

coverstory

Improvising a winner

World-class Umbrella Music Festival showcases local, international jazz artists |

Here's your big chance, jazz fans: Odean Pope hits Chicago Nov. 5 as part of the festival.



BY MICHAEL JACKSON

One of the most ambitious and original music festivals—the Umbrella Music Festival—is back for a sixth year and stronger than ever, conjoined at the hip with the showcase of European musicians at the Cultural Center this week, which already witnessed Chicago debuts from rising stars Francesco Bigioni from Italy and Lithuanian saxophonist Jan Maksimowicz on Nov. 3.

The Nov. 4 bill at Elastic in Avondale/Logan Square features electro-acoustic British solo saxophone innovator John Butcher followed by an equally rare visit from New Yorker Tim Berne in trio with bassist Devin Hoff and drummer Ches Smith.

Smith returns Nov. 6 at the Hungry Brain to stroke guitarist Mary Halvorson's quintet, which follows a rare solo set from witty drum wizard Matt Wilson.

The Nov. 5 line-up at the Hideout also is outstanding. After opening sets from Locksmith Isidore and a new duo pairing Umbrella presenter Mike Reed and guitarist Jeff Parker, Odean Pope's Quartet with Marshall Allen will headline.



Saxophonist Marshall Allen also is on the bill Nov. 5 at the Hideout.

Back in the '80s Pope was already making waves in a remarkable, funky trio with bassist Gerald Vesley and drummer Cornell Rochester,

and earlier still with the collective group Catalyst. Despite sporadic associations in fast company, Pope has remained an innovator in his own right, a jazz godfather on the Philadelphia scene, and beyond.

The Sun-Times recently caught up with Pope over the phone:

Q: You joined *Max Roach* in 1967, then after one year you took a 12-year break, since *Max* accepted a teaching gig, while "rock 'n' roll and disco" were drowning jazz.

Odean Pope: I wasn't completely sold on music as a livelihood at that time and I wanted to study more, get more detailed. I learned flute, bass clarinet, soprano sax and piano in the meantime and began to conceive the music I would later write for the Saxophone Choir.

I took lessons with Ron Rubin, principal woodwind in the Philadelphia Orchestra. I wanted to learn more about the woodwinds, as well as the subtone.

Q: What did you learn from *Roach*?

OP: Max was a pioneer for having your own voice every time you picked up your instrument. Cross rhythms was another thing, playing three against four, five against eight. I use ¾,

11/4, experimenting with different concepts.

Q: John Coltrane gave you one of your first gigs. When did you first meet?

OP: We used to jam after hours at the Woodbine Club in Philly. Jimmy Heath, Benny Golson, Philly Joe Jones and Donald Bailey would be there often. When Miles asked Trane to join him, he asked me to finish out his gig with (Hammond organ hero) Jimmy Smith.

Q: But you, still a teenager, didn't think you were ready?

OP: Coltrane told me: "You will never be ready. If you play a hundred years you're never ready. But you have to make yourself available."

Q: Was one of your missions to translate what Coltrane was doing in the upper register to the lower register of the tenor saxophone?

OP: Well I have to give my wife credit for that suggestion. She really likes the lower range of the horn and it is more difficult to play certain things down there.

Q: You have used your explorations in the bottom range to develop multiphonics, where you overblow to split chord tones. You've done some serious work in this area, notably on your record "Out for a Walk" (Moers 1980).

OP: Multiphonics started when I was learning the oboe and then would play fake fingerings on the tenor by accident and sounds started coming out.

Q: Another thing you employ regularly is circular breathing. Who taught you that technique?

Well surprisingly it was (the late Philadelphia pianist) Eddie Green who told me specifically how to do it. I was good friends with Roland Kirk, who lived in Philly for five years, but he never quite explained what he was doing with circular breathing.

Q: There's a wild story about Kirk joining you on the stand at the Aqua Lounge in the '70s?

OP: I was playing with

Eddie and I heard this voice behind me say, "This is Raissa Roland Kirk, release your hands, keep blowing and let me play your horn." He was amazing, a showman, the audience loved it.

Q: Tonight you will be playing with alto saxist Marshall Allen, with whom you recorded with on "Universal Sounds" (Porter Records) this year. Marshall is known for his association with Sun Ra and is one of the most uninhibited musicians on this planet (or any other). You originally met when you attended rehearsals for the Sun Ra Arkestra years ago.

OP: Marshall lives close to me in Philly; he is such a great guy. We rehearsed the other day. It was raining and I forgot my hat. He met me with an umbrella and held it over my head when I arrived and when I left. I was amazed how powerful and strong he was when he played the music (Ilen is 97, Pope 73).

Q: Marshall creates intergalactic sound spaces with EW1 (electronic wind instrument) as well as blowing the analogue horn. Wild as Sun Ra's music was, it was notated. Will you be reading or playing free at The Hideout here in Chicago?

OP: We'll perform my tribute to (late saxophonist) Prince Lasha, which is very complex and fast (2005's "The Mystery of Prince Lasha," with Lasha and the Odean Pope Trio), but, being the individual he is, I will be offering Marshall the flexibility and freedom to fully express himself.

◆ *The Odean Pope Trio with drummer Craig McVie; bassist Lee Smith plus Marshall Allen, 11 p.m. Nov. 5, The Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773) 227-4433, \$15 cover; hideoutchicago.com. Also on the bill: Locksmith Lodge, 9 p.m.; Jeff Parker and Micke Reed Duo, 10 p.m.*

Michael Jackson is a local free-lance writer and photographer.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Here are some highlights of the 2011 Chicago Umbrella Music Festival:

Nick Mazzarella Trio

9 p.m. Nov. 4, *Elastic*, 2830 N. Milwaukee, (773) 772-3616 elastikarts.org

Up-and-coming alto saxist Mazzarella just released his second album within a year; this one a breezy live document from a set at the Hungry Brain in May titled "This is Just a



Nick Mazzarella | KATE JOYCE

Test," though it adds up to much more than that. Mazzarella possesses a joyfully keening, lemony-fresh alto sax tone engraved with the happy-go-lucky, gambooling-puppy impact of Ornette Coleman's alto lines, as well as Coleman's upbeat existentialism. Mazzarella has his own term, "circumstantialism," as per the closing track on the new CD, where he also reveals a capacity for cage-fighting fury and fluently abstraction, ably abetted by the superior rhythm section of drummer Frank Rosaly and bassist Anton Hatwich.

Locksmith Isidore

9 p.m. Nov. 5, *The Hideout*, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773) 227-4433; hideoutchicago.com

Bass clarinet virtuoso Jason Stein named this trio after his grandfather Isidore Stein, "he was a master locksmith in New York where I grew up and he made a killing." Stein's respect for forbears is born out in his music, which elsewhere derives from cool school innovators Warne Marsh, Lee Konitz and Lennie Tristano.

Isidore is his most personal project and convenes East Coast buddy Mike Pride and prolific local bassist Jason Roebeke, playing Stein's strong originals. Material from the group's two previous Clean Feed CDs is likely to be featured as well as the back-bent stretch out of Miss Lizzy. With luck Stein will include his lovely ballad "Little Bird" from "Three Kinds of Happiness" (Not Two Records, 2010)

UMBRELLA MUSIC FESTIVAL

◆ Continues through Nov. 6

◆ Various venues: Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington; The Whistler, 2421 N. Milwaukee; Elastic, 2830 N. Milwaukee; The Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia

◆ Information and complete schedule: umbrellamusic.org



Matt Wilson

Matt Wilson

9 p.m. Nov. 6, *The Hungry Brain*, 2319 W. Belmont, (773) 709-1401

Wilson is a somewhat surprising but welcome inclusion to this year's festival. Rarified intellectuals tend to dominate the improv music milieu and though Wilson is bright as a button, he has a winning sense of humor, all the more potent given his world class drum skills which have boosted the likes of Wynton Marsalis, Pat Metheny, Denby Zeitlin and Dewey Redman. In anticipation of his performance Wilson states: "I will cordially invite

the sonic spirits, allowing them to welcome the moment with a delightful sense of adventure and abandon. I hope some booty shakin' and other enthusiastic forms of participation will ensue. Watch out-it could get messy!"

Mary Halvorson Quintet

10 p.m. Nov. 6, *The Hungry Brain*, 2319 W. Belmont

Guitarist Halvorson is the kind of maverick composer that makes her band play differently. For example, titanic saxophonist Jon Irabagon, known for his wild exorcisms with "Mostly Other People Do The Killing," plays quite differently in Halvorson's company; his adventurous solo on the metrically shifting opener to Halvorson's critically acclaimed "Saturn Sings" (Firehouse 12, 2010), seems nonetheless chaste next to the sonic implosions she detonates without warning into her own forays. Iconoclasts Marc Ribot and Derek Bailey are suggested in her sound, but Halvorson claims to steal harmony from such sources as Marvin Gaye, Scriabin, Shostakovich, Robert Wyatt and Clifford Brown. This stellar quintet also features trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson from Steve Coleman's Five Elements and has Trevor Dunn standing in for regular bassist John Herbet.

—Michael Jackson



Mary Halvorson | JAMANI WILLET