



# Fearsome foursome at Foothills

May is jazz month at the theater

By Chet Williamson

Presenting today's jazz in theater venues is a long overdue perfect match. Jazz in the '90s has become a more sit-down, dance-in-your-head experience where performers and audiences alike show zero tolerance for distraction. Theaters offer an intimate, concert-like setting free from the intrusions of bar noises, smoke clouds and chattering conversation.

Joining forces to bring jazz to theater locally are Worcester Foothills Theatre and radio station WICN (90.5 FM), who present "Just Jazz," a new concert series happening every Wednesday in May at Foothills. Trombonist Curtis Fuller opens the series at 7:30 p.m. tonight, Wednesday, May 6; the series continues with Mose Allison May 13, Dewey Redman May 20 and Worcester's own Jaki Byard May 27.

Foothills is located off Commercial Street at the Worcester Common Outlets. A cash bar with appetizers will be available at 6 p.m. in the theater lobby.

Credit this recent local marriage of jazz and theater to singer Karrin Allyson. In September of last year, WICN presented her in concert at Foothills to a standing-room-only, sell-out performance. Recognizing the growth and potential, the two cultural organizations met to discuss future shows.

"The board here decided this was something we were interested in doing," says Lloyd Henley, house manager at Foothills, "and found out about my background in promoting jazz and asked if I would put something together."

A Virgin Islands native who now makes his home in Western Mass., Henley is both a jazz drummer and promoter. In the past he has presented concerts at Amherst College, where people like Archie Shepp, Billy Taylor and Max Roach performed.

Given the roster of talent he has scheduled for Foothills, it appears as though Henley has not missed a promotional beat. The artists represented cover a wide range of styles from blues to bebop and beyond. Each one of the four performers is internationally recognized as well as having many local associations.

Trombonist Curtis Fuller lives in Millbury. Currently on tour with the Jazz Messengers Tribute Band, Fuller comes home to lead his own ensemble which features saxophonist John Farnsworth, trumpeter Jim Rotundi, pianist David Hazeltine, bassist Nat Reeves and drummer Joe Farnsworth.

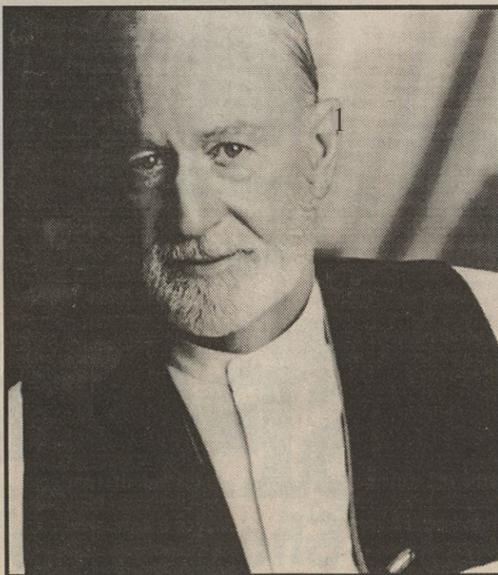
Steve Davis, another trombonist who was a group member when they performed in February of '97 at WPI, is now a part of Chick Correa's new band, Origin. Davis will not be on the Foothills date but took time out recently to talk about Fuller:

"It's beyond words how much of an inspiration he's been, not just to me, but to so many trombonists," Davis said. "I feel that he is perhaps the most important trombone player—certainly after J.J. [Johnson]—in this century... for what he has done in liberating the instrument. The style he developed out of J.J.'s approach is much more like a saxophone or trumpet... in terms of the phrasing and the speed."

"He's the only trombone player that John Coltrane ever hired."

Fuller is a master of the double- and triple-tonguing technique which allows him to articulate ideas and to complement and compete with the saxophone and trumpet. His staggering jazz resume boasts performances with many greats including Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Miles Davis, among others.

Born in Detroit in 1934, he came up playing in a rich scene with the likes of such legendary players as Sonny Stitt, Milt Jackson and Tommy Flanagan. Moving to New York in the late '50s, he quickly became a first-call, in-demand player who can be heard on countless historic recording sessions including the Coltrane album *Blue Train*.



Mose Allison



Curtis Fuller

From 1961 to 1965, Fuller played with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, a group which featured Wayne Shorter, Freddie Hubbard and many of Fuller's compositions.

Throughout his impressive career, he has always shared his knowledge with developing students. Serving on the faculty at Cuyahoga College and the Tri-C Jazz Festival in Cleveland, he is a frequent visiting artist-in-residence at Rutgers, Duke and other national universities.

Last year Fuller began his first year on the faculty at the New England Conservatory in Boston. Look for this show to be both educational and enlightening.

At 71 years young, pianist, singer and songwriter Mose Allison has been delivering his down-home brand of blues and swaggering swing to live audiences for almost 50 years. And Worcester has been a regular stop. In the '60s he used to spend an entire week playing at Sir Morgan's Cove. His last local appearance was a sold-out affair when he opened the 1993 edition of Jazz at Sunset at the New England Science Center.

Allison is currently touring in support of his latest release *Gimcracks and Gewgaws* for the Blue Note label.

"Gimcracks and Gewgaws? That's the little things you put on your mantle piece like little figurines and things," said Allison recently, speaking by phone from his Long Island home. "Everybody has 'em."

Gimcracks and gewgaws (pronounced *Jim cracks* and *Gee-gaws*) is a southern expression and just the kind of word play and turn-of-phrase stuff that delights the tunesmith in Allison.

"I had the idea of the name for a long time," he says. "I ran across it somewhere years ago. I wrote this tune which is based on a little five-finger exercise that I do on the piano -- when I feel like I need to get my hands limbered up. Over the years I've practiced those simple exercises and now and then they have suggested a line, words to me."

Allison is the author of some great titles: "Your Mind is on Vacation [and your mouth is working overtime]," "Everybody's Cryin' Mercy [and they don't know the meaning of the word]," "I Don't Worry About a Thing

[nothing's going to be all right]."

As a songwriter, he has penned more than 100 titles, and his tunes have been covered by such diverse artists as the Who, the Clash, the Yardbirds and Bonnie Raitt.

He was born Mose Allison, Jr. on November 11, 1927, in Tippecanoe, Mississippi. His diverse influences range from Nat Cole to Thelonious Monk, from Charles Brown to Charles Ives. His own influence on other songwriters and performers can be heard in the work of Georgie Fame, John Mayall, Van Morrison, Randy Newman, Ben Sidran and Pete Townsend.

"The man's voice was heaven, so cool, so decisively hip, uncomplicated," the Who's Townsend once remarked of Allison.

Allison returns to the area with a trio consisting of drummer Bob Guillotti and bassist Paul Del Nero. He says he will play many of his hits and material from the new disc, as well as tunes from both the American blues and jazz song books.

Multi-instrumentalist Dewey Redman returns to town with his new quartet, including pianist Charles Eubanks, bassist John Menagon and drummer Skip Hadden. We last heard him live in the late '70s, performing with bassist Mark Helias at the now-defunct New England Repertory Theatre, which was on Oxford Street.

Dewey is the father of saxophonist Joshua Redman. Although his now famous son has eclipsed him in popularity, Dewey is a masterful musician whom *Jazz Times* recently called, "one of the great tenor players of our time."

Asked about his son's success Redman commented recently from the Big Apple: "What can you say? He's a very good player and I'm very proud of him. He can play and he still knows what page he's on. He doesn't have a big head."

Born in Fort Worth in 1931, Redman is best known for his work and recordings with Ornette Coleman, Keith Jarrett, Charlie Haden's Liberation Orchestra, Old and New Dreams, Elvin Jones and Pat Metheny.

"I've paid my dues and I'm still paying them," Redman says. "You never finish learning. I think music is the most powerful of all the arts. I was captivated from a young age. I never thought I'd be a musician. I used to be a school teacher in Texas and decided to come to New York for five years and get it out of my system."

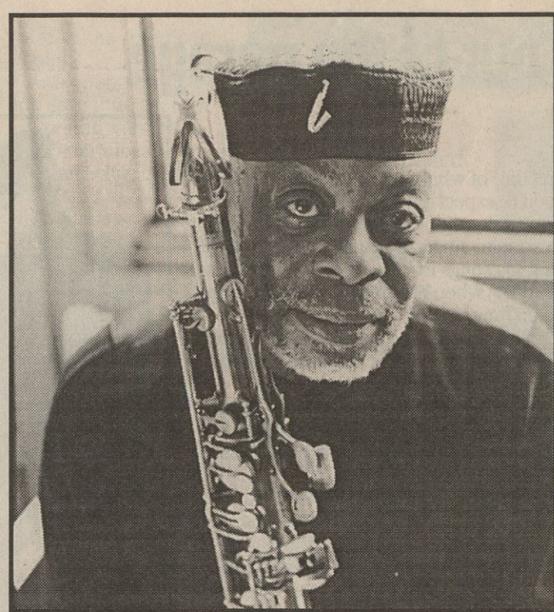
*There must be a great deal of music in your system.*

"I've been in New York for thirty years," he says. "I've had a chance to travel a lot and New York is the most fascinating place I've ever been in my life. It is the music capital of the world."

"Who can be prepared for New York? You can't. That's my number-one accomplishment: surviving in New York - 30 years, and the only thing I've ever done is play music. I'm proud of that."

In describing Redman's playing *Jazz Times* has said: "Whether he is dishing up fat-toned Jug-ish [Gene Ammons] 'bluesiness,' exemplifying Long Tall suavity, or unorthodox structures with his patented voice enhanced textures, he creates compelling music."

Since 1976, Redman has been touring overseas with his own group and with others, including Coleman, Jarrett and Metheny, as well as European jazz artists such as Henri Texier, Aldo Romano and Michel Benita.



Dewey Redman

The performance by pianist Jaki Byard will mark the Worcester native's first local concert in over a decade. It will be a homecoming celebration for one of the world's most venerable and versatile of all jazz musicians. Now living in Queens, NY, Byard is the walking embodiment of jazz in this century.

"Jaki is the history of jazz," says saxophonist Michael Marcus, one of Byard's many collaborators. "To me, he represents the whole spectrum of modern jazz from Willie 'The Lion' Smith to post-Cecil Taylor."

Before making his way in the jazz world outside of Worcester, Byard spent many years developing his craft right here in town. Along with neighborhood pals like Barney Price and Howie Jefferson in the late 1930s, Byard ran musicians' cooperative called the Saxtrum Club.

"I named that club," Byard recalls. "Saxtrum Club - yeah! A lot of musicians used to jam there. Acts that played the Plymouth Theater would come up and jam. Remember a violin player Joe Venuti? He came and jammed with us. So many...."

*Rumor has it that you spent a lot of time woodshedding there:*

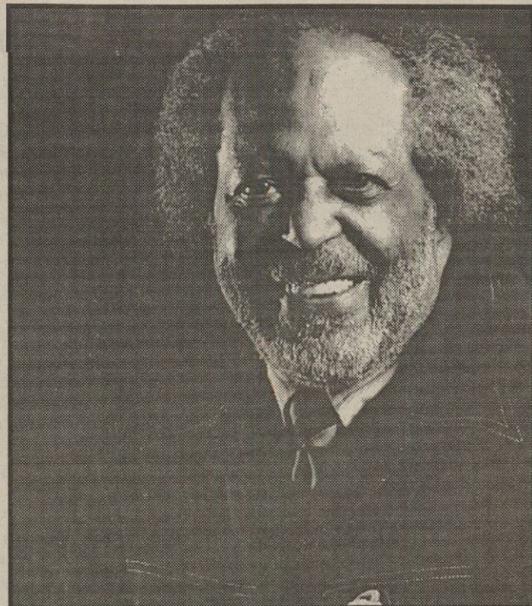
"Oh, yeah -- practiced, played and played. We got ahold of a piano and that was it. Cats used to come to jam: Ed Sham, Emil Haddad, Murray Guralnick, an alto player who ended up with Gene Krupa. We used to have a rehearsal band called Sal Salah. I played piano with that band. It was pretty interesting. There were some pretty interesting musical ventures then."

Byard moved to Boston in the '40s and the rest, as they say, is history. More than 30 years ago, Leonard Feather, onetime dean of all jazz critics wrote this about him:

"Aside from his work with [Charles] Mingus, Byard has played with Eric Dolphy, Booker Ervin, Don Ellis, Ken McIntyre, Charlie Mariano, Sam Rivers, Roland Kirk and has led several of his own bands in Boston and New York City. As a composer, he has been able to incorporate 'stride' into a modern setting and has written strictly modern compositions... Byard's piano style is often tinged heavily with the blues, showing the importance of 'roots' to a musician who can handle them without being repetitious or imitative."

Byard has long been at the vanguard of jazz education. For 18 years he divided his time between the New England Conservatory of Music and Hartt College of Music. Today, he can be found teaching piano students at the Manhattan School of Music.

At 75, Byard also continues a busy performance schedule. Besides working with his trio, Byard directs his big band, the Apollo Stompers, and tours in duos with Marcus and cellist David Eyges. In 1997, the Worcester-based Brownstone label released *Night Leaves*, an album featuring compositions by both Eyges and Byard.



Jaki Byard

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