Our Twenty-fifth Season

Our One Hundred Sixty-Second Program
2003-2004

Shades of Bix:
The Wolverine Jazz Band

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

8 p.m. Monday, February 2, 2004
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
TSE ARTISTS

The Wolverine Jazz Band

The title page for this concert, as the jazzologically learned may have surmised, is a bit fanciful, stemming not from what the performers might actually play but rather from how they describe themselves. The Wolverine designation does not herald a University of Michigan athletic team but to the contrary appropriates the somewhat curiously chosen name of a Chicago-based band of young jazz musicians with whom the legendary Leon Bismark Beiderbecke of Davenport, Iowa made his first recordings 80 years ago this month in Richmond, Indiana. Two weeks from tomorrow we will celebrate Bix’s 101st birthday, lamenting that he barely survived his 28th.

Bix was of that first generation of northern white musicians who were influenced by the New Orleans idiom as mediated by such groups as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the more formidable New Orleans Rhythm Kings. His status as a legend comes from two sources: his musical style, which has since inspired numerous trumpet/cornet players of lyric bent, and his lifestyle, which whatever its mysterious origins, destroyed him. It is one of the great paradoxes of our cultural history that a life so suffused with instability and internal torment could generate such beauty, so pure and controlled yet joyous, with an excitement seemingly free of turbulence.

Dating from 1923, the original Wolverines played mainly the college and ballroom dance circuit in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Despite several recording sessions in 1924, (including a piece by one Hoagy Carmichael; young people can look him up—maybe even on the Internet!), the group did not last long as a unit, and other than Bix, none of its members are much remembered today. But the name itself evokes a period and a function, as well as an approach to the art. Although collective improvisation was still the operational norm, it was soon to be threatened by the emergence of dominant solo voices—among them Louis Armstrong and Bix himself; moreover, ensembles requiring written arrangements were finding ways to utilize jazz gestures and articulations (as well as soloists; Bix soon moved on to the orchestras of Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman). In fact, one could easily conclude that during Bix’s brief six year recording career the music was actually undergoing tectonic shifts, perhaps not fully perceived by those responsible.

Changes in the jazz landscape often have generated controversy, but, as elsewhere, the passage of time has served to enhance perspective on both the creative process and the myth of progress. Modernists are ever more actively conscious of their roots and heritage, and those others who choose to work within earlier parameters find no constraints, nostalgic or otherwise, on their imaginations. (We trust that this concert series has been illuminating of these realities!) Thus our reborn Wolverines are honoring not only a name but a style which crystallized in the Midwest in the mid-20s and has never lost its saliency no matter what other temptations may have been seductive from time to time.

Tonight’s performers, all of whom arrived on the planet long after Bix sadly had departed, certainly have a totality of experience and expertise which far transcends that of their namesake aggregation. A few descriptive items: John Clark, author of a Ph.D. dissertation at Brandeis on Fletcher Henderson, played here with the Back Bay Ramblers last April, as did ex-Clevelander Ross Petot; Jeff Hughes, a marine biologist (and survivor of a dreadful fire, sometimes an occupational hazard for working musicians) will be remembered from Ray Smith’s Paramount Jazz Band; Jimmy Mazzy, an occasional visitor to Lake Wobegon and other rarified realms, is a virtual family member, his appearances here starting in 1980; Dave Whitney’s presence goes back even further, to our third concert. And it is always a pleasure to welcome such similarly committed artists as Tom
Boates, Rick MacWilliams, and Dave Didriksen into our fold for the first time.

Finally, the special horn duo of Jeff and Dave is perhaps the frosting on the historical cake; on one hand it will remind us of the famous and somewhat unusual front line pairing of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong in the former’s Creole Jazz Band, circa 1923, but also, the differences between Dave’s exuberant Louis-based approach and Jeff’s reflective Bix-inspired style encapsulates one of the basic and enduring aesthetic contrasts in all of jazz. How about that?!

**NOTE:** John Clark will speak at the Dover Public Library on Feb. 17 at 7:30.

**TOPIC:** George Avakian and the Reunion of Early Jazz Musicians for Decca Recordings in 1939-40.

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