Oregon's Jazz Magazine February 2017

JAZZSCENE™

Maria Schneider
Music As an Escape

+ Musician of the Month:
  Arietta Ward
  PJCE Grasshoppers
  Pictures from around town

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Maria Schneider Photo Credits: Briene Lermitte

Maria Schneider Orchestra at the 2017 PDX Jazz Festival sponsored by Biamp

From the President's Desk

Hello and welcome to the February issue of Jazzscene! Each member of the Board of Directors of the Jazz Society of Oregon™ is having a turn at writing the introduction each month, and this month is my turn. They say music is a form of communication that

transcends all spoken forms of communication as it can be understood by people everywhere around the world. Within the language of jazz, there are many "dialects" such as swing, bebop, cool jazz, fusion, avant-garde, big band, ragtime, Latin-jazz and others. They each communicate a feeling that can be appreciated and enjoyed. I have been playing bass for many years and have played gigs all over the US and abroad. When I look out into the audience as I play a gig and see all the people enjoying themselves, it is such a high for me.

We in Portland are very fortunate to once again welcome the PDX Jazz Festival. In the last two weeks of February you can catch many favorites such as the Branford Marsalis Quartet, the Maria Schneider Orchestra, the Heath Brothers, the John Abercrombie Quartet, Roy Ayers, as well as our own Mel Brown Big Band featuring Jon Faddis and much, much more! You can log into the JSO Jazz Calendar at jazzoregon.com/events at this time or at any time of the year to find out who is playing and where!

Whatever is happening in the world, there is always the sanctuary of completely submerging oneself in music. Let us all do what we can to promote peace, love, and understanding. I wish you all the hippest, coolest, most outstanding existence ever! Cheers!

Loyd Love

Jazz Society of Oregon

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Board Meeting

(Public Welcome)

February 8th

7:00 pm

Beaverton Library (Cathy Stanton Room)

12375 SW Fifth Street, Beaverton, OR

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Maria Schneider

Music As an Escape
By Dan Davey

Friday, February 17th, 7 pm
Maria Schneider Orchestra
Newmark Theater
$45-75

In anticipation of her upcoming visit and PDX Jazz Festival performance I had a chance to speak with world-renowned composer and bandleader, Maria Schneider. With input from Portland musicians and educators on what they wanted to hear from her, I got a glimpse into the life and compositional influences that have given Schneider her voice, her music, her musicians, and her vocation.

She spoke eloquently about the members of her band and what she expects from her musicians. She described the influence not only of those jazz icons whom we would expect such as Bob Brookmeyer, Gil Evans, and Ray Wright, but the influence of teachers and educators who played major roles in shaping her future and her character. She shares her insight into discovering and nourishing your artistic voice and the importance of a society that values, appreciates, and protects artists and their work.

Dan Davey: Jazz musicians are always searching to find and nurture their own voice in their music. You have managed to remain dedicated to your own style and vision for the big band sound. What advice do you have for jazz musicians and composers in both finding and nurturing their own unique and personal voice?

Maria Schneider: Well, I think there are a few things. The first is that a lot of people do not trust that their voice is unique and that their own point of view is unique. So they think they have to go outside of themselves and find something exotic to attach to their music in order to make them unique. As if in their regular life they do not have something of value that is unique. I think that is the first mistake because everybody *is* unique. Secondly, in music, it is important to not only study and work, but to have things in life that you are passionate about outside of music. If you are just music, music, music, it is almost like a flesh-eating virus. It just turns on itself. I think it is important to have things in life to draw upon. Not that you do those things and then specifically write about them, but I believe if you find those things, they will inspire music.

The third thing I will say is that when people write, especially in the jazz realm, they tend to write almost as if they are putting up a pre-fab house: "I have to create a tune and people are going to solo on that tune." It becomes like there is a form or template that you are plugging notes

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PDX jazz

THE BIAMP PDX JAZZ FESTIVAL BEGINS FEB. 16–26, 2017

Get your tickets to the festival's numerous world-class headlining artists such as Maria Schneider Orchestra, The Heath Brothers, John Scofield, Roy Ayers, and the world premiere by the 2017 Portland Jazz Master Mel Brown and his Big Band featuring Jon Faddis in Tribute to Dizzy Gillespie.

100+ Events | A Dozen Venues
pdxjazz.com

Generously sponsored by biamp

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Benefits of membership in the Jazz Society of Oregon!

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- Support America's original art form - JAZZ!
- Support local jazz musicians, clubs and events
- Support students of jazz
- JSO is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization

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Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Jazz Society. Without volunteers, nothing gets done. And we've got lots of exciting things to do!

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- Events coordination
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- Fundraising

If you'd like to express your love for jazz music and meet like-minded enthusiasts, just send mail to volunteer@jazzoregon.com. Please indicate what areas you would like to work in.

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into. Brookmeyer really helped me with that. He would ask me questions that were things I never really questioned, like "Why is there a solo there?"

And I would answer "Well, the tune happens and there is some writing and now there is a solo."

Then he would say "A solo should not happen until the only thing that *can* happen is a solo." What started to happen is I started to realize that there are infinite choices for everything in music. You have to start questioning what you want. And as you do, your point of view emerges as a unique voice and your music becomes your own without you trying to figure out who you are. Your music starts illuminating who you are because you are not asking "Can I do that?" in every aspect of the music. You are making the choices and figuring out what you really want yourself for that music.

DD: What would you recommend to a student who struggles with personal creativity after studying composition or improvisational techniques and processes?

MS: There is a problem in pedagogy when teaching people to write, to get everybody in the class to produce something. A lot of times they give them a step 1, step 2, step 3. The problem with that is once you learn a way to proceed from somebody else, it is hard to know what your naive path would have been if you were left to your own devices. One of the things that was luck for me, in a way, was that when I started, there was no jazz program at the University of Minnesota (UM). I took some lessons from people, but basically I was hearing things, stumbling and experimenting, and trying different unorthodox things. I guess I would say to try to strip away those steps 1, 2, 3 and throw things out there. Dare to throw something on the page that just feels like something that is not out of the tradition. Put it down and see if you can make something out of it. Try to mold an unusual idea into something using other tools.

I am trying to write something new and at the end of the day I say "I like it," but the next day I wake up and say "No, I do not like it." I have been going through that for weeks now. Sometimes you have to go through these things for weeks...

Writing is very difficult. I am trying to write something new and at the end of the day I say "I like it," but the next day I wake up and say "No, I do not like it." I have been going through that for weeks now. Sometimes you have to go through these things for weeks... Maybe even months. You go through periods like that and you have to force yourself through it. If you take the easy path of producing something using some technique somebody has given you and do not face the pain then you will become a certain type of writer. There is nothing wrong with that, but that is more like a commercial writer. I have great respect for people who develop technique and tools for get-

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ting things down fast and it is effective music. It is a different realm than my realm and they are both super valid... but they are different.

DD: Do you find that when you have a block, starting with writing something influences creativity that flourishes into a new idea?

MS: Yes, you have to do it and sometimes that idea sits there and later you come back to it and you say "Ah, now I know what I can do with that." So it is not completely lost. I have many pieces that went in the drawer for years and then all of a sudden came back and became something. There are a lot of examples of that in my music. A piece I wrote called "Cerulean Skies," pulled on something old. A piece called "Journey Home," also did that. With "El Viento," the whole initial idea ended up turning into a Spanish thing after I heard flamenco music. It never started that way. Originally, it was called "Cellophane" and it was very Hindemith-like and very classical. It was completely different from what it is now.

DD: Speaking of the classical influence in your writing, do you consciously use classical techniques in your jazz compositions or is that just an influence that comes through?

MS: Not really; I wish I was disciplined enough to say that I knew a lot of classical techniques but I do not really do that. I am not methodical in my writing. That is not to say I am not mathematical, in a way. I come up with things intuitively and then I analyze them and look for the consistent elements in this idea. Invariably, if you like something it is because there is something that has a character in it, either intervals, rhythm, motif, relationship of melody to the bottom – there is something within that and you have to pull out what that character is that you like, analyze it so you know what it is and can develop it so that the whole piece has continuity.

DD: Your music is well-known for its unique and creative timbres not always common for jazz ensembles. Does that uniqueness come from a specific influence?

MS: It comes more from trying to make the big band not sound like a big band. I did not want to deal with the complexity of bringing in unique instruments. Early on, my music was for big band. Then I started getting called to work with big bands and universities overseas. It is such a standard instrumentation and it enabled me to make a living doing what I do. If I had three different ensembles and one had bassoon and cello and violin that could be really fun and maybe I will do something like that someday, but it does not have legs for me to go out and perform with different groups and make a living. I

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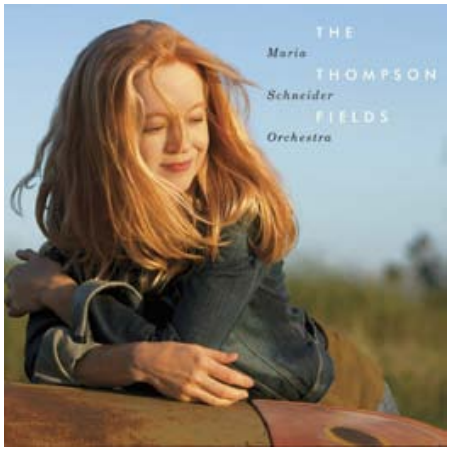

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have managed to create this sustainable group in my music that I write that enables me to tour my own group. Working with my own musicians inspires me. When I record that music and other groups want to play it, I am able to work with them... do my educational things and make a living. It all feeds each other.

The big band felt sonically limiting to me. I enjoy hearing straight-up big band music but, honestly, these days I do not really listen to that. I like music that has more space in it and combinations and things. In my music, you will hear everything from one person or two or three people playing different woodwinds and mutes and combinations and doublings to try to get different sounds and textures and different degrees of transparency out of the orchestra. It is like any limitation where you are forced to be expansive in your way of thinking about it. That has been my limitation: that it is a big band.

DD: Your music is largely written with your musicians in mind and you have said that part of what you love about your compositions is the collaborative process with your musicians and that it can be different every night. Knowing that, what process do you have for selecting your musicians and what do you look for them to bring to your music?

MS: I am looking for people that are great ensemble players and have a really beautiful sound, play in tune, respect playing in an ensemble, respect that a huge part of this music is playing their part expressively, and blending in a section; that has got to be part of it. The other part of it is for people who are soloists (and not every person in the band is a soloist, but most of them are) that have a character and a voice that are beautiful improvisers who are not satisfied playing the same thing every night. I am not looking for people who are hard on themselves... but they all are. They are not satisfied doing the same thing every night. I am looking for players that contrast each other. Donnie McCaslin and Rich Perry are very different kinds of players. They have different sounds, worlds, and landscapes. Ryan Keberle and Marshall Gilkes are both great trombone players with a different sound and different approach. They are also both quite virtuosic, also. Marshall has a more classical, controlled sound and Ryan has more of that wild, care-free trombone power. The biggest thing is people who are willing to take risks, who are willing to just throw it out and there and be a risk-taker.

DD: What do you see as the future of large jazz ensembles and what do you think jazz educators can do to ensure the survival of music for large jazz ensembles? Any ideas for how to keep a jazz program relevant and connected.

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MS: Well, I do not know where the music is headed. I think it is headed in many directions and I think many people use the large ensemble to create musical landscapes that have improvisation. It is concert music now. For years it was dance music. I think the large jazz ensemble in school teaches students a variety of things that are really important, not just if they become musicians.

One thing is playing in a group and that sense of ensemble and making a great sound together. That is a wonderful feeling for a group to have and working as a team and supporting one another and listening to one another. It gives solo opportunities to these people, too. I have always thought that it is not a good thing when a school is all about small group and improvisation and does not give large ensemble experience. It builds musicians that are not adept to going out there and making a living.

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There will be a few that will be jazz stars but most will depend on doing a little of that and then a lot of ensemble playing. You want them to be able to do that as well. And it is fun! It is pretty amazing that there are jazz ensembles in so many schools, not just in the country but in the world.

DD: Knowing that Evelyn Butler, Ray Wright, Gary Lindsay, and Bob Brookmeyer impacted your life and career, who were your biggest role models? How do you feel about being a role model for young musicians and composers?

MS: There are so many different people who helped form me. Definitely Mrs. Butler did but there were people who had a big influence in small ways that I have not talked about. Reginald Buckner, who was a pianist in Minneapolis who is no longer alive, had a jazz piano class. I was not a great pianist but he really took me under his wing and made me feel that what I was working on was happening and valued. He was so supportive. I had a classical teacher, Paul Fetler, who had heard my music was so influenced by jazz, even though he was a student of Hindemith and was all-out classical in a time when most classical musicians were head-strong in a world of serialism. He said "I hear so much jazz in your music, you should go listen to the big band at the (UM) and watch them rehearse." That changed the course of my life!

I took piano lessons with Manfredo Theft, who was this great Brazilian blind pianist living in Minneapolis. We did a lot of Bill Evans transcriptions and he really opened up my head to a love of inner voicing, voice movement, and the harmonies of Bill Evans. I can go back to educators who rocked my world in big ways in nursery school.

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I had this teacher who would have us sit in the dirt. We would each get a string that was a loop. We would sit and watch everything that happened in our circle; in our string and share it with each other. In the beginning, you are sitting and looking at dirt but all of a sudden you see an ant that is carrying something and everyone would run over to see. You have teachers that do things you never forget; that make an impact on your world.

Even at UM, I went in as a theory major and wanted to be a composer, but I had no confidence or experience. I had no business going to Minneapolis to the biggest university in the country and saying "I want to be a composer." A theory student teacher, after hearing one of my four-part madrigal theory exercises, said "You should really add composition to your major. You really seem to have talent for that." I went the next day and added composition to my major. Without that person giving me permission to dream what I was secretly dreaming, I maybe would not have done that and would have switched over to astronomy or ornithology or something else. It is amazing the difference a teacher a can make in your life. Mentors are not necessarily people like Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer, and Ray Wright who, of course, all were huge influences on me.

Do I influence other people's lives in some way when I go and do a clinic and talk about writing? I do not know. I hope so! We all influence each other without knowing in many ways. When I was a kid, I figure skated. I was lousy, in terms of figure skaters, but in Windom (Minnesota) I was good. There were a few of us who just powered to learn jumps on our own the way I learned to write for big band; just stumbling, literally with skating I did that.

There was a little girl that I used to help and I completely forgot about her until my band played in my home town. This girl came up to me and asked if I remembered her. I looked at her and I said "No, I'm sorry, I don't."

She said "You really changed my life and helped me ice skate."

I looked at her again and realized she was that little girl. She told me she became a figure skating teacher and really changed her life. I inspired someone to become a figure skater! That is the last thing I thought I would inspire someone to do. You just never know in life.

DD: As we look at the world around us, what role do you feel jazz music has in influencing, communicating, or uniting people both in our country and with other countries?

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MS: Music is just so important. I say music is chemical: it turns pain into beauty and worry into comfort.

I think just about anybody who goes into music is largely drawn to it as an escape. There is also so many studies saying that when young students play music, their minds develop for math and they do better in all their studies. I believe they act out less because they have this expression and outlet. Music is so important for the people who play it and the people who hear it.

What I worry about most in our culture is the death of art. I worry a lot about Google and streaming music and these huge corporations and this "free ride" that all of these things get that are making art into some YouTube star. There are some YouTube stars who are hugely talented so I am not belittling them. You cannot replace what has evolved in music and when music cannot pay for the making of itself anymore, it is going to suffer. What is that going to do to our culture as a whole? It is really important right now that music is a big part of our society. Artists will do what they are going to do no matter what, but at a certain point when you cannot make a living or fund the recording of your work anymore because there is no way to recover the cost, it is going to start to die.

DD: Have you been to Portland before?

MS: I have never been to Portland. I have been to Eugene and Seattle but that is the closest I have been to Portland. I do, however, watch Portlandia on occasion so I feel like I know it well. We unfortunately have no time to explore while we are there. We fly in the day of the concert and get on a bus the morning after. I look forward to coming. I cannot wait!

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