

July CJA Newsletter

Welcome to the very first CJA Newsletter! We are excited about sharing a monthly newsletter about Christian Jazz Artists and their music! Each month there will be an interview with a CJA participant, an article about Jazz and how it relates to the Christian Jazz Artist, as well as a jazz chart from a CJA participant and other great features! You will enjoy reading the newsletter so pass them on to others!

This month we have a great article on "Why Jazz Is Appropriate For Christian Worship", by Pianist Bradley Sowash, as well as a great free Mp3 song, chart, and interview with Keyboardist/Composer Ray Lyon! Check it out!!

We are very excited to have new CJA artists that have been added to the web page. We welcome saxophonist **Greg Vail**, **Singer and saxophonist Dean Mills**, and keyboardist **James Ranka**! Be sure and check out their music and make them feel welcome. **Alex Acuna** and other great Christian Artists will be added to the CJA page this month as well!! If you haven't already make sure and listen to the rest of the CJA artist's music here:

http://www.songsofdavid.com/christian_jazz_artists.shtml

Also encouraged is the sharing of CD's between CJA artists as well as e-mails to get better acquainted with each other! Greg Vail also has a jazz discussion group, "All That Jazz" located at the link below:

<http://www.thirdage.com/WebX?14@68.MxmaaelcWCG^4@.ef561bb/>

If you know of other Christian Jazz artists please share this newsletter with them and have them contact:

CJA@songsofdavid.com to subscribe or for more info on how to become a participant in the CJA!

CJA Faves

Each month we will ask a CJA participant to list 5 of his favorite Jazz CD's and share them with everyone.

(This months CJA Faves are shared by CJA Artist David Arivett)

1) Native Dancer (Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Milton Nascimento)

One of the most incredible Brazilian jazz CD's of all times! A must have available as a re-issue! Downbeat gave this 1974 release the famous "five stars" rating! Brazilian Jazz fused together as only these great artists can do!

Here is a link to some audio samples and where you can hear it or buy it! Make sure you hear the audio excerpt "Beauty and the Beast"!

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00000274F/qid=1057285581/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-5479667-6658548?v=glance&s=music

2) Water Sign (Jeff Lorber)

I love Jeff Lorbers writing and playing but his early material is hard to beat! A recent compilation has been issued of some of his best early material. Jeff has been called the father of smooth jazz! But many of his early tunes are much more driving, funky, and imaginative than what some would consider "Snooz Jazz"! Drawing elements from the artists he admired—Earth Wind and Fire, Tower of Power, Miles Davis, and Weather Report—Lorber has fashioned a jazzy funk hybrid that sounds more fresh than retro even today.

Here is a link to some audio samples from "The Definitive Collection"

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/B00004KD22/ref=m_art_li_4/102-5479667-6658548?v=glance&s=music

3) Schemes & Dreams (Pat Coil)

If I had to pick only have 5 CD's to listen to this would have to be one of them! Incredible writing and playing!! This one is out of print but you can probably find it online if you search hard enough. If you can't e-mail Pat and ask him to burn you a copy or get permission for me to burn you a copy! Lyle Mays also co-produced this one and it is a must have! (Pat is also a CJA participant and will be interviewed for the August CJA Newsletter!)

4) Carmel (Joe Sample)

This is what some consider Joe's finest work and there is an incredible depth of writing, soloing, and extremely high level of musicianship displayed on this CD! Joe has the touch!

5) The Scene Is Clean (Ronnie Cuber)

Ronnie Cuber has played his Sax for many great names and has assembled some great musicians for this Latin flavored offering. Hot percussion is provided by Milton Cardona, with Geoff Keezer on piano and Joey De-Francesco on the Hammond organ. If you like Latin Jazz this one will keep you in the groove for a long time!

CJA Featured Chart

"The Yearning Sky" by Ray Lyon

Make sure you download both the Mp3 and chart for this beautiful song by keyboardist/composer Ray Lyon!

Ray describes this song as a, “A worshipful prelude segues into a dreamy and atmospheric bossa-rock groove. This long story telling tune features a wistful and arching melodic theme, and a dramatic and sweeping piano solo.” (Romans 8:19, 21)

Here is the link:

http://www.songsofdavid.com/CJA_Free_Download.htm

CJA July Interview

Ray Lyon

(Besides being a veteran jazz keyboardist and pianist on the south Florida music scene for many years, Ray was a member of guitarist Randy Bernsen's Ocean Sound Band and recorded on three of his albums along with such luminary jazz artists as Jaco Pastorius, Michael Brecker, Wayne Shorter, and Herbie Hancock. Ray has also performed with jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie, trumpeter Ira Sullivan, saxophonist Ed Calle, and flautist Nestor Torres.)

1) When did you start developing a love for Jazz music?

In my mid teens. I had studied classical piano as a child (and continued to do so thru my sophomore year in college) but always preferred improvisation and composing to practicing and performing classical music. My love for jazz really kicked in after being exposed to the jazz fusion music of such groups as Herbie Hancock and the Headhunters, Chick Corea's group "Return To Forever" as well as many others. Later I really began to appreciate traditional jazz more as I was exposed to music by jazz icons such as John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Wes Montgomery, Bill Evans, and many others.

2) Did you study Jazz formally?

Yes, at Palm Beach Community College, Eastman School of Music, University of Miami, and Florida Atlantic University. I received a B.F.A. in jazz arranging and composition from

Florida Atlantic in 1982. Jazz is also “studied” gigging and my many experiences over the years playing with wonderfully talented musicians was just as important, if not more important than any formal education I received. I believe it is important that Christian musicians who wish to play jazz get their education not only from school and studying the masters, but out there gigging and interacting in the secular scene... that’s the only way to become a good player. And you can witness as you work.

3) Who do you consider some of the main influences on your writing and playing jazz?

(in no particular order) Brad Mehldau, Liz Story, Lyle Mays, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Pat Metheny, Yellowjackets, Mark Isham, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Weather Report, my teachers in college, and finally my association with guitarist Randy Bernsen from whom I learned much about simple creativity and spontaneity.

4) What are 5 of your most favorite Jazz CD's. (if you had to choose just 5 which ones would they be?)

That is a really hard question. Limiting me to five is almost impossible and requires me to “kill” music that I love. Ouch! Nevertheless, these would probably be the five jazz CD's I would choose since they are musical foundations for me. I return to them often over the years and they always remain fresh: #1) “Wave” - Antonio Carlos Jobim, #2) Pat Metheny Group “Still Life Talking”, #3) Herbie Hancock “Thrust”, #4) Pat Metheny Group “First Circle”, #5) Pat Metheny and Charlie Haden “Missouri Sky”. Note that there is no overtly “Christian” element to these projects, nor are the artists Christians (to the best of my knowledge). It’s purely about the Music... truly played by honest and inspired musicians. And that’s the way it ought to be for any artist, sacred or secular.

5) Do you find opportunities for playing jazz as a Christian Jazz Artist starting to open up more?

In previous years I often took my music out into the secular scene as a method of outreach and pre-evangelism. However, playing in clubs, no matter how pure the motive, was frustrating because I found the music largely lost on the listener who is there for "other" things. It is also an unhealthy atmosphere. "If your in a steam bath, your eventually going to sweat" is my motto regarding playing in clubs. And, it was always difficult to keep a band together. However, I am sure there will be many opportunities down the road to play my music be it in a sacred or secular setting, God willing. I feel many opportunities coming.

6) Tell us something about the other people playing on your song, "The Yearning Sky"?

Brad O'Donnell is a fine bass player who is now Vice President of A+R at Sparrow Records. He is also a superb songwriter and writes most (if not all) of the tunes for his wife, vocalist Erin O'Donnell who is a well known CCM recording artist. With his even and legato bass stylings he was a perfect match for the part, which I had written out note for note. I had the privilege of serving as recording engineer for Erin's demo which got her signed on her first record deal. Drummer Jeff Quay and I use to play around S. Florida for many years and are old friends. He is kind of like a "musical soul mate", though his tastes are much more eclectic than mine. He is what I call, "a musician who just happens to be a drummer", full of ideas, enthusiasm, and very creative. He now holds a position with the Blue Man Group in Chicago as their main drummer and musical director. Dan Warner is an extremely versatile guitarist, fluent in almost any style and is a top studio player on the Miami recording studio scene. He has recorded on literally hundreds of projects. Saxophonist Ed Maina is well known in

S. Florida and is a great player who has toured and recorded with many well known artists both secular and sacred. Percussionist Carlos Jorge was of immense help in completing the parts to this song, especially his playing of the bongos.

7) Are you working on another CD project of your own?

Yes, I have a few projects (and individual songs) in different stages of completion. Some new stuff is being posted on my website soon... some of these songs feature vocalists, which is a first for me. One project is a collection of prayer and meditation music, the other (entitled "Beginning to See") consists of original jazz compositions in the style of my earlier works, but further along the road for me musically speaking. Right now, I am mainly working on completing construction of my new recording studio which will be the main vehicle for my future music projects, as well as recording and producing for others.

8) Do you find a spiritual connection in playing and writing music? Some writers consider the creative process to be a gift from the Creator and feel the spiritual connection very strong while writing music. What are your thoughts concerning this?

Yes, there is an absolute connection between the two. However, I don't often feel it while I'm working... those kinds of connections come after the fact, after the hard work of completing a song. Ideas come easy for me, its the diligence required to complete the work that is hard. Both are spiritual qualities: perseverance and inspiration. I also believe that the music already exists, it's "out there" somewhere. My job is to have my musical antennae up and ready to receive, and faithfully translate that Pattern of an idea into a complete work of art as co-creator along with the Holy Spirit. This is what would give the work an ineffable transcendent quality that would attract the listener... by

virtue of truth, honesty, craftsmanship, excellence, and beauty. It is not a conscious process.

9) How do you feel about the new worship music being produced today?

Here we go. Unfortunately, I find much of it is trite, derivative, and uncreative... merely copying what is popular or trendy in the secular arena. Our culture (and much of the church) is geared towards quantity, mass production and success. The trend is towards what is measurable and marketable and that which makes no demands upon the listener. The motto is: give me what I want now, no cost, no work, no effort. A sort of fast food type of music mentality has set in. Hence the plethora of "easy" praise music, bland worship songs and derivative music. There are notable exceptions, of course. In the "Christian jazz" arena, however, its even worse with labels putting out kitsch called "jazz" when it could not hold a candle to the real thing out there in the secular arena. I'll never forget when I heard a truly awful CD of smooth jazz arrangements of Amy Grant songs that was marketed by a well known Nashville record company. This is jazz? Where are the players? Where are the composers? Where is the fire? Where is the originality? Many (not all) Christian record companies fall into the same trap as the world, marketing music with the same industrial mass production system, like widgets on a production line, with the same totally inhuman and dictatorial system of promotion and publicity. The whole thing is assembled according to the laws of the market, not creativity. Original music such as jazz is pioneering, individualistic, and by necessity, artist driven. Christian labels will not support it because it is not profitable to do so.

Further, it is not possible to mix God and Mammon (Matt. 6:24), and the profit motive of many of the so called "Christian" record companies has, in my view, corrupted much of what's out there. Yes, there are many who are

working out of pure motives, but I believe "success" in the world system (and the sub-culture of the Christian music genre) which is so eagerly sought for by recording artists, almost inevitably will corrupt and is something to be constantly on the alert for. Not to say we shouldn't strive for success; but we should redefine what success is from God's viewpoint. A true servant-artist of God is not concerned with money, fame, record deals, contract riders, accolades, awards, reputation, etc. but simply serving his or her Master with the talent, vision, and individuality God gave. Let God have the glory whether one CD is sold or 100,000. Or whether you play your instrument for your old deaf aunt, or for a crowd of thousands of eager fans. As for me, I'm learning to be content to fail at "success", for failure is one of the greatest of all teachers. Unfortunately, the profit motive of the Christian music business precludes such attitudes. Besides that little diatribe, I don't have an opinion!

10) Are you now playing keys for a Church? If so tell us a little about the style of worship music you are doing there.

Yes, I am contributing on an occasional basis at the church I am now attending... accompanying vocal solos and playing special music for communion and other services, more or less in a meditational style where I often reharmonize familiar hymns in a jazz style. (The church I presently attend does not have a worship band, but utilizes CD tracks for worship) In previous years I was on staff at a church as an assistant music director, directing rehearsals, planning services, writing charts and such. At another church which I attended for over 12 years, I would often sub for the worship leader who was also a keyboard player. I also helped out in the recording production area since I had a studio and my services were requested as engineer, player, or co-producer. Thankfully, the church I am attending now (a small church in western North Carolina) has given me the freedom to express myself in the jazz idiom, though it is

quite conservative and understated. One of the things I like to do best is provide instrumental background ambience that provides an atmosphere for quiet worship, prayer and meditation.

11) Do you ever get an opportunity to play your jazz music in a church setting? (If so please elaborate)

Those kind of opportunities have been infrequent over my career. The art of jazz is often misunderstood in the church, especially amongst the more conservative churches who consider it a "worldly" spiritually non-productive art form since the emphasis is often on the musician playing instrumentally (with no overt quantifiable message) rather than vocally oriented music which is supposedly more "Christian" and has more spiritual "usefulness". Additionally, some of the problem is semantic in that there is, in my opinion, no such thing as "Christian music". Music, in itself, can only be aesthetically good or bad. For example, there is no such thing as a Christian melody, or a Christian chord progression. There are only good and bad melodies or chord progressions. The only thing that makes the music ostensibly "Christian" is a lyric. Consequently, vocal music seems to be the modus operandi of many church music ministries. Despite this obstacle, there seem to be more and more opportunities opening up for instrumental artists such as myself to perform in a sacred setting, where the Holy Spirit can use the music to bring people to a place of worship, longing, and wonder.

12) What is your favorite church hymn and why?

An old English choral classic called "Jesus Christ, The Apple Tree". When I first heard this I fell on my face and wept for half an hour. The words perfectly epitomize my need and desire for God and his love and faithfulness to me. I have recently completed a contemporary jazz arrangement of this hymn and plan to release it soon.

13) Any plans in the making for a CD of church hymns and worship songs with your touch on piano and keyboards? (I know many Christian fans would love for you to do one!)

I would love to do a solo piano project of such proportions. When the new studio is up and running, I will have my piano set up ready to record anytime day or night... so I expect to have one completed sooner or later!

14) What has been your most challenging project that you have ever worked on?

My own stuff. Although I did not work on it all in one shot, "Figures Of The True" took five years to complete recording and mixing. Some of the tunes on that CD were written over 15 years ago. Composing, recording, mixing, and mastering your own material takes a long, long time... that's the only way I can maintain objectivity. I would set the project aside for weeks just to maintain focus. Then the tunes would sound fresh again so I could work on it without getting sick of my own material. Eventually I got it done.

15) You have played and produced for many top names in Jazz...what future goals do you have planned for yourself as a artist and a person?

To continue to make more CD's of my music, and be faithful to the unique artistic path that God has called me to follow. I would not be happy doing anything else and I treasure the freedom God has given me to pursue music of my own making, without constraint. Of course, growing in my relationship to God is my top priority in life, and in this He is proving faithful as I continue to grow in my relationship to Him each passing day.

And of course, there is all of eternity to play and write music! What will it be like to look back ten thousand years

from now and see what I've accomplished with God? I guess I'll have to wait and see.

CJA Monthly Article

This Month's article was written by Bradley Sowash entitled,

Why Jazz Is Appropriate for Christian Worship

As a touring "sacred" jazz pianist (I prefer the word "inspirational"), I spend a lot of time with colleagues and parishioners nationwide who connect with the gospel through this joyous music. People love the sound of jazz hymns and spirituals and I am continually impressed by the relevance of jazz for contemporary worship. Why does it work so well? The answer lies in the parallels between jazz traditions and the life of the church. Consider how readily jazz models the Christian lifestyle:

- • **Jazz is multi-cultural and inclusive** - Jazz was born in America when the harmonic and melodically based music of European colonists eventually blended with

African rhythms preserved in the hearts and minds of slaves. As the music matured, black and white musicians continued to learn from each other. In time, famous bandleaders including Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and others led integrated bands. Later, Latin cultures introduced a third influence initially championed by Dizzy Gillespie. With roots stemming from several cultures, jazz continues to be influenced, performed and enjoyed by people of diverse backgrounds to this day. Jesus was radically inclusive. His habit of inviting people of all sorts and conditions to join him in fellowship is an open-armed model of welcome churches seek to emulate.

- • **Jazz is indigenous but universal** – Religious practices tend to reflect the culture that produces them. Yet mainstream American worship styles often feature musical selections which are European imports. Jazz is indigenous to America. Therefore, it is altogether right and appropriate to worship within our own cultural

context. Jazz is also now enjoyed worldwide. Musicians from around the world play jazz together whether or not they share a spoken language. God is at once both personally indigenous (the God within us) and universal (the God "out there" somewhere). Similarly, when we gather together to worship locally, we simultaneously participate in a worldwide Christian body.

- • **Jazz is spontaneous** - The essence of jazz is improvisation. Drawing on their training, preferences and inspirations, jazz musicians spontaneously create variations on a given theme. To listen to live jazz is to witness raw musical ideas being given substance often within the framework of a well-known melody. Many musicians describe a sense of the ideas flowing through them rather than from them. This inherent creativity in jazz relies on a connection to the Spirit. Jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli hinted at this when he said, "*Great*

improvisors are like priests. They are thinking only of their god." Jazz imitates God's creation - ever evolving.

- • **Jazz involves cooperation** – Live jazz in any setting is performed and received by a cooperative community. Each musician is called upon to both support his/her colleagues and work as an individual soloist as roles are shared. Listeners inspire the music through their reactions to complete the circle. While the quest for meaning is ultimately a private endeavor, church life exemplifies cooperation and community building in which participants learn and grow collectively as well as individually.
- • **Jazz has a range** - Sometimes meditative, sometimes celebratory, jazz touches us by speaking directly to a spectrum of emotions. Without this ability to reflect the full range of human experience, it never would have lasted. Louis Armstrong was right when he said, "*What we play is life.*" The church year reflects this range of

experience from the wonder of Christmas through the reflective Lent season to the joy of Easter and from baptisms to weddings to funerals.

Once the worship enhancing powers of jazz are understood, it is hard to understand why any church would not want to, at least occasionally, incorporate this rich and uniquely American musical style into its programming. Churches who have already taken this step report the following:

- • **Jazz makes for excellent evangelism** – With outreach as a priority, many churches have discovered that the uniqueness of a jazz worship service holds appeal and potential healing for people whose past experiences have led them to consider organized religion uninviting, dogmatic, irrelevant or even repressive.
- • **Jazz offers a tradition-based alternative** – Most mainstream churches are interested in balancing heritage

and contemporary relevance. When experimenting with new forms of music or worship practices, inevitable complaints follow regarding the abandonment of church traditions. With roots reaching back to African-American spirituals and European folk songs on up through Duke Ellington's famous sacred concerts and New York City's jazz vespers scene of the 1960's, jazz renditions of the remarkable American hymnody we inherited link the past to the present.

- • **Jazz has cross-generational relevance –**

Contemporary services utilizing popular music have proven successful in attracting younger families to churches. And why not? Even Martin Luther understood the importance of including compelling music in worship when he wrote, "*Why should the devil have all the good music.*" However, a pitfall of offering too narrowly defined contemporary music for worship has the unintended effect of dividing the church into age demographics since older

members are likely to prefer traditional fare. The toe-tapping wide appeal of jazz, on the other hand, draws people of all ages and backgrounds thereby creating a diversified community of worship and a sense of belonging for the individual parishioner.

Author Bishop John Shelby Spong points out, *"The church will die of boredom long before it dies from controversy."* By preparing a feast that for the mind and senses that includes prayer, spoken word and the appeal of culturally relevant music, a church that is willing to embrace jazz sends a message that it is visionary. It says "we are willing to experiment with the recipe for bringing about a greater contemplation of God.". And in the words of Biblical scholar Marcus Borg, *"Churches that are full of God are likely to find their pews full of people."*

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One of this country's experts on jazz ministry, Bradley Sowash's inspirational jazz piano concerts, worship services and workshops have delighted people of all ages and backgrounds throughout the United States and abroad. Self-described as an "ecumaniac," Sowash is comfortable in many denominational settings. Confirmed in the Lutheran Church, he currently serves both a Presbyterian and Episcopal Church as jazz-musician-in-residence. When he's not on tour, he and his family worship at a United Church of Christ congregation. His most recent recording, We Gather Together, features hymns and spirituals for solo jazz piano and was voted "Best of 2001" by Solo Piano Publications. Two additional recordings of jazz hymns will be released in 2003. For more information about Bradley Sowash's music ministry, visit www.bradleysowash.com or call 614-846-1454.

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http://www.songsfordavid.com/christian_jazz_artists.shtml

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