



all about jazz

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Lest one needs a reminder of the globalization of the world in general and music in particular, last month's eruption of a volcano under Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull glacier was a particularly effective one. Lost in all the news reports of stranded travelers on both sides of the Atlantic were the many musicians whose tour plans were disrupted by the thousands of cancelled flights. The modern musician is a world traveller by necessity in the 21st century; there just aren't enough audiences in any one city for players not to tour. And given how long it takes to book these overseas gigs (in either direction), the effect of this recent natural disaster may be devastating to some artists. That we can't control nature is becoming increasingly obvious but what we can do is make our best effort to see live music as much as possible.

In other sad news, we report on the passing of guitar legend Herb Ellis (Aug. 4th, 1921 - Mar. 28th, 2010). The impact of his work in many situations but perhaps most famously as a long-tenured member of pianist Oscar Peterson's trio with bassist Ray Brown is still felt today. Though it is a sad duty, we present one of our In Memoriam spreads with remembrances from those who knew and loved this great artist. And for those readers who might be in Los Angeles on May 8th, a huge tribute concert will take place at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

But jazz keeps going; that is its strength. Our coverage this month includes features on guitarist Pat Metheny (On the Cover), who brings his certainly unique Orchestrionics 'band' to Town Hall; bassist Eddie Gomez (Interview), playing two weeks at Blue Note in memory of his former boss Bill Evans and a rare two-night appearance by seminal Detroit saxophonist Faruq Z. Bey (Artist Feature) at Issue Project Room. Our Megaphone this month is by Clean Feed Records label head Pedro Costa in advance of that imprint's annual festival. And of course more CD reviews and concert listings than you can shake a springtime-blooming stick at.

We'll see you out there...

Laurence Donohue-Greene, *Managing Editor* Andrey Henkin, *Editorial Director*

On the cover: Pat Metheny (Photography by Jimmy Katz and Sputnik)

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Tommy Gumina

by Elliott Simon



'60s



'90s

It is the rare jazz instrumentalist who gains such a total understanding of their instrument that by technical innovation they change the way

the instrument is played to achieve that elusive 'sound in their head'. Jazz accordionist Tommy Gumina is such an artist. When it comes to the accordion, Gumina's modifications and amplification development are on a par with Les Paul's guitar inventions and his polytonal voicings and advanced harmonics, though distinctly different, match in instrumental significance those of pianist Bill Evans.

Gumina came from the hotbed of second-generation American accordionists who grew up in ethnic '40s Middle America where the accordion was a staple. Through his association with the Harry James Orchestra, Gumina met up with clarinetist Buddy DeFranco and together they would create the most significant jazz accordion recordings of all time. These releases, such as *Polytones* (Mercury, 1963), are notable for Gumina's use of the accordion's inherent ability to sustain combined with his advanced harmonic techniques and DeFranco's incredible tone. DeFranco has called them the most cutting-edge recordings of his career and Gumina reflected on their approach. "I came up with a harmonic device for the accordion called polytonalities where you play two chords at one time and the accordion is a natural for this. I play the left hand for the basic chords downstairs. For example, I play a C7 downstairs, C bass and on my right hand I will play a DMaj chord so it gives you the augmented 11/13. I came up with that sound while we had the group with Buddy...some of that stuff has six- and seven-part harmony...we had a harmonic sustaining situation because with the accordion you can really sustain as opposed to the piano which can't sustain quite as long as we can." DeFranco and Gumina were the perfect partners and cuts like the beautifully ambient "My Ship" from over 40 years ago impress with their contemporary sound and feel.

Proud of the way the two musicians melded, Gumina is in the process of rereleasing some of these difficult-to-obtain landmark recordings through his Polytone company. Gumina started the business in the

'60s and since that time the greatest jazz guitarists and bassists have entrusted their tone to Tommy Gumina Polytone amps and equipment. The sound on guitarist George Benson's mega hit "Breezin'" was achieved through a Polytone 120-watt model 104. Gumina tells it: "When I first started Polytone I didn't have a background in electronics but I took a course at UCLA because I wanted to know about the business so consequently I have become fairly decent in the electronics field. Our first endorser for Polytone was [guitarist] Joe Pass and nobody was like Joe. He was unbelievable and the first guy to endorse my bass products was Ray Brown. Ray would come into my place and we would play together and we would also do a lot of the NAMM [National Association of Music Merchants] shows and Ray would be there and Joe would be there and we would play right at my booth. Ray's sound was so beautiful that we would be playing and I would stop just to hear him. He really was the boss and nobody has ever got that particular sound."

Gumina's blend of electronics acumen and instrumental expertise has allowed him to develop electronic accordions such as his polychord ("It has 80 different instruments that you can play with it"); state-of-the-art amplification equipment ("My new amplifier is 170 watts RMS and it weighs only about 18 pounds and the new power amp only weighs half a pound") and produce some superb but difficult-to-obtain recordings such as his partnerships with guitarists Joe Pass (*Sound Project*, Polytone Productions, 1987) and Ron Escheté (*Polycolors*, Polytone Productions, 1990).

Gumina is pleased to know that the relatively recent fruitful interchanges among world musics and jazz, most particularly those of Latin America and Eastern Europe, have given the accordion a new place and he is contemplating going out on the road again with DeFranco. "This is what I have to do. Before Buddy and I wrap it up, Buddy is going to be 86 or 87, he and I want to do another shot. I want to really do our polytonalities and some ballads of course but I want to really get the right situation where we can smoke a little bit. I am very happy that young guys are out there playing the accordion because for so many years a lot of times the accordion was slighted. It was strictly ethnic and they played it well but it never got beyond that and it is great that young guys are playing jazz accordion. It needs it." ♦

For more information, visit tommygumina.com

Recommended Listening:

- Tommy Gumina - *Hi-Fi Accordion* (Decca, 1957)

- Buddy DeFranco - *Pacific Standard (Swingin') Time!* (Decca, 1960)
- Buddy DeFranco - *Presenting Buddy DeFranco and Tommy Gumina* (Mercury, 1961)
- Buddy DeFranco/Tommy Gumina Quartet - *Kaleidoscope* (Mercury, 1962)
- Buddy DeFranco/Tommy Gumina - *Polytones* (Mercury, 1963)
- Joe Pass/Tommy Gumina Trio - *Sound Project (Sentimental Moods)* (Polytone-Alfa Jazz, 1987)



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LEST WE FORGET

Scott Joplin (~1867-1917)

by Donald Elfman

It may seem odd to be remembering Scott Joplin, usually considered a 'serious' composer, in a jazz publication. But ragtime influenced the earliest jazz and Joplin was himself known as a master improviser.

Joplin was born in eastern Texas in what research has shown to be the second half of 1867. He was given a basic education by his musical family and at the age of seven was permitted to play in the home of an attorney and in a neighbor's house. He soon went to school and studied music under several teachers including one Julius Weiss. Weiss taught the youngster about classical music, folk forms and opera and encouraged Joplin's aspirations towards composition. Joplin played music at church gatherings and at secular events where, it was reported, he often played

his own compositions.

In the late 1880s, Joplin left the area to work as a traveling musician and soon discovered that there were not a lot of opportunities for black musicians. He did accept work in churches and at brothels. He also found time to take classes in composition and counterpoint in the George R. Smith College for Negroes in Sedalia, Missouri. He went to play at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and soon formed his own band to play his own music.

Joplin began working at Sedalia's Maple Leaf Club and the Black 400. He got a reputation as a well-respected piano player and composer. In 1899 he sold "Maple Leaf Rag" and the tune became an immediate success, selling about 75,000 copies in six months. He became known as the "King of Ragtime writers" and tunes like "The Easy Winners" and "Elite Syncopations" were soon covered by other musicians.

In 1900, Joplin and his wife Belle moved to St. Louis. He continued to have success with

compositions such as "The Entertainer" and "March Majestic". In June of 1904, Joplin married Freddie Alexander, the woman to whom he had dedicated "The Chrysanthemum". During the period he also created an opera company and self-financed the opera *Treemonisha*. But the audience was indifferent and Joplin went bankrupt. By 1916, Joplin was ill from syphilis and died in 1917.

Joplin and his fellow rag composers rejuvenated American popular music and helped create an appreciation for the music of black America. After the composer's death the popularity of ragtime waned but there was something of a resurgence many years later in the '60s, culminating in the use of "The Entertainer" in the popular movie, *The Sting*. The classical label Deutsche Grammophon even released the first recording of the complete *Treemonisha*. ♦

Tributes to Joplin are at Bargemusic May 14th and St. Michael's Cemetery May 22nd. See Calendar.