

FROM THE CHAIR

Improvisation is a key element of the sound story created by jazz musicians. Little did we know a year ago at this time that we would all become masters of improvisation as we continue to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Wearing masks, keeping at least six feet apart, and constantly washing hands have required finding alternate ways to operate day to day. For PAJA, it has meant that we have had to cancel, first our spring concert with Greg Abate and the Six Jazz Masters, then a fall concert, and now another spring concert in 2021. We're still hoping to present a Six Jazz Masters concert later this year. It is still not clear when we can all feel comfortable attending a live gathering again, but have no fear—there will be a gig as soon as we can be assured there is little risk in sitting together with other jazz aficionados.

Thanks to Harvey Mittler, our concert master par excellence, and to Leslie Marks, our computer guru, we have been able to e-mail you information about concerts that can be heard via streaming, zooming and whatever. This all keeps our appetite whetted for that Happy Day when we can go to a LIVE concert once again.

And appreciation to Ed Fox, our fearless Buff editor, who has been able to keep finding content to make sure this way of keeping in touch with our members continues on schedule.

In continued appreciation of your support,
C. Stuart Brewster
Chair, Palo Alto Jazz Alliance

Akira Tana played at our last member party—September 15, 2019.



INTERNET GEMS

As many of us have time on our hands these pandemic days and may be looking for a few things to perk us up, here are five short videos I've listened to on line that are very much worth watching and enjoying. I'd be interested in any of your comments or other video suggestions./Ed Fox (chezfox@mindspring.com)

- **2019 Laura Sant Andreu Jazz Band.** This is an exquisite rendition of the ballad "Laura" by the amazing trumpeter Elsa Armengou of Barcelona, who was 14 years old (!) at the time. With big band and a solo by Scott Hamilton.
- **John Coltrane, Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson—Hackensack.** Wow, Coltrane and Getz did not play together very often, but this video from a performance in Germany in 1960 demonstrates their contrasting tenor styles, and has a neat solo by Oscar. Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb are on bass and drums.
- **Eva Cassidy—Over The Rainbow.** Never heard of Eva? You're not alone. This performance in January 1996 at Blues Alley in Washington, DC will bring tears to your eyes. Tragically, Eva died 10 months later of cancer at age 33. Her version of "Autumn Leaves" is also remarkable.
- **The Tierney Sutton Band—The Peacocks.** This haunting Jimmy Rowles tune is a favorite of many fans, and there are many lovely versions. It's not an easy song to sing, but Tierney Sutton is letter perfect and delivers a beautiful club performance with the fine accompaniment of pianist Christian Jacob.
- **Gene Krupa Compilation shows clips from various Krupa gigs.** Some great stuff, including a movie scene of the Goodman Orchestra playing "Sing Sing Sing" (with Harry James trumpet solo) and another movie with Barbara Stanwyck singing "Drum Boogie" with Gary Cooper in the nightclub audience. Remember nightclubs? And big bands in nightclubs?

NOODLING *Thoughts on jazz* By Michael Burman

Maybeck Recital Hall

We're all familiar with the beautiful physical setting of San Francisco. It's been over 50 years since I made my first trip to the Bay Area and learned this for myself as a practical matter, rather than its being just another fact in books. I'd already visited Vancouver, British Columbia, and in the interim I've added Sydney, Auckland, and Hong Kong, but San Francisco continues to impress.

On that first trip, I naturally did all the tourist things, such as confirming the setting via a visit to Twin Peaks, crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, eating in Chinatown, and generally sight-seeing. One of the sights I saw was the Palace of Fine Arts, and doubtless at the time I would have learned that it had been designed by Bernard Maybeck, although the name would have meant nothing to me, and so would have been rapidly forgotten.

And so it remained for over 20 years, until 1990 that is, when Concord Records released Joanne Brackeen's "Live at Maybeck Recital Hall, Volume 1". For those of us who like any particular style of music, or literature, the term "Volume 1" elicits an anticipation which is usually fulfilled. This is not always the case, however: sometimes the record company or book publisher doesn't follow through; not so here, though—Brackeen's was the first of what was to be a series of, ultimately, 42 solo piano releases on that label recorded at Maybeck. That said, it seems that any prescience on the part of Concord Records wasn't communicated to the writer of the liner notes for that first recording, Leonard Feather, who refers only to "Live at Maybeck Recital Hall", i.e., without any volume sequence number.

But Maybeck Recital Hall? What was that? For years now, a simple Web search (colloquially, "Googling it") would have provided the answer, and quickly, too; indeed, I've just tried it, and found that Google returned "about 40,400 results" (and apparently in 0.73 seconds). But back in 1990, there was no World Wide Web, at least not available to us hoi polloi: Tim Berners-Lee's credit for its invention dates to 1989, and the first browser to 1990, but the Web's literal world-wide availability didn't come until late 1991. Indeed, while I was based in Paris in the mid-1990s, we continued to get by just fine, *merci beaucoup*, using Minitel, which survived until 2012. (Now you can use Google to find out what Minitel was.) So in those days it took me a lot of work, spread over a number of years, to find out much of what can now be discovered in just seconds.

I learned that Bernard Maybeck had designed innumerable structures, many in his adopted home town of Berkeley, and that in 1914 he'd built a recital hall there. It had been commissioned by the Nixon family, arts patrons and fellow Berkeley residents, who wanted a studio



for Alma Kennedy, the live-in piano teacher of their daughter Milda. The hall itself and Ms Kennedy's adjacent home were completed in 1914. Less than a decade later, though, the hall, and the homes of Ms Kennedy and the Nixons themselves next door were destroyed in the 1923 Berkeley Hills fires; nonethe-

less, all were rebuilt rapidly.

Properly called The Nixon-Kennedy House, the name inevitably elicits memories of the 1960 presidential debates. Simplicity is the hallmark of the design of the recital hall itself. The ceiling is high, the windows tall and narrow; I challenge you to visit, or even to view a photograph, and not be reminded of a church, even if a secular one. It's small, seating 40 in comfort and perhaps 60 in a pinch, but is in no way oppressive. The Bay Area saxophonist and now ex-journalist, the award-winning Zan Stewart, wrote in the liner notes to a recording done there in January 1994, "[Bernard] Maybeck, who died in 1957 at the age of 95, was a man renowned for his handcrafted wooden homes in what became known as 'The Bay Area Style.' An architect whose principles included building with natural materials, Maybeck constructed the hall of redwood, which allows for an authentic, live sound."

The hall was used for recitals even before that fire almost 100 years ago. In 1987, following the death of then nonagenarian Milda Nixon in 1981 and a few years later that of her son, the property was bought by New York City-born jazz pianist Dick Whittington and his wife, Marilyn Ross. Jazz piano recitals began soon afterwards.

Joanne Brackeen's recording took place at a concert in June 1989. She and Whittington had known one another in the LA area while growing up (she was born in Ventura), and he'd booked her for that concert at Maybeck while she was to appear at Yoshi's with Sonny Fortune, et al. Whittington had picked her up at SFO on a Wednesday and driven her to Berkeley for her Maybeck concert that night. She was so delighted with the hall—and, I presume, its Yamaha S-400 B piano—that she told him it was there that she wanted to record the solo album for which she was contracted with Concord (two birds with one stone). Whittington assumed that she meant to do it the next time she was in town, but not so: she wanted to do it that very day! Contacted by telephone, Concord Records founder Carl Jefferson was willing, but only if the technical arrangements were handled by the two pianists themselves. After a lot of effort, Whittington was able to arrange for Bud Spangler's Syn-tropy Audio Images to do the recording. (I inferred from a conversation with Whittington that it was Bud himself who did the recording, but the liner notes identify Ron Davis.)

Over the period of some eight years during which Whittington and Ross owned Maybeck Recital Hall, some 500 concerts were held. Not all were recorded, though: Whittington spontaneously identified three pianists as having performed “probably three times” each during the two years preceding that seminal recording with Brackeen, and who were to be the performers of the immediately following three volumes: Walter Norris (Vol. 4, recorded April 1990), Dave McKenna (Vol. 2, November 1989), and Dick Hyman (Vol. 3, February 1990). He also identified Dave Frishberg (who, I understand, did not perform at Maybeck again later—or, if he did, then he was not recorded). Whittington also identified Tommy Flanagan as having appeared at Maybeck “several times”, but Flanagan’s wife, in her role as his manager, hadn’t want him recorded.

Two years after the Brackeen concert, Concord Records began a duo series in May 1992, releasing ten concerts over the next two-and-a-half years. Apart from the two-piano Dick Hyman/Ralph Sutton concert, (one of them playing the hall’s Yamaha C7, 25cm (10”) longer than the S-400 B), each featured a pianist either accompanying a horn (saxophone or clarinet), or accompanied by a guitar or bass.

The conventional wisdom is that all the recordings in both Concord series were recorded on a Sunday afternoon, and, at least as far as the recording dates show, this is about 70% correct. The Recital Hall being in a residential area, I understand that the regulations permitted concerts on Sunday afternoons only, but concerts were in fact held at other times and on other days of the week, too, especially once the recordings began: apparently more flexibility was required because of the artists’ schedules (the logic is clear, but the legality questionable).

To access a complete list of all the solo and duo recordings on Concord, Google “Maybeck Recital Hall” and click on the Wikipedia entry. It’s a remarkable listing of great pianists.

What’s the jazz legacy of Maybeck Recital Hall? The clear answer is the recordings made there for the Concord label between June 1989 (Brackeen) and August 1995 (James Williams): as mentioned, 52 recordings, 42 solo and 10 duo. (I know of only one recording done there during that pe-



riod and not on Concord: “An Evening with Calvin Keys”, a 2-CD set from February 1994 on Dawan Muhammad’s Life-Force label; it’s also the only one which has no piano.)

I’ve listened to every track on every one of those recordings bar a scant few. (Putting

my money where my mouth is, I own a copy of over half of the volumes in the piano series.) There’s not a bad recording among them; indeed how could there be with such a roster of piano stars? Perhaps my very favorite recordings are these three.

- Ellis Larkins (Vol. 22, March 1992). I’d known his work only via those excellent duet recordings he did with Ella Fitzgerald between 1950 and 1954 while he was her accompanist. They, and the Maybeck recording, make me wonder why he isn’t better known.
- Stanley Cowell (Vol. 5, June 1990). On the two-minute opener, Sigmund Romberg’s “Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise”, Cowell plays in all 12 keys.
- Dick Hyman (Vol. 3, February 1990). The subtitle, “Music of 1937”, gives you an idea of the repertoire. Musical chameleon Dick Hyman always delivers, but if he’s ever done anything better than “Bei Mir Bist Du Schön”, then I must have missed it.

Dick Whittington and Marilyn Ross sold the Maybeck property in 1995, thus bringing the Concord series to an end, but the hall’s use as a performance space continues (or, at least, “continued” until the COVID-19-dictated shutdown in early 2020) under the name “Maybeck Studio for Performing Arts”. Since then, there have been further jazz recordings, but only occasionally: nothing like the one-every-two-months of the early 1990s, The duet albums “Maybeck Duets” by Hal Galper and Jeff Johnson (March 1996) and “The Single Petal of a Rose: The Essence of Duke Ellington” by Marian McPartland with Bill Douglass (April 2000) come to mind.

But the departure of Whittington and Ross marked the end of an era. When they left, they took with them just one item, one of the Yamahas (the C-7, I think). As Whittington told me, “It was the only thing in the place that worked.”

Michael Burman hosts “Weekend Jazz Oasis” Saturday nights on KCSM Jazz 91.1.

Join PAJA

Mail your check to Palo Alto Jazz Alliance — P.O. Box 60397, Palo Alto, CA 94306

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

New subscriber Renewal This is a change of address

Annual dues, \$35 for individuals \$ _____

Annual dues, \$50 family (two persons) _____

Additional contribution to support jazz education _____

Total enclosed \$ _____



RECORD REVIEW—

EMMET COHEN / FUTURE STRIDE / MACK AVENUE 1181



Emmet Cohen, who turned 30 years old in May 2020, already is an accomplished and successful musician. At age 20, even before he graduated from the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, he recorded his first self-produced recording, and he has produced and released several more. A milestone of sorts, *Future Stride* is his first release on a major label. Another indication of his professional growth is that he is accompanied by his regular trio mates of five years, Russell Hall on bass and Kyle Poole on drums, both still in their late 20s. Joining them on three tracks are Melissa Aldana on tenor saxophone and Marquis Hill on trumpet, and Hill plays on a fourth cut as well. Five of the ten tracks are standards, and five are originals composed by Mr. Cohen, and one of those is co-written by Mr. Hall.

The music on the album exemplifies many facets of Emmet's piano mastery, which have been displayed in his extensive touring around the country and the globe, including annual appearances on the Jazz Cruise which began in his undergraduate years, plus many concerts in the San Francisco Bay Area at SFJAZZ and San Jose Jazz and smaller venues. Similar to the playlists of his live performances and now his popular live-streamed Monday afternoon shows from his apartment in Harlem, the breadth of Emmet's musical interests is represented on this album.

As a student, Emmet nurtured an appreciation for the music of the masters, including two-handed stride that began in the 20s and 30s, and he remains

an unabashed admirer of Willie "The Lion" Smith, James P. Johnson, and Fats Waller. Indeed, *Symphonic Raps*, the first track on *Future Stride*, and the title track (written by Cohen and Poole) are compositions in the stride style. The playing of the trio, even more than the joint composing credit, demonstrates the collaborative advantage of their playing together. It is evident throughout the album that they listen and support carefully, send and receive subtle cues, anticipate and alter the course of the music, and inspire improvisation.

As a working group, the trio's adhesion meshes well with the spirited contributions of their two sterling guests.

This music was recorded in the studio, but the varied playlist has the feel of a live date. Besides the two stride pieces mentioned above, the trio plays the lovely 1919 composition *Dardanella*, a lesser known Duke Ellington tune *Pitter Panther Patter*, and two lovely standards, *Second Time Around* by Jimmy Van Heusen & Sammy Cahn and *My Heart Stood Still* by Richard Rodgers & Lorenz Hart. The four selections with the guest artists, both in their early 30s, are compositions by Emmet. *Reflections at Dusk* is a lovely modern ballad, made even more attractive by the adept use of the Harmon mute by trumpeter Marquis Hill. *Toast for Lo*, set at a brisk clip, and *You Already Know*, set at an even faster tempo, reveal the impressive ensemble work of the quintet. The final track, *Little Angel*, adds Hill to the trio, and is another beautiful ballad written by Emmet. His mature ability to write for horns is inescapable.

"*Future Stride*" is a very good album by a cooking trio and their guests, both of whom are former Thelonious Monk competition winners. Fans who have heard Emmet Cohen and the trio play live in person or on his live-streamed concerts from his home may join me in thinking it's high time to record the group live. Now that Emmet has signed with a big-time label with the resources, I hope it will be soon. /*Harvey Mittlel*

GOODBYE TO TWO GREAT JAZZ FANS

Thomas Howard Meeks

March 23, 1940 - December 20, 2020



Tom Meeks was a lifelong jazz fan who enjoyed photographing his favorite performers at the Monterey Jazz Festival for 35 years. He also had a lifelong interest in international travel and, of course, photography.

During a jazz-oriented visit to Cuba sponsored by PAJA in 2000, Tom was inspired to bring a group of Cuban high school jazz students to the U.S. to perform at Monterey. Making the multitude of arrangements, including obtaining permissions from the U.S. and Cuban governments, proved to be nearly a full-time job during the following two years. Finally, in 2002 the students were able to spend a week in the Bay Area where they performed a concert for PAJA members and at local high schools.

Tom had a B.S. degree in civil engineering from Purdue University. Among other engineering jobs, he worked for almost two years in Sydney and Perth, Australia, finally returning to San Francisco where he was head of his own civil engineering practice for 24 years.

Tom leaves his wife of 56 years, Jean (nee Shoemaker), and his sister Rose Anne Negele, of Boston.

To honor Tom, a celebration of life will be held at a future date when those who loved him can safely gather. Donations in his memory may be made to americares.org. To plant memorial trees in memory, visit our Sympathy Store.

Ronald Jay Sax

January 2, 1933 - February 13, 2021



Ron Sax was an charter member of the Palo Alto Jazz Alliance, and served on the Board of Directors (as secretary) for many years. Born and raised in Benton Harbor, Michigan, he joined the Air Force in 1952; some of that service was in Japan, sparking a serious interest in that country. At Central Michigan University, he met a foreign exchange student from Japan—Katoko, who would become his wife for 50 years.

As a computer programmer, Ron's working life was spent at SLAC, Stanford University, and RLG (Research Libraries Group). He and his wife and family traveled to more than 40 countries and many places in the USA. He loved international travel, jazz, and long distance running (finishing three San Francisco Marathons).

A devoted and knowledgeable jazz fan throughout his life, Ron went on the same PAJA-sponsored trip to Cuba in 2000 that Tom Meeks was on.

One of Ron's proudest possession was a photo of him and some friends with Louis Armstrong who was kind enough to take a picture with them at a club in Chicago in 1952. When he was stationed in Tokyo, he spent his free time going to jazz clubs; he met Toshiko Akiyoshi and they remained friends, with Katoko and Ron often having dinner with her when she came through the Bay Area.

Ron is survived by his daughter Naomi (Neil Simmons) and son Kenji (Cindy Lamerson) and grandsons Nathan, Joel, Nick and Scott. Ron's kind and gentle ways will be missed by all who knew him.

Due to Covid-19, the family will hold a private memorial at home. Donations may be made to the Danville d'Elegance Foundation (for Parkinson's research), www.danville-delegance.org.