Our Twenty-ninth Season

Our One Hundred Eighty-Fifth Program
2007-2008

Stefon Harris
&
Blackout

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

8 p.m. Monday, November 19, 2007
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center, Durham, NH
**THE ARTISTS**

**Stefon Harris and Blackout**

Part of the jazz tradition has always been a restless creativity in enhancing the freshness and scope of the expressive process while maintaining the identifiability of the underlying language. After so many decades we might take certain earlier stylistic norms for granted without realizing that originally they might not have been deemed compatible with one another (for example, the difference between the improvised New Orleans front line and the specifically structured big band). In this writer’s high school days just prior to mid-20th century I was acquainted with a devotee then only in his twenties who asserted with unequivocal conviction that “Jazz is folk music” — (case closed!). I also remember reading at the time words to the effect that “when the music was written down it was no longer jazz” — (so much for the big band era!). And of course in the same period there was a polarization in the jazz press which makes today’s political divisions seem pallid; one might be both amused and appalled at British critic Philip Larkin’s comment, “I used to think that anyone hearing a Charlie Parker record would guess he was a drug addict, but no one hearing Bix Beiderbecke would know he was an alcoholic, and that this summed up the distinction between the kinds of music.”

On the other hand, in his seminal book *Stomping the Blues* the venerable Albert Murray writes of jazz artists engaging in “extension, elaboration, and refinement” as they work and rework the materials of their art, applying the fruits of reflection, imagination, and experience. Murray, a profound traditionalist and mentor to Wynton Marsalis, goes on to hail the desired results as necessarily possessing “a range comprehensive enough to reflect the subtleties and complexities of contemporary experience.”

Tonight we will hear some colors and textures that may be new to our ears in a jazz context, but perhaps few of us remember when the guitar was first electrified, the acoustic bass amplified, the xylophone replaced by the vibraphone, — or that Artie Shaw used a harpsichord! We also will hear some original approaches to jazz composition where the regularity of our expectations will be refreshingly interrupted as the forms and rhythms take unusual directions with an effect doubtless comparable to what Duke Ellington often presented his surprised listeners. But most importantly we will hear exciting and authoritative playing both individually and collectively which communicates those enduring values of personal exploration and statement which have been the hallmarks of jazz expression at least since Buddy Bolden.

At just over age 30 Stefon Harris has received a startling amount of recognition for his individual and ensemble accomplishments. A native of Albany, NY, he first attended Eastman, and subsequently earned two degrees at the Manhattan School of Music, dealing with both jazz and classical performance as well as composition. Three of his CDs already have received Grammy nominations, and beyond his serious acknowledgement by a wide variety of venues and publications he has received awards, commissions, and/or artist in residence status at New York’s Lincoln Center, Boston’s esteemed Gardner Museum, San Francisco Performance, and Michigan State University. And he has toured Europe, South Africa, and Brazil, touching such bases as the Montreal, North Sea, Istanbul, and Umbria Festivals, and the Sydney, Australia Opera House.

Despite their youth, Stefon and his colleagues have worked together over several years and possess that ensemble cohesion which sets a standard for artistic quality. This is music of power and technical excellence, but also of thoughtfulness, subtlety, and total honesty. It is a product of open minds and ears, joyful yet perspicacious, and we have a feeling it is not only stimulating to hear, but also to see! Let’s settle in!
Stefon Harris
vibes & marimba

Casey Benjamin
saxophone

Marc Cary
keyboards

Derrick Hodge
bass

Terreon Gully
drums

Tape recorders and cameras are not permitted due to contractual arrangements. Please turn off beepers and watch alarms. Your cooperation is requested.
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