

LEO

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YOUNG AND IN LOVE WITH JAZZ

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PHOTOGRAPHY - NOBOLINE H. THORPE, LOUISVILLE DIVE CENTER

What's the frequency, Tom Wills? **PAGE 8** "Fahrenheit" is agitprop, but it's good agitprop **PAGE 20**

FEATURE

Young and in love ... with jazz

NEW CATS NEGATING NOTIONS OF INSIDER NODS AND SECRET HANDSHAKES

BY STEPHEN GEORGE

It's a Sunday night in February, and the Louisville Jazz Project is playing on the small corner stage at Clifton's Pizza. B.J. Jansen controls his baritone saxophone, summoning a flawless series of notes for each run in the ensemble's traditional jazz tunes. T. Martin Stam's left hand swaggers up and down the neck of his upright bass, a good five inches taller than his roughly six-foot frame. His fingers bend and stretch to form astonishing angles.

At the electric piano, Todd Hildreth's fingers move in a maddened frenzy, while Colby Inzer keeps time, taking the occasional solo that reminds the crowd that reticence with an ounce of flare is key to the jazz drummer's game.

All of this from a two-year-old crew of young jazz experts. Yep, we said experts — and only one of these guys is over 30.

The Louisville Jazz Project is a microcosm of the city's blossoming young jazz community: a collection of musicians who move on intuition and live by improvisation. You can see them lock themselves into huge rhythms. These true groove junkies attest that jazz is not only alive and well but growing in Louisville.

"Jazz isn't dead, because we're here playing it," Jansen, a 23-year-old University of Louisville graduate, said between sets. "There are a lot of people around here playing it."



DAVID HARPE

Blow, Baby, Blow

Words of gratitude for helping LEO create this week's cover (a shameless take-off on the cover of Nirvana's breakthrough album *Nevermind*) go to baby Liam and his parents, Katę and Will Perryman, and photographer Norbourne H. Thorpe and the rest of the staff at the Louisville Dive Center. Also, credit goes to David Harpe for the photo of Liam with a saxophone taken on the stage at The Jazz Factory.

Jansen's enthusiasm matches many of his contemporaries who exude a wild and youthful raw energy and display dedication and competence.

The talent among Louisville's young set of musicians has caught the attention of some of the city's veteran jazz musicians.

"These guys are just wonderkids," said Bobby J, 53, a longtime proprietor of jazz in Louisville and current owner of Steam, which hosts occasional jazz nights. "There are just such great players around, just blowing their hearts out."

Jamey Aebersold, the noted saxophonist and jazz educator from New Albany, also sees promise.

"I think a lot of them are getting much better," said Aebersold, the namesake for the U of L Jazz Studies Program. "It's always been a good scene."

That scene, according to other musicians and jazz aficionados, is growing.

"I've never seen it as good," said Dick Sisto, a Chicago native who's been playing jazz around Louisville since the early 1980s. Sisto began playing at the Old Seelbach Bar in 1989 and has been its resident vibraphonist since 1995. Sisto and Marty Pearl, the Old Seelbach Bar's manager, have helped turn the hotel bar into a jazz venue by bringing in scores of top-notch performers over the past several years.

This one time, at band camp ...

The Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops at the University of Louisville have become a national centerpiece for immediate jazz education and have been held in other parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand and England.

This year's workshops in Louisville — there are two one-week workshops — will host more than 400 students and involve 60 instructors.

"You have the best of all possible worlds at Jamey's camps," says David Baker, chair at IU's jazz studies department and current president of the International Association of Jazz Educators.

Baker, who has been an instructor at the Aebersold camps for the past 30 years, says the premise behind the workshops mirrors that of U of L's Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program.

"Jamey was instrumental in making sure there was a small-group component," Baker said.

Daniela Schmitz, a 24-year-old alto saxophonist from Cologne, Germany, attended the Aebersold camp three years ago in London, which then turned her on to U of L's jazz studies program and prompted her to move to Louisville.

"There's a lot going on here," said the soft-spoken Schmitz through a thick German accent. She has played with the Metro Big Band at the Jazz Factory (see main story).

A crowning point of the each workshop is a Summer Jazz Jam concert. The final concert for this year's workshops is next Wednesday, July 7 (see details below).

The concert will feature various artists in combinations of three acts. Performers include trombonists John Fedchock and Rick Simerly; saxophonists Don Braden, Eric Alexander, Gary Campbell and Jim Snidero; trumpeters Jim Rotondi and Scott Wendholdt; pianists Andy Laverne, David Hazeltine, Harry Pickens and Steve Allee; bassists Rufus Reid, Lynn Seaton and Tyrone Wheeler; guitarists Dave Stryker and Steve Erquiaga; vocalist Jennifer Shelton Barnes; and drummers John Riley and Steve Davis. Phew. We're out of breath.

Wednesday, July 7, 8 p.m.
Masterson's, 1830 S. Third St., 636-2511

Tickets: \$10 for the general public; \$8 for Louisville Jazz Society members; and \$5 for students and workshop attendees. Available in advance at the U of L School of Music building on the Belknap Campus and at Masterson's on the night of the performance.

Young and in love with jazz

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Factory and The Rudyard Kipling. Likewise, some of the problems those players faced — especially an ebb-and-flow in local interest in jazz and underlying tension between musicians over upholding traditional jazz — are still present today.

Louisville as a breeding ground

Today the draw to Louisville is twofold: U of L's Aebersold Jazz Studies Program and a blossoming club scene led by the Jazz Factory, two poles that feed one another and provide a blend of instruction, leadership and opportunities to jam around town.

"I view it as a great place to nurture young talent," Tracy said.

U of L's renowned faculty of both part- and full-time professors includes nationally renowned bassist Wheeler, who has played with giants like Cab Calloway and Little Anthony, and Chris Fitzgerald, current bassist for Louisville's Java Men. John LaBarbera, an associate professor, has done arrangements for big names such as Count Basie and Buddy Rich. The program also attracted trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis of the fabled Marsalis clan, who was a grad student and teaching assistant there this past academic year.

One advantage Louisville offers is that developing players have an opportunity to play publicly in low-pressure situations.

And although Louisville isn't among the major cities for jazz in the United States — the usual suspects are New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles and Miami (known for Latin jazz) — Tracy explained that Louisville's smaller size gives developing players an opportunity to play publicly in low-pressure situations.

"Unless you're just one incredible individual, you're nothing [in cities like New York and Chicago]," he said. "We have a lot of opportunity [in Louisville]."

LaBarbera said the strong academic program counters the city's geographical challenges.

"I would place us at the top of everything else [besides New York and Los Angeles]," he said. "We're more visible now [nationally]."

For that visibility the city can thank Aebersold, who provided a \$200,000 endowment for the U of L program in 1998. His high profile has helped attract music instructors and talented young players to Louisville, who in turn have nurtured the scene. Tracy notes that such resources aren't available in lots of cities.

Foremost among those resources, for

students and fans alike, is U of L's annual Jazz Week, which combines education and performance. Jazz Week, which dates to 1993, brings a major name to town each February to perform for the public, as well as other artists who perform and interact with students.

The U of L program also holds its own among the best curriculums in the region while providing an intimate educational environment. Even David Baker, president of the International Association of Jazz Educators and chair of IU's jazz studies department, credits the program with using minimal resources to maximum effect. (IU's jazz program is part of a large and world famous music school that has substantial financial support and cannot be compared equitably with U of L, according to Baker.)

Moreover, U of L's faculty and curriculum have engendered a true companionship among young musicians and professors, or what LaBarbera calls a genuine "all-for-one" mentality.

"There's no ego," said Daniel McGeeney, an 18-year-old pianist and recent graduate of Trinity High School who plays with a combination of musicians who study at U of L and has performed with them at the Jazz Factory and the Borders bookstore on Hurstbourne Lane. "We're all trying to learn from each other. It's a very open atmosphere, very down to earth."

McGeeney talked about a unique chemistry and mutual respect between the U of L faculty and the players, even ones like himself who take classes from university faculty but are not yet in college.

"They can appreciate what they do [musically]," he said. "It's easy to get involved with some of the stuff going on at U of L."

Jansen echoed McGeeney when he spoke about the bond that jazz cultivates between musicians of all ages and backgrounds.

"I could get together with somebody two to three times my age, and we could play together. That's a beautiful thing," he said.

Another notable resource is the annual weeklong Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops at U of L, which he began in 1975. It brings in master musicians and teachers to lead classes, in which players of similar skill work together. The focus is on teaching inclination and intuition rather than note-playing (see related story at left).

Playing a different jam

Every Wednesday night for the past year and a half, The Rudyard Kipling — a charming bohemian fixture near Fourth and Oak in Old Louisville — has played host to Open Air Transmissions, a wide open and laid-back jazz jam session assembled by three young musicians.

Drummer Ray Rizzo, pianist Scott



MEG FENTON



MEG FENTON



UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

From the top, the old guard in Louisville includes Jamey Aebersold, Dick Sisto and Mike Tracy.

Anthony and bassist Mike Dufresne form a loud and inspired trio, playing with a force and concentration more akin to rock than jazz. Their sessions are essentially open mic nights, and so the Open Air trio welcomes all talent levels and styles of play.

On a Wednesday night in June, 28-year-old Brad Tharp, a trumpet player with a week-old newborn at home, steps up to the makeshift stage and blows through a staggering rendition of Nat King Cole's "These Foolish Things," pulling on a burning cigarette between breaks.

After the tune, Tharp shouts, "This is my therapy," before launching into an upbeat number as the quartet becomes a

"For the size of this town, [the scene] is pretty strong," Sisto said.

Ken Shapero, 48, is owner of the Jazz Factory, which, opened at Glassworks in April 2003.

"It's really thriving," Shapero said. "There's tremendous jazz in this town. It's as strong here as anywhere I've been. It's having a resurgence."

The resurgence is due in large part to Shapero's club, which many area musicians say has become the epicenter of Louisville's young jazz scene. An important reason, say Jansen, Shapero and others, is that it's all ages: high-schoolers can swing by and jam if they want (as they often do), and parents can bring along the little ones. That provides a unique opportunity for various ages to jam on everything from Davis and Coltrane to the 18-piece Louisville Metro Big Band that plays most Wednesday nights during the school year.

The band is certainly big.

Your ears never quite get used to the sheer power and intensity that is 14 brass instruments blowing the hair from your head. (The other four musicians — a guitarist, a bassist, a pianist and a drummer — round out the sound.) Even as things get a little quiet and your eardrums catch a breather, you're sure the lull (if one could even call it that) won't last long.

On a Wednesday night in March, the audience is a mixed breed. There is a slew of older folks waving nimbly and asking Mike Arthurs, the 40-year-old conductor, to call more traditional numbers. Arthurs, a graduate student at U of L, moved here from Canada last fall to study at U of L.

The young-uns are there, too: the girlfriends and buddies of some of the players, which Shapero said is common, as well as a few twenty-something hipsters.

"I think it's as diverse a crowd as I've ever seen in Louisville," he said.

The young cats at the Jazz Factory on this evening are also full of enthusi-



Drew Miller, left, of Louisville, and Anthony Sekay of Chicago came out to jam with the Metro Big Band earlier this year.



Mike Arthurs moved here from Canada to study jazz at U of L. Here he conducts the Louisville Metro Big Band.

BRIAN BOHANNON

asm when discussing the recently emerging scene.

"There's been more young groups and young people getting out and playing and making great music [in Louisville]," said saxophonist Drew Miller, 22, a Louisville native and senior in the U of L program. "There's more interaction between the young players and the people in the community who have lived here all their lives."

These folks play together in various incarnations. Whether it is U of L students performing in ad hoc jazz combos, regular side groups or weekly Jazz Factory jam sessions, most of the players are familiar with one another.

U of L freshman and trombone player Audrey Davis, 18, one of two young women who plays frequently with the Big Band, said her skills have improved significantly because of the mix of classes at the university and opportunities like those afforded by the Jazz Factory.

"I've already grown more than I have in the past four years," she said of the progress she has made in just one semester. "If you play with good players, you'll become a good player."

Deja vu?

Musical trends are generally circular. They flutter and dive, then fly again as time passes and tastes change. The popularity of jazz in Louisville illustrates this tendency.

As the youthful naivete and sociopolitical optimism reflected in the music of the 1960s crashed head-on into the grim commercial realities of the 1970s, a core group of local musicians were busy forging a new path in both musical performance and education.

One was a young and ambitious sax-wielding Hoosier named Aebersold, who was working to bridge the gap between formal jazz education and a club scene. Aebersold, now 64, was born just across the river and graduated from Indiana University's School of Music. He is widely known as an innovator in jazz education; he's developed nearly 100 play-along records and books that are used by instructors around the globe.

In the late 1960s, he began opening his house to a variety of musicians who came to experiment and improvise. Through the 1970s, he set up various bands and combos, usually three or four a week, bringing together many of the people who would come to define Louisville's jazz scene at the time.

"People would come to his house for essentially jam sessions," said Mike Tracy, one of the musicians who jammed there and now the director of U of L's Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program. "He was like our jazz guru," he added. Tracy, 52, is a longtime champion of the Louisville jazz scene, and with nearly 30 years of teaching, also one of the foremost jazz educators in the country.

Aebersold's early disciples included Tracy, bassist and U of L faculty member Tyrone Wheeler, and Sonny Stevens, Steve Crews and Tim Krekel, among others.

Louisville's club scene of the time included places like Joe's Palm Room, still a West End fixture, as well as 118 Washington and the Fig Tree, both long since closed. The three venues had stages familiar to local jazz musicians and housed most of the jazz coming from out of town.

The ABCs of nurturing a scene

During the 1970s, Tracy and Aebersold hit it off particularly well, and when Bellarmine University asked Aebersold to recommend someone to teach jazz in 1975, he tabbed Tracy.

A fresh-faced recent college grad, Tracy grabbed the opportunity. He taught at Bellarmine for two years before moving on to pilot a new jazz studies program at U of L in 1977.

"Musically, I got to do whatever I wanted to try, which was kind of cool," he said of the fledgling U of L program that had 80 students. "It was good in one way, in the sense that I got to experiment. It was bad in another way, because I didn't get any assistance learning how to deal with a college, how to coordinate certain items. I had to learn the hard way."

By 1980, U of L had built its current music building on the Belknap campus, where Tracy moved the program before leaving the same year in a bout of frustration over administrative issues. In 1985, Tracy returned to take the reigns of a more defined and supported jazz studies program, the result of a statewide accreditation process that compelled U of L to expand its music studies beyond the classical genre.

"I realized, in my own head, I said, 'Well, it didn't work the first time, if I'm going to do this I have to do something different,'" Tracy said. "So that was the beginning of what we have now."

During the intervening years, the young university faculty and their students formed the main nerve of the jazz scene, a trend replicated today at places like the Jazz

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sextet with the addition of a sax and another trumpet.

The openness these players encourage and cultivate, Rizzo said, is what makes the new, young wave of jazz so exciting in Louisville.

"The idea is playing the jam session more from the essence of exploration," said Rizzo, 31, who spent 10 years with the jazz trio the Java Men and also played with rock band Days of the New on several tours. "We're really indiscriminate in the way the music is being played."

With the growth of more avant-garde style of music that some young musicians favor come concerns that an essential emphasis on tradition is being pushed to the background. The young players have emerged during a time when jam-band culture has expanded in popular music, with the growing prominence of groups like Phish, Widespread Panic, String Cheese Incident, Moe., O.A.R., Leftover Salmon, Robert Randolph & the Family Band, Strange Folk and Gov't Mule. Several of the city's jazz elders say some of the music the younger set plays cannot even be called jazz.

The traditionalists say many young players don't pay enough attention to masters like Duke Ellington and Miles Davis, and they believe jazz players of all ages need a strong foundation in the tradition. These players, such as Sisto and Aebersold, are familiar with a vast repertoire of jazz tunes that date to the early 20th century, and they can summon them at will. The traditionalists believe the ability to play jazz well comes through knowing its history and being able to play the classics.

"I think the tradition is a big part of [playing jazz]," Aebersold said. "If you've got good ears, the records become your teachers."

Sisto, who has mentored and hired young folks in the past and is complimentary of many of today's young players, likened learning jazz to learning a different language. Although he doesn't claim to be a purist, he thinks that jazz musicians who don't learn from tradition, while they may make good music, aren't playing jazz.

"Don't call it jazz," he said. "There's a lot of crazy stuff out there that's not real."

Rizzo said the young players aren't out to buck tradition but are looking for a balance between tradition and something modern, a sense of open-minded exploration that permeates the young jazz scene now.

"There are a lot of other groups pulling in other types of music," said Dufresne, 21. "People are really starting



Every Wednesday at The Ruyard Kipling, Ray Rizzo (drums), Scott Anthony (keyboards) and Mike Dufresne (bass) host an open mic night. Recently Brad Tharp sat in on trumpet.

to come together, encompassing a broader sense of music."

It's this sort of atypical jazz — and these kinds of players — that Rizzo and company believe will carry Louisville's scene into the future.

"I think the art form itself is going to change," he said. "For me, it's way more about a feeling than a chord structure. Jazz is very much a feeling of being in the moment."

Tracy noted the stubbornness on both parts — the old and the young — that keeps them from uniting to build a stronger scene. It's a circumstance that has repeated through the years.

"I wish the older ones could find a way to embrace them more and the younger ones could learn to be a little more patient," Tracy said. "There's also an impatience when you're young, you want to play all the time and don't realize that sometimes the guys who get the gigs will hire their friends, because that's who they know and who they trust. And that's a hard one to learn."

He said finding a balance between generations is a challenge, but he sees the U of L program as an instrument for doing so. "That's what our role at school is," he said.

He added that forging links between the two groups presents a variety of advantages for everyone involved in jazz music. His commitment to making connections between the two groups is evident in how he manages the Mike Tracy Trio. While he is the trio's permanent member, he rotates guest musicians, who have ranged from 27 to 52 years old, into the other two slots. He talked about the young folks bringing a fresh energy to the older players, and also how the older players bring maturity and experience that benefits the younger players.

No secret handshakes

Back in February at Clifton's Pizza, T. Martin Stam, the Louisville Jazz Project's bassist, took a break to give his view on jazz's universal appeal. Stam, a 2003 University of North Carolina graduate, is gigging his way through town while exploring graduate school options.

"It's not constrained at all," he said. "It can be whatever. You don't need a big amp or a bunch of fancy stuff to do it. It's such a free kind of thing. There's no wrong way to go."

While the Louisville Jazz Project is rooted in the jazz tradition that Aebersold and Sisto speak of, their energy and mass appeal match that of other musicians who are exploring the traditional definitions of jazz. Nonetheless, whatever you call the jazz being played in Louisville today, local audiences have learned to appreciate all kinds.

Onstage just a few minutes prior, the Louisville Jazz Project tore up tunes that are two and three times their respective ages and provoked an interesting reaction from the various mix of people watching their set.

Children younger than 10 bounced joyously around the weathered, wooden floor. A girl in a highchair danced in whatever way her quaint, undeveloped figure would allow. Across the parlor, an older couple sat. The woman focused intently on the group while intermittently sipping on a dark beer and picking at a round silver tray of pizza, as the man smoked Marlboro Reds and pulled at a Foster's. And there were the four couples in their 20s, looking a bit uncomfortable but somewhat sedate — perhaps on one of their first dates — smiling and occasionally yelling to each other across the Formica tables.

The crowd and their reactions seemed

Places where you can go to hear jazz in Louisville

Over the past several years, Louisville has seen an upswing in regular jazz performance venues, in particular a surge in "jazz nights" around town. Here are some spots that regularly offer jazz.

Artemisia, 620 E. Market St., 583-4177

Avalon, 1314 Bardstown Road, 454-5336

Bristol, 1321 Bardstown Road, 456-1702

Central Park Café, 316 W. Ormsby St., 635-2066

City Café, 1250 Bardstown Road, (Mid-City Mall), 459-5600

Clifton's Pizza, 2230 Frankfort Ave., 893-3730

Comedy Caravan, 1250 Bardstown Road (Mid-City Mall), 459-0022

Good Times Pub, 12612 Shelbyville Road, 245-3220

Jazz Factory, 815 W. Market St., 992-3242

Kentucky Center for the Arts, 501 W. Main St., 589-5060

Old Louisville Coffeehouse, 1489 S. Fourth St., 635-6660

O'Shea's, 956 Baxter Ave., 589-7373

Park Place Restaurant, 401 E. Main St., 515-0172

Ruyard Kipling, 422 W. Oak St., 636-1311

Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, 6100 Dutchman's Lane (Kaden Tower), 479-0026

Seelbach Jazz Bar, 500 S. Fourth St., 585-3200

Steam, 2427 Bardstown Road, 454-9944

Syl's Lounge, 2403 W. Broadway, 776-9105

Third Avenue Café, 1164 S. Third St., 585-2233

If you want to know more, check out the Louisville Jazz Society's home page at www.louisvillejazz.org for updates and new listings.

to bear out that audiences and young players in Louisville are scuttling the notion that the genre is clandestine, built on insider nods and secret handshakes, a misconstrued idea that has been accepted as truth through the years. ■

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