

Dan's Den

By Dan Morgenstern

Clearwater Jazz Party

Our friend and colleague, the noted photographer Mitchell Seidel, has his say and display in these pages on the Third Annual

Arbors Records Invitational Jazz Party, held in Clearwater, Florida from January 14 to 16, but your reporter would like to offer his two cents. (The nomenclature is new, but the "Invitational" is a direct successor to the March of Jazz series also sponsored by Arbors. So it's the brainchild of Mat and Rachel Domber, patron saints of Arbors, with emphasis on the international and pianistic.)

As always with the Dombers, there is a surfeit of music, presented this year by a cast of 42. Five pianists were theoretically assigned to the tavern at the host hotel, but most of them, besides the seven billed as "piano giants," were also given a chance at the main stage. Plus a surprise, a classically trained (University of Chicago) pianist, 23-year-old Stephanie Trick, a ragtime and stride specialist. Stephanie's rendition of James P. Johnson's "You've Got to Be Modernistic," arguably the most challenging of that grandmaster's pieces, was astonishing. (Don't know if Mitch is showing her pictures, but she is a cutie.)

Piano delights abounded. The dean and unofficial musical adviser, Dick Hyman, performed alone and in tandem, notably with his frequent partner, Derek Smith. Dick is always in fine fettle. But this observer was lucky to catch the veteran on the evening before the formal start, when early arrivals gather in the tavern where there's a pretty good upright. Dick warmed up with "St. Louis Blues" and then played something I'd never heard him do, "Tango Jealousy," a tune by the Danish composer Jacob Gade that was a big 1920s hit, jazzed by Harry James in the '40s. Thanks perhaps to my teenage years in Denmark, I happen to like "Jealousy." But I'd never heard it like this, and never will again, for this was not one of Dick's studied things but a free-form fantasy that I only wish someone had taped. (Maybe someone did?)

The sole organized band, which had four spots — each lasting 20 minutes, with very few longer or shorter exceptions — was Marty Grosz's Hot Winds, with Scott Robinson, cornet, clarinet (E-flat, metal), C-Melody and tenor saxophones, Dan Block, clarinet, alto and tenor saxes; Vince Giordano, bass sax, tuba and string bass (aluminum, of course); Arnie Kinsella, drums, and the maestro on acoustic guitar, vocals and commentary. They were consistently inventive and interesting, all that doubling creating a variety of textures and solo and duo outings, with non-hackneyed material. "From Monday On" was a gasser, with Scott not copying, but hinting at Bix, and, also in a Crosby vein, "Thanks," with perhaps Marty's best vocal, and a kick for your correspondent, who had the Bing 78 way back when, on a purple label European Columbia. On "Rose of Washington Square," one of those good old non-AABA tunes, Vince split a chorus with his three instruments, twice on each, certainly a first in jazz history!

Scott drew plenty from that little clarinet and often joined with Dan in interesting, interweaving reed conversations. And his cornet, often heard in ensemble lead role, while not huge in range, is remarkably musical and often Louis-tinged. I can't understand why Scott wasn't given the opportunity to appear at least once or twice in a less-structured role; he is surely one of the most creative of today's musicians. There were only two other cornetists/trumpeters, Duke Heitger and Warren

Vaché. Duke presided over the last set of the first day, with Dan Barrett and Block, pianist Paolo Alderighi, bassist Nicki Parrott, and Kinsella, a rare half-hour slot ending at near two in the morning, and one of the best multi-horn sets of the weekend. It started with "Tickle Toe," on which Block's tenor shone, then on to "Ida," with fine turns by the brass cats, a rousing "Sleep" (maybe a hint) a-la Benny

Carter's chart, and "Roses of Picardy" (nice Barrett) to finish it off in nostalgia.

Warren always seemed to be teamed with other brasses — trombones in addition to Dan's were the Allreds, father and son — or Aaron Weinstein's fiddle, and this great player did not, in my opinion, really get a fair chance to shine. Oh yes, he had his moments, but what I, and I suspect he, most enjoyed was his vocal duet with Nicki Parrott on the Armstrong-Holiday vehicle, "Sweet Hunk Of Trash."

Nicki also scored with her vocal on "Whatever Lola Wants," and her bass playing throughout, as always, was in the pocket. Ken Peplowski did an elegant tenor sax job on Ray Noble's "Love Locked Out" and shone on a set led by Daryl Sherman, who dedicated "Moonlight In Vermont" to the memory of Margaret

Whiting and recalled her recording with Ken (clarinet this time) of "Doin' the New Lowdown." On her other set, Daryl had both vibist-drummers, Chuck Redd and John Cocuzzi, the former soloing superbly on her lovely "Midnight Sun." Joining Daryl and Nicki in the vocal category was Rebecca Kilgore, whose "East of the Sun" went down ever so nice and easy, with some unison with Barrett a highlight. Bob Wilber, the other old master, was

heard in various formats, all marked with his arranging touches, such as three sopranos — the others were Antti Sarpilla and Pieter Meijers — on "Sentimental Journey," done as a sort of blues, or three clarinets (same guys) on "Runnin' Wild." I also enjoyed his "Bechet's Fantasy."

I could go on, but let me sign off with a few words about two guitarists: the indestructible Bucky Pizzarelli, just past his 85th, and Denmark's Jacob Fischer. They gave us several joint sets that were standouts, though I would have liked to hear the remarkable and wholly original Fischer on his own. "And one more," as Lionel Hampton used to say, the pianist Bernd Lhotsky, who can do some great, unfeigned Willie "The Lion" stuff, but also offered a sotto-voce "It Might As Well Be Spring" so special, everybody listened — you could, as Milt Hinton liked to say, have heard a mouse piss on cotton. With apologies to all I didn't mention, see you next year!

Jersey Jazz

Journal of the New Jersey Jazz Society

Dedicated to the performance,

promotion and preservation of jazz.

March 2011



Drummer Dan Coots is a picture of Zen as he keeps time with a minimalistic drum set of snare and brushes during one of the jam sessions in the Sheraton Sand Key bar during the 3rd Arbors Invitational Jazz Party in Clearwater Beach, Fla. Jan. 2011. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

3rd Annual Arbors Records Invitational Jazz Party



Bassist Bob Cranshaw performs at the Arbors Records jazz party in Clearwater Beach, Florida.

Arbors Party

Story and photos
by Mitchell Seidel

You're facing your third blizzard in as many weeks, the days seem to get dark by mid-afternoon and summer is just a rumor. How do you get warm? If you're like 300 or so classic jazz fans, you chase your winter blues with a trip to Florida and the Third Annual Arbors Invitational Jazz Party.

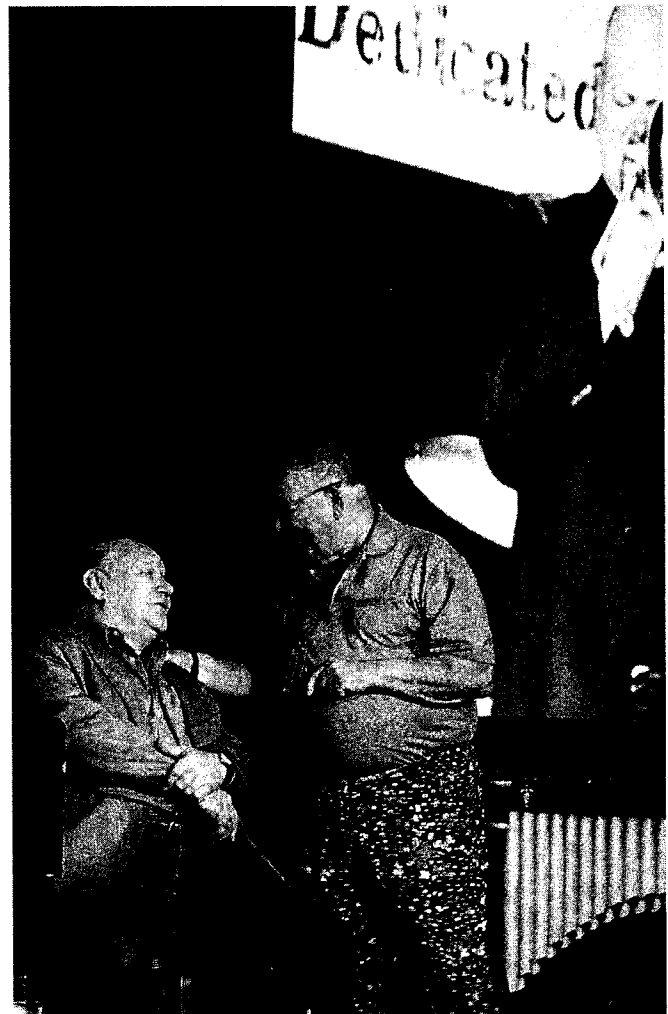
Mat and Rachel Domber's Arbors record label is one of the better-known purveyors of swing and mainstream jazz, with a roster that ranges from youngbloods to greybeards. The annual jazz party is an opportunity for the fans to see their favorite musicians up close and personal. For Arbors, it's an opportunity to showcase the artists they so lovingly record.

If you've ever been to a jazz party, the format of this one will be nothing new: like-minded players perform in short sets, engaging in a musical give-and-take not always available to them on regular gigs.

What makes the Invitational different is that odds are pretty good that the musicians on stage have made records together for Arbors or, in some cases, will soon be doing so (saxophonist Bob Wilber, for example, used both this and last year's events as live rehearsals for recording sessions in a nearby Bradenton studio immediately following the parties).

Despite yet another Northeast snowstorm that cancelled many Florida-bound flights with just a few days before kickoff, the Arbors event went off with very few visible glitches.

The entire MLK weekend event was meant to be a tribute to the late John Bunch, who had been scheduled to perform at the party before his death last year. Appropriately, Arbors highlighted the participation of "seven piano giants:" Dick Hyman, Bernd Lhotzky, Louis Mazetier, Rossano



Warren Vaché, left, and Arbors Records head man Matt Domber chat while John Allred performs on the big screen.



Daryl Sherman warms up during a sound check.



Known more for his Benny Goodman-style clarinet playing, Dave Bennett tries his hand at some boogie-woogie piano at the 2011 Arbors Records Invitational.

ARBORS PARTY

Sportiello, Derek Smith, Johnny Varro and Paolo Alderighi. That said, it was far more than a jazz piano round-robin, thanks mainly to an ample supply of drummers, bassists, vocalists and horn players who filled out the lineup.

Like the owner of a small restaurant with a reputation to uphold, Mat Domber prepared what could be called a selection of jazz tapas, small aural tasting sessions of 20-minute sets that encouraged wit and brevity in tunes and solos. The mood was casual, with an emphasis on fun. Serious fun.

Eighty-year-old Marty Grosz's Hot Winds is an example of that spirit. The avuncular guitarist led a swinging small group that featured saxophonists Dan Block and Scott Robinson, drummer Arnie Kinsella and bassist Vince Giordano. The repertoire was that of the 1930s, with Grosz's encyclopedic knowledge of the works of Fats Waller setting the stylistic mood. Grosz didn't let the set time limits dissuade him from inserting historic factoids, audience banter and just plain one-liners between tunes ("This next song was written by Harry Barris, not to be confused with Barry Harris...").

But music wasn't reserved solely for the hotel ballroom. Strolling about the Sheraton Sand Key lobby, you could hear sounds coming from other rooms. One afternoon, for example, the sounds of clarinets could be heard coming from a hotel dining room, where saxophonist Wilber could be heard rehearsing among empty tables before the establishment opened for dinner.

If all that weren't enough, the lobby bar, AKA the Mainstay Tavern, served as the venue for some spirited jamming between sets. Since there were no real time constraints in the more casual jam setting, musicians were considerably less constrained and able to stretch out more without worrying about keeping to a schedule. Plus, since they weren't required to cater to an audience expecting music solely from the era of Tin Pan Alley, it wasn't unusual to catch interplay that owed more to Lee Konitz and Lennie Tristano than Benny Goodman and Teddy Wilson. With plenty of time between formal sets — some musicians had several hours to kill — it was easy to catch the likes of Harry Allen or Warren Vaché relaxing with some free-spirited playing away from the ballroom.

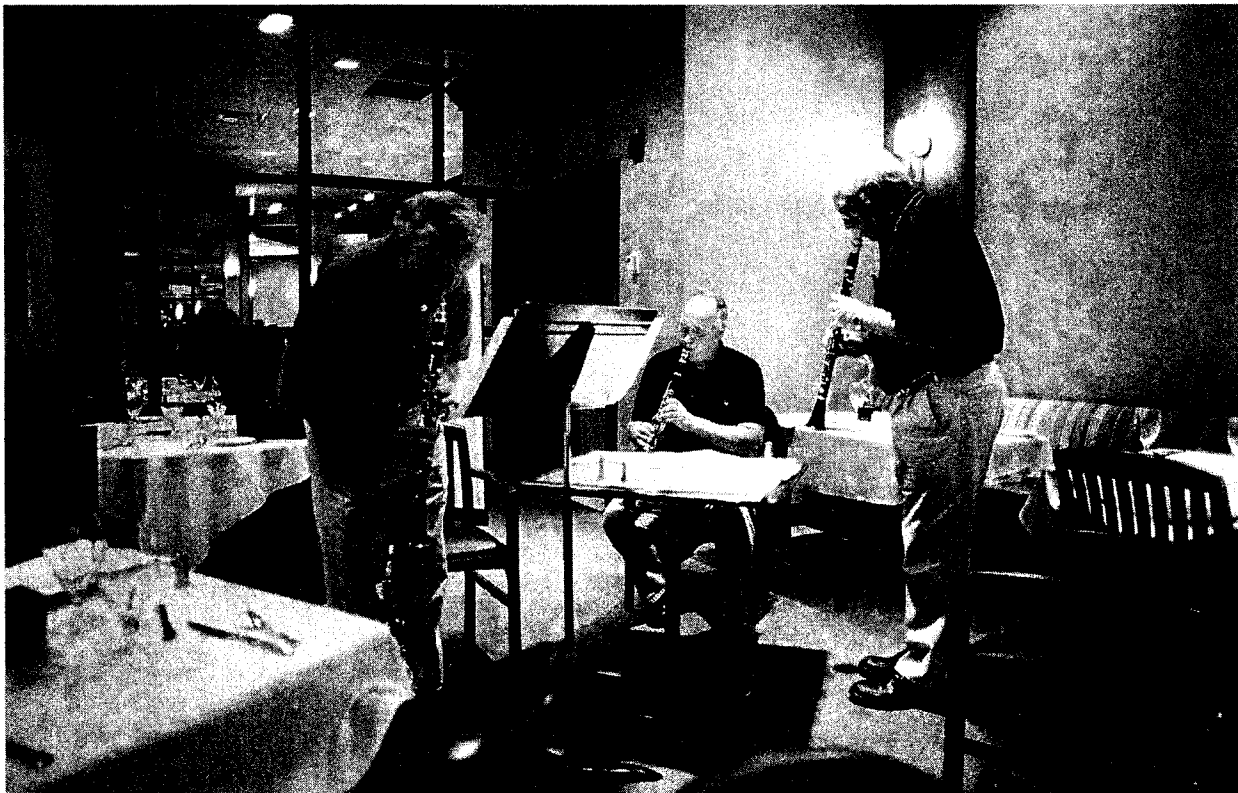
For those who missed this year's event, the Dombers already have plans firmly in place for next year, over the same weekend at the same hotel. Among those scheduled to play are Buddy DeFranco, Warren Vaché, Howard Alden, Butch Miles and Monty Alexander. For more information, call Arbors at 800-299-1930 or visit their website at www.arborsrecords.com.



Rebecca Kilgore takes in a sax solo by Harry Allen.



Guitarist Marty Grosz, left and His Hot Winds (Vince Giordano on bass, Scott Robinson and Dan Block, right) keeps things lively in the wee hours during a late-night set.



"In some secluded rendezvous..." Bob Wilber, left, Antti Sarpila, center, and Pieter Meijers make good use of the back of Rusty's Bistro at the Sheraton Sand Key for some between-meals rehearsing at the Third Annual Arbors Invitational Jazz Party.