

West Coast Jazz Party

This vignette is a loving and heartfelt tribute to my original Jazz Trio: Betty, Gloria, and Jean. They were my accompaniment on several gigs in the Bay Area over several years before I relocated (returned) to the east coast.

Yes, we did many, many performance dates between 2005-13 at Yoshi's - Oakland, Jazz at Pearl's, S.F. Jazz, Kuumbwa's, Stanford Jazz Workshop, San Jose Jazz Festival, Yoshi's - S.F., Healdsburg Jazz Festival, and Jazz on The Plazz, to name a few venues. We still gig occasionally during my trips out west.

No, we did not play any instruments, but we communicated (*talked among ourselves*), were on one accord (*traveled in my car*), improvised (*pick-up/drop-off plans*), took solos (*paid table tab*), traded fours (*shared table tab*), played in 4/4 time (*never late*), felt the blues (*rush-hour traffic jams*), sight-read (*food menu*), vocalized (*lip-synced the lyrics*), swung hard (*tapped our feet*), and listened intently (*tuned in*) to the melody, harmony, and rhythm, just like a seasoned Jazz ensemble. And we all shared a genuine love, respect, and appreciation for this wonderful original American art form – Jazz music.

Many have sat in with us over the years, most notably Mary, who replaced Betty when she relocated out of state in summer 2008. Others who seamlessly filled in, blending in perfectly with the trio's chemistry, included: Eunice (deceased), Vatchye, Carolyn, Joy, Faye, Wanda, Awele, Irene, Ralph, Ngozi, James, and Dan. You see, lots of great talent in the Bay Area!!!

Interestingly enough, I met my original trio members in 2005 at a gig (of course!) in Campbell Recital Hall during a Stanford Jazz Workshop performance. I arrived a few minutes before it began and, being a smaller venue, seats were rather scarce. So I looked

around, saw other open seats, but noticed a particular open seat in between these two Black women in the center of a long row.

Now, being that I'm of a certain age and from a certain era, when in large public gatherings where I'm in the stark minority by far, I/we tend to naturally or subconsciously gravitate toward my/our own. Perhaps, that was the case here, so I headed toward that open seat, sat down, greeted both women, complete strangers, and proceeded to enjoy the first half of the concert.

During the brief intermission, I formally introduced myself to Betty and Gloria, and we discussed backgrounds, favorite Jazz artists, upcoming Stanford Jazz performances, past Bay Area shows, other Jazz venues, etc. After the performance, we chatted some more on the way to the parking lot and I said good-bye to Betty and Gloria. Until next time...

In my experiences, ALL Jazz fans seem to be very cordial, friendly, interesting people. That's what's so great about the Jazz fan community; you may not know a person's name, but you surely recognize his/her face and begin talking Jazz, sharing stories, discussing albums, mentioning a recent or upcoming Jazz concert, opining about particular Jazz artist, etc.

At another Stanford Jazz Workshop performance, I saw Gloria with another friend of hers and sat near them. That's when I first met Jean. Again, we chatted during the intermission. Very nice and genuine folks! Unbeknownst to me, my Jazz Trio was coming together...

Soon after that, while checking out a Jazz performance at Yoshi's – Oakland, I saw Betty and Jean sitting in a booth with their friends. So, I thought, "Man, these must be some serious Jazz folks... like me."

Over time, when I saw Betty, Gloria, and/or Jean at many more Jazz

performances in the Bay Area, we chatted more, became good friends, and formed a special bond. Eventually, for Yoshi's – Oakland concerts, in order to save time, gas, and parking costs, we all agreed that they'd drive to my home in Fremont, leave their car(s) in my driveway, then we'd all head to Oakland in my car for the performance. Afterwards, we'd return to Fremont, they'd get in their cars and head home – Mission Accomplished!

Soon after, with so many great concerts and venues on the docket (back when straightahead Jazz bookings were prevalent in the Bay Area), it became more convenient for me to just do all the driving and buy all the tickets, my treat! The women certainly didn't mind and I didn't either. To their credit, they were always ready when I drove up, especially Jean. Nothing worse than arriving late for a gig!

Through Gloria and Mary, I eventually met and came to know their wonderful friends: Eunice, Vatchye, Joy, and Carolyn.

Yes, my Jazz Trio and I popped up everywhere in the Bay Area to hear some great music, so much so that sometimes, when I did see a performance all by myself, I'd be asked at the box office or by others, "So where's your trio?" or "Where's the crew?" I just had to smile. Truth be told, they were really my bodyguards, as part of my security detail. :v)

All in all, we (3 or 4) saw approximately 75 Jazz performances together, including:

Wayne Shorter, Bobby Hutcherson, Kenny Burrell, Eldar, Stanley Clarke, Sean Jones, Jamie Davis, Benny Green, Pat Martino, Hank Jones, Roberta Gambarini, Andrew Speight, James Carter, Faye Carol, Joey DeFrancesco, Rachell Ferrell,

Allen Smith, Barbara Morrison, Clairdee, Roy Hargrove, Pharoah Sanders, Rhonda Benin, James Moody, Lou Donaldson, Kim Nalley, Terrence Brewer, Eric Reed, Regina Carter, Cedar Walton, Ramsey Lewis, Earl Klugh, Buster Williams, Nancy Wilson, McCoy Tyner, Monterey Jazz Festival All-Stars, Terence Blanchard, NEA All-Stars, Babatunde Lea, John Handy, Jazz Crusaders, Ron Carter, Ambrose Akinmusire, Jacky Terrasson, Jeff Hamilton, Willie Jones, III, Alfredo Rodriguez, Renee Rosnes, Tom Harrell, Mary Stallings, Nina Freelon, Ravi Coltrane, Marcus Shelby, Kevin Mahogany, Bill Bell, Kenny Barron, Danilo Perez, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Monty Alexander, Junko Onisho, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Mary Wilson, Branford Marsalis, Goldings/Bernstein/Stewart, Arturo Sandoval, , Jaz Sawyer, Hubert Laws, Helen Sung, Jimmy Cobb, Larry Coryell, The Cookers, Billy Cobham, Tom Browne, Ronnie Laws, Wallace Roney, and Junius Courtney Big Band.

(This list does not include the numerous other Jazz performances that I checked out on my own.)

So there you have it, the origins of my Jazz Trio. Many others filled in from time to time. We really enjoyed the music, but even more, the fellow Jazz patrons who sat near us, were very friendly and cordial, chatted with us, applauded following a great solo, maintained a great spirit, etc. I guess that's what Jazz does to/for you. It's certainly good for the soul...

Unfortunately, when I travel to the Bay Area these days, it's often hard to find a straightahead Jazz performance that my trio and I would thoroughly enjoy. But I'll never quit trying, searching venues near and far, from San Francisco to Oakland to San Jose to Santa Cruz.

To each of these classy, sophisticated, and Jazzy ladies, most of

whom are now octogenarians and nonagenarians, and who continue to the relish in the beautiful melodies, harmonies, and rhythms of life, I pray that God continues to bless them and keep them in good health: Betty, Gloria, Jean, Mary, Vatchye, Joy, and Carolyn. We dearly miss you, Eunice (up in heaven)!

Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't send special shout-outs (*call and response*) to the wonderful and patient fellas responsible for reserving great tables for me and my Jazz Trio at both Yoshi's: Jason, Beniyam, and Daniel! Thanks a bunch!!! Indeed, my West Coast Jazz Party!

Love,
Kenneth

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