Madams of the Organ

By Matt Silver

Female jazz instrumentalists have long faced an uphill battle for recognition, both from fellow musicians and, more often, from those charged with shaping the public’s perception of jazz and those who play it—jazz journalists. In his 1967 book The Big Bands, George T. Simon, one of the most influential jazz writers of the Swing Era, wrote, “Only God can make a tree, and only men can play good jazz.”

Philadelphia hasn’t always been on the right side of history, socially speaking—perhaps an understatement to rival some of history’s most flagrant. But the idea that women can’t play jazz never gained much purchase here—because the women who could play, and there’ve been several over the years, were impossible to ignore.

“One thing you’ll never hear in Philadelphia is that women can’t play,” said organist Rich Budesa, one of many now-accomplished jazz musicians to receive on-the-job training from legendary jazz organist (and pianist) Shirley Scott. “Between Shirley and Trudy [Pitts], we knew better.”

Shirley Scott and Trudy Pitts. Different, but forever linked. And where any serious conversation about female jazz organists must begin. In this manner, the two are every bit as indispensable to the historical record as Jimmy Smith.

Shirley Scott grew up in North Philadelphia, with a lot of music in the house. Literally. Her father ran a de-facto jazz club in the family’s basement. And so from a very young age, all Scott had to do to hear musicians like saxophonist AI Steele, Philly Joe Jones, and Red Garland was walk downstairs. Like so many great jazz organists, she began on piano, but decided to try the organ after hearing

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records of Jackie Davis, a soul-jazz founding father who predated even Jimmy Smith in centering small jazz combos around the Hammond organ.

As the story goes, Scott had barely been playing organ for six months when she fell into the steady gig that would change her life. Saxophonist Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis was working his way through Philadelphia and, suddenly, found himself without an organist. His, Doc Bagby (the one-time music director of North Broad St.’s legendary Uptown Theater), had decided to leave to form his own band. Scott was self-deprecating when explaining to NPR several years ago how Lockjaw eventually came to hire her, telling Marian McPartland, “I was the only one in Philadelphia who could play the organ—or who said that they could play the organ.” The truth is, per WRTI’s Bob Perkins, a close friend of Shirley’s, “Davis heard her play at the old Spider Kelly’s jazz spot in Center City.”

Lockjaw clearly dug what he heard because Scott spent the next several years as his protégé, playing on his very successful series of Cookbook albums, as well as with his band as part of a residency at Count Basie’s club in New York. In Basie’s opinion, there was no greater organ player. Which is why The Count tapped Scott to play that club’s opening in 1958. When Basie was asked to follow, he demurred: “Not after her.”

Basie may have been so enamored of Scott because he saw some of himself in her.

Stylistically, Scott had a lighter touch than Jimmy Smith, relied less heavily on the blues. She was the antithesis of those musicians who seem to wrestle their instruments into submission. And she warned developing players against the inclination toward tough love. “She told me ‘You’re banging at the keys,’” recalled Rich Budesa. “You can draw the sound out with a much lighter touch,” Scott instructed.

But boy could she swing. Sensitivity and swing—that was really Scott’s calling card. “She bridged big band sensibility with George Shearing-type voicing on the organ,” says Budesa of the quality that likely endeared Scott’s playing to Basie to such a great extent.

Scott played great with saxophonists—starting with Lockjaw and later Stanley Turrentine, whom she’d end up marrying in the early sixties (they stayed together until the early seventies). Of the fifty-plus albums she recorded as a leader (most on the Prestige and Impulse labels), those featuring Turrentine were probably her most influential.

Less well known are the later years, which found Scott back in Philadelphia.

Most often alongside drummer Mickey Roker and bassist Arthur Harper, she presided over the house band at Ortlieb’s in the early years of the former brewery’s incarnation as the JazzHaus.

The list of musicians who became Scott’s protégés simply by showing up to jam at Ortlieb’s reads like a who’s who of Philadelphia’s jazz scene: Budesa, Tim Warfield, Terell Stafford, Mike Boone—they all played Ortlieb’s. But so did so many other area-musicians who just wanted to get a jazz run in after making money playing the party circuit. “Every musician came into Ortlieb’s in that era,” said Budesa. “Guys would roll in coming off other gigs, still in their tuxedos.”
Among the mostly male musicians at Ortlieb’s, it went without saying that Scott was as close to jazz royalty as most would ever get. But the only thing boss-like about her was her playing. “She didn’t have that authoritarian air about her or anything like that,” said Mike Boone, perhaps the most in-demand bass player in town and one of the three or four most important stewards of jazz in Philadelphia. “We just knew she was the queen; she was a bad lady out there.”

Trudy Pitts was a different story. Not a jazzier by birth—or perhaps even by sensibility—Pitts was a bonafide classical musician, “a marvelous piano player…and a real intellectual,” said Budesa.

Mike Boone used to gig with Pitts a lot. They had a steady club gig in Wilmington for about a year. And while he loved playing with her, what he really cherished were the car rides down: “I feel pretty blessed that I got to hang with her and, philosophically, take in where she was coming from.”

Trudy Pitts didn’t have nearly as prodigious a recording career as Shirley Scott—why that was is a matter of some debate. She only recorded four albums as a leader, all for Prestige, but did do side-work with tenors Willis Jackson, Gene Ammons, and Sonny Stitt. Notably, she appeared on guitarist Pat Martino’s debut album El Hombre, and Martino, in turn, appeared on Trudy’s first two releases.

Still, the question lingers: why isn’t Trudy Pitts more well known?

Talent never seemed to be the question. Unlike Shirley Scott, who always favored playing with an upright bassist, Pitts’ playing always featured solid bass pedal work and her repertoire was huge, owing to gospel roots and classical training. Said WRTI’s Perkins (a.k.a. BP with the GM), “She could start out playing ‘Stolen Moments,’ and along the way ease in classical, gospel, or blues.”

Some have surmised that her lifelong partnership with husband, drummer Bill Carney, a.k.a. Mr. C, might, for better or worse, explain. Mr. C, in his own right, was a Philadelphia legend who played with the Hi-Tones, a group that featured Tootie Heath on drums, a young John Coltrane on saxophone, and the aforementioned Shirley Scott on organ. In that super-group, Mr. C sang. In a story emblematic of the Philly jazz scene, Mr. C met Trudy Pitts when Shirley Scott left the band; he hired Pitts to be the new organist.

“It wasn’t like people didn’t know about her,” said Mike Boone. “She came up at the same time as Trane and McCoy Tyner; Trane was aware of her playing. She was heavy-duty.”

“But Trudy spent most of her time playing with Mr. C,” continued Boone. “And he kind of kept her in a certain bag. I mean, she got it in [her share of playing], but it would’ve been interesting to see how she would’ve developed and gotten more well known had Trudy gotten the chance to play with some other folks the same way Shirley did.”

In jazz, as in life, there are lots of ‘what-ifs.’ Still, Scott played for over fifty years, sharing her erudition with college students and doing what she loved until the very end, becoming the first jazz musician to play on the 7,000-pipe organ at the Kimmel Center (at an organ summit that featured the likes of Dr. Lonnie Smith, Joey DeFrancesco, and John Medeski).
She also leaves a legacy, as Scott does, in more ways than one. Orrin Evans, the great pianist who found his way into some of those Ortieb’s sessions towards their end, is her godson.

But the legacy is even broader than that. What these women from Philadelphia started—it’s global now.

There were others along the way, of course, who helped ‘grow the game,’ so to speak. There was Gloria Coleman (wife of saxophonist George Coleman, who’s probably best known as the tenor saxophonist between John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter in the Miles Davis Quintet), a New York native, who according to Boone “…could handle her business…. Cats knew not to mess with her.” There was Rhoda Scott, the American expat who moved to France in the seventies and played with bare feet, using the pedals exclusively to play bass lines.

It seems, though, that Scott and Pitts occupy that rarefied space just above the rest—but maybe that’s my bias as a Philadelphian. Either way, their influence on those doing it today can’t be denied. Barabara Dennerlein (Germany) and Atsuko Hashimoto (Japan) are just a couple of the bigger names burning it up abroad.

And then there’s Akiko Tsuruga, perhaps the most celebrated among the new generation. Based out of New York City for the past couple decades, everyone who plays with her says her playing is an extension of her joyful, ebullient personality.

She’s also an example of how every organ player can be connected in a Kevin Bacon-like way to Jimmy Smith. In the late nineties, Smith was touring Japan, playing the Blue Note in Osaka. Akiko, an Osaka native, was playing the club across the street. That’s where Grady Tate, the legendary drummer who was playing with Smith and who would become Akiko’s closest American mentor, heard her play for the first time.

Tate would help her move to New York City, where she’s come to love the American jazz audience (and they’ve come to love her back). “The American audience shows more emotion,” said Akiko. “There’s more dancing in their seats.”

It’s that type of enthusiasm that Akiko’s most looking forward to when she descends upon Somers Point for this year’s Jazz @ The Point Festival. She was absolutely giddy when I mentioned she’d be sharing a lineup card with friends Pat Bianchi and Tony Monaco. “I love Tony Monaco,” she exclaimed, as though she’d just heard me inform her she’d won the lottery.

It’s really us, jazz fans, who’ve won the lottery, of course. Come the second weekend in October, we’ll get to see and hear the legacies of Shirley Scott and Trudy Pitts manifest themselves on stages across Somers Point. Only difference between the Jazz @ The Point festival and the lottery is that everyone who buys a ticket to the former wins the grand prize.

Matt Silver is a writer and jazz host at WRTI 90.1 in Philadelphia, whose own saxophone playing can most aptly be described as somewhere between not altogether hopeless and delightfully adequate. He lives in Philadelphia & Ventnor.
And So It Began

By Nick Regine

The History of the South Jersey Jazz Society started way before we officially formed what was then known as the Somers Point Jazz Society in 2004. It really started as an afterthought.

It was back in 1999 when I was the Director of Community Education and Recreation in Somers Point. The position was multifaceted and involved everything from youth sports to adult enrichment programs, to bus trips for senior and various other assorted activities. One of my jobs was as the Fund Development Officer for the newly formed Foundation for Education (a non-profit dedicated to help the local public schools). Most of our fund raising activities were centered around events, golf tournaments, opera dinners, a gala dinner dance and more. I wanted to do an event focused on music and I thought that if I combined a Blues Festival with a Chili Cook Off I might be able to convince a local company that had patented and marketed the product “Beano” to join us as a title sponsor.

Things were looking up after I meet and got a verbal approval from the “Beano” people. About a week went by and I receive a call from them telling me that they had misspoke. (This is the first time I ever heard the term). Anyway now I was stuck with an event with no sponsor. So, I called an audible. My friend Pete Chavez, a great tenor sax player in his own right, agreed to help me put together a small jazz festival to take the place of a Blues Festival and Chili Cook Off.

Pete contacted some of his jazz friends from Philly, Monette Sudler, Lucky Thompson, Donald Washington, Carol Harris, and others and we were able to convert a sleepy mid-March Sunday afternoon into a jazz happening with people walking up and down the streets, popping into Gregory’s, The Pearl, and Brownie’s By the Bay.

Since then the Festival itself has undergone many changes. It went from a one day event to a festival that now spans 4 four days. Also we went from an event that featured mostly local and Philadelphia jazz artists, now boast, of showcasing some of the best jazz talent anywhere to be found in the world.

The list of artists who have played the South Jersey Jazz Festival over the years includes Pat Martino, Mulgrew Miller, Richie Cole, Jimmy Bruno, Dr. Lonnie Smith, The Four Freshman, Bill Charlap, Paul Bollenbeck, Jimmy Cobb, Eric Alexander, Vincent Herring, Howard Alden, The Caribbean Jazz Project, Marlon Simon, and many others.

Order your tickets for the “Jazz Organ Summit” OCEANFIRST BANK FOUNDATION JAZZ @THE POINT FESTIVAL today by going to sjjs.ticketleap.com. Enjoy 4 days of jazz!
The Jazz Organ and its Philly/Atlantic City Connection

By Michael Pedicin

The Hammond Organ was developed by Laurens Hammond, who was born in 1895. He eventually attained a degree in Mechanical Engineering from Cornell University in 1916.

Armed with his first organ, the Model A, Hammond received a U.S. patent for his design in 1934. At the Industrial Arts Exposition in Radio City’s RCA Building, the organ drew accolades from almost all who attended. Interestingly, two of his first buyers were George Gershwin and Henry Ford.

In the 1930s, Fats Waller, who most of us know as one of the very early jazz pioneers and also as a brilliant jazz pianist, took a tour with the organ. And, so begins the Hammond Organ’s shy entrance into the domain of Jazz.

Actually, as the son of a Baptist pastor, Fats Waller learned to play church organ before he ever touched a piano. Although he eventually did continue to tour with the organ, he rarely recorded with it, and therefore was usually recognized by his listeners as a pianist, not as an organist.

Waller’s inclusion of this “new” instrument did however, create some attention from Count Basie. Basie began to use the instrument as somewhat of a novelty in his performances.

During this period and through the 1940s, the Hammond Organ became a commercialized instrument, providing the background music for many commercials and soap operas. At this time, its full musical ability and complexity was never fully tested, but its sound was always being heard.

There was one man who could not stop himself for wanting to play and explore the possibilities of the Hammond Organ, and that was Wild Bill Davis.

Wild Bill Davis was the dominating figure of what little jazz organ scene there was in the late 1940s. He showed not only his jazz style, but a legitimate coherence in the R and B field. He also broke ground by recording with the first organ trio in the early 1950s. His talents were noted in the jazz scene.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Atlantic City was fortunate to have Wild Bill Davis appearing, during the summer months, on Kentucky Avenue at a small nightclub called “Gracie’s Belmont.” In those live music-filled days, Kentucky Avenue was a haven for jazz and R & B music lovers. One could stroll down Kentucky Avenue and hear music pouring out from bars and clubs that dotted just a few blocks. Surprisingly, most of the groups appearing here, had a jazz organist as part of their rhythm section. Drummer Chris Colombo and saxophonist Willis “Gator tail” Jackson to name a few.

One of the next and very important jazz organists to come onto the scene is Jimmy Smith, who was born and raised in Norristown, PA. Smith was a constant figure in the local Philadelphia jazz clubs. (continued)
One magical night, as Jimmy Smith was in the audience to listen to alto saxophonist Charlie Parker with pianist Bud Powell, he had that “golden opportunity” that only rarely happens. Bud was late for the gig, and Jimmy was asked to sit in, which he did. Charlie Parker and the band just loved his playing, and invited him back for the next night. And so, history is being made for Smith and the jazz organ!

Larry Young took the importance of the organ to a new level, as he was chosen to play with jazz luminaries such as John McLaughlin, Tony Williams, and Jimi Hendrix, as well as being asked to join the band of Miles Davis.

Unfortunately, Young had an untimely death at the age of 37.

To name a few of the next in line, we have Jimmy McGriff, Richard “Groove“ Holmes, “Brother” Jack McDuff, Larry Young, Charles Earland, Don Patterson, Shirley Scott, Trudy Pitts, Akiko Tsuruga, Mike LeDonne, Joey DeFrancesco, Tony Monaco, Jared Gold, and Pat Bianchi. A few interesting facts for us at the South Jersey Jazz Society: Pat Martino, the jazz guitarist extraordinaire from Philadelphia, got one of his earliest gigs with the aforementioned Charles Earland. Shirley Scott, the very active native Philadelphian, was married to saxophonist Stanley Turrentine. Philadelphia organist Trudy Pitts was a constant Philadelphia jazz force and educator for decades. And, along with her husband, drummer Bill Carney a/k/a Mr C, mentored so many young Philly musicians. Mike LeDonne is right next door, and often playing in NYC.

Today, we are fortunate to witness the continuing evolvement of some incredibly talented young musicians who have chosen the organ as their vehicle for creative expression.

And, the best news is that ORGANISTS Joey DeFrancesco, Pat Bianchi, Tony Monaco, and Akiko Tsuruga will be featured at this year’s SJJS October “Organ Summit” festival.

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OGD

By Tony Monaco

Playing the drums with an organ trio is definitely a skill that not all drummers understand! Especially when the organist plays the bass lines! Its in this OGD (Organ Guitar Drum) Configuration that all 3 work to fill the rhythmic and harmonic spectrum! Drummers in this setting are a cross between another comping instrument and a big band drummer. The groove and ride cymbal must help accent the bass lines while as the organ swells into big band type sounds, the drummer must then also rise as if playing in a big band....
Member Spotlight

Phyllis Childs

Though I am a resident of Cape May County I became a member of "Somers Point Jazz Society" very quickly after the original group incorporated to become a non-profit organization. Prior to that time, a small group had been sponsoring Friday evening events - mostly staged in the Dining Room at Somers Point location of Gregory's Restaurant. As I recall, these events were scheduled to increase revenue and support music education in Somers Point schools. Tickets were sold for a rather nominal amount, $10 or $15 perhaps? I had first heard of these cheerful events from a friend and local vocalist-about-town and A C casino lounges, Paulina Kaye. Often I attended these varied events alone, but also frequently with a friend, Margaret Conrad, who was always interested in live music or theatrical performances.

To my recollection, the SP Jazz Society was a direct outgrowth of these long-ago Friday evening events, and it’s established organization offered more of an opportunity for the general public to support a very important cause.....furthering opportunities for students to learn about music and to nurture live performance of music. Helping to further that cause was the reason I wanted to join the Society.

Membership in both the original "Somers Point", and more recently the "South Jersey" group affords me the luxury of receiving notifications of many and varied music-related events in the area - we always know what is going on, not to mention the personal warmth and charm. The joy and friendly overtures from what I term "the regulars" at most of our events are most endearing to me, and I always thoroughly enjoy attending.

A favorite memory of mine in connection with the Jazz Society occurred many years ago - 17 or 18? I was, and am, a faithful listener to my friend, Bob Perkins’ Jazz Show on WRTI. When the Jazz Society was new - probably 2nd year of its life - Bob was giving away pairs of tickets to the S P Jazz Festival. One evening he broadcast that the 5th caller would be the winner. I was the fortunate winner of those 2 tickets. I invited my friend Margaret to attend some of those performances with me. One that stands out was Gina Roche and her quartet appearing at the former "Pearl" restaurant on the Circle in S. P. That was the moment I also introduced myself as a ticket winner to Bob and Sheila Perkins, and we have remained friends ever since.
Drums + Organ = A Dynamic Duo

By Carmen Intorre Jr. (Drummer for Akiko Tsuruga)

My first encounters with music were going to see organ groups. What struck me about this instrument were the sound, its power, and the excitement it brought to the music. The audience sure was electrified! From that moment on I felt that I could identify with this sound and I felt that my musical and drumming style would fit playing with an organist. I have performed with all of the who’s who of today’s organists and what I find common is the ability to groove. So first and foremost the drummer has to find that groove and stay on it. The bass from the organ does not have the same point on the note that it does coming from an acoustic bass. So because of that I think it is important to have a wide beat on the drums. I find myself approaching the time as horizontal rather than vertical. I feel that drummers should match the bottom that comes from the organ. Which is achieved by feathering the bass drum along with the bass line, by doing this it gives the bass notes a point and also helps to lock in with the organist. There are several schools of thought in this idiom and I can’t say that I like one way or the other in fact I like them all. Some of my favorite examples of Drum/ Organ hookups are: Jimmy Smith/Donald Bailey, Jimmy Smith/Grady Tate, Larry Young/Elvin Jones, Don Patterson/ Billy James, Jack McDuff/Joe Dukes, Wild Bill Davis/Chris Columbus, Lonnie Smith/Idris Muhammad, Joey DeFrancesco/Byron Landham. There’s a wide range of conceptual approaches here but one thing that is guaranteed is Drums + Organ = A Dynamic Duo.

The Art in P(ART)nership

By Kathleen Arleth, Chair, Somers Point Arts Commission

The ARTS – a way of life, the concept, the work – we look at Art and The Arts in many ways and through many lenses. Art impresses on us every day – the architecture that we walk by or drive past, the words that we read or write - stories, memoirs, poems, the photographs that we view or take ourselves, the music that we hear or play or tap our feet to, the designs that we see on billboards and ads, the plays that we attend, the films that we see, the paintings in a gallery or a studio. Whether we are aware or not, the arts are part of our everyday life.

Interesting that art grows into part, and part into partnership. Interesting that art grows into part, and part into partnership. Also interesting is how that word play emerges, and how essential it is that the arts relies on community - a community at large as well as certain smaller communities that are identified with and dedicated to a specific genre of art - one that cultivates seeds of specific artistic interest and allows growth into maturity.
An arts community could be insular with like-minded individuals learning, supporting and sharing among each other but the genre-specific communities also need to reach outward to the larger community and to other kinds of arts communities and organizations. Like a design of intersected circles all touching and crossing into each other’s space, the interrelated design becomes full, rich, deep and it becomes the community of the whole.

In our Southern New Jersey area there have been in the past fifteen years or so, a number of arts organizations covering a pallet of artistic endeavors that have become partners with each other. The Somers Point Arts Commission (SPAC), an official commission of the City of Somers Point, reactivated in 2013, has as its mission to present, promote and cultivate the arts in the City of Somers Point through the support and coordination of community resources. The commission has taken this mission to heart. Beginning with its first project, SPAC partnered with the Somers Point Historical Society to bring art and history together in the “Art of History”, the outdoor mural depicting the life of USN hero Richard Somers as public art on the Somers Point Library. Since then, the concept of partnering has led to mutual support through a number of sponsorships, memberships and cooperative ventures leading to expanded arts presentations, mutual promotions and a wider audience. Where the Somers Point Arts Commission is unable to produce artistic events on its own, becoming partners with other arts organizations allows it to be part of a panorama of expanded arts programs.

As a business member of the South Jersey Jazz Society, the Somers Point Arts Commission has found a mutual partner of the Arts in Somers Point through shared promotions and publicity and at its events that include jazz musicians performing at *Love the Arts and Art in the Park*, and Jazz film nights that open South Jersey Jazz Society’s’ Autumn Jazz Festivals.

The Somers Point Arts Commission has created additional partnerships that allow the Commission to be a participant in multi-disciplinary arts programs and events, bringing the arts to the general population. These partnerships include sponsoring *April in Paris in Somers Point*, a week-long+ event presented by the Somers Point Unique Experiences Club, a non-profit LLC where collaboration with the SJ Poets Collective enables SPAC to present regional poets at *April in Paris: An Evening of Spoken Words and Music*, membership in the Somers Point Business Association. Educational partnerships with the Somers Point School District and its Community, Education & Recreation Program and the Somers Point Foundation for Education brings further opportunities like *The Arts Reach Out and Writing Poetry Your Way* for community members, and Poetry Workshops for students, teachers. This August the Somers Point Arts Commission became the music sponsor for the South Jersey Area Wind Ensemble for their summer concert at Somers Point’s Gateway Playhouse, adding yet another organization to our partnerships.

Partnering in the Arts allows organizations of various arts genres to broaden their reach into the community at large while developing deeper relationships among themselves through increased attendance, promotion and establishing a sense of awareness of the Arts. The energy that results brings excitement to a community as it develops an appreciation of the arts and becomes an art community. With mutual partnerships bringing awareness of the arts in all its forms, The Arts Commission has adopted the all-embracing slogan *The Arts Live in Somers Point.*
Organ Drummers  By Pat Bianchi

I have always found it to be an interesting discussion when the topic of “organ drummers” comes up amongst musicians. What is an “organ drummer” exactly? As the style of Jazz Organ has grown and evolved thru the years, so to has the function of the drums with in the ensemble. I feel the best place to start is when listening to some of the earlier Jazz Organist’s (pre Jimmy Smith) The organ was in many ways thought of as a substitute to a big band. The Hammond organ is able to cover a wide range of sounds and colors as well as a wide range of dynamics, just like a big band. (Think about Count Basie’s version of April In Paris) Ironically that arrangement was written by organist/pianist Wild Bill Davis. So it makes sense that thinking about playing in the “big band” style is one way to approach playing with an organ. But when Jimmy Smith hit the scene in the mid-late 1950’s, his “horn like approach” to the instrument was a game changer in many ways. The drummer still played a supportive role in the group, but the concept was more based in the bebop style of drumming. Listen to Art Blakey and Jimmy Smith on records like “House Party” and “Cool Blues”. As Jimmy’s style changed and he began to play more what is considered soul jazz and funky jazz, along with a number of other legendary organists making their mark on the scene such as Jimmy McGriff, Jack McDuff, Charles Earland and many others, the drummer had the responsibility of keeping the groove solid and strong. It had to make you want to dance. Again jazz organ took another turn in 1965 with organist Larry Young’s record “Unity” this recording changed the landscape of jazz organ in so many ways: harmonically, compositionally and especially in the role of the drums. Elvin Jones is featured on this recording and his role was not simply support but more in the way of conversation. Also during this time the great organist Don Patterson hit the scene accompanied by his longtime musical partner Billy James. Billy James played in both ways so to speak. Supportive in keeping a solid groove but also very interactive.

In the end the ideas of what an organ drummer is has changed as the genre itself has evolved over the years. One thing to remember is that a Hammond B3 bass sound is very different than that of an acoustic or electric bass. The organ bass sound is very round and can be best described and then visualized as an upside down “U” .. the center or attack of the note is not very defined where as an electric or acoustic bass sound can be visualized as an upside down “V” .. It is much more defined making it easier to lock to. Since the point on the bass sound/beat of the organ can be harder to hear, in essence an organ drummer must learn to hear and identify the center/point of the beat on the organ in order to lock or keep the tempo solid.
The (multi-faceted) purpose of Jazz, and the need for Improvisation and jazz education in our lives.

By Michael Pedicin

Jazz is America’s true, innate, and “congenital” Art form. It was born on the shores of New Orleans in the early 1900s.

A very intriguing aspect of its birth is that it was born out of some intrinsic American misdemeanor as well as some of America’s most wonderful attributes, and that is the welcoming of folks from other lands bringing their culture and soul to our soil.

Although sometimes misplaced and bigoted, the ultimate melding of more than a few races and ethnicities allowed for the creation of this wonderful music we call Jazz.

My strong belief is that the basis for this music was unequivocally created by those of African descent. Sadly, many of those who were later to become what we know as African Americans, were brought here against their free will to be slaves in the burgeoning port of New Orleans. New Orleans was then a very busy port exchanging trade and merchandise between many nations.

Music was a very important part of its daily life. It was entertainment. It played a role in the sensibility of weddings, births and funerals, and brought dancing to the streets, as well as almost any and all aspects of social gathering.

What I find most appealing and satisfying is that what eventually created jazz is the blending of these cultures, their soul, their yearning, their struggles, and also the intuitive knowledge to allow the synergy to grow and evolve into a form of, not only Art, but a form of blending, acceptance, and that wonderful feeling of creativity and spontaneity.

Spontaneity, without regard for judgment allowed the ‘now’ local folks, e.g. singers and musicians to share what they felt and wanted to express. From the work songs in the fields to the town brothels, music was what got them through their difficult days.

Eventually, the cultures collided! The soulful, improvisational, and intense rhythmic music of the working class was introduced to the more sophisticated music forms of the Europeans who brought with them the classical forms of music, filled with theoretical and technical prowess. The two collided and jazz was born.

As in all art forms, the creators have a basic need to do what they do, and always show a very determined effort to find ways to do so.

As time went on, the locale of opportunity for musicians began to shift to other locations, i.e. New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.

And, so we see the “pop” music of these early years as being this music, jazz, and all of its sensitive attributes. It was music to listen to, to dance to, and to enjoy.
It allowed the listener to find pleasure and a release of emotions. As years went by, Jazz became more of a sophisticated art form, and probably took some of the ‘fun’ out of it. People began to feel that one must understand it rather than just enjoy it. My feeling is that, although it truly is an art form, we may have lost some of our potential audience over these years.

It is my strong belief that jazz education for all, old and young, has the potential to re-create that understanding of what this music can do for each of us. It can bring a sense of mindfulness to our existence. It will allow each of us to experience what improvisation means to the player who has studied music in its complete and traditional ways, and can also enhance our ability to develop that in ourselves.

What a better world it could be if we all allowed for freedom of thought and feeling, without any dogma or bias.

In my belief system, we can, and should carry this process into all aspects of life—education, relationships, work, family, and the duty of all human beings to create a world of dignity, respect, love, and appreciation for every individual on our planet.

I ask all for giving yourself and others the gift of Improvisation and creativity in your thinking, behavior, and life itself. Listen to jazz. Enjoy jazz. And, know that those of us who enjoy the sensibility of making music and improvising together, have been blessed with that gift and hope that you will share it with us.