The Hottest of the Cool:

Lee Konitz

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

8 p.m. Monday, November 24, 2003
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
Lee Konitz

One of the more fascinating attributes of us humans is our capacity to respond differently to the same stimulus; for example, every member of a group of listeners may react with similar positive (or negative!) intensity to a musical performance, but each individual may really have been focusing on a separate aspect of the event. This phenomenon can carry over to performers themselves, who despite their compatibility in a given idiom, may find that the same experiences inspire them into highly varied directions (if anywhere else at all!). Lee Konitz, one of so many superb musicians seasoned in the big bands, exemplifies how the traits of restless imagination and intellectual curiosity—not to mention uncompromising integrity—can generate unique accomplishments of a very different sort, but always imbued with those special expressive qualities so endemic to the central jazz tradition.

Born in Chicago in 1927 (while Louis Armstrong's Hot Five recordings were in progress!), Lee’s first influences were Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, and most prominently, Lester Young, all of whom were big band soloists. After some time with Jerry Wald (a good band neglected by history) he first emerged as a soloist with Claude Thornhill in the late ’40s. The Thornhill orchestra utilized an unusual palette of instrumental colors, including French horns and unorthodox woodwind mixtures, achieving a blend for which the term “cool” still seems appropriate, especially since several Thornhill alumni, among them Lee, Gerry Mulligan, and arranger Gil Evans, were involved in the famous Miles Davis Birth of the Cool recordings. Lee later worked with somewhat similar ensembles led by Mulligan and himself, as well as with the spectacularly non-cool aggregation of Stan Kenton’s in the early ’50s. During much of this period he was studying (and sometimes performing) with the influential pianist/teacher/thinker Lennie Tristano, whose profound conceptual and technical insights touched such disparate types as Bob Wilber and John LaPorta.

Cerebralism aside, Tristano really was an exponent of both melodic expansion and unselfish interrelationship on an intimate scale; resultantly the kind of attention a performer must give to his partners in a given improvisatory context restores the sort of collective linear dialectic which tended to disappear in the big bands where one was often limited to one’s prescribed role in a section. Thusly, Lee’s exploratory proclivities have led him to a variety of realizations of this process, especially in that most exposed of idioms, a series of duets with a fascinating range of stylists and instruments such as violinist Ray Nance, trombonist Marshall Brown, drummer Elvin Jones, pianist Martial Solal, and guitarist Attila Zoller. And tonight’s configuration is likewise unusual.

As we welcome Lee and his chosen colleagues for the first time, best we give him the last few words.

From an interview with Whitney Balliett circa 1980; “I think of improvisation coming in ten levels, each one more intense than the one before...Sometimes, though, you never get past three or four or five, but that’s OK, because no one level is more important than any other.” And from an interview with Bob Blumenthal in 2000; “No, I’m not even close to retiring. When I see Clark Terry out there in a wheelchair, or practicing intensively on a plane or when I heard the late Benny Waters at Birdland, getting the biggest sound out of the alto at age 95, and swinging, those are great inspirations.” (May we respond, “Amen”?)
Lee Konitz
alto saxophone
with
Dennis Irwin, bass
&
Matt Wilson, drums

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

2003-2004 SCHEDULE

September 22: Continuing to Soar: The New Black Eagle Jazz Band

October 20: The Latin Tinge: Bebop Samba

November 24: The Hottest of the Cool: Lee Konitz

February 2: Shades of Bix: The Wolverine Jazz Band

March 1: First Annual Tommy Gallant Scholarship Concert: The Press Room Connection

April 5: Double-Barreled Piano: Marian McPartland and Benny Green

OTHER SPECIAL JAZZ PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

October 4: 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 20: Harry Jones Memorial Concert: Seacoast Big Band featuring composer ANITA BROWN, UNH ’84; Dave Seiler, directing. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

March 16: Gala Jazz Concert, DR. CLARK TERRY, trumpet and flugelhorn with BENNY GREEN, piano, JOHN CLAYTON, bass, and JEFF HAMILTON, drums and the UNH JAZZ BAND, Dave Seiler, directing, PLUS a treasure trove of trumpeters in tribute to their mentor. Trumpets are: Stjepko Gut, Dave Ballou, Tony Lujan, and Trent Austin. Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, UNH.

For tickets call (603)862-2290