

JAZZ & BLUES

JULY
2009



F L O R I D A

FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES



The Nouveaux Honkies



Ernie Southern



Eldar Djangirov



Diogo Brown



Scott Holt



Davis & Dow

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WINNING SPINS

By Bill Meredith

ELLA FITZGERALD AND JOE PASS

may be gone, but they set the bar high regarding vocal-and-guitar duos through their collaborations in the 1970s and 1980s. Successors, like the husband-and-wife duo Tuck & Patti, have aspired to those heights internationally since then, and Davie-based duo Davis and Dow have formed the South Florida version since the mid-1990s.

The married tandem of vocalist Julie Davis and guitarist Kelly Dow is becoming increasingly less local, though, as demand for their performances increases throughout the Northeastern and Southern United States. On June 21, the two performed in front of 7,000 people for "Music Under the Stars" at the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso, Texas, and also conducted a jazz workshop for underserved children in the community.

The reason for the couple's increased notoriety is its latest self-produced CD, *Loverly*, which leads off with the Lerner and Loewe showtune from which it cribs its name. Most of the disc features a full band playing standards alongside the pair, but the lone original, "Dancing in the Sand," is an early highlight. Also featuring bassist Don Coffman and drummer Tony Morello, the song's bossa nova feel is a showcase for Dow's timing and technique, touch and tone.

Two standout live tracks employ the rhythm section of bassist Paul Shewchuck, drummer Lenny Steinberg and rhythm guitarist Pat Hackett. The Beatles' "Honey Pie" allows Gypsy-jazz lover Dow, freed up by having chords played behind him, to display a Django Reinhardt influence as he coaxes tongue-in-cheek witticisms out of Davis. On the Juan Tizol-penned Duke Ellington hit "Caravan," the guitarist plays a jaw-dropping intro to the band's Gypsy-meets-bossa ministrations and Davis' Ella-approved scat-singing.

Davis also channels the attitude of Billie Holiday on a Gypsy/bolero arrangement of "You're My Thrill," with its stunning solo by violinist Federico Britos. Saxophonist Dave Hubbard guests on "Azure," which sports a similar feel, but Morello's mallet work on the drums helps approximate the version Fitzgerald performed with Ellington's orchestra.

Britos also leads off the closing take on Pat Ballard's "Mr. Sandman" with the melody to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Then, the violinist, Davis, Dow, Hackett and Coffman



DAVIS & DOW

swing the sans-drums piece into the rare air of Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli's Hot Club of France band. The versatile, Grammy-winning Britos also shades an otherwise-duo performance of another Fitzgerald gem, the Irving Berlin ballad "Reaching for the Moon."

The CD features only two actual duo tracks, but neither sounds empty in comparison to their full-band counterparts. On another Berlin standard, "Stairway to the Stars," Davis displays expert phrasing accompanied solely by the seven-stringed artistry of Dow, whose Eastman instrument sounds like a second voice. The other duo piece, "Dedicated to You," pays tribute to the definitive version Johnny Hartman recorded with John Coltrane. Davis' pleading vocal and Dow's inspired chords form the couple's ode to one another, though they avoid sounding contrived in the process.

With a full band behind them, Davis and Dow are practically orchestral. Even in their frequent duo performances, the couple is always more than the sum of its parts. Dow displays

WINNING SPINS

great dexterity and impeccable intonation, blending melodies with rhythmic bass lines. And the ever-sassy Davis, whether she's torching a ballad or scatting a rapid-fire phrase, demands audience attention because of what might be missed otherwise. That wit and magic is undeniably evident throughout *Loverly*.

As jazz critic Will Friedwald writes in the liner notes, "Davis and Dow knew what Nat King Cole, Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong knew — that a sense of humor is closely related to a sense of rhythm."

Davis and Dow will perform from 9PM to 1AM on July 3 and 24 at Blue Jean Blues in Fort Lauderdale. Call 954-306-6330 or visit Bluejeanblues.net. They will also perform from 11:30AM to 3PM on July 12 and 26 for Sunday brunch at the Setai Hotel in Miami Beach. Call 305-520-6000 or visit Setai.com.



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**SCOTT HOLT
EARL'S HIDEAWAY (SEBASTIAN)/JULY 26**

Scott Holt vividly remembers the first time he met the blues. His dad had taken him to see Buddy Guy at a club in Tampa in the 1980s, and the kid was smitten. The eager protégé and the veteran bluesman struck up a friendship, as Holt followed Guy and his harmonica-playing partner Junior Wells around the area. After woodshedding with his growing record collection and what he'd picked up from Guy, Holt got good enough to jam on-stage with his hero, who invited him to play at the opening of his Chicago blues club, Legends, in 1989. Holt then became a member of Guy's band, touring the world with the blues giant for 10 years. Out on his own for the past decade,



Holt continues to impress with his sawtoothed soloing and powerful vocals. But he's never forgotten his roots. On his 2007 recording, *From Lettsworth to Legend: A Tribute to Buddy Guy*, Holt puts his considerable chops to his mentor's remarkable songbook, spanning the Chess years to the *Damn Right, I've Got the Blues* era. **BW**

**ELDAR
CORAL GABLES CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
JULY 30**

It's too early to predict how successful Russia-born pianist and composer Eldar Djangirow might eventually become, but not to note the 22-year-old's early successes. The latest is his new CD, *Virtue* (Sony), available next month. Accompanied by bassist Armando Gola, drummer Ludwig Alfonso, guest trumpeter Nicholas Payton and saxophonists Joshua Redman and Felipe Lamoglia, Eldar (who goes by his first name on recordings and stage) navigates many different feels and time signatures—on acoustic piano and electronic keyboards—in ways not unlike a young Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea. Eldar's



previous release, *Re-Imagination*, was a 2008 Grammy nominee. The pianist appeared on Marian McPartland's *Piano Jazz* radio show at age 12, and signed with Sony and released four CDs before he could legally order a drink. **BM**



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DIOGO BROWN
JAZZ AT MOCA, N MIAMI BEACH/JULY 31

Not many bass players are bandleaders in South Florida. But by relocating to Pompano Beach from Brazil, and ascending as both a leader and session artist, bassist Diogo Brown is thusfar following in the rare giant steps of Pennsylvania-born bass titan Jaco Pastorius. Only 27, the native of Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro is a noted composer, recording artist and producer. On his self-released 2007 debut *Daqui Pro Mundo*, Brown added elements of funk, New Orleans and Cuban music to his samba and bossa nova base, resulting in a fresh form of world jazz. Brown plays both acoustic and electric basses, as well as guitar and percussion, and displays a keen sense of both American



and Brazilian jazz history on compositions like "If Charlie Parker Had Met Pixinguinha." **BM**

ERNIE SOUTHERN
EARL'S HIDEAWAY/JULY 25 & 28

With songs like "I Wanna Kill Somebody" on his latest CD, *Every Day is a Fight*, one could be concerned for singer/songwriter Ernie Southern. In truth, the veteran bluesman delivers each tune far less seriously than the titles indicate—from concluding chorus of "before somebody kills me" to the title track, which resembles The Eagles' rootsy, tongue-in-cheek mid-1970s *On the Border* era. Southern has sung in a capella groups in New York during the '60s; played bass in psychedelic California bands in the '70s, and spent much of the past 30 years refining his estimable National steel guitar chops in South Florida. He's been to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis during the



decade as both a solo and band performer. **BM**



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THE NOUVEAUX HONKIES

by Bill Meredith

IT'S APPROPRIATE THAT ROOTS-MUSIC road warriors The Nouveaux Honkies would have time to talk while doing something they do most — driving.

“We’re making that long drive out of Florida, but there’s pretty good reception here near Melbourne,” says vocalist, guitarist and songwriter Tim O’Donnell, calling while driving the band 14 hours north to play the ninth annual Greenwood Blues Cruise in Greenwood, South Carolina on July 9-11. “Greenwood holds a barbecue festival every year with some very good bands.”

Based in Port Salerno, O’Donnell, violinist/vocalist Rebecca Dawkins, bassist Mike Burney and drummer Phil Ori play throughout Florida when they aren’t touring around the rest of the Southeastern US. The quartet blends blues, country, swing and bluegrass into its own unique Americana synthesis.

In February, the four scheduled a brief afternoon recording session at the legendary Sun Studios in Memphis before an evening gig along the city’s famed downtown Beale Street music corridor. The new resulting five-song EP, *Live at Sun* (Bluzpik Rekerdz), bristles with the immediacy and energy of a band performing in the moment at a studio where many of its heroes (Elvis Presley, Howlin’ Wolf, Johnny Cash) recorded close to a half-century ago.

“I didn’t want to lay down separate tracks,” O’Donnell says, “I wanted to do it old-school. We were nervous, but looking at the historic pictures there relaxed us. The engineer put up a few ambient mics; we plugged in, and I sang through an old Shure SM57.”

The recording room at Sun is small, but the Honkies achieve a big sound from the downbeat of the introductory “Mystery Train.” Junior Parker first recorded the tune at Sun in 1953; Presley covered it there in 1956. The Honkies’ update features a confident early solo by Dawkins (who does some of her best playing on the disc) and Ori’s perfectly-percolating rimshots.

O’Donnell’s originals, “Memphis Bound” and the instrumental “Sun Boogie,” showcase his expert hollow-bodied guitar wizardry, the latter also featuring solos by the rhythm section. Burney makes his electric bass approximate an acoustic upright on the slow blues of Otis Rush’s “I Can’t Quit You Baby” and the uptempo boogie of “Give Me My Money” (which blends the feel of Muddy Waters’ “Can’t Be Satisfied” with the attitude of The Beatles’ “Taxman”).

“We’re really happy with what we got out of that session,” Dawkins says. “Especially



considering that we had about an hour of recording time.”

The group has come a long way since Dawkins relocated from Myrtle Beach, SC, met O’Donnell at a blues jam, and formed a duo with him in late 2005. By 2007, the four-piece version released a self-titled debut of blues covers that prompted consecutive nominations from the Blues Alliance of the Treasure Coast to play at the annual International Blues Challenge in Memphis.

The initial Memphis trip was the Honkies’ first outside of Florida, and resulted in synchronicity. While at an area restaurant, they overheard two gentlemen discussing the music business in the next booth, so Dawkins handed them a CD. The two turned out to be Memphis talent agent Dennis Brooks and South Florida-based Bluzpik producer Jim Nestor. The band was quickly signed to the label, which has released 2008’s all-original *Where Do I Go* and *Live at Sun*.

“We would’ve been happy getting one good tune at Sun,” O’Donnell says. “But we got six, and kept one for our next CD.”

With first-time stops in New Hampshire, Rhode Island and New York City in August and September, the Honkies’ future is looking up, literally and figuratively.

The Nouveaux Honkies play at various Florida locations through the end of the month, including July 24 at Broadwalk Friday Fest in Hollywood.

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