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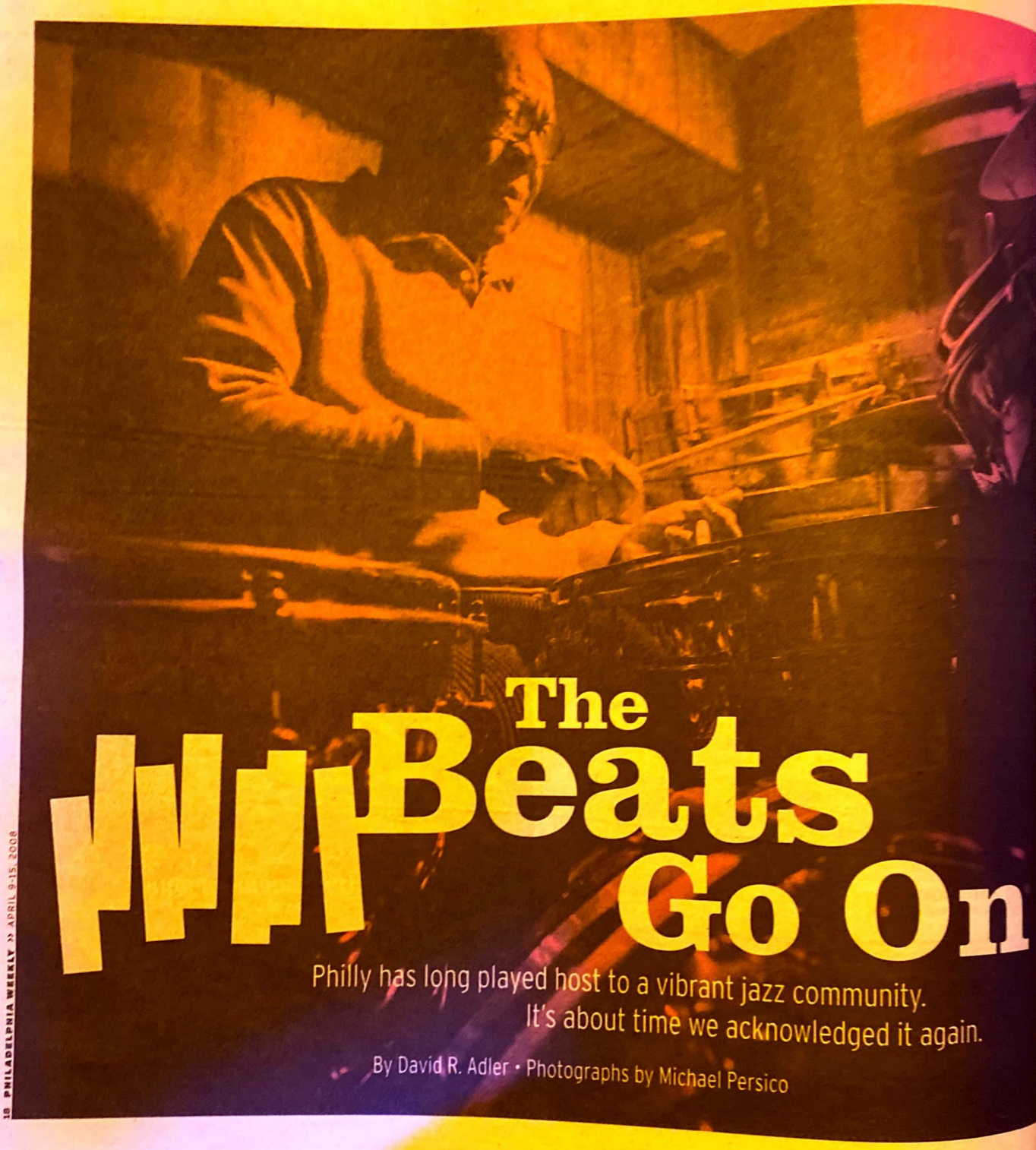
**PW**  
PHILADELPHIA WEEKLY

# A LOVE SUPREME

THROUGH GOOD TIMES AND BAD,  
OUR AFFECTION FOR JAZZ NEVER WAVERS  
BY DAVID R. ADLER

**PW** MUSIC  
GUIDE





# The Beats Go On

Philly has long played host to a vibrant jazz community.  
It's about time we acknowledged it again.

By David R. Adler • Photographs by Michael Persico



"No group in this city has been as consistently undernourished and underappreciated as the jazz community." With those words, *Philadelphia Weekly* introduced its "first annual" jazz issue, dated Dec. 13, 1995. The centerpiece was Elena Bouvier's huge photo spread "A Great Day in Philadelphia," modeled on Art Kane's classic 1958 shoot for *Esquire* that inspired the documentary *A Great Day in Harlem*. It seemed this multigenerational jazz family, assembled for a group portrait outside the John Coltrane House on North 33rd Street, was finally getting its due. But the idea lost momentum, and *PW*'s first annual jazz issue was also the last. It's well past time, without overpromising, to pick up where we left off.

Philadelphia jazz has continued to develop in the interim; it's the underappreciation that hasn't changed. Orrin Evans, a young in-demand pianist, felt the pang of recognition watching a *Rocky* marathon on TV. "*Rocky* is a great story about what Philadelphia does to its heroes," he says. "Kids were chasing *Rocky* down the street. He was riding high. Then he was just *Rocky* on the corner. You lose one fight, you're back to nothing. Much like our athletes, we're the worst at supporting our artists. I go to New York and people talk about [organists] Shirley Scott and Trudy Pitts and [drummer] Edgar Bateman and I've watched them, right here, not get the same respect they do when I'm on the other side of the turnpike."

Pride, defiance and apologetics are close to the surface when one talks about jazz in Philadelphia, an underdog music in an underdog town. With little prompting, tireless advocates like saxophonist Byard Lancaster ("Pennsylvania's first jazz lobbyist") and drummer Bill Carney ("Mr. C," Trudy Pitts' husband) will praise Philly jazz to the heavens and try to take New York and New Orleans down a peg. If their rhetoric smacks of overcompensation, it's easy to understand why.

Philly is where Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Benny Golson, Lee Morgan, frustrated drummer Bill Cosby and so many others got their start, where big clubs drew big talent, and jazz rang out from countless neighborhood bars. The older and even not-so-older generations know a time when Philly's jazz-mecca status wasn't in dispute.

Ask people, and they'll recall a half-dozen jazz spots from across the years, without duplicating each other's lists. The Showboat, Pep's, the Downbeat Club, the Woodbine, Jewel's, Gert's, the 421 Club, Aqua Lounge, Just Jazz, Morgan's, the Cadillac Club, the Blue Note, the Blue Moon. The names don't stop multiplying.

"I've played in every nook and cranny in Philadelphia, just about," says tenor

saxophonist Bootsie Barnes, recounting jam sessions with Sonny Stitt and Dexter Gordon, and rattling off more bars: Chester's Fun Spot, Mr. Silk's Third Base, the Sahara. "Back then," he adds, "a jazz club became a jazz club as long you had jazz played in it."

What's more, black working-class audiences were there to listen. The point can't be overemphasized: Philly's jazz heritage is its black heritage, even if the players and listeners span all backgrounds.

## Where We Are

The health of jazz is inseparable from wider turbulence in the music business, real estate markets and other socioeconomic spheres. Flip open that "first annual" jazz issue from 1995 and you'll see ads for Zanzibar Blue and Tower Records, as well as a story on Third Street Jazz and Rock, the beloved Old City record store. Gone, gone and gone. Today's musicians face a different world, with dwindling CD sales, apathetic media and fewer accessible performance venues.

Jazz is also evolving to the point where it is "hundreds of microclimates," as *New York Times* critic Ben Ratliff has written, and we speak of "the jazz community" in spite of its segmentation. In Philly today there are strong straightahead ("inside") and avant-garde ("out") currents, but their points of contact are few. They're all but different musics, bound together by their marginality.

It's too simple, though, to view jazz in Philadelphia as a story of loss and decay. Despite the divisions and the dramatic shrinkage of the club scene, the city has entered a comparatively healthy phase in terms of live jazz and improvised music. Maybe it's part of a broader upswing in a place with its share of "spiritual maladies," to borrow bassist Mike Boone's phrase.

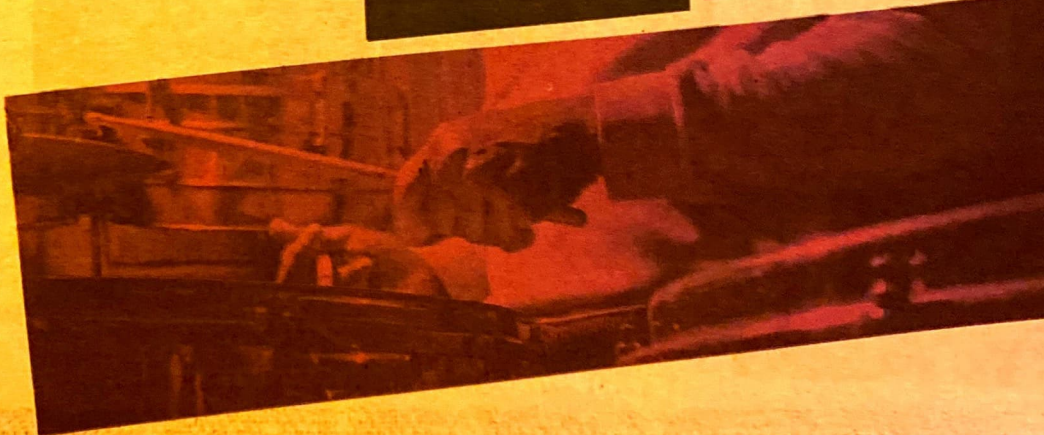
Playing host to Live 8 in 2005 certainly helped. Barack Obama's landmark Philadelphia speech on race, the make-or-break Pennsylvania Democratic primary, Stephen



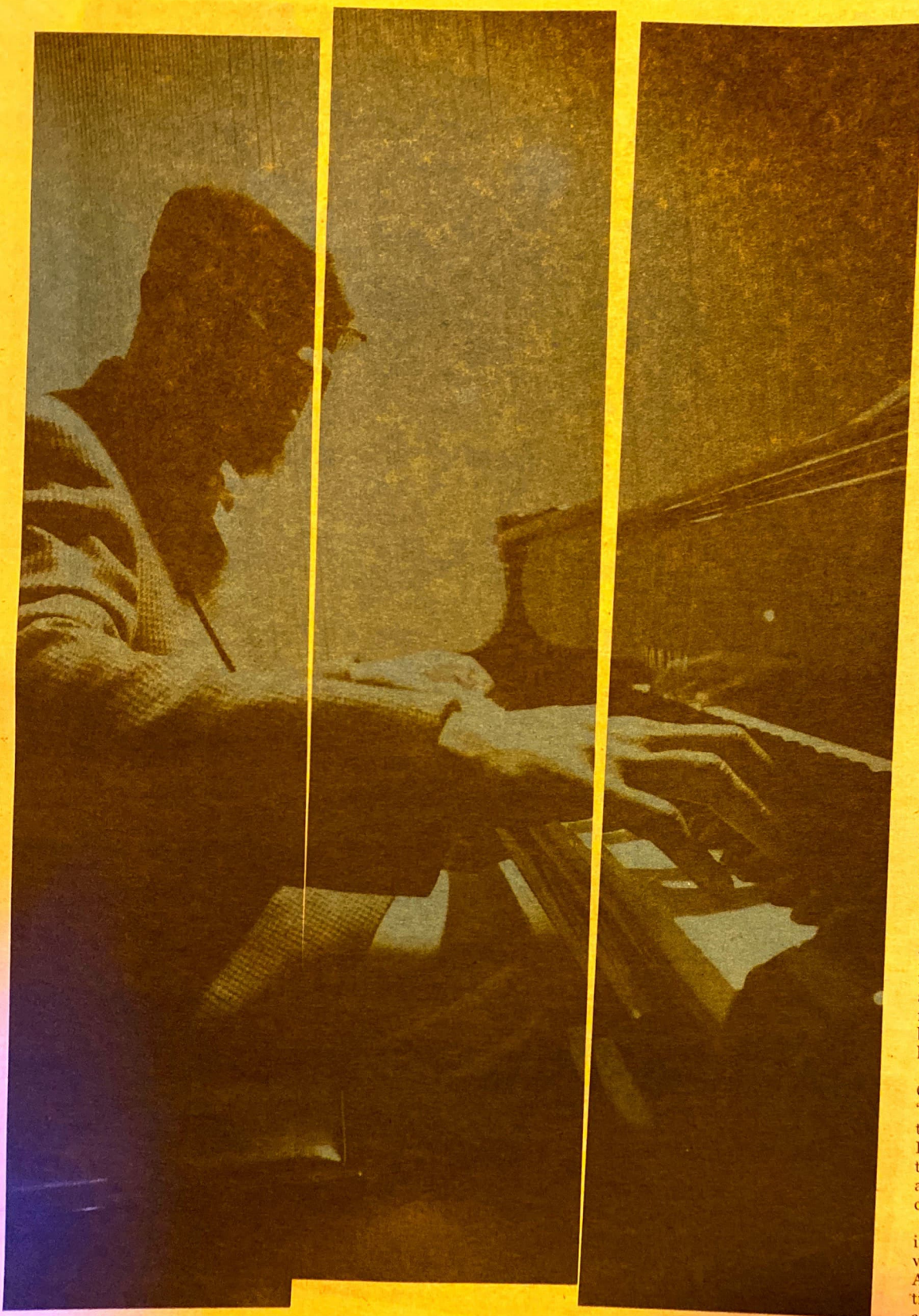
## ON THE WEB

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Low key: Orrin Evans tickles the ivories.

► Colbert's upcoming Annenberg Center broadcasts from April 14 to 17, the Nutter mayoralty: These things have given Philadelphia, which pianist and bandleader Sun Ra once called "death's headquarters," a sense of relevance and renewal. Conditions are ripe for Philadelphia jazz to ride the coattails.

There are great bands to be heard: Bootsie Barnes' co-led group with trumpeter John Swana; guitarist Matt Davis and his peculiar large ensemble Aerial Photograph; alto sax veteran Bobby Zankel and his progressive big band the Warriors of the Wonderful Sound; Shot x Shot, an adventuresome quartet featuring young fellow Warriors Dan Scofield and Bryan Rogers; and the Odean Pope Saxophone Choir, which will headline at the Blue Note in New York from July 8 to 13.

Midcareer soldiers like saxophonist Elliott Levin, bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma and drummer Calvin Weston also continue to blast away. And the up-and-comers are impressive. Drummer Justin Faulkner, still in his teens, has done tour dates with Branford Marsalis. Pianist George Burton of Pope's choir also plays a fine viola in Aerial Photograph. Bassist Evan Lipson is a serious contender in avant-jazz and other experimental settings. Trombonist Daniel Blacksberg, a Warriors member, leads his own exploratory trio and keeps busy in klezmer circles. There are more, of course. Where do they all play?

For gifted local artists, mainstream and decidedly otherwise, opportunities are limited. Zanzibar's demise last year left only two full-time jazz clubs: Chris' Jazz Cafe in Center City and Ortlieb's in Northern Liberties. Chris' owners are considering opening a second, larger space under a different name. Meanwhile, they're booking bigger and bigger artists (Joe Lovano, the Bad Plus) while remaining a clubhouse for esteemed locals like guitarist Jimmy Bruno, hopefuls like tenor saxophonist Victor North and students from Temple and UArts.

Ortlieb's, still a citadel of old-school hard-bop, is finding its legs under new management as of March of last year, and will soon receive a loaner Steinway from Temple's jazz department—so we'll be able to hear Sid Simmons, the brilliant house pianist, on a proper instrument.

One can also hope that the historic Clef Club, described by *Scoop USA* as "underutilized and erratically administered" since its 1995 move to Broad and Fitzwater, will revive under new director Shuna Miah. On April 27 they'll hold a fundraiser for Jazz Bridge, a musicians' relief organization.

Outside the clubs, presenters are doing valiant work but catering largely to visiting musicians. Mark Christman's Ars Nova Workshop, the most provocative, books avant-gardists both obscure and well-known, making ample use of International House, the Art Alliance, the Rotunda and other venues. ►



► At the other end of the size spectrum, the Kimmel Center has played a vital role since 2001 in maintaining jazz on the Avenue of the Arts. The Kimmel's Commonwealth Plaza lobby space features student groups and worthy local artists, people who'd struggle to fill the two larger halls. Only at the Kimmel, the Keswick Theatre or the Mann Center will you see such legends as Wayne Shorter, Keith Jarrett, Pat Metheny, John McLaughlin and Chick Corea—although Ars Nova has brought out-music icons Anthony Braxton, Wadada Leo Smith, Cecil Taylor, Kidd Jordan and John Zorn to Philadelphia, in some cases for the first time in decades (in Smith's case the first time ever).

The Art Museum's Friday Art After 5 series, set in picturesque Great Stair Hall, has attracted the cream of national talent, from Grammy winner Maria Schneider to the thorny and challenging altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa, though on June 13 they'll feature longtime Philly resident Dave Burrell, the great pianist/composer.

The Painted Bride, a black-box theater space, perseveres with a timely focus on jazz globalism (Elio Villafranca, Adam Rudolph), but far fewer jazz offerings than in its '80s and '90s heyday.

The jazz component at World Cafe Live is far from enormous but almost always relevant, part of a wide stylistic picture. Others include the Annenberg Center, which books high-profile acts (Dianne Reeves, Chris Potter) and special projects (Orchestra Underground); the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, which has brought the likes of Uri Caine and Kenny Garrett to the Gershman Y; and Rutgers-Camden's Gordon Theater, which has attracted stars on the order of Bill Frisell and McCoy Tyner.

**It's key** for leading national and international figures, old and young, to make stops in Philadelphia—the more highly publicized and well-attended the better. But locally based musicians are often left to their own devices, creating gigs where they can. Until recently, Orrin Evans took time despite a hectic touring schedule to lead a weekly jam at Reuben's Marc in Mt. Airy. Tenor sax virtuoso Ben Schachter is hidden away upstairs at Dr. Watson's Pub on Wednesdays. The young and inventive Joanna Pascale sings standards three nights a week at Solefood in the Loews Hotel. Thank goodness the divey Tritone makes room in its schedule for Kancel's Warriors, Aerial Photograph and other jazz groups.

Across from Tritone at Bob and Barbara's, or at Natalie's in West Philly and LaRose in Germantown, the old neighborhood lounge tradition hangs on. Both the West Oak Lane Jazz & Arts Festival and the Trane Stop Resource Institute's John Coltrane Festival showcase locals admirably, but only for a few summer days.

There's a strong scene that needs to coalesce in a consistent venue," says Dan Scofield, one of a number of local

improvisers feeling the pinch. He and several friends plan to inaugurate Science Fiction: New Music Sundays at Gojjo, an Ethiopian restaurant at 45th and Baltimore. The focus will be original work, rooted in jazz but with an experimental bent.

Dustin Hurt's Bowerbird series, founded in late 2005, has served this constituency well so far, situating acoustic jazz within a radical mix of electronics, far-out chamber works and other fringe music. Not unlike Ars Nova, Bowerbird will continue to stir the pot and make use of Philadelphia's unique environments, hosting gigs in galleries, schools, church-

and foster new interactions. The results in Philly are palpable.

"The chemistry here right now is really exciting," says Gene Coleman, a composer, bass clarinetist and music curator for the Slought Foundation, a PMP grant recipient. "Something is happening that wasn't happening five years ago."

It may never be New York, where you'd have to clone yourself to take in all the "microclimates" available in a given week. But a Philly night with three simultaneous can't-miss shows doesn't seem rare at this point.



Bobby Zankel



Odean Pope

J. Michael Harrison, host of *The Bridge* on WRTI-FM, recalls a time "when I felt I had to go to New York to check out the music, and I don't feel that way anymore. I talk to people down in Atlanta and other places, and they're not getting it like we do."

## Where We've Been

As critic Francis Davis explained in these pages in 1995, "a great black migration from the Carolinas" during and after World War II brought John Coltrane and many others into Philadelphia, where

they heard their idols in the flesh and were inspired to chart their own course. In Lewis Porter's *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*, we learn that Trane heard Charlie Parker for the first time on June 5, 1945, at the Academy of Music. Odean Pope took up tenor after hearing Illinois Jacquet and Arnett Cobb with Lionel Hampton at the Earle Theatre at 11th and Market. In the '50s when Coltrane mentored Pope, they'd gather with pianist Hasaan Ibn Ali (born William Langford) for deep practice sessions.

"Hasaan was one of the great forerunners of what we do today," Pope argues. "I used to say when you heard musicians from Philly, out of five notes they played three might be related to Hasaan." (Amazingly, the pianist appeared on only one release, the Max Roach Trio featuring the Legendary Hasaan.)

Following Coltrane's death in 1967, Philadelphia proved hospitable to avant-garde jazz as it gathered steam. The Sun Ra Arkestra moved into its communal house on Morton Street in September 1968. Though Sun Ra died in 1993, members of his group still reside there, and plans are afoot for a 40th anniversary commemoration later this year.

Starting in the early '70s, Geno's Empty Foxhole, in the basement of St. Mary's Church at 39th and Locust, was where the Arkestra, Charles Mingus, Hasaan Roland Kirk, Cecil Taylor, the Art Ensemble of Chicago and others played memorable shows. By the middle of the decade, according to Elliott Levin, the Long March Coffee House provided an outlet for jazz freaks on Rittenhouse Square, of all places. "It would be open until 4 or 5 in the morning," Levin recalls. "There was kind of a socialist agenda. It was in the basement of this high-rise building, and they were paying the rent on welfare checks."

Elsewhere, J. Michael Harrison remembers "a lot of inner-city outdoor performances with local cats getting together. Turns out they were people like Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Calvin Weston, Papo Vazquez. With the civil rights movement, black power, Sly Stone and James Brown, all that was fusing with their jazz studies. So you'd have 'Super Sundays' in the neighborhood, at recreation centers and parks, and Friday night dances and stuff like that."

Players at the time also benefited from Model Cities, a federal program tied to the war on poverty. Based near Broad and Girard, the program enlisted music teachers on the order of Pope, bassist Tyrone Brown and the late pianist Eddie Green and drummer Sherman Ferguson—the members of Catalyst, one of Philly's most innovative (and unrecognized) early fusion groups. Bobby Zankel took full advantage of the bargain-rate study opportunities at Model Cities. "I just recorded albums with Odean and Tyrone," he notes, "so these associations are still going on."

Zankel, an associate of avant-gardist



Cecil Taylor, came to Philly from New York in 1975 and found himself welcome in the organ joints on 52nd Street between Spruce and Market. "It was an opportunity to get seasoned playing in front of people who were real jazz fans," he recalls. "Also, three or four nights a week there were Latin jobs. I remember places around Fifth and Erie, Fifth and Allegheny. A lot of older people would come to these things and dance like crazy."

Dave Burrell left New York for Philly later, in 1985, but he'd already made regular trips with bassist Wilbur Ware and trombonist Grachan Moncur III to play the Aqua Lounge and other 52nd Street spots. "We couldn't wait to get down here," Burrell remembers. "Philly offered a sense of family, and we started making permanent friends. Fifty-Second Street was really lit up then." The same-numbered street in New York was synonymous with the bebop revolution, an irony lost on no one.

Uri Caine, the renowned pianist and Philly native, came up in the same period, playing lots of Fender Rhodes and backing former Miles Davis sidemen Hank Mobley and Philly Joe Jones. "It was a rich experience," Caine recalls, "with a lot of characters and support for younger musicians. You don't realize what it is until it's over."

The neighborhood bar scene began falling off, and according to Francis Davis, "by the late '70s or early '80s there wasn't really a full-time, big-name jazz club. There were no equivalents of the Village Vanguard and Sweet Basil's in New York." But enough was going on for Davis to write a jazz column for the *Inquirer* between 1984 and 1989.

There was the Kool Jazz Festival, renamed the Mellon Jazz Festival, a well-heeled George Wein production that undertook joint efforts with the Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, the Clef Club and other entities (including Ortlieb's and Chris'

Jazz Cafe in later years).

Thanks to such promoters as Rick Luftglass, Dave Gold and Fred Miles, there were concerts at Haverford and Bryn Mawr and the Chestnut Cabaret, as well as Grendel's Lair, which facilitated Pat Martino's comeback after a devastating brain injury. Davis also recalls milestone events at the American Music Theater Festival (now the Prince Music Theater), including operas by Anthony Davis (X) and Duke Ellington (the previously unperformed *Queenie Pie*).

The Painted Bride established itself during the mid-'80s as a clearinghouse of avant-garde jazz (Ronald Shannon Jackson, Butch Morris), and remained busy for more than a dozen years, booking such bona fide giants as Jack DeJohnette and Sam Rivers. Deep River Productions, run by the late David Sempliner, had also taken up the avant-garde mantle by the mid-'90s.

Until early 1998 there was Sarah Caine and Steve Wood's Shanghai Trunk Company, which booked avant-garde acts mainly at the ill-fated Five Spot. Picking up the unsustainable Shanghai's pieces, Craig Baylor and Alan Kayser began Sweetnighter Productions, precursor to the presently thriving Ars Nova Workshop.

"The '90s seemed more like a hodgepodge and a lack of organization," says Ars Nova's Mark Christman, who as a Drexel student became curatorially inspired by frequent trips to the Knitting Factory. His goal was to create a new home for "the post-Coltrane free-jazz continuum of the '60s and '70s, the loft scene and the downtown New York scene. We saw all these intersecting communities without options in Philadelphia." In March 2000 Christman kicked off Ars Nova with a Wednesday series at the Plays and Players Theater. He also held many a concert at Tritone, but ultimately found the bar environment ill-suited for the music.

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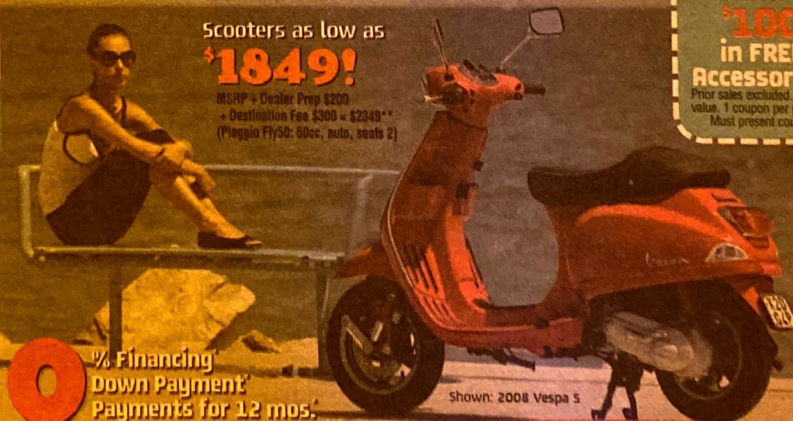
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► oped on a parallel track with the opening of Ortlieb's Jazzhaus in 1987. The late, great Shirley Scott led the "Haus" band with drummer Mickey Roker and bassist Arthur Harper. Young newcomers, including trumpeter Terrell Stafford, now director of jazz studies at Temple, apprenticed under these hardened veterans. Then Zanzibar Blue opened in 1990 at its original 11th Street location, another stronghold of mainstream jazz in the thick of the "young lions" period.

Chris' Jazz Cafe, then a young club as well, was situated to catch some of that buzz. And while the Mellon Jazz Festival cooked in multiple venues during summer, the PECO Energy Jazz Festival provided heat briefly during winter. Today there's no brand-name jazz festival in downtown Philly.

The '90s also saw Philly or area native sons honored in the prestigious International Thelonious Monk Competition. Saxophonist Tim Warfield placed third in 1991; Orrin Evans finished second among pianists in 1999; bassist Darryl Hall won in 1995. According to Mike Boone, "There was a whole crew of guys—Orrin, Reid Anderson, Matt Parrish, Jaleel Shaw, Duane Eubanks—who were reaching past what they'd already heard. There was new vocabulary going on. I ended up playing with them, and it pulled me along too."

## Where We're Going

In every area of music, categories are being dismantled, and jazz is caught up in the process—Herbie Hancock's Grammy for *River: The Joni Letters* was just one highly visible sign. In addition to being "America's classical music," jazz is also a node of alternative and even pop culture, an art in dialogue with other urban, global and experimental forms. Young jazz players are hearing different sounds, acquiring new skills and moving a wider



Tuned In: Mark Christman (left) and Bootsie Barnes help keep Philly on the jazz map.

crop of listeners.

Mickey Roker, the "dean" of Ortlieb's and former sideman to Hancock, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins and many others, is accepting of the music's evolution: "When I started, we used to play for dances a lot, so you didn't mix up the beat so much. Now these guys are mixing up the beat, playing over the beat—it's a different ballgame. Some of the stuff these guys are doing I could never even think of doing. But everything changes in time. I remember when there was no penicillin."

In terms of outreach to African-

American audiences, the most significant Philly development in years was the West Oak Lane Festival on Ogontz Avenue, which will stage its fifth annual event June 20 to 22. It's an interesting mix: Bootsie Barnes, Khan Jamal, Byard Lancaster & the Blues Messengers, the Sun Ra Arkestra and others will rub elbows with Ashford & Simpson, the O'Jays, War, Mandrill and Pieces of a Dream.

This isn't a watering-down, though there might be a fine line sometimes. Philadelphia jazz has always been about connections

among black music genres. Uri Caine remembers how Gamble and Huff session players used to hang in the jazz bars, and he cites his sometime colleague, the late Grover Washington Jr., as a key link in Philly music genealogy.

*The Philadelphia Experiment*, a 2001 Ropeadope album bringing together Caine, star bassist Christian McBride and drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson of the Roots, included covers of tunes by Washington, Catalyst and Sun Ra. King Britt, who remixed *The Philadelphia Experiment* in 2002, is intermingling

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Alive In '95: Dozens gathered for PW's "Great Day in Philadelphia" photo shoot.

DJ culture and live bands in new ways at his recently revived Monday night Back 2 Basics party at Silk City. Similar things went down at the Roots-affiliated Black Lily, at Wetlands and the Five Spot, where Jill Scott, Erykah Badu and Jaguar Wright put in appearances.

Jazz careers are starting to reflect pan-stylistic realities. Bassist and Temple alum Derrick Hodge has found himself employed by Terence Blanchard and Common. Orrin Evans has backed Mos Def. At his now-discontinued jam at Reuben's Marc, Evans would veer from heated improvisation to hits by the Stylistics, Sam Cooke and Smokey Robinson. The goal was not only to draw an existing black clientele to jazz, but to draw white listeners into East Mt. Airy as well.

In Evans' view, creeping resegregation has affected the makeup of not just audiences, but also bands, in Philly and elsewhere. He recalls recent gigs where he was "not just the only black guy on the bandstand, but the only black guy in the room," which illustrates that there are probably more white jazz players, and fewer black jazz listeners now than at any time in history.

"There are a few people who cross the line and play with everybody," Evans continues, "but if you step back and look, it's really divided. The reality is that the division will probably always exist." Yet superb artists of Asian, Latin and other backgrounds make it clear that jazz isn't just a black/white proposition.

Philadelphia's jazz scene mirrors the flawed conditions that exist everywhere, and yet it's gathering strength as a bellwether for the Delaware Valley and mid-Atlantic region. Events are happening at Montgomery County Community College, the Jazz at Cliveden series, the new Jazz Club at Longwood Gardens and the Clifford Brown Jazz Festival in Wilmington. The High Two and Dream-box Media labels are documenting local and regional

players, and Florida-based Porter Records is reissuing gems from Philly's avant-garde past. Jason Fife's documentary in progress, viewable in segments at Phillyjazz.blip.tv, is poised to introduce Philly's artists to the world.

The time may come, as Mr. C envisions, when aspiring players, instead of "leaving here for New York as soon as they get their act halfway together, can stay in Philly and get their just due." ■

David R. Adler writes about music, politics and culture for numerous publications. He covers jazz regularly for PW. Comments on this story can be sent to [letters@philadelphiaweekly.com](mailto:letters@philadelphiaweekly.com)

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