

# **THE BALTIMORE JAZZ SCENE**

**1975 - 1976**



**THE LEFT BANK JAZZ SOCIETY<sup>Inc.</sup>**

**Baltimore, Maryland**

## *History of the Left Bank Jazz Society, Inc.*

The Left Bank Jazz Society, Inc. was formed in 1964 by a group of young men who met in a South Baltimore night club to discuss the plight of jazz in the city. Among those present were Benny Kearsse, Vernon Welsh, Phil Harris, Charles Simmons, Eugene Simmons, Joseph Simmons, Gilbert Rawlings, Earl Hayes, Benjamin Kimbers, Otts Bethel, John O. Thompson, Orlando Pino, Glen McGill, James Dunn, Harold Bell, Charles Brice, Robert Brice and Lionel Wilson. From their discussion came the idea of forming an organization devoted to perpetuating and permeating an awareness of jazz as an art form through organized activities such as lectures, concerts, sessions and field trips to festivals and night clubs where jazz is featured. Within the next two weeks the group met several times to draw up its final constitution and select an appropriate name. On their final meeting they elected the following officers: Benny Kearsse, President; Phil Harris, Vice-President; Lionel Wilson, Secretary; Joseph Simmons, Financial Secretary; Charles Simmons, Business Manager; and Benjamin Kimbers, Treasurer.

The first project launched by the organization was its weekly concert series, which features out-

standing local, national and international jazz performers. These concerts have been instrumental in attracting thousands of new jazz converts. The first concerts were held at the Al-Ho Club, 2559 Frederick Avenue, beginning August 8, 1964. After about 25 weeks L.B.J.S. moved its weekly concerts to the more spacious Madison Club at Madison and Chester Streets, where it conveniently accomodated its vast following every Sunday. Two fires which gutted the entire building necessitated moving the concerts to their current location at the Famous Ballroom, 1717 N. Charles Street, in the heart of Baltimore.

During the years of its existence the Left Bank Jazz Society moved toward its goals in striving to create a social and cultural climate in which jazz can better be enjoyed and advanced, and to reach audiences that might not otherwise be reached. The Society tries to develop and maintain a rapport between the musician and his audience, fulfilling the needs of both. Through a variety of cultural outlets, L.B.J.S. strives to bring about opportunities to learn more about jazz; its evolution and its relevance.



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# RICHARD "GROOVE" HOLMES



Baltimore's own O'Donel Levy sits in with "Groove" Holmes on 5-4-75.

F.W.

Every now and again two individual dynamic forces collide. The resultant explosion leaves a fallout that echoes and re-echoes for time immemorial.

It happened last Sunday.

The occasion was the regular weekly concert of the Left Bank Jazz Society, which was presenting the quartet of Richard "Groove" Holmes.

Enter one dynamic force.

Then there was O'Donel Levy, guitarist, who sat in with Holmes.

Enter the other dynamic force.

The catalytic result of the union of these forces will keep the Baltimore jazz world abuzz for many a moon. It was truly fantastic.

At one point during the evening, Groove and O'Donel launched into a series of 4's that left the audience gasping. Not only were they really cooking - they were having so much fun doing it

that the audience was caught up in the spirit of the occasion.

Didn't get a chance to talk to Levy during the course of the evening. He was quite a busy lad, what with sitting in with Holmes, then filling the interstices of intermission with a set with his own group.

You need not be told that O'Donel is a Baltimorean, and if you haven't heard him, you must.

Charles Covington and Art Gore make up the rest of the Levy Trio--Gore on drums and Covington on organ, piano and synthesizer.

Together -- dy-no-mite!

As usual, listened to some of the conversation around the room and have to agree with one observer who commented: "If they ever get around to having a concert featuring O'Donel Levy and George Benson, the world will never be the same."

# JAZZ ON RADIO



*Benny Kearse hosts Left Bank's radio show on WBJC-FM.*

F.W.

## On The Air

Had some visiting jazz buffs in town recently, and the conversation turned to jazz on the radio. Which naturally led to the question of where do you find it in the Baltimore area.

After a bit of research, discovered to my total amazement that WBJC-FM, 91.5 mhz, is the leader in total amount of jazz programmed on the air.

Back to that in a moment. An informational note. That 91.5 mhz is the designation of where the station is located on the FM band. mhz stands for mega-hertz. On the AM band, it is called khz, or kilo-hertz.

When you were a kid, they called them kilocycles, but - time stumbles on.

WBJC is the station of the Community College of Baltimore, formerly known as Baltimore Junior College--from whence come the call letters.

On Monday through Friday WBJC plays jazz during its AM America show from 6-9 a.m., and during the afternoons from 2:30 -4:30 p.m.

Saturdays there is a solid ultra-modern jazz bloc from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., followed by the Left Bank Jazz Society show from 8:30 to midnight.

Hoppy Adams is still around on WANN in Annapolis, 1190 khz, and still programming jazz from 1:05-2:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Veteran jazz DJ Harley Brinsfield is doing his thing as usual. He's heard at 8:30 p.m. nightly on WITH.

Just a note about Harley. He has, perhaps, the most extensive collection of jazz records extant.

Thought to stump him one day by asking him to play some Al Cooper and the Savoy Sultans records. Now, just in case you weren't around

during the heyday of the Savoy Ballroom in New York, Al Cooper headed up the 7-piece house band at the Savoy.

The group made only five recordings, all 78s, all on Decca blue label.

Lo and behold, the following night after my request, Harley played all five of the Al Cooper recordings.

If you have a decent FM receiver and can pick up Washington stations, one of the top jazz shows around is done by Yale Lewis on WETA-FM, 90.9 mhz.

Unfortunately, it airs only on Saturday nights from 8 p.m. to one a.m., but it is absolutely top drawer. Yale, too, has an extensive collection of oldies, plus a lot of unrecorded material.

Remember the old radio remotes where the networks hopscotched the country picking up bands at ballrooms? Some of this material is stockpiled in wax transcriptions. Yale has a few, and plays some of them on the air. Can you remember the Mills Blue Ribbon Band? Slim and Slam or the Cats and the Fiddle?

In the mainstream of radio programmed jazz is the Howard University station, WHUR-FM, 96.3 mhz. While not primarily jazz oriented, HUR plays contemporary black and soul music.

Two of the DJs on the station play jazz primarily, and are quite knowledgeable about it. Specifically, Ron Sutton, who is on daily from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m., and Dan Pochet, who handles the 5 p.m. to 7 trick.

— Bob Matthews

*Reprinted with permission from the Baltimore AFRO-AMERICAN, "...and all that JAZZ" [5-9-75].*

# Jamal's Jazz Piano Soothed A Savage Crowd



*Ahmad Jamal "had a few surprises in store for the audience" on 11-9-75.*

J.W.

The Famous Ballroom was crammed to the rafters with wall-to-wall people who were eagerly awaiting the rare opportunity to hear Ahmad Jamal, the jazz pianist, in concert.

The atmosphere was tense. It was nearly 5:30 P.M. and Jamal was very late for his first Baltimore appearance in nearly a decade.

The standing-room-only crowd was beginning to get restless. The clock kept ticking, ticking, ticking. Everyone was asking the musical question, "Would Ahmad Jamal actually stand up the Left Bank Jazz Society and his many fans?"

Suddenly the back door flew open. It was Jamal and the members of his group. The hustle-bustle of activity rose to a frenetic level as the musicians scurried through the crowd, taking case after case of musical instruments to the stage.

Everybody was expecting to hear Jamal in trio format, backed by bassist John Heard and drummer Frank Gant. But the master musician had a few surprises in store for the audience.

He had augmented his trio with percussionist Seblon Newton and guitarist Calvin Keyes, whose recording "Coral Keyes" is a classic treatise on how to play the electric guitar without the aid of gadgets and gimmicks.

Yet another surprise that Jamal would unveil during the evening was the unique style that he has developed on the Fender-Rhodes electric piano.

While the equipment was being spread out on the stage and the band was tuning up, Jamal took the microphone in hand and apologized for his tardiness. The atmosphere was still tense.

Realizing that actions speak louder than words, Jamal struck up the band and began to serenade the audience he had antagonized by his lateness. Proving the old adage that music has charms to soothe the savage beast, Jamal quickly won over the crowd by performing cunning stunts on the concert grand piano.

Soon the tense atmosphere dissolved into festive, bacchanalian revelry as drinks flowed freely and ice cubes danced rhythmically against the sides of glasses.

The tour-de-force of Jamal's performance was a dazzling rendition of Gershwin's immortal "But Not For Me", a tune that has been associated with Jamal since he recorded his first album, "Live At The Pershing" in the early sixties.

Jamal really roasted this old chestnut. Jab-

*(Continued on page 49)*

# PHOTO GALLERY



10-12-75

GEORGE BENSON

J.W.



8-17-75

JOE WILLIAMS

J.W.



4-13-75

BARRY HARRIS

J.W.



9-14-75

HOUSTON PERSON with ETTA JONES  
FRANKIE JONES (rear)

R.W.



# In Memoriam

*The Left Bank Jazz Society, Inc. reserves this page to honor the memory of these great musicians who have passed since our last edition.*

LOUIS JORDAN

OLIVER NELSON

JULIAN "CANNONBALL" ADDERLEY

NOBLE SISSLE

RAY NANCE

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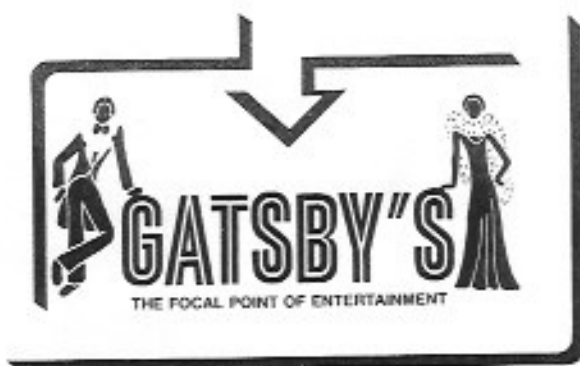
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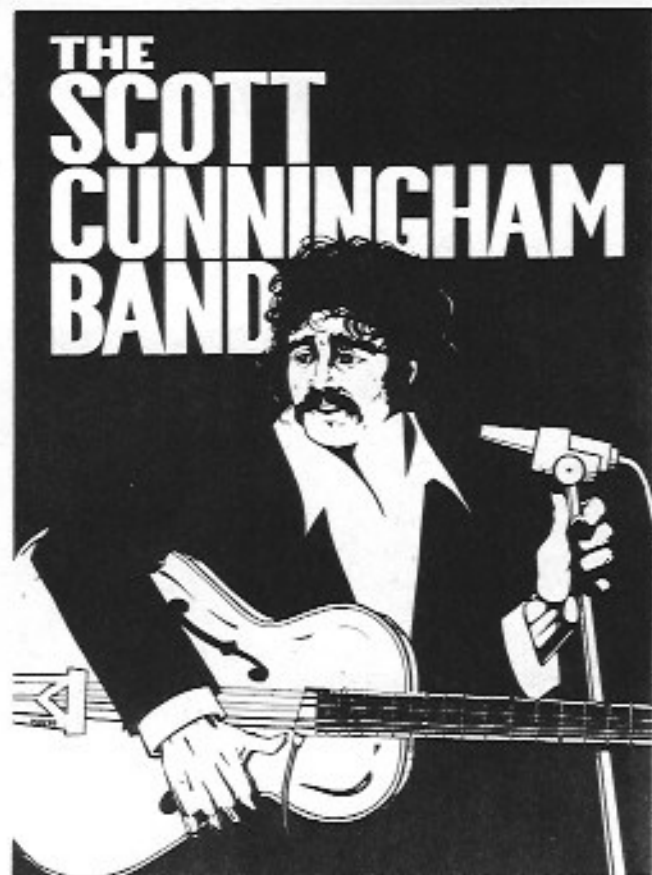
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