

coverstory

Jazz Festival has solid lineup at every turn

BY MICHAEL JACKSON

Though the basic programming budget for the Chicago Jazz Festival has remained at \$175,000 for several years now, collaboration with Chicago Jazz Partnership (which in part bankrolls the fest that continues through the weekend in Millennium Park and Grant Park) has meant that the lineup continues to be stronger than ever.

Despite an absence of international acts, homegrown talent is abundant, embracing hip up-and-comers, plus exposure for undersung stalwarts such as Rich Corporongo, Jeremy Khan, Curtis Robinson and Pat Mallinger.

The Young Lion's Stage in Grant Park showcases a dozen combos from area schools from noon Sept. 3 and 4, then surrenders to 87.7-FM's Close Up 2 starting at 6 p.m. (This stage faces west, avoiding last year's sound spill when the smooth jazz pointed north toward the bandshell.)

Don't neglect lunchtime sets on the Jackson and the Jazz and Heritage stages, which include MacArthur genius grant-endorsed pianist Reggie Robinson's sextet and New Horizons Ensemble (12:30 p.m. Sept. 4).

Omnipresent will be artist-in-residence Orbert Davis, who fronts his excellent sextet with guest pianist Brandon McCune and virtuoso violinist Zach Brock (1:10 p.m. Sept. 4, Jazz on Jackson). Davis also premieres "Life" with the Jazz Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble, a suite charting his development through classical, jazz and P-Funk (7:10 p.m. Sept. 3, Petrillo Music Shell).

CHICAGO JAZZ FESTIVAL

- ◆ Throught Sept. 4
- ◆ 6:30-9:30 p.m. Sept. 2, Millennium Park
- ◆ 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Sept. 3-4, Grant Park
- ◆ Free
- ◆ (312) 744-3316; chicagojazzfestival.us



Saxophonist Oliver Lake (pictured at the Hideout last year) and the rest of Trio 3 are celebrating 25 years of musicmaking. | MICHAEL JACKSON PHOTO

Among the Sept. 3 bill (6-6:55 p.m.) is supergroup Trio 3 — saxist Oliver Lake, drummer Andrew Cyrille, bassist Reggie Workman — toasting 25 years together and the release of "Celebrating Mary Lou Williams, Live at Birdland New York" (Intakt) with pianist Geri Allen.

"Intermission" on the CD combines the attributes of this unit of legends, from Workman's statement of the quizzical bass line, to Cyrille's offbeat rhythms. Allen spins a solo

of melodic tension after inimicable forays from Lake — gravelly rips, expressionistic asides and rapid marker scribbling in the alto sax's remote upper range.

Lake was a founder of St. Louis' multidisciplinary Black Artists' Group (BAG) in 1968 and also the World Saxophone Quartet. An AACM alum, he has experimented with Caribbean music and is also a poet and painter. Workman's credits include "Live at the Village Vanguard" with John Coltrane, and

he'll present his large-scale African-American Legacy Project at Lincoln Center next month. Cyrille was Cecil Taylor's beatmaster for 10 years, and recorded with Coleman Hawkins, Leroy Jenkins and John Carter. Allen, a Guggenheim fellow, has worked with Charles Lloyd and Ornette Coleman, plus husband Wallace Roney, and is musical director for the Mary Lou Williams estate.

The Sun-Times phoned Lake at his home in New Jersey.

Question: *Isn't Trio 3 somewhat of a default title for the group?*

Oliver Lake: Reggie, Andrew and I were forever guesting with each other's projects, so we decide to unite under one name.

Q: *What are the strengths of your cohorts?*

OL: With Reggie it's sound; before he plays a note I have the foreknowledge of his beautiful sound, that he'll lay everything down. Andrew is so lyrical and a great accompanist. Geri is literally a powerful pianist. She has her own style yet plays any style.

Q: *Rather than Coltrane and Charlie Parker, your style is a synthesis of Eric Dolphy and Jackie McLean.*

OL: I came up with my own sound taking bits from each. I messed with the tenor on my album "Jump Up," but the lower sounding horns are not my forte, I am more in tune with alto and soprano.

Q: *Early on you studied with Oliver Nelson, who once teamed with Dolphy.*

OL: I took summer classes at Washington University with Nelson. He taught me to trust myself and find my voice from a compositional point of view.

Q: *Your blues feeling stems from the jukebox in your mother's restaurant in St. Louis?*

OL: I grew up around "Five Sisters Restaurant," run by my mother. It was a big part of our survival. There was always R&B coming from the jukebox. Tina Turner live nearby, as well as Lester Bowie and drummer Phil Wilson.

Q: *Your poetry, which you include in sets, harks back to days with BAG.*

OL: I was around poet Ajule Rutlin in St. Louis, then later in New York, Quincy Troupe and Amiri Baraka. There's more excitement when my poetry is performed than read. I compiled a second anthology *If I Knew This*. My first, *Lifedance of Is* came out 30 years ago.

Q: *Mary Lou Williams once said of her playing: "I am praying through my fingers. ... I get that good 'soul' sound and try to touch people's spirits."*

OL: Music is a religion. I am communing with God when I play, the notes are my prayers. The days when I don't touch my instrument are incomplete.

Michael Jackson is a free-lance writer and photographer.

Picks from the Park: some must-see shows

SEPT. 2
Jay Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park

6.30-7.30 p.m. | Bobby Broom and the Deep Blue Organ Trio: Guitarist Broom, drummer Greg Rockingham and organist Chris Foreman are part of the furniture at the Green Mill, scant exaggeration since Foreman has been tight with the club's cumbersome Hammond B3 throughout this grooving trio's long-running residency there. Their latest CD celebrates Stevie Wonder with churchy stops and chilled takes on "My Cheri Amour" and "Golden Lady." With guest altoist Watson, a charismatic, quixotic character, they'll expand their close-knit simpatico.

8-9.30 p.m. | Saxophone Summit: This overgroup is more considered than its junket name suggests. Originally featuring the late Michael Brecker (to whom their latest, "Sepharic Light," is dedicated), now, Ravi Coltrane, the rhythm section — including stellar drummer Billy Hart — has remained consistent during the group's 15-plus years together. Dave Liebman and pianist Phil Markowitz are the nucleus, the legacy of the late John Coltrane, the catalyst. Coltrane genetically (not stylistically) transports the mountainous legacy of his father, John, and mother, Alice; Liebman is resilient and tenacious, renowned in particular for soprano saxophony; and Joe Lovano's gorgeously gruff tenor and cascading phraseology is pure jazz wonder.

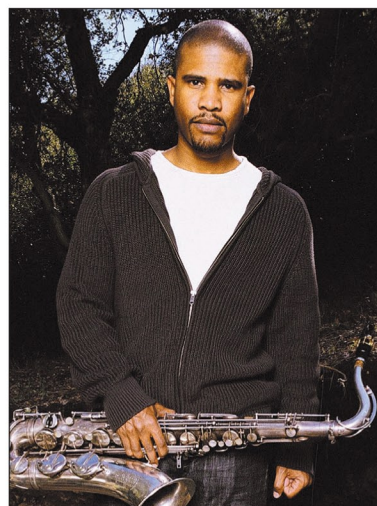
SEPT. 3
Jazz on Jackson Stage, Grant Park

Noon-12.55 p.m. | Brian O'Hern and the Model Citizens Big Band: Eccentric pianist/arranger O'Hern's all-star orchestra has grown a cult following at Bucktown's Gallery Cabaret. Funk jams meet Mingus-like expressionism and comedic riff pieces demanding audience participation; all stoked by drummer Gerald Dowd, guitarist Mike Allemana, pianist Dan Trudell and a raft of rambunctious horns.

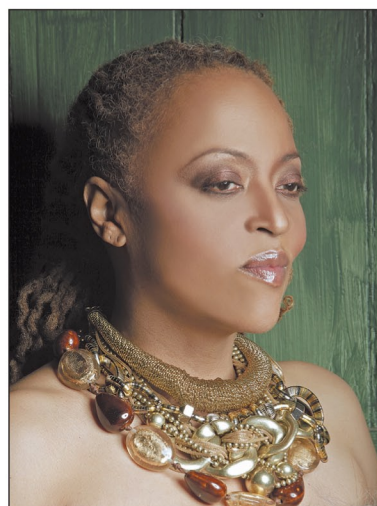
1:10-2:05pm | Marquis Hill Black-tet: Twentysomething trum-



Maurice Brown | MICHAEL JACKSON-FOR THE SUNTIMES



David Sanchez



Cassandra Wilson | WILL STERLING PHOTO

peter Hill's succinct debut CD "New Gospel" shows smarts and easy lyricism affront a septet of crack young hopefuls, including feathery-toned saxophonist Chris McBride, bassist John Tate and the Fender Rhodes of Joshua Moshier. Autumn floats like Ahmad Jamal and Hill's gospel-tinged valediction for Fred Anderson betrays the warm spirit of this rising talent.

Petrillo Band Shell
5-5.50 p.m. | Maurice Brown Effect: Gregarious trumpeter Brown left Chicago for New Orleans and was then displaced by hurricane Katrina to New York, where he has allied with such as Aretha Franklin and Cee-Lo Green. Brown's quintet features N'awlins saxophonist Derek Douget and Chicago pianist Chris Rob; they may belie late afternoon billing by bringing the house down.

8:30-9:30p.m. | Cassandra Wilson: Wilson frames smoky tenoresque vocals in enigmatic context, blending the delta blues of her Mississippi roots with jazz and pop revamps. On hand are guitarist Marvin Sewell, bassist Reginald Veal and outstanding New Orleans drummer Herlin Riley, all present on Wilson's 2009 Silver Pony, recorded in the Crescent City. The bonus is brilliant Swiss harmonica man Gregoire Maret. Though Wilson's voice is often twilight, it's seldom somber; she'll likely spark the evening air with her upbeat aura.

SEPT. 4
Jazz on Jackson Stage
2:20-3:15 p.m. | Matt Ulery's Loom: Ulery's layered themes rank him as a counterpart to NYC's Ben Allison or big band arranger Maria Schneider in that despite the strength of soloists, the focus is on collective weaving of the compositional tapestry.

Petrillo Band Shell
5-5.50 p.m. | Mike Reed's Myth/Science Assembly: Drummer and Pitchfork impresario Reed is the



Legendary trumpeter Orbert Davis has several shows on the bill at this year's Chicago Jazz Festival. | MICHAEL JACKSON-FOR THE SUNTIMES

scarlet pimpernel of Chicago Jazz, cropping up as jazz fest committeeman, AACM member, producer of the Umbrella Festival, plus leading innovative groups Loose Assembly and People, Places and Things. The latter title indicates his big picture outlook. This presentation uses Experimental Sound Studio's enviable archive of rare Sun Ra, transmitting soundbites around Grant Park. Reed's tentet boasts vibist Jason Adasiewicz, bassist Josh Abrams, cellist Tomeka Reid and Nick Butcher on electronics with progressive New York-based musicians, including critics' darling Mary Halvorson, highly original saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, Taylor Ho Bynum and Greg Ward.

7:10-8.10 p.m. | David Sanchez: A festival favorite, virile Puerto Rican saxophonist Sanchez is joined by vibraphone genius Stefon Harris, his compadre on a recent expedition to Cuba. No doubt Harris will provide gorgeous pools of resonance for Sanchez's melancholy tribute to New Orleans, "The For-

gotten Ones," as per their recording at Havana's Egrem studios, plus his own mood-shifting "And This Too Shall Pass."

8.30-9.30 p.m. | Roy Hargrove Quintet: Trumpet hero Hargrove documented his own tryst with Cuba on Crisol Habana (1997) and has since split allegiances between straight-ahead quintet, big band and funk/hip-hop/R&B group RH Factor. At Segal's Jazz Showcase in January, Hargrove looked fried and apparently was coaching new sidemen on-the-job, but jazz flows from the guy's pores. Though he's mellowed since his unforgettable jazz fest set in 1998, if the scorching blowing alongside Cannonball Adderley-inspired altoist Justin Robinson on "Mr. Clean" from Earfood (2008) and the rambunctious blues on Sam Cooke's "Bring it on Home To Me" is fair indication, Hargrove's sumptuous balladry — making love to each note — should be offset with plenty of fire.

Michael Jackson