University of New Hampshire

Traditional Jazz Series

Celebrating our Twentieth Season!

Our One Hundred and Twenty Ninth Program
1998-1999

Donna Byrne & Company

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

8:00 p.m. Monday, October 19, 1998
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
As we reflect on the history which has led up to this twentieth year of our series, the passage of time allows us to reminisce about certain issues which were better treated with silence in earlier years. One of them was our late founder Dorothy Prescott’s seeming disdain for vocalists. This is a bit of a paradox because her record collection contained a fairly comprehensive and tasteful component of jazz-oriented singers, and there was even a picture of Frank Sinatra on one of her walls, but she appeared to be comfortable with them only at a safe distance. Whatever the reasons for this prevailing condition, Donna Byrne was an exception. Dot was impressed with her both as a musician and a person, and as her career developed we were honored to have her become in 1993 the first singer to front her own group on this series; sadly Dot had passed away five years previously.

This does encourage us to ponder a bit the role of singers in jazz. The singer has at least one problem from which instrumentalists are directly spared, i.e., the text and its organic relationship with the melody. The degree of freedom with which this can be convincingly treated is a major challenge and of course raises inevitable questions about the nature of jazz singing; (“Was Ella Fitzgerald a jazz singer when she sang the melody ‘straight’?” - “Was Frank Sinatra a jazz singer simply because he swung?”) The fact that such questions do not always admit of consensus indicates both the subtlety and complexity of the issues involved – and this is just scratching the surface!

Whatever anyone’s personal judgement as to the necessary elements – melodic imagination, rhythmical excitement, vocal inflections, improvisation, scatting, and spontaneous admixture of various of the above – it is clear that Donna has mastered all of them and then some, and over many years has not only studied and absorbed the richness of our vocal heritage, but also has grasped how the voice is more than the conveyer of words but is itself an instrument, with all of the mysteriously transcendent yet uniquely personal aesthetic qualities appertaining thereto. In the vernacular, she is a class act.

Donna is aided and abetted in this ardent activity by her musical director Marshall Wood (who otherwise serves as her husband), and who in Tim, Jim, and Mike has assembled a group of compeers who will remind us that the environs of Boston are truly second to none as a habitat for performers of the highest quality.
It goes without saying that a concert series of twenty years duration emphasizing the best of what has gone before will experience the passing of some of its participating artists. However, it is particularly sad when one who has been part of our “immediate family” since the very beginning is taken from us precipitously, at the peak of his powers. Tom Gallant was another class act and the lodestone of jazz in this area, and his contribution (including to this series) can never be replicated. It would not be realistic to dedicate a program to him, since his spirit will be present in everything we do. Eventually his memorabilia will be housed in our library; a scholarship has already been established in his name through the UNH Foundation.

Tom would want us to celebrate that which made his life meaningful, so let’s do it; he will be watching.
THE SERIES

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

1998-1999 SCHEDULE

September 14: New Black Eagle Jazz Band

October 19: Donna Byrne & Company

November 9: Trombonist Al Grey, Jane Jarvis, piano, & Clark Terry, trumpet

January 25: Clarinetist Bob Wilber

March 1: The New York Perspective: Dick Oatts, reeds, Mike Abene, piano

April 5: Dick Hyman, piano

May 3: The Original Salty Dogs

OTHER SPECIAL JAZZ PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

October 14: Rebecca Parris, John Bunch and Bucky Pizzarelli with the Seacoast Big Band. Harry Jones Memorial Education Fund Concert, Portsmouth Music Hall (603) 436-6017

January 19: James Williams and the Intensive Care Unit, Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH

March 21: Gala Jazz Concert: Dr. Clark Terry and guests with the UNH Jazz Band. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH