

El Morocco jazz is reborn

Plus: Meg and the Mutts, Dennis Brennan, WCFO concerts, First Night deadline

By Chet Williamson

For local jazz fans, the rebirth of the El Morocco Restaurant, 100 Wall St., wasn't deemed official until the new owners re-established the tradition of the Monday-night jazz program. Last Monday night they made it official in a big way, and the television cameras were there to catch all the action.

Local guitarist Jack Pezanelli opened the new series with an all-star cast that featured

original Blood, Sweat and Tears saxophonist Fred Lipsius. Pianist John Arcaro, bassist John Lockwood and drummer Casey Scheurell filled in the rhythm section. The group was filmed by Greater Media Cable's jazz show Studio 3 with host Toni Ballard. The performance is scheduled to air in two segments, beginning next week.

The performance was held in the renovated Nile Room. Now called One Hundred Wall Street, the area has been expanded and enhanced with a new sound and lighting system. The stage is now centered along the side wall opposite the bar. Only large enough to provide a platform for a drummer's kit, it is a curious architectural flaw. Most of the musicians set up on the dance floor. Fortunately, that is the only drawback. The sightlines are clear to the band throughout the room and the acoustics are great. Estimated seating is 150.



Chet

Jack Wertheimer, Monday-morning jazz host for *A Tasteful Blend*, heard over radio station WICN, 90.5 FM, and a jazz force in the Worcester community for years, has been confirmed as the series producer. "People in Worcester have asked, 'When are you going to see jazz at the El Morocco again?'" Wertheimer said. "Well, here we are. Emil Haddad said they were looking to do a jazz program again on Monday nights and he recommended me. Obviously, we'd like to get off to a good start. On occasion, we hope to have a nationally recognized artist."

Shows begin at 8 p.m. Covers vary, so call first. The series continues April 17 with saxophonist Greg Abate and April 24 with singer Steve Marvin with the Jack Pezanelli Trio.

According to new El Morocco general manager Randy Nason, the El is presenting live entertainment seven nights a week. He is especially pleased with the Sunday jazz brunch with Emil Haddad and Dick Odgren. He adds that Tuesdays feature Mitchell Kutsunas and the Rollins Brothers, presenting Middle Eastern music complete with belly dancing. Wednesdays is blues night with Barbecue Bob and the Rhythm Aces playing April 12. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays are reserved for deejays and dancing.

Finally, no mention of the El Morocco is complete without acknowledging resident pianist George Gregory.

"I know every song there is," Gregory says. "Go ahead and challenge me." On a recent Saturday night, two grade-school children, Elizabeth and Julie K. Wolf, put



George Gregory plays for diners at the El Morocco.

him to the test. Calling out tunes while standing alongside Gregory, the sisters took turns singing to the unsuspecting diners.

"They just love to sing," said the proud parents speaking from their catbird seat. "We've been bringing them here to sing with George for a couple of years now. They just love singing with him."

Gregory, whose illustrious career dates back to the days when he arranged for Glenn Miller, supported the girls in renditions of "The Summer Wind," "The Sound of Music," "Yes Sir That's My Baby," "The Sunny Side of the Street" and "You Make Me Feel So Young." Yes indeed, you could see the twinkle in his eye on that one.

Jack Wertheimer is also the producer of the popular Jazz at Sunset series at the New England Science Center. He is the owner of Brownstone Records, whose latest releases are saxophonist Leonard Hochman's *Until Tomorrow*, with Ula Lawrence, Alan Dawson and Harvie Swartz, and clarinetist Harry Skoler's new disc. In the works is Jack Pezanelli's *Pleased Hands*. Due out in May, it is Pezanelli's first as a leader, with bassist Michael Moore, pianist John Arcaro and Jimmy Madison.

Wertheimer went on to say the Jazz at Sunset Series opens with this year's session June 2, with Artie Barsamian's Boston Big Band. "We are hoping that they complement," Wertheimer said of the two programs. "Being involved with both, we can announce at each place what is going on at the other."

BLUES RAINS LIKE CATS AND DOGS: Meg and the Mutts, a group that has been howling at the hoodoo moon with little or no fanfare, plays Saturday, April 15, at Gilrein's, 802 Main St. "The group is similar to the Sled Dogs," said Meg Kelly. "Because Jim Kelly, my husband, plays guitar, Bob Tamagni is the drummer and Bobby Killoran is the bassist. That's all the same. Then there is me on vocals, and John Mazzaelli plays Hammond B-3."

The Mutts are also a spin-off of the Voodoo Dogs, sans horns. "Basically, it's a derivative dog band," Meg laughed. "We do more blues. I do a lot of Freddy, Albert and B.B. King tunes, Ruth Brown - I guess you could say classic blues. We do more New Orleans stuff too, like the Neville Brothers and the Meters. It's good rockin' blues with a New Orleans flavor."

ME BLUESEXPRESS: Blues performers and fans should check out the new radio show on WSRO, 1470 AM, *The Blues Express*, with host Karen Anton. Heard Tuesday nights at 6 p.m. the show is, as Anton said, "a fun-filled talk radio show dedicated to the blues and jazz in

Metrowest and beyond." On the program she profiles clubs with extensive listings and interviews the musicians who perform there. Anton comes to the airways after working promotion for James Montgomery. In fact she uses Montgomery's "Train Song" as her theme for *The Blues Express*. The AM dial being dominated by talk-radio format, Anton invites musical guests on to tell folks where they are playing and to tell their story.

"I strive to make this part of the show informative, entertaining, somewhat intimate and very real," she said. Speaking of Montgomery, he's in town Friday night at the Plantation Club, 151 Plantation St., where the Mighty Bel-Mars, featuring Michael Lynch, play Saturday.

DENNIS BRENNAN SIGNED: Singer-songwriter Dennis Brennan, former frontman for the Worcester-based Westside Band and the Boston acts the Martells and Push-Push, has released his first recording, *Jack in the Pulpit*, under his own name on Upstart Records, a subsidiary of Rounder. Brennan's hard-rocking debut contains the explosive punklike energy mixed with a soulful writing "Style." The disc features guitarists Duke Levine and Kevin Barry, drummers Jay Bellarose (Talking to Animals), Bill Conway (Morphine) and bassist Richard Gates (Bill Morrissey and Patty Larkin).

COFFEE, TEA AND MELODY: The Rob Levit Group, nominated as Boston's "Best Local Jazz Act" and selected to play this year's *Boston Globe* Jazz Festival, appears at 8 p.m. Saturday, April 15, at the increasingly popular Coffee, Tea and Melody, Route 117, Stow.

PIANO A LA MODE: The Worcester Common Fashion Outlets is presenting free piano concerts in the center court. The series continues with the outstanding Chris Neville April 15, Eugene Lumclsky April 22 and 23 and Bevan Manson April 29 and 30. Performance times are 1 to 4 p.m.

ROBIN LANE: Ex-Chartbusters' chanteuse Robin Lane has a new CD out called *Catbird Seat*. The disc features 13 originals. Some great players helped out in the project, such as Dean Cassell, currently working with Marc Barnicle's new band, Catfish Walk. Percussionist and sound engineer Ducky Carlisle, who produced Barnicle's last demo, also helps Lane out on background vocals, songwriting and keyboards.

FIRST NIGHT DEADLINE: April 28 is the deadline for applying to perform at First Night Worcester on New Year's Eve. Those interested should contact First Night Worcester at P.O. Box 351, Worcester, MA 01614, or call 799-4909.

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