

COME SUNDAY

BY MICHAEL JACKSON

IN AN ATTEMPT TO PRY MY PRETEEN son away from Facebook and unhook his ears from the iPod, which he uses religiously to tune out the old man, I strong-armed my boy down to Joe and Wayne Segal's Jazz Showcase to check some live music the other Sunday.

I took him to hear Joe Lovano at the Old Town School years before when he was a toddler and was castigated by another critic who felt distracted by the presence of the urchin, "I know you two are pals," the fellow critic said sarcastically, "but he is too young to bring to a show like this."

Joe Segal may not greet me with arms akimbo at his club, but whenever I have taken the kids on a Sunday, his indifferent mien will thaw and he'll offer something to the tune of "I remember when you were this high." Since matinee houses at the Showcase are often as strong as Saturday nights, the family show is good for business, but Segal has missionary zeal beyond pecuniary measure: "You can't let kids grow up with this crap in their ears, at least give them a choice," he insists.

Segal claims he naturally gravitated towards decent music, listening to the radio in Philly and checking theatres where big bands would play, he was also into classical and opera from an early age. When he began promoting jazz, he would tote Wayne, his youngest of five offspring, to check such legends as Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon at live recording sessions at one of his first venues, The North Park Hotel. Wayne says his father always advocated nurturing a young audience and would sneak youngsters into his various clubs. "As long as they didn't touch any alcohol," says Wayne. "But the jazz kids know better: there's an opportunity there and they don't want to blow it." In the mid 1980s, when the Showcase was at the Blackstone, and Tari, Wayne's eldest of three children, turned five, Dizzy Gillespie serenaded her on his knee with Happy Birthday.

The current Showcase home is particularly kid friendly, with big windows on either side of the stage



Joe Lovano

making a matinee experience less sepulchral than at the Grand Ave location. "It's our Fred W. Friendliest space yet," says Segal, referencing the name of an old newscaster. "Its roomy and comfortable, our nicest space ever. Wayne's design," he adds.

When I arrived with my reluctant hostage to Lovano's matinee show the Showcase was jam full of young people, including the saxophonist's youthful band "US Five," which features NOW gen players like Esperanza Spalding, Francisco Mela, and Otis Brown III. The spontaneity of the music - Lovano devised the twin drummer band so it can break down into trio, duo, and quartet configurations - combined with its immediate, gritty dynamic created a charged atmosphere. My son removed his headphones voluntarily and I detected he felt a part of what was happening.

Talking with Lovano later he described how the band fed off the energy in the room. >>> **CONT. P. 7**

>>> **CONT. P. 3** "We felt fresh in the afternoon and executed a real concert set, which propelled us into the evening shows." One of Lovano's first Chicago gigs was at Segal's Rush Street venue in 1977 when he was touring with Woody Herman, he subsequently played the club with John Scofield before appearing as a leader in the early '90s. "There is a particular mood when you play in a room with a rich history like the Showcase, Yoshi's, The Village Vanguard, Ronnie Scott's, or the New Morning in Paris; a different attitude."

Lovano recalled opportunities afternoon concerts gave him to connect with the music. When he was a high school senior in Cleveland he and his pal, vibraphonist Ron Smith, went to a concert at The East Town Motel. James Moody came off the stand and sat down at the table with them, introduced himself and said "Are you guys musicians?" Influenced by Moody's virtuoso playing and perhaps also his approachability, Lovano went out the following week and bought his first flute.

Hanging with his sax-playing father in formative years the young Lovano remembers meeting Gene Ammons backstage. "My Dad and Jug embraced and it freaked me out that they knew each other. It taught me how real the community of musicians was. Jug was not this iconic figure, but a friend of my Dad's y'know?"

Along with a plethora of autograph hunters and well-wishers, I introduced my boy to Lovano after the show. He's been lucky enough to meet several of my heroes, that's what Dads do. No doubt he figured I was basking in reflected glory and a double dose of pride, but when I dropped him home after the afternoon's kidnapping he offered, succinctly, "That was cool, thanks."