
Afro-Asian Tour Planned

by Margo Swensson

For many jazz lovers in Africa and Asia, it's a dream come true. In June, more than a dozen jazz greats will combine their talents during a one-month tour of major cities on those continents. So far, confirmed performers include violinist Andrea Reynaud, saxophonist Elroy Harte, drummers Pete Patterson and Benny DiGiovanni, trumpeter Tony Cansero, trombonist Will Skinner, guitarists Rashid El-Hafiz and P. K. VanRijn, bassist Hal Wiggins, clarinetist Jean-Pierre Donnier, and vocalists Gheri Rush, Loretta Gazzo, ChoCho Morales, and "King" Richard Johnson.

This tour marks the only time that international jazz artists from so many venues have joined together to perform in both Africa and Asia on one tour. Scheduled cities include Abidjan, Dakar, Lagos, Casablanca, Cairo, Nairobi, Bombay, Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, and Hong Kong.

The program calls for each artist or group to play solo and for all the musicians to collaborate on at least one song. No information has been released about which song that will be, but you can be sure it will be a knockout number. Many of the performances will be videotaped for a cable special to be broadcast sometime in the late summer, and an album of the tour's highlights will be released in the fall. Proceeds from the album will be donated to the Refugee Children's Relief Fund.

Tickets will be available starting May 3rd. For information about performance times and locations, and to order tickets, call 1 (800) FOR-JAZZ.

Speaking on behalf of the concert's organizers, Martha Benson told us, "We expect this tour to be a great success. If things go as well as we anticipate, we may repeat the tour at least every other year. We are also considering arranging an additional tour through Eastern Europe, now that travel in those countries has opened up.

Interview

by Gene Sedita

Rudy Wester

Perhaps no other trumpet player today displays such an eclectic style not only in his original compositions but in the way he plays the work of others. His smooth, silky playing is always immediately recognizable, but reaches new peaks in his latest production, *Sunflower*. Throughout one song, called *Corn Muffins*, the melody melts in your ears like butter on one of those hot-from-the-oven delights. *JazzMatazz* had the pleasure of visiting with Rudy recently to hear firsthand about his background and plans.

GS: Where did you grow up, and how did you first become interested in music?

RW: I was born in Kentucky but I grew up in Queens, New York, in a large family that was always either listening to music or singing. We didn't have a lot of money, so I'd buy albums second hand or borrow them from the library. As soon as I was old enough, I would take the subway into Greenwich Village to listen to the great jazz musicians that played at the clubs there. This was in the late sixties. Interest in jazz was waning, but there were still a few of the original clubs open back then.

GS: When did you learn to play, and why trumpet?

RW: My mom saw how interested I was in the trumpet, so she started me on lessons when I was 13. I always liked the clarity of the trumpet—its simplicity. You can make it sound hot or cool.

GS: Some of the songs on

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your latest album reveal ragtime roots that were not present in your earlier work.

RW: Ragtime is real American classical music. Scott Joplin became popular when *The Sting* came out several years ago, but I've spent some time exploring the work of other lesser-known ragtime composers. Ragtime was a very important component in later forms of mainstream popular music as well as jazz and swing. The bounce and drive can be contagious; the intricacies of melodic variations are quite impressive when you follow them closely.

GS: What new directions do you see your work taking; what's influencing you now?

RW: A lot of different kinds of folk music—old traditional stuff from a lot of countries. And medieval music, which was the basis for a lot of the folk songs, which in turn were often influenced by Arabic and North African music. All of those

connections fascinate me, and I love to make similar connections when I compose. I'm also going to do some vocals on a future album, but that will be a while.

GS: You also sing. What got you interested in that?

RW: I love to sing. I started taking singing lessons a few years ago, just for fun, but I had it in the back of my head that I might want to combine singing with playing at some point. That point has come.

GS: How do you get ideas for songs? What inspires you to compose?

RW: Many different things. Sometimes I'll wake up with a tune going through my head. And, of course, travel in other countries, their sounds and music, is always inspiring.

GS: Thanks for your time, Rudy.

RW: It's been a pleasure.

Reviews

by Indra Banerjee

AudreyLee Knox

Fit to Be Cried

Bluebeat, D45-290 (46:58)

Take a deep breath before you plunge in—these blues are deep. In this, her second album, the lady seems to be hitting her stride. Her voice is strong and steady, but mellow, and she engineers an unusual expressiveness in her phrasing, even in the relatively upbeat numbers that temporarily liven up the low-down pace.

Her backup crew (Teddy Long, John Tom Powell, "Booster" Simms), all impeccable musicians in their own right, manage to shine gently in the background without overpowering AudreyLee's delicious laments.

In Shady Blues, she wraps her voice around the melody; it sounds as if there are satin ribbons flowing from her throat. The incredibly rich bass work by Booster adds to the effect. The fifth cut, *Over My Dead Body*, is suffused with humorous, almost celebratory, gospel overtones that never pull the tune away from its blues base.

AudreyLee's rendition of the old classic, *Riverbank Blues*, is so fresh and personal you'll swear you never heard the song before. When she sings *Mama Needs Some Barbecue*, she generates more bone-grinding grit than a Mississippi hog farm.

Michael Abel & Company

Camping in Italy

Modern, VW 41231 (53:10)

Fans will delight in this amusing new contribution from a group that's garnered international acclaim for their impassioned ingenuity as well as their first-rate execution. This collection of traditional Italian songs has been given a jazz twist that makes you stand up

and take notice. Each tune has been solidly restructured with jazz chords, and the timing has been cleverly revamped, to generate an urgent but harmonious pace. Although the tunes do have a campy, quirky quality, they never descend into forced creativity.

David Makhmaltchi

Chick Peas

Soulsound, CNC 1965 (39:04)

This is the fourth album from this New York-based trio, and, like their third album, it is good but not consistent. David, on drums, is again supported by Stavros Athanasiades on keyboard and Jeff Ahlzadeh on bass.

Their approach is, for the most part, solid and on target. They are most successful with the more lyrical songs such as Give Me Your Love and Khami, where they seem to ascend directly into each song's soul, realizing an intense but delicate sensuality. On the other hand, Mustang Reverie loses the coherence needed to carry the listener through the complex changes in both melody and tempo that make the song intriguing. However, on Chick Peas, the album's title track, the playing achieves a bright balance that makes the piece really jump.

One wonders why this group of extremely talented musicians has not been able to produce consistently well. Their first two albums were unusually good. In the meantime, some of us can enjoy this trio's tastiest morsels if we can tolerate a few disappointing bites.

Other albums produced by this group have similar disappointments. Let's hope that their next work is more consistent. They have tremendous potential and we wish them well.

Paul Vergara

Melange

Vivid, MRG 23086 (67:55)

Paul's engaging style truly is a melange. He was born of Filipino and Greek parents, and his music is a unique blend. It combines exotic bouzouki with passionate, classical Spanish, and occasional colorful threads of Chinese and Indonesian folk music are woven in to create an even more interesting tapestry. All of the songs are original compositions.

The first song, Fishboats at Dawn, captures the feeling of village fishermen venturing out at sunrise to fill their nets with finny creatures. On the second side, Bamboo is playfully syncopated, while Tide Pool is languorous, almost somnolent. All in all, a very nice selection of songs.

Pass'em by:

Dorian Turner

Years to Come

Oceanic, TTX 36159

The title tune is a wonderful song, not badly sung. Otherwise, wait for coming years.

Caryl Carew

Peaches

Logo, B6602

These trumpet interpretations of jazz standards just aren't ripe enough.

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Fenella Flynn

Club 999

Chicago

Max Tannenbaum

The Jazz Lounge

San Jose

Pete Patterson

S. J. State University

Paris

Ivan Badekian

Le Ronde

New York

“King” Richard Johnson

Tiny's

Kansas City

Jack Venice

Wally's Club

Boston

Randi Korenberg

The LoDown

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Stage West

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Gheri Rush
St. George's

Chicago

Fenella Flynn
The Jazz Lounge

Boston

Aurio
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