

CJF Preview

# The Jazz Judges

By Scott Appleby

The Notre Dame 1977 Collegiate Jazz Festival commences this Friday night at Stepan Center and promises to be one of the most exciting and entertaining events of the semester. Under the financial auspices of the Student Union Cultural Arts Commission, and the meticulous direction of senior Mike Dillon, this year's festival boasts a most impressive line-up of musicians and judges, all of which are highly regarded for their considerable achievements as session men and recording artists in the New York area.

Reigning supreme as the only American jazz competition which maintains a national complexion, the Notre Dame festival is the oldest and largest, and most prestigious collegiate tradition of its kind in the United States. This year's roster of participating bands was whittled down from the sixty groups initially invited, to the fifteen who survived a taped audition conducted by area jazz experts. As chairman Dillon puts it, "We feel that we have some of the most talented young musicians in the country represented at this year's festival, not to mention a board of judges worthy of all-star status."

All-stars, indeed. Through the dogged perseverance of Dillon and his associate James Smalley, the festival has acquired five top-name performers who will constructively criticize each band in edifying fashion and then proceed to demonstrate the various talents which constitute true excellence and virtuosity. In fact, this "Judges Jam" (Friday night, after regular performances) promises to be the highlight of the weekend; although each of the judges is an individual talent in his own right, the fact that the five know one another and have played together before will certainly heighten the intensity of the set.

Bob James, a young and creative keyboard player, made his first public appearance at the 1962 ND Jazz Festival. At that time, representing the University of Michigan, Bob led his trio to top honors, copping for himself the awards for best composer, soloist, and keyboard man. One of the judges that year was Quincy Jones, who became enthusiastic about the groups potential and signed them to record their own brand of avant-garde classical com-

bined with jazz.

Bob then struck out on his own, working stints with famous jazz personalities such as Maynard Ferguson and the legendary stylist Sarah Vaughan, before providing the scores for two theatrical productions which won him national recognition. This work in composition led him to the Broadway show, "The Selling of the President."

"It was ahead of its time," Bob comments. "When the show opened, Nixon was riding the crest of his popularity. Had the show been produced a year later, it might have become a hit."

Bob went on to arranging, and directed the studio efforts of such notables as Dionne Warwick, Roberta Flack, and Aretha Franklin, before meeting producer Creed Taylor, who signed him to record under the CTI label. The performer-arranger-stylist has since appeared on a variety of albums by other artists (most notably on Paul Simon's Grammy-winning *Still Crazy After All These Years*) and has recorded four solo albums.

Will Lee, the son of a music educator, attended the University of Miami and played bass at local clubs as a side interest. He became a member of the premiere jazz ensemble "Dreams" which included Billy Cobham, Chuck Rainey, and Randy Brecker. Once the group disbanded, Will worked as a session man, playing on countless gold records and eventually turning his talents toward the field of TV-radio commercials. Bob Moses, a respected NYC percussionist, has involved himself in virtually every facet of musical expression. As composer, Bob produced and wrote the score for the prize-winning documentaries *Megalopolis* and *Crayons*; as performer and recorder, he has worked with Keith Jarrett, Gary Burton, Karl Berger, Larry Coryell, and Mike Gibbs, to name a few. Perhaps his most impressive accomplishment has been his teaching for Karl Berger's Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, during which he held numerous drum clinics and composing workshops.

Randy Brecker, another veteran of the Collegiate Jazz Festival won first place in 1964 representing Indiana University as a trumpet soloist; as in the case of Bob James, Notre Dame was just the first stop



on a successful career journey. Randy has played for Blood, Sweat and Tears, Horace Silver, and the Average White Band while forming his own band, The Brecker Brothers.

Dave Sanborn, virtuoso on alto sax, once played under Fr. Wiskirchen, advisor for the ND festival in the Northwestern Lab Band. From there, Dave branched out to session work and later toured with such celebrities as Burt Bacharach, Stevie Wonder, and the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

The Notre Dame Jazz Festival was first held in 1958, primarily due to the inspiration and backing of Charles Suber, editor of Chicago's *Downbeat* magazine. Mr. Suber returns this year to campus, after a ten-year absence, in order to act as master of ceremonies for the festival.

In the initial years of the festival's development, competition was emphasized much more than it is today: the bands customarily opposed one another in "play-off" rounds, the winner of which merited a placement in the Newport Jazz Festival. Such rigorous rivalry has since been downplayed in favor of a more co-operative, learning atmosphere. Top money prizes have given way to plaques and plaudits; indeed, the festival is now an exciting forum for collegiate jazz exposure, with an eye towards promoting the growing industry which has sprung from the popularity of creative jazz.

The money has been channeled into more lucrative avenues; for example, one-third of Dillon's annual budget (approved and appropriated by Student Government) goes toward hiring the type of top-notch judges which are appearing this weekend. This year's festival has also been widely publicized in an effort to increase the chronically-poor student attendance. Dillon points out: "If this event were held at a state university, 20,000 tickets could easily be sold. For some reason, the Notre Dame-St. Mary's community has been disappointing up to this point in their support of the festival."

In spite of these problems, Mike enjoys one special blessing: the sound system, which would cost upwards of \$10,000 regularly, is provided free of charge by a Michigan jazz freak. This devoted engineer donates his sound system to Stepan Center as proof of his expertise; if it is effective in the terrible acoustic setting of Stepan, he reasons, it will sell anywhere. Thus, he even holds a class on electronics and uses his experience at Notre Dame as proof positive of his genius.

However, his is not the only genius which will be on display this weekend at Stepan Center--there will also be over one hundred top-notch musicians, composers and performers, including special guest band Eastern School of Music. Indeed, Mike might well be justified in his claim: "This will be the greatest weekend ever for Notre Dame Jazz."



JONI MITCHELL HEJIRA

## Records By Gregg Bangs

### Hejira

Many Joni Mitchell admirers were disappointed with the different style of her last album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.

That recording found Mitchell breaking away for the folk-style that she had become best known for. Instead, she decided to use jazz to accompany her always enthralling lyrics. Critics charged the jazz presentation ruined the free-flowing nature of the lyrics and many hoped she would go back to the fold approach.

Critics might be disappointed that her latest album, *Hejira*, did not return to jazz, but they should be pleased to know that she now sounds as natural within her new framework as he did in her fold-oriented days.

What Mitchell has done is cut down on the number of instruments that accompany her. Instead of competing with her, the accompaniment practically serves as a rhythm section for her. On most cuts, Mitchell accompanies herself on guitar and is joined by a bass, lead guitar and either a percussionist or drummer. On all the cuts, Mitchell's guitar playing has a strange metallic edge that compliments her singing. The bass and drum playing are mainly supportive, but compliment her nonetheless. Drummer John Guerin and Bassist Max Bennett of the L.A. Express play with restraint, and one notices their performance for just that reason--particularly on "Song for Sharon," where they keep an eight-and-one-half minute song moving along with a steady beat with intermittent filler work.

Mitchell sounds like she's been singing with this kind of background music all of her life. Her delivery, especially the sense of her timing in her phrasing, has always been one of the most interesting and attractive features of her singing, and she's never been better. Whether it's holding onto a certain note, breathlessly running off a string of emotions, humorlessly sounding like an old man, or coyly reprimanding a lover, she does it naturally and effortlessly. This is one reason why Mitchell stands out from other contemporary singers.

Another reason is her writing. In this album, Mitchell almost exclusively uses loneliness, self-destiny and holding onto or losing a lover as the subject of her songs. Yet she never lapses into cliches and each venture at any one of the subjects is different and unique. In "Amelia," she juxtaposes a sketch of Amelia Earhart, the famed woman aviator who died trying to cross the Pacific, with her own problems of coming to grips with love.

"Furry Sings The Blues" is a detailed and sensitive look at the decay of a neighborhood and its inhabitants. Mitchell's character sketches of Old Furry and Beale Street are as accurate as any journalists. Neil Young's harmonica adds a suitable melancholy touch.

Although "Blue Motel Ropom" starts off like another life-on-the-road-with-a-rock-star song, it quickly becomes a sketch of a person's paranoid fear of losing a lover who is back at home. Delivered in a bluesy style, Mitchell delivers several comic lines, such as:

I know that you've got all those pretty girls coming on  
Hanging on lyour boom-boom-pachyderm  
Well you tell those girls that you've got German Measles  
Honey, tell 'em you've got germs  
Or a line that is funny, but seems to hit the nail on the head:

You and me we're like America and Russia  
We're always keeping score  
We're always balancing the power  
And that can get to be a cold, cold war

Lyrical and musically, *Hejira* is a step up from *Hissing of Summer Lawns*. There is no need comparing this album to her earlier material for the two are completely different. Like Paul Simon, she has grown away from her folk roots to successfully that one can only hope she keeps going further. *Hejira* is an excellent step along the way.

## Observer

# Features



WIZARDS

Directed and Written by Ralph Bakshi

This film has generated more than its share of brouhaha in the past pre-release months. Ralph Bakshi, the animator who created *Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic* and *Coonskin*, hyped his newest release as "like nothing ever before undertaken in the field of animation." The time was right for something like *Wizards*, an idea with vast potential in an art form still exploring its visual parameters. Most of the speculative excitement centered around the visual images that Bakshi and a veritable army of animators would create to inhabit the Earth after millions of years of post-holocaust regeneration, which is the setting of the film.

Considering, then, the nobility of Bakshi's efforts, *Wizards* can only be castigated as a magnificent failure. Some of the visuals, but not quite enough, satisfy the enormous expectations that one invariably

## Cinema in South Bend

# Suspended Animation

By David O'Keefe

brings to the film. The animators seem to have lavished most of their creative efforts on the villainous mutants who fight for Blackwolf, (the evil technocrat) who wages war on his twin brother, Avatar, (the ruler of the Free States and the wizard of love). The most intense images in the film are the scenes of Blackwolf's warriors preparing for battle, a literal parade of grotesque nuclear victims.

The central characters are disappointing. Avatar looks like a cross between Dopey and Yosemite Sam, a curious elf with an amazing red beard who takes thoughtful puffs from a cigar held between his toes. Elinore, a young nymphet apprenticing to become a wizard under Avatar, looks like a refugee from Mark Eden via Weight Watchers. Blackwolf is a reasonably well-drawn character, a gaunt old man with skeletal features, but trying to pass him off as Avatar's twin is like trying to find a freckle on a frog.

The story is a delicate fable about the powers of love versus the powers of technology. Blackwolf's forces are stirred into murderous frenzy by watching old Nazi footage from World War II, unearthed by the wizard while digging through the nuclear ruins in search of technological armaments. Avatar's good guys, aided by fairies and sprites and elves, seek to

destroy the machine. Their journey, from Montagar to Blackwolf's stronghold in Scrotch, comprises most of the film.

The voices, like the animations, are a curious amalgam drawn from various sources, to the ultimate harm of the movie. The most heinous and senseless of all is the insistence on making Avatar sound like a dotting rabbi, an absolute non sequitur for the alleged hero. In fact, the filmmakers have invested *Wizards* with so much needless comedy and cuteness that the strength of the visuals are the only element that saves the film from impotence. The thing is nicely integrated by the subtle interventions of a female narrator, only to have the smooth, placating tones of her incredibly expressive voice shattered all too often by simplistic nonsense.

It is a shame that Ralph Bakshi didn't take his ideas to a more courageous limit. At times, he seems utterly capable of creating a new direction in cinema in *Wizards*, only to feel a compulsion to fall back on vapid conventions. It may be that Bakshi wanted to appeal to the widest variety of moviegoers possible, which accounts for most of the problems in *Wizards*. What he failed to realize, unhappily, was that any film that seeks to break new ground isn't so much appealing as effecting.