

brooklyn's Jazzy Times



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inside this issue:

haitian benefit 2

smooth jazz 3

jazz calendar 4

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the smooth jazz debate

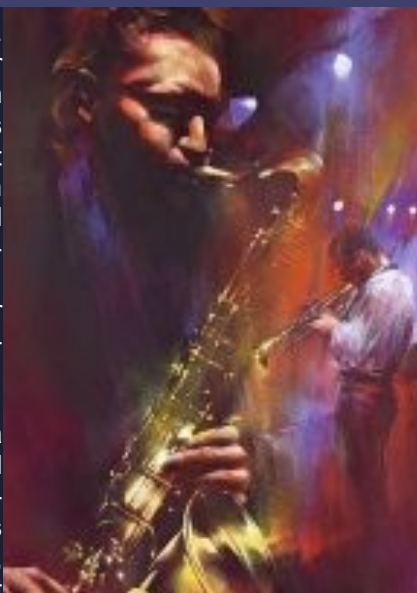
by n.m. shabazz

Jazz music is about the cerebral. Thus, for anyone wanting to appear hip, it has always seemingly been chic to say they're into jazz. Since it's perceived as a "deep" musical art form, by saying this the implication made is that the person is cultured and refined. In many eyes, jazz music is reserved for the intelligentsia; those intellectuals who spend their time sipping wine, pondering the adversities of life and its solutions.

This perception has always been a part of jazz's problem, its musical complexities not being easily palatable to the masses. Though jazz is about spontaneity and improvisation, to be labeled a jazz musician is, at times, marginalizing.

Take Miles Davis, for instance. Forty years ago, he approached the head of Columbia Records, Clive Davis (no relation), and told him that if he stopped promoting him as a jazz musician then he would sell more records.

Miles was right. His next album, *Bitches Brew*, went gold after its release in 1969. However, despite that seminal album and a plethora of more heralded music by myriad jazz artists over the years, some pundits have been speaking of jazz's coming death for decades.



Enter Smooth jazz, a more commercially viable alternative to Traditional jazz. Though many definitions of Smooth jazz exist, probably the best was offered by writer Will Layman. "Smooth jazz is probably best under-

Though Kenneth Gorelick—better known as Kenny G.—represents the extreme side of the Smooth jazz spectrum, there are a slew of other jazz musicians—respected amongst their peers—who can be considered Smooth jazz artists, too.

stood as a kind of easy-listening contemporary R&B without vocals". Usually, melody-playing instruments—saxophones or guitars—dominates the tracks.

Though Kenneth Gorelick—better known as Kenny G.—represents the extreme side of the Smooth jazz spectrum, there are a slew of other jazz musicians—respected amongst their peers—who can be considered Smooth jazz artists, too. Not as technical or musically complex as Traditional or Straight-ahead jazz, Smooth jazz started gaining in popularity during the 1970's.

A big reason for this was because of national radio exposure. After it had bought out New York's WRVR-FM in 1976, Sonderling Broadcasting tripled that radio station's listening audience by focusing on artists like George Benson and Pat Metheny.

Later, WRVR radio station programmer Frank Cody would start "The Wave" musical format in Los Angeles (KTWV), San Diego (KIFM), and San Francisco (KKSF) which emphasized R&B and Pop influences. Layman states that, "It was through market research (continued on page 3)

WNUA that the phrase "smooth jazz" was coined—it apparently came from the mouth of a focus group participant."

(Continued on page three)

haitian charity benefit shows *dfw artists care* by I. lourdes shabazz

After Haiti suffered a massive 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010, the world watched in horror as approximately three million of the country's 10 million people needed emergency aid. Since the nation had no real building standards, many of the houses that Haitians inhabited were destroyed, leaving scores homeless.



Singer Melanie Dutton (left) and Jim Casey of *The Buster Brown Band* (right) take a break during the charity benefit
Photography by Frank Lott Photography

Robin Hackett, a Dallas vocalist and songwriter, was among many who watched the news reports about the devastation in Haiti. Unlike most, however, she felt compelled to take action about it.

With a quick call to friend and fellow singer, Breggett Rideau, the two formed *DFW Artists Care*;

an organization created, in part, to raise funds to help those affected by the earthquake in Haiti. Gathering the support of other local musicians, *DFW Artists Care* held a benefit concert at Brooklyn Jazz Café on March 7th.

Approximately 15 bands participated in the all-day event, held from 1:00PM until 1:00AM. For jazz connoisseurs, it was a real treat; everyone from *Natural Change* and Melanie Dutton, to the *Buster Brown Band* performed. Despite the climatic weather that day, the free event garnered about \$3,500.00.

Though the organization is pleased with its results, Rideau stated it was still far away from its goal—\$10K—and would continue fundraising efforts throughout the year.

"The attention span of Americans is real short," she added, "and we have to make sure they understand that Haitians are still suffering."

Sunday Brunch at Brooklyn Jazz Cafe is designed for friends, family and fellowship



Enjoy our Sunday Brunch and that jazzy thing we do... Our Sunday Brunch offers everyone's favorites, accompanied by some of the best jazz musicians Dallas has to offer.

Our Sunday Brunch Menu can be found at:
www.brooklynjazzcafe.com/mbrunch.htm

smooth jazz (continued from page one)

During the early 1980's, Smooth Jazz radio stations started replacing New Age radio stations in earnest. However, not everyone was as thrilled about Smooth jazz's economic or social popularity.

Pianist Ellis Marsalis, Jr., once called Smooth jazz, "A hooker in an evening gown." Such grumblings from the patriarch of the legendary jazz family is understandable. He and son, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, are jazz purists who dismiss Smooth jazz as elevator music. Wynton, a jazz zealot who once criticized Miles Davis for experimenting with commercial jazz styles later in his life, despises any music that utilizes a repetitive beat (he abhors Hip Hop music).

Yet, are such diatribes lobbed at Smooth jazz artists because of professional preferences or professional jealousy? The CD's that Smooth jazz artists make don't buy themselves. Likewise, not all listeners want to be challenged all of the time whenever music is played. Sometimes, people just want to relax.

Proponents of Smooth jazz call jazz purists and traditionalists snobs. They ask the question, can they help it if they give people what they want?

Several decades ago, the same charges were hurled at some Hip Hop artists, like Will Smith, for breaking from the traditional Hip Hop image of being machoistic, spewing lyrics that glorified street life. When he won rap music's first Grammy award in 1988, Smith was



Smooth Jazz artist Kenny G.
Picture courtesy of the Associated Press

criticized by rappers (Hip Hop artist Ice Cube was among them), for not being "street" enough to win the award.

Yet, Hip Hop's growth in and influence on music was probably, in part, a direct result of rap artists who were more palatable to the mainstream. Now, many musicians—from blues, rock, and even jazz—have gone on to experiment with

Comparing them to Smooth jazz artists like Kenny G.—who appears to represent the epitome of instrumental schlock—is perhaps unfair.

Hip Hop.

Likewise, Smooth jazz artists have probably attracted people to the genre who otherwise would never have bothered listening to the genre. States Traditional jazz saxophonist Gary Bartz, "Maybe somebody will hear Kenny G. and like the soprano and go get a Coltrane record."

Cody adds, "We have to start

where the listeners are, then we can teach them. I'm going to be respectful of the listener, not cynical."

Consequently, Smooth jazz artists such as Grover Washington, Jr., George Benson, Bob James, and several others who are considered jazz juggernauts in their own right are widely regarded by their jazz peers. Comparing them to Smooth jazz artists like Kenny G.—who appears to represent the epitome of instrumental schlock—is perhaps unfair.

However, the debate amongst the two sides may be a mute point. Both Traditional jazz and Smooth jazz sales have been in decline in recent years, with the number of Smooth Jazz stations in the United States declining.

In 2009, "...a National Endowment for the Arts survey found that the number for Americans attending live jazz concerts had declined precipitously and consistently over a 26-year span."

Don't ring jazz's death toll just yet, though. It has proven to be nothing, if not durable since

its inception during the 20th century, spawning several musical art forms—Blues and Rock and Roll. Jazz has also gone through several other transformations before, from Swing, to Bebop and, later, Hard Bop. It will endure.

For jazz purists, then, perhaps the lesson to be learned is to meet somewhere in the middle. It would make jazz's next evolution...well, jazzy.

**NOW PLAYING!
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brooklyn Jazz Calendar

April 2010

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		April 1 Ardina Lockhart	April 2 Melanie Dutton	April 3 Ascension
April 6 Mahogany and the Jam Box	April 7 Name That Tune with Eric Willis and friends	April 8 Fingerprints	April 9 Natural Change	April 10 Breggett Rideau
April 13 Watusi	April 14 Name That Tune with Eric Willis and friends	April 15 The Freddie Jones Quartet	April 16 Melanie Dutton	April 17 Natural Change
April 20 Montrose	April 21 Name That Tune with Eric Willis and friends	April 22 The Freddie Jones Quartet	April 23 The Buster Brown Band	April 24 The Buster Brown Band
April 27 Domino Effect	April 28 Name That Tune with Eric Willis and friends	April 29 Claud Hardrick	April 30 Natural Change	

Sunday Jazz Brunch 11:00am – 4:00pm
Musical Performances 11:30am – 3:30pm

April 4 The Freddie Jones Quartet	April 11 Ardina Lockhart	April 18 Carolyn Lee Jones	April 25 Linny Nance
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Jazzy Sunday Evenings
Mahogany and The Jam Box
Musical Performances 7:00pm – 11:00pm

Special Events @ brooklyn Jazz Cafe

Spoken Jazz, A SpokenWord Event—Tuesday April 6th @ 7:00PM

Name That Tune Wednesdays hosted by Eric Willis—Wednesdays @ 7:00PM

The Buster Brown Band Weekend—Friday and Saturday April 23rd & 24th @ 8:00PM

Out In The Open...A Talent Showcase hosted by Domino Effect—Tuesday April 27th @ 7:00PM