

All That Jazz

After swinging through the '60s, Phoenix's hard bop life goes on.

If blues music can be said to beat from the heart, jazz emanates from the head. Whereas blues is full of emotive vocals and primarily driven by a 12-bar chord progression with few erratic rhythm changes, jazz veers into myriad musical territories streaked with improvisation.

"Jazz... can be so masterful, it's intimidating to some," KJZZ deejay Blaise Lantana says. "There's so much to learn and so much to do." But despite the difficulty, she notes, "There is really a lot of [jazz] talent here in the Valley."

Between upcoming young players and experienced ones, educational settings such as the jazz programs at ASU and community colleges, and live venues like nonprofit The Nash (see page 122),

there's a musical confluence here that's as rich as the genre itself. More than 50 venues in metro Phoenix host jazz shows, according to Patricia Myers. And she should know. Myers is one of eight founders of nonprofit support organization Jazz In Arizona (est. 1977) and compiles live jazz listings for jazzinaz.org. She's a virtual encyclopedia of the genre in general, but particularly in Phoenix. "This current panoply of jazz was slow to develop, from roots planted as far back as the 1930s," she writes from Paris, where she's spent her summers reviewing jazz shows since 1997.

Myers first landed in the Valley via Ohio in 1962, the same year prominent black businessmen Lincoln Ragsdale and Bill Dickey opened the legendary Century Sky Room at 11th and Washington streets. "It was a second-floor club in a wooden building where touring musicians would stop by after their gigs to sit in, including members of the Duke Ellington and Count Basie orchestras," Myers recalls. The club closed in 1984, and the building was reportedly torn down due to safety issues.

But there were always plenty of other places for jazz in Phoenix. The Elks Lodge No. 477, established in 1922 and also a popular place for early blues shows (see page 110), frequently featured jazz singer, saxophonist and South Phoenix resident (and future posthumous Rock and Roll Hall of Famer) Louis Jordan, who dipped his toes in several styles over his career. Another regular player at the Elks in the '50s was Philadelphia transplant Charles Lewis, a jazz educator and pianist who still performs around the Valley and privately teaches harmony and jazz improvisation.

During the still-segregated 1950s, more jazz joints – including The Jazz Mill, the Rose Room, the Hut, and La Ronde – opened throughout the Valley, though primarily in southern and central Phoenix. In the '60s, stars like Nat King Cole and Dizzy Gillespie stopped at swank venues like the Playboy Club, and local jazz junkies got their fixes on weekends at places like the Westward Ho and Sonny Malkoff's Steak House.

In the mid-1970s, the Boojum Tree Lounge at Phoenix Doubletree Inn on Second Avenue and Osborn (now a Holiday Inn) became the city's hotspot for nightly jazz. In addition to national acts like Stan Getz and Art Pepper, Phoenix's finest frequented the stage. Pianist and current Jazz In Arizona executive director Joel Goldenthal moved to Phoenix from New York City in 1972 and picked up a semi-regular gig at



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