

T R A D I T I O N A L  
*Jazz*  
S E R I E S

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

OUR SIXTY-SECOND PROGRAM

**DAVE  
McKENNA**  
AT THE  
**STEINWAY**

SPONSORED BY  
THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC  
AND THE NEW HAMPSHIRE  
LIBRARY OF TRADITIONAL JAZZ

8 PM MONDAY  
MARCH 6, 1989  
STRAFFORD ROOM  
MEMORIAL UNION  
DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## THE ARTIST

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### DAVE McKENNA

Apart from actually hearing Dave McKenna play, one of the remaining joys in life is to be able to write some program notes for him—not to bask in reflected glory, but to testify to sheer greatness in a realm to which relatively few are called, and even fewer chosen, that of solo pianist.

In a way, this is an ironic situation; early jazz was rife with solo players of the ragtime persuasion, and the 1920s and '30s provided legendary accounts of endless "cutting contests" by a roster of stride performers, many of whom remain sadly obscure. And of course contemporary society still offers opportunities for the jazz pianist to provide environmental enhancement to eaters and drinkers. However, a central threat and challenge to the capabilities of the solo pianist was created by the increase in the range and sophistication of the sonic materials of jazz as it traversed the journey from infancy to maturity over such a very few decades.

As the pianist attempted to absorb into his inventory of resources the panorama of provocative possibilities suggested by horn players, orchestrators, and singers (as well as other practitioners on his own instrument), the pure mechanical complexity of convincingly manipulating melodic, harmonic, rhythmical, textural, and articulative elements simultaneously with only two hands became almost overwhelming; things were further complicated by certain changes in stylistic taste in the late 1940s which tended to force pianists to perform with at least a bass player, thus reshaping the instinctive role of the left hand, and affecting one's perception of self-sufficiency as well. All of this confronted the pianist who wished to relate to the scope of his heritage with a challenge remarkably like the decathlon, and with just about the same number of successes.

Dave McKenna accomplishes this Olympian feat in a spectacularly unpretentious way (please pardon the oxymoron!). Despite his assimilation of the fullness of pianistic history, he described himself to the *Boston Globe* as a "tune player", and in a manner reminiscent (but not imitative) of Art Tatum he invests conventional sources with transcendent meaning; in fact, perhaps Dave's most unique attribute is his capacity to be his own swinging self no matter how much he makes us freshly aware of tradition.

A native of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, (b. 1930), Dave had some classical and jazz lessons as a youngster, but largely learned his craft and art through the attentive ear and on-the-job training. His travels and appearances with other giants in the field now emanate from Cape Cod, and he is frequently "artist in residence" at Boston's *Copley Plaza*. He has recorded copiously on a number of labels—most recently with guitarist Gray Sargent, so familiar to our audiences.

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Much has been written by perceptive critics praising the quality of Dave's artistry—Whitney Balliett of *The New Yorker* refers to him as “Super Chops”—but one of the most compelling descriptions is this by Don Asher: “ The left hand is a prodigious multi-faceted weapon, alternating a buoyant walloping stride with an uncanny guitar-strum effect produced by tightly-rolled five-note tenths and a piledriver walking bass that manages to simultaneously stalk the melody and anchor it like spikes driven into a rail bed...!” (This may sound like a hard act for the right hand to “follow”, but the listener will certainly enjoy the judgmental process!)

Dave McKenna was a personal favorite of the founder of the *New Hampshire Library of Traditional Jazz*, the late Dorothy Prescott, and was her choice to inaugurate this series in 1979. He has returned several times, and it is particularly fitting for him to give the first solo program on her own Steinway piano. Welcome back, Dave; it's been awhile!

***Tape recorders and cameras are not permitted due to contractual arrangements.  
Your cooperation is requested.***

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## **THE SERIES**

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The UNH Traditional Jazz Series began in 1979. 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

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## **THE SCHEDULE**

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<b>September 12</b>	<b>Bourbon Street Paraders</b>
<b>October 10</b>	<b>Benny Carter</b>
<b>November 21</b>	<b>Hot Antic Jazz Band</b>
<b>February 6</b>	<b>Harry Allen &amp; Randy Reinhart</b>
<b>March 6</b>	<b>Dave McKenna</b>
<b>April 10</b>	<b>Jimmy Mazzy &amp; Friends</b>