




THE STATE OF JAZZ TODAY

Share your opinion on the state of jazz at krtu@trinity.edu

Engagement: It's not just politics anymore

Why jazz doesn't need saving - we all do

by Ron Nirenberg, Associate General Manager

“One thing I like about jazz, kid, is that I don't know what's going to happen next. Do you?” Perhaps Bix Beiderbecke said it best about jazz music and the spontaneous creativity that it inspires. But recently, critics have been fearing what's next for the genre itself, despite signs that the art is flourishing all around us, especially here in San Antonio.

Terry Teachout, an arts critic for the *Wall Street Journal* and himself a jazz musician and scholar, created an uproar this summer by publishing a commentary about the impending doom of jazz music. Teachout is armed with survey data from the National Endowment for the Arts and points out that the jazz audience is growing older and shrinking at alarming rates. The median age of adults who attended a live jazz event was 29 in 1982 and 46 in 2008. Adults who reported attending at least one live performance has dropped nearly 30 percent since 2002.

Teachout, who cut his jazz teeth as a bassist for many years and has penned biographies about American icons, including Louis Armstrong, was appointed to the National Council for the Arts (the advisory board of the NEA) by President Bush in 2004. Teachout contends that the empirical facts reveal that Americans now see jazz as a form of high art, not much different than classical music or Renaissance sculpture. In short, jazz has an image and accessibility problem, and younger people are not interested.

Wait a minute. Isn't this the same dilemma we've been hearing about most “art” and, in fact, about most uniquely American traditions, that the ‘youth aren't engaged’? While Teachout's article shone a light on jazz – enough for musicians like Ramsey Lewis to offer “ideas for how jazz can be saved right now” (in the *Journal*) – I believe we have reached a cultural fork in the road, and it is not a problem jazz can solve on its own.

One need only wait two years before being inundated by a wave of news that voter turnout is down, particularly among young people. Flip through the pages of the local newspaper, and you'll probably find a letter or column prescribing the “fixes” for an education system that produces increasing numbers of drop-outs or ill-prepared graduates. Knock on the average American family's door, and you are more likely to interrupt a video game or TV show than a creative discussion. And while conducted with comedic intention, listen closely to the next man-on-the-street interview of the twentysomethings who can quicker sing the Big Mac jingle than hum a bar of the national anthem.

Jazz is a defining American experience, but like civic engagement, participation in the arts and other endeavors that require critical thinking and creative enterprise, Americans as a whole – especially youth – are becoming increasingly disengaged. What captivates us quickly fades away if it isn't spoon-fed as a mass-produced, “pop-ified” version of our cultural experience. It is no wonder why American Idol continues its run but most indie rock groups continue to be, well, indie.

But jazz, at its very core, is antithetical to the erosion of creativity. The defining elements of jazz eschew musical and artistic rules that might otherwise corner it into banality: improvisation is spontaneous creativity and remains the hat-hanger of the genre. The uniqueness of the jazz voice is every bit as important as the performance itself. The experience of the audience plays against and shapes the musician and the music in real time. Jazz will always be a living art demanding imagination from its players and participation from its audience.

And the roots and evolution of jazz reinforce its counterculture essence. From its emersion as a multicultural alternative to high-brow and ultra-

continued on page 2

Jazz Exclusive



Ellington/Strayhorn Nutcracker Concert

November 4 & 5 | 7 p.m.
Josephine Street Theater
Tickets at (210) 734-4646

In 1961 Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn reworked Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* for a jazz orchestra. The result was a stunning and beautiful recording. Listening to the “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy” you will not hear the tinkling melody you expect on a piano, but rather the melody adapted for the baritone and tenor saxophone. In character with the new sound to the music, Ellington gave new titles to the movements and rearranged their order. Curiously, the music was never published and the piece has only been performed publicly a handful of times since the early 1960's.

This December, a collective of San Antonio's own jazz talent, conducted by Freddie Mendoza of Texas State University, will present the Ellington/Strayhorn version of the *Nutcracker Suite* at Josephine Street Theater on Friday, December 4 and Saturday December 5. The event includes a pre-concert presentation by Larry Strayhorn, nephew of Billy Strayhorn. This promises to be a very special adult evening.

The performance showcases local talent, featuring on trumpet Karlos Elizondo, Ed Sherry, Logan Keese, and Jason Jones. The trombone lineup includes Ron Wilkins, Gilbert Garza, and Jerry Verges. Saxophones by Pierre Poiree, Morgan King, Jim Ballentine, Tim McWright, and Bill King. The rhythm section includes Darren Kuper on drums, Brandon Rivas on bass and Barry Brake on piano.

Join KRTU for a holiday concert featuring the work of great jazz composers re-imagining a classical piece. Ticket information available at the Josephine Street Theatre box office at (210) 734-4646.

Upcoming Events

Sunday Jazz @ the Witte

November 8 | 4 - 7 p.m. | Witte Museum
Featuring *West Side Horns*

House of Jazz Festival

November 21 | noon - 8 p.m. | 818 S. Flores
Information at (210) 477-6044

Kenny Barron Concert

November 30 | 7:30 p.m. | UTSA Recital Hall
Tickets at <http://music.utsa.edu>



KRTU-FM 91.7
 TRINITY UNIVERSITY
 ONE TRINITY PLACE
 SAN ANTONIO, TX 78212-7200

Non-Profit Organization
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Permit No. 210
 San Antonio, Texas 78212

KRTU in the community this November and December:

Second Sunday Jazz at the Witte

Kenny Barron Concert

Ellington/Strayhorn Nutcracker Jazz Performance

From the Booth

Dear Members,

This is an exciting newsletter, as I write both to welcome our newest members, who joined during the recent Fund Drive, and to thank renewing members, who rejoined and upgraded your memberships this fall.

I write with the good news that the recent Fund Drive was a resounding success. Thanks to your support, we raised almost \$61,500, a sum that ensures strong programming and meaningful community outreach in the year to come. During our on-air pledge drive we welcomed 143 new members into the KRTU family, and we renewed over 200 committed donors.

Your collective support proves witness to the thriving state of jazz in our community today. As Ron Nirenberg's feature article summarizes, many critics and jazz-enthusiasts recently expressed a concern for the longevity and accessibility of jazz as an evolving art. But here in the Alamo City, we have no worries.

San Antonio's thriving jazz scene is the product of a community of music enthusiasts, just like you, who actively and willfully support the genre. KRTU is listener-supported radio, and our recent Fund Drive confirmed that you are, indeed, out there listening, keeping the music and the art vibrant and accessible.

With the knowledge that jazz is lively and thriving in our community thanks to your patronage and support, KRTU is pleased to be part of stellar upcoming jazz events, including the December performance of the Ellington/Strayhorn version of the Nutcracker Suite and the Kenny Barron concert at UTSA in late November. And mark your calendars for the Dee Dee Bridgewater concert hosted by KRTU on March 26, 2010! Tune in for more details on these and other events.

Thank you, and keep listening!

Kate Rawley Warters

Director of Development, KRTU 91.7 FM

Contact us at:

General Manager

Dr. William Christ

Assoc. General Managers

Chris Karcher
 Ron Nirenberg

Music Director

Alfredo Cruz

Director of Development

Kate Rawley Warters

Operations Manager

JD Swerzenski

Office Support Assistant

Brad Fox

Special Projects Producer

Jamie "JJ" Lopez

Listener Line (210) 999-8313

KRTU Office (210) 999-8917

Office Fax (210) 999-8355

KRTU 91.7 FM

One Trinity Place
 San Antonio, TX 78212

KRTU@trinity.edu

www.KRTU.org

continued from page 1

dogmatic classical symphony and its prominence in the underground speakeasy, jazz was a symbol of American independence, the genuine article, creative and cultural authenticity. The lifeblood of jazz rebels against the orthodox and conventional, those things that define our increasingly mass-produced cultural experiences.

So Teachout's lament should come as no surprise. But before everyone rushes to the door, consider what is right in the world of jazz: supporters refused to let the iconic Newport Jazz Festival – the event's 55th annual – succumb to the worldwide economic crush; veteran and new artists continue to explore the sound with hot new releases (see Roy Hargrove's latest and new stuff by Tamir Hendelman, both currently featured on KRTU); jazz bands from middle school to college thrive ... there's a lot to be excited about in jazz.

Even in our own backyard, there's at least one gig nearly every night by a local artist at vibrant clubs like Blue Star Brewing Company, The Landing, Boardwalk Bistro and Carmen de la Calle's Cafe. KRTU's partnerships with local arts groups continue to grow, including work with the Texas Music Educators Association and school jazz bands across the region. Our flagship education initiative *Growing Jazz* brings live jazz and musical instruction to thousands of children every year. And let's not forget San Antonio's own Jazz'SAlive festival celebrated its 26th year in 2009, bringing local and national

acts to Travis Park for a free, public event. Jazz IS alive and well here and across the country.

On the air, KRTU's format and philosophy are uncompromising, bringing you the best straight ahead jazz from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, year round while continuing to explore the musical evolutions and new sounds, those things that keep the genre fresh, interesting and authentic.

And with your support demonstrated during the recent fall membership drive, KRTU is making jazz accessible to new fans, casual listeners and aficionados alike.

There is no doubt we've reached a point that demands our active attention. Agents of our treasured cultural institutions - jazz, civics and otherwise - need to work with youth to educate and engage the next generations. We need to take care that critical and creative discussion are fostered in our schools and on our streets. And while jazz is certainly a part of that process, to dismiss the current vitality of jazz – the music, the musicians, the audience – would be to ignore the richness of the art itself, the energy brought to the genre by people like you.

Thank you for keeping jazz alive and well in San Antonio.

KRTU would like to hear your opinion on the state of jazz today. Share your comments at krtu@trinity.edu or call Associate General Manager Ron Nirenberg at (210) 999-8159.