence in the musical arts, not popularity. By rendering these genres invisible in the awards show, they are marginalizing them. The unstated theme of this move is that all of the eliminated genres are championed by the independent record companies. The major labels, multi-million dollar corporations, seem to only support the most popular genres of rock, hip hop and country music. By clearing the playing field of the competition, the majors are excluding some of the most vital music from the game. NARAS has been asked many times to reverse their decision. A petition available online at Grammywatch.org has garnered 5,000 signatures, but NARAS continues to ignore and denigrate the protesters. Like the move to represent some Latin music, including Latin Jazz to the "LATIN GRAMMYS" telecast, which is in Spanish. Again, Latin Jazz is being rendered invisible.

The Latin Grammys represent all of Latin America BUT Latin Jazz is true American music, born in New York City, with the contributions of musicians living and working in the U.S. during the decade of the 1940s, especially Mario Bauza, Dizzy Gillespie, Juan Tizol and others. Latin Jazz is a vital and influential genre of music, influencing other genres, as well as absorbing influences of many cultures. It is a truly valid American form of music.

All of the proposed sponsors of the Grammy telecast need to be informed that they are supporting an organization which has gone rogue.

In addition, organizations like AFTRA, which are sponsoring public events glorifying the Grammys, are likewise guilty. Under the current leadership NARAS has flagrantly disregarded its own bylaws and has turned a deaf ear to the protests.

We are asking everyone to withdraw support for the Grammy telecast and all other operations until this heinous decision is reversed. Please do not watch the telecast on February 12, 2012 and voice your discontent.

Bobby Matos is a proud Latin Jazz artist, bandleader and recording artist. Los Angeles, December 2011

MORE CDS

Herb Ellis

**Four Classic Albums
(Avid)**

This two-CD set lives up to its name. Four of guitarist Herb Ellis' finest Lps are reissued here in full: *Nothing But The Blues*, *Herb Ellis Meets Jimmy Giuffre*, *Ellis In Wonderland* and *Thank You, Charlie Christian*. Dating from 1955-60, the earlier albums were opportunities for Ellis to record away from his regular job with the Oscar Peterson Trio.

Nothing But The Blues, which was Ellis' personal favorite of all of the albums that he led, is the best known of these projects. The guitarist is matched in a pianoless quintet with trumpeter Roy Eldridge, tenor-saxophonist Stan Getz, bassist Ray Brown and drummer Stan Levey. Although many of the songs (all blues) are similar, the contrast between the explosive Eldridge and the cool Getz makes this a memorable date.

Herb Ellis Meets Jimmy Giuffre is a bit unusual for although Ellis is joined in a nonet by such notables as altoists Bud Shank and Art Pepper, Giuffre and Richie Kamuca on tenors and Jim Hall (on rhythm guitar), he is the primary soloist. Giuffre's arrangements fit the guitarist quite well, challenging him while still allowing him to swing comfortably.

Ellis In Wonderland, which also has Giuffre on tenor, is more of a blowing session. Altoist Charlie Mariano and trumpeter Harry "Sweets" Edison take turns with Ellis while Oscar Peterson himself keeps the eight tunes swinging hard.

The least known of these projects is *Thank You, Charlie Christian*. Performing in a quintet that includes pianist Frank Strazzeri and Harry Babasin on cello, rather than play swing tunes popularized by Christian, Ellis emphasizes his originals plus a version of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" inspired by Ray Charles. The spirit of Charlie Christian was always heard in Herb Ellis' playing anyway and this fairly obscure album holds its own with the other three.

Four Classic Albums, a generous twofer, is available from www.avidgroup.co.uk.

Scott Yanow

**Midiri Brothers Septet
City Lights
(Midiri Music)**

As heard in live performances (most recently at the now-deceased Orange County Classic Jazz Festival), the Midiri Brothers are often dazzling. Clarinetist Joe Midiri frequently plays six or seven hot choruses on barnburners such as "Air Mail Special," sounding like a mixture of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw at their most adventurous. His twin brother Paul Midiri hints at Lionel Hampton on the

vibes and has no difficulty playing very fast runs. The Midiris often stretch out, pushing swing to its breaking point and showing how exciting the music can really be.

City Lights is a bit calmer. This studio set is performed with their septet with guitarist Pat Mercuri, trumpeter Steve Schaffner, pianist Dean Schneider, bassist Ed Wise, and drummer Jim Lawlor. Several of the themes are from unusual sources including the beautiful "La Violetera" from Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*, the theme for "The Odd Couple," and Star Trek's "Where No Man Has Gone Before." While there are a few faster tracks including Duke Ellington's "Jubilee Stomp" and "Get Happy," the solos are not as lengthy or as full of climaxes as the Midiris sound in concert.

City Lights features the Midiri Brothers on a quieter and more mellow day than usual, introducing a couple of originals, bringing out the beauty of Django Reinhardt's "Douce Ambiance," and sounding laidback on "How High The Moon." This set of solid swing music is available from www.midiribros.com.

Scott Yanow

**Ali Ryerson
Con Brio!
(ACR Music)**

Ali Ryerson has long been one of jazz's top flute players. But because she tends to record on small labels and spends a lot of time working as an educator, she has not received quite the acclaim that she deserves.

ConBrio! deserves a lot of attention for it is Ali Ryerson's definitive set. She leads an all-star band consisting of vibraphonist Mike Mainieri (often the co-star), keyboardist Pete Levin, guitarist Mike DeMicco, bassist Mark Egan and drummer Danny Gottlieb. The sextet performs two songs apiece by Levin and DeMicco, one by Mainieri, and John Abercrombie's "Jazz Folk." Those six numbers challenge the players as does "Where Flamingos Fly" and Jimmy Giuffre's ballad "Shadows." Ryerson sounds quite inspired by the company she keeps and the other players react immediately to her inventive ideas, displaying a very attractive group spirit.

However the highpoints to *Con Brio* are a flute-vibes duet on "You Don't Know What Love Is" and a haunting version of Erik Satie's "1st Gymnopedie." On those two pieces, as on the other selections, Ali Ryerson is heard at the peak of her powers. This gem, available from www.aliryersson.com, is well worth searching for.

Scott Yanow