

Our One Hundred Eighty- Sixth Program 2007-2008

# Luminous Rays of Pianistic Elegance: Tim Ray

Sponsored by the Department of Music and the New Hampshire Library of Traditional Jazz

8 p.m. Monday, February 4, 2008 Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH

## **Tim Ray**

Solo piano events are special for a number of reasons, some more obvious than others. We have mentioned often on this page that the juggling of melody, harmony, and rhythm into a stylistically convincing texture with just our natural physical apparatus is a most challenging feat; the prestigious composer, scholar, author, and administrator Gunther Schuller expresses the problem this bluntly, "It is obvious that to encompass all these functions, three hands would be a lot better than two." This reality tends to draw the attention of the listener to the virtuosity of the player rather than the musical content of the result. Moreover, it is easy to overlook that such a format eliminates one of the central elements of the jazz experience—improvisatory interaction. Not only must the solo pianist physically perform a virtual circus act, he must aesthetically respond only to his own inner impulses rather than those of his colleagues. Even such virtuosi as Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson played more frequently in trios.

Then there is the instrument itself—or perhaps there isn't. Time was that any public venue hosting musical performances (even irregularly), be it a bar, church hall, or civic auditorium, maintained a serviceable piano; technological progress has allowed replacement of some by other pieces of furniture deemed more central to human needs, forcing pianists to become manipulators of electronic keyboards, a sometimes reasonable facsimile but one which for all the resources it provides, too often only approximates many of the nearmysterious properties of touch, nuance, balance, voicing, tone color, and resonance somehow locked into that cumbersome acoustic wooden and steel frame with all of its hammers, felts, metal strings, etc. Furthermore, pianos have individual personalities, and performers often seek out particular locations because of the specific instrument located therein. Thus, in our national history, pianos are not to be taken lightly; in fact there is one reputable if not completely verifiable source which maintains that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there were more pianos in the United States than bathtubs(!).

While the solo piano idiom may not be the first thing one thinks of in reference to the development of jazz expression—even though the so-called "houses of pleasure" in old New Orleans always had a resident pianist (called a "professor", yet!)—it is worth recalling that for the first concert in this series on October 15, 1979, its founder Dorothy Prescott selected one Dave McKenna playing alone, a feat he replicated on four subsequent occasions. Tonight marks the 24<sup>th</sup> such event, but only the 15<sup>th</sup> pianist, with previous exemplars ranging from the venerable Art Hodes (b. 1904) through such continuing legends as Marian McPartland and Dick Hyman to the younger adventurer Kenny Werner.



Tim Ray has appeared on this series with singer Donna Byrne and duo trombonists George Masso and Jeff Galindo. His jazz feeling, imagination, and absolute oneness with the expressive possibilities of the instrument told us that he was an appropriate candidate for the list suggested above. Tim hails from the southwest where he attended Arizona State University; he then settled in Boston and did graduate work under Fred Hersch at the New England Conservatory, later teaching at Berklee. Like many pianists he learned a great deal about the practical aspects of the art and business by working as an accompanist for such pop artists as Lyle Lovett, Jane Siberry, and Bonnie Raitt. However, his jazz proclivities were honed with the likes of Scott Hamilton, Bucky Pizzarelli, and Gary Burton, and he has recorded over 50 CDs, his first as a leader being with Rufus Reid and Lewis Nash. He has also worked with the magisterial Gunther Schuller.

Five years after our most recent solo recital (by Bill Charlap)—with of course some superb pianism in other formats in between!—we proudly welcome Tim Ray to that select roster inaugurated by Dave McKenna over 28 years ago, and a truly blessed few of us in the hall tonight heard that one as well!

#### THE SERIES

The UNH Traditional Jazz Series began in 1979 through the imaginative vision and generous commitment of the late Dorothy C. Prescott. It promotes the enjoyment and understanding of the art through concerts featuring musicians of regional, national, and international prominence. The program represents a unique endeavor to expand interest and honor outstanding talent and achievement.

Musicians wishing to do so are encouraged to offer their recordings for sale or mail order during intermission; a brief announcement may be made. The sponsors have no financial interest in such sales beyond offering a courtesy service to the artists and the public.

## Program Notes -- Paul Verrette

Production -- David Seiler

Program essays from the entire UNH Traditional Jazz Series now can be accessed on the internet. http://www.izaak.unh.edu/nhltj

#### 2007-2008 SCHEDULE

September 17: For Lionel, Red, and Bunny: The Ed Polcer Sextet

October 15: Decades of Songs in Her Heart: Sheila Jordan

November 19: Youthful Vibrations: Stefon Harris and Blackout

February 4: Luminous Rays of Pianistic Elegance: Tim Ray

March 10: Great Scott!: The Multidimensional Mr. Robinson and His Colleagues

April 14: Rediscovered Jewels: Onyx Club Sextet Led by Wayne Roberts

## OTHER SPECIAL JAZZ PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

October 26: Family Weekend Concert, UNH JAZZ BAND and COMBOS, Dave Seiler and Thomas

Palance, directing. Strafford Room, Memorial Union Building, UNH.

January 22: Harry Jones Memorial Concert with the Seacoast Big Band, Dave Seiler, directing with

special guest, composer/trombonist John Fedchock. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts

Center, UNH.

January 30: Faculty Jazz Sextet. Johnson Theatre, PCAC. Free and open to the public.

March 16: Gala Jazz Concert, DR. CLARK TERRY, trumpet and flugelhorn, and his "Real" Clark

Terry Quintet, with Stantawn Kendrick, saxophones, Don Friedman, piano, Marcus McLaurine, bass, and Sylvia Cuenca, drums. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center,

UNH.