Our Twenty-fourth Season

Our One Hundred Fifty-fourth Program
2002-2003

THE RAREST OF PAIRS:

TOOTS THIELEMANS & KENNY WERNER

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

8 p.m. Monday, October 21, 2002
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
THE ARTISTS

Toots Thielemans & Kenny Werner

It is indeed a singular occurrence when a concert-goer knows to a certainty that he is about to hear the unequivocally acknowledged greatest performer on a given instrument. However, we can state with pride, and without fear of contradiction even in an election year, that such is the case this evening. At eighty, Jean “Toots” Thielemans remains the undefeated champion of the harmonica world; so distinguished a referee as Quincy Jones has described him as “one of the greatest musicians of our time”.

His instrument is usually classified in the “miscellaneous” category, (along with the violin and the banjo; worthy companions!), a somewhat misleading characterization since the harmonica was (and still is) central to the blues and folk groups that provided many of the raw materials for jazz as it wended its way from the “vernacular to the cultivated”, as the scholars say. For whatever reasons the classical world as well as the American Federation of Musicians were reluctant to take the instrument seriously even though such esteemed composers as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Darius Milhaud wrote concerti for the virtuoso Larry Adler. It likewise received sophisticated attention in the popular realm, Stevie Wonder for example, --and how many of us remember the Harmonicats, or better yet, Borrah Minevitch and his Harmonica Rascals!? But compared with all of this Toots is a uniquely transcendent being.

A native Belgian, he first played accordion, then was drawn to the harmonica after seeing the aforementioned Adler in a movie. He was also encouraged to learn the guitar—a “real instrument”—and in France during World War II he came under the spell of Django Reinhardt. He visited America in 1948, sitting in with trumpeter Howard McGhee and with pianist Lennie Tristano. Soon he toured Europe with Benny Goodman and jammed with Charlie Parker in Sweden, and from 1951 to 1959 was a member of George Shearing’s highly successful group. (The then youthful writer of these notes recalls being stunned and overwhelmed at that time by a recording of Shearing’s guitarist actually playing the harmonica!)

Toots has appeared in countless venues over the ensuing decades, always expanding the potential of his instrument, from films (most notably Midnight Cowboy), work with artists ranging from Oscar Peterson and Bill Evans through Ella Fitzgerald to Jaco Pastorius, and projects on both French and Brazilian music. And the younger among us may be surprised to discover that the Sesame Street theme is his, both as performer and composer.

But above all, Toots always communicates. As he says, “If I have one motto, it is that I am between a smile and a tear.”
When Kenny Werner was here in 1999, we introduced his artistic persona with the word “prodigious”; the passage of time has only increased the scope of that adjective. His musical curiosity is matched only by his energy, and both are at the service of his unselfish and optimistic faith in the imaginative potential of every precious member of our species. In this regard he tends to consider his book *Effortless Mastery* to be more important than his playing, (though some of us unaccountably lesser mortals are content to settle for the latter!) His interests touch on everything from the early pianists and composers who influenced him (Fats Waller, Bix Beiderbecke, et al.), to arrangements and compositions for all kinds of ensembles, to musical direction for singer Betty Buckley, to spectacularly improvised trio formats. His very association with Toots is a prime example of his musical character.

We thank Toots and Kenny for being here, and the mysterious forces beyond ourselves which have made it possible, at a time when our own smiles and tears are in need of such faith and optimism.

*Tape recorders and cameras are not permitted due to contractual arrangements.*

*Please turn off beepers and watch alarms. Your cooperation is requested.*
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

2002-2003 SCHEDULE

September 23: The Quintessence: Donna, Bucky, & Scott

October 21: The Rarest of Pairs: Toots Thielemans & Kenny Werner

November 25: Family Values: The Brothers Heath

February 3: Remembering Vic: Phil Wilson & Company

March 3: Pellucid Piano: Bill Charlap

April 21: Forever Fresh: The Back Bay Ramblers

OTHER SPECIAL JAZZ PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

October 19: Family Weekend Concert, UNH JAZZ BAND and COMBOS, Dave Seiler, directing; UNH JAZZ SINGERS, William Kempster, directing. Granite State Room, Memorial Union Building, UNH.

January 21: Harry Jones Memorial Concert: Seacoast Big Band featuring composer/saxophonist BOB MINTZER; Dave Seiler, directing. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

February 28: Dave Seiler Quintet: David Seiler, clarinet; David Newsam, guitar; John Hunter, bass; Ed Saindon, vibes; Les Harris Jr., drums. "A Tribute to Benny Goodman, Charlie Christian and Others". Johnson Theatre, PCAC.

March 24: Gala Jazz Concert, DR. CLARK TERRY, trumpet and flugelhorn with a distinguished guest and the UNH JAZZ BAND, Dave Seiler, directing. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

For tickets call (603)862-2290