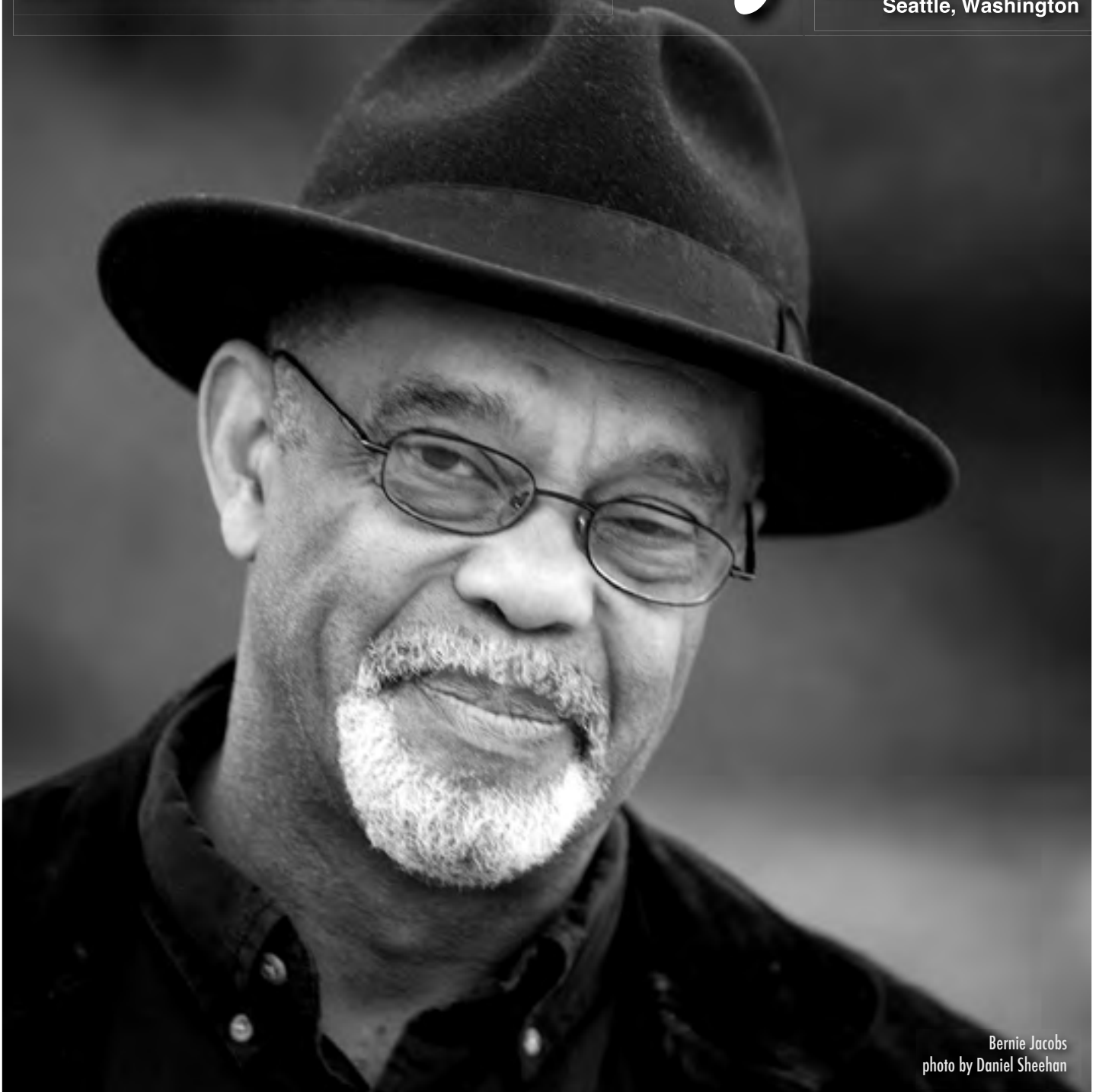


# EARSHOT JAZZ

A Mirror and Focus for the Jazz Community

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Bernie Jacobs  
photo by Daniel Sheehan

# BERNIE JACOBS: from Beatnik to Bebop

BY KIMBERLY M. REASON

What happens when you mix Jack Kerouac with Roland Kirk, James Moody, Sly Stone, and Hubert Laws?

You get Bernie Jacobs.

Known for his facility with the flute, alto and tenor saxophones, and vocals, Bernie Jacobs delivers his own style of music that blends straight-ahead jazz with rhythm and blues in one turn, and funk and yodeling the next.

Wait a minute – yodeling?

“That came out of Leon Thomas and John Coltrane,” Jacobs explains. “Thomas had a great tenor and baritone voice that had mastered the art of yodeling. To me it was similar to what Coltrane would do with his horn – jumping intervals. Over the years, I’ve been working on doing this vocally so the ‘leap’ is smooth and doesn’t sound so acute.”

Although rarely used as a vocal technique in jazz, yodeling probably best represents Jacobs’s passion for using the voice and horn interchangeably to produce a particular sound or musical idea. “Al Jarreau showed us the value of using sound to explore different musical ideas,” he says. “I’ve always liked sound. I even like hearing accents. Talking is sound – it’s like music. You get to know something about people by listening to how they talk. And then there’s cats like Bobby McFerrin—what he does almost defies time and space.”

Inspired by a class of exceptional jazz flautists fluent as multi-instrumentalists, Jacobs has established himself as a versatile musician who crosses over genres as easily as he moves between the flute, saxophone and microphone. This adaptability led Gaye

Anderson, owner of The New Orleans Restaurant and Jazz Club, and Clarence Acox, director of the Garfield High School Jazz Band, to select Jacobs as Floyd Standifer’s replacement during the latter’s illness. Jacobs has thrown



Photo by Daniel Sheehan

down funk and R&B at Belltown Billiards, performed straight-ahead at The Seattle First Baptist Church’s Jazz Vespers, crooned standards with The Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra, and belted bebop at The Whiskey Bar.

Jacobs’s fascination with sound began as a toddler. “My first time hearing music was on ‘The Big Radio,’” he recalls. “It was one of those fancy, console radios that sat on a ledge. I would walk over to it and listen to whatever was on – it didn’t matter. It was like what The Duke used to say: ‘There’s only two kinds of music – good music and the other kind.’ I listened to everything.”

A self-taught musician born on September 13, 1944, in Norfolk, Virginia, Jacobs first tried his hand at the clarinet as a sixth-grader. But his elementary school’s band program bored him – he wanted to play Benny Goodman. After one semester he left the band and de-

voted himself to singing at the neighborhood Jerusalem Baptist church. Jacobs continued singing during high school and college. “We would perform doo-wop beneath street lights,” he says. “Or in hallways and stairwells that had a good reverb. That was really big back in those days – everybody was doing doo-wop.”

But he was enticed by the sound of horns, which he found “so much bigger.” As a sophomore in college, Jacobs bought his first flute for \$15 and used a music book to learn how to hold it. “I became obsessed. My girlfriend complained that all I ever did was ‘play that damn flute,’” he recalls. “You have to understand, back then the sexual revolution was in full swing. I had to have a hobby to keep myself out of

trouble.”

At the time, Jacobs immersed himself in existentialism and the beatnik poetry of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. “I was into the flute as an artsy, cool sound,” Jacobs remembers. “Peter Gunn was on TV, and the opening scores to his show were Henry Mancini tunes that usually featured the flute or saxophone. I would learn Bud Shank’s flute solos. That was also when Herbie Mann had his big crossover hit, ‘Comin’ Home Baby.’ Mann was playing Middle Eastern music – all kinds of stuff.”

But Jacobs did not embrace jazz until Baltimore drummer William Gottigand introduced him to flautist Roland Kirk. For the first time, Jacobs heard a flute player vocalize on his instrument, and the sound enthralled him. “Vocalizing added intensity to flute playing,” Jacobs explains. He went on to study the music of multi-instrumentalists James

Moody, a bebop and hard bop specialist, and Yusef Lateef, who blended Eastern music with jazz. He even listened to flautist Jeremy Steig, who, like Jacobs, “was an art student who wanted to be a flute player.”

When flautist Hubert Laws, proficient in both jazz and classical music, released his first album, “The Laws of Jazz” in 1964, Jacobs found himself uncharacteristically drawn to Laws’ dulcet sound. This surprised Jacobs, since he had, up until then, avoided the more melodious tones of classically based music.

During college Jacobs took his flute on the road with the International Jazz Artists for a two-week tour of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Jacobs eventually moved to Washington, D.C. to perform full-time. For the next three years, the band played in officer clubs and at parties and cabarets along the east coast. “I went on the road and never looked back,” says Jacobs. He laughs. “The International Jazz Artists’ was a grandiose name, but we played a lot of really good jazz, and worked just about every night – sometimes two or three gigs a day.”

After leaving college in 1966, Jacobs put his musical career on hold. He first entered a manager trainee program at Dart, a Washington D.C drugstore chain, before moving on to sell life insurance. Although he did not perform regularly, Jacobs still played his flute daily, with an eye on mastering his technique.

In 1971, Jacobs returned to performing, landing his first gig as a saxophonist with the Orlando Smith Quartet, a Hammond B3 organ based band. Needing to bone up quickly, Jacobs bought a tenor saxophone for \$75 from a magazine ad. The reed instrument, however, did not appeal to him. “I didn’t like putting it in my mouth,” Jacobs explains. “It hurt my lips to bite down on the mouthpiece.” Jacobs persevered, traveling to Lake Tahoe with the Smith Quartet. He performed there for a year before returning to his hometown of Norfolk in 1972.

At the time, the Norfolk area did not have an active jazz scene, so Jacobs turned to funk: “I played in a lot of funk bands, but the big one was Sex Machine.” He laughs. “We named it after the song by Sly & The Family Stone.” Performing funk music gave him an opportunity to develop his voice as a bandstand singer. “You can’t fake the funk,” Jacobs says. “When we played, we had to get people to get up and dance. I learned how to reach out to my audience and get them on their feet. I was very lucky to have that experience.”

By 1980, jazz began to regain its place on a scene dominated by pop, rock and disco. Jacobs sat in with a number of bands before forming The Jacobs Beckner Group with pianist Ron Gary, drummer Billy Drummond, and bassist Dave Hufstedler. The group played straight-ahead, smooth jazz and pop music. After Jacobs Beckner disbanded, he hired musicians from the Naval School of Music, where he met now-Seattle drummer Andre Thomas. During this period Jacobs performed with saxophonist, flautist, and clarinet-

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ist Steve Wilson, electric bassist Victor Wooten and drummer Roy Wooten of Bella Fleck & The Fleck Tones. He also collaborated with Norfolk State College professor of Jazz Studies, Consuelo Lee, who played piano for her brother, bassist Bill Lee, the father of filmmaker Spike Lee. "I liked the Lee family's old way of doing things," says Jacobs. "They were from the south, where you learned to pick yourself up and do better than those who had gone before you."

Jacobs continued to hone his craft as a flautist, saxophonist and vocalist, and in 1981, he was featured in a Jazz Workshop special for PBS. At this point in his career, he had the best of both worlds: Jacobs was able to pursue the bigger sound of the horn while also developing his skills as a vocalist. "People listen to singers more than they do the horn," he notes. Yet his years as a multi-instrumentalist gave him the foundation to branch out vocally. "I worked on a lot of different stuff before I started getting up on stage and singing jazz."

In 1994, Jacobs flew out to Seattle to scout out its post-Coltrane *Live in Seattle* performance scene. He brought his flute and sat in at The New Orleans. Six months later he and his family relocated to the Pacific Northwest.

At first Jacobs sat in wherever he could, eventually meeting guitarist and vocalist Brian Nova, who hired him to perform at parties and Belltown Billiards. Nova often invited guest artists to perform at Belltown, and it was there that Jacobs met a host of Northwest jazz notables, including Woody Woodhouse, Jay Thomas, Greg Williamson and Peter Vinikow. He also reestablished ties with Andre Thomas, who had moved to Seattle several years earlier. He began performing in Thomas's band, Quiet Fire, and when Jacobs landed a gig at Tula's in 1995, he started his own band, BJQ, featuring Eric Verlinde on piano, Chuck Kistler on bass, and Andre Thomas on drums. In 2003, Jacobs joined the seventies funk band,

Smooth Groove, which performs at special events throughout the area.

After all of these years, Bernie Jacobs has a wealth of knowledge and experience. So, does he have any advice for up-and-coming jazz artists? "If you're a singer, only sing songs you like," Jacobs offers. "If you're an instrumentalist, practice your technique on songs you like, and don't let a day go by that you're not working on your music."

On the topic of crossing over, Jacobs reminds us: "No form of music is better than the other. I listen to everybody – you can't afford not to. Sometimes,

what someone else is doing will help you solve a musical problem." These are wise words from a self-taught musician who walks the talk.

*Jacobs performed his CD, Live at the Farm, at The Herbfarm's Northwest Wine Festival in 1996. He appears on Edmonia Jarrett's Live, Live, Live recording, and on an alternative rock version of The Tempest. He is currently working on two CDs – one an instrumental, the other predominantly vocal. He performs frequently at Tula's and The New Orleans.*



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**JANUARY 2007**

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 <b>CLOSED</b> <i>Happy New Year</i>	2 <b>BIG BAND JAZZ</b> BCC Jazz Orchestra w/ Hal Sherman 8-12 \$7	3 <b>Isabella Du Graf Quartet</b> 8-12 \$12	4 <b>Richard Cole</b> CD Release: <i>Shade</i> 8:30-12:30 \$15	5 <b>Susan Pascal Quartet</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15
6 <b>Reggie Goings/Hadley Caliman Quintet</b> 3-7 \$8 <b>Jim Cutler Jazz Orch.</b> 8-11:30 \$5	7 <b>VOCAL JAM</b> with <b>Greta Matassa</b> 8-12 \$8	8 <b>BIG BAND JAZZ</b> Emerald City Jazz Orchestra 8-12 \$5	9 <b>Michael Emswiler/John Hansen</b> 8-12 \$8	10 <b>Ziggurat Quartet</b> 8-12 \$8	11 <b>Josh Nelson Quintet w/ Greta Matassa</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15	12 <b>Bill Anschell Trio</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15
13 <b>Jazz Police Big Band</b> 3-7 \$5 <b>Jim Cutler Jazz Orch.</b> 8-11:30 \$5	14 <b>JAZZ JAM</b> with the <b>Darin Clendenin Trio</b> 8-12 \$8	15 <b>BIG BAND JAZZ</b> Roadside Attraction 8-12 \$8	16 <b>Jon Hamar and Friends</b> CD Release: <i>Hereafter</i> 8-12 \$10	17 <b>LATIN JAZZ</b> Sonando 8-11 \$10	18 <b>Hadley Caliman Quartet</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15	19 <b>Jay Thomas Quartet</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15
20 <b>Garfield HS Jazz</b> 3-4 <b>Jay Thomas Big Band</b> 4-7 \$5 <b>Jim Cutler Jazz Orch.</b> 8-11:30 \$5	21 <b>VOCAL JAM</b> with <b>Kelley Johnson</b> 8-12 \$8	22 <b>BIG BAND JAZZ</b> Critical Mass Big Band 8-12 \$5	23 <b>Jake Bergevin Group</b> 8-12 \$7	24 <b>EARSHOT JAZZ PRESENTS</b> Atomic 8:00PM \$14	25 <b>Greta Matassa Quartet</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15	26 <b>Milo Petersen and the Jazz Disciples</b> 8:30-12:30 \$15
27 <b>Fairly Honest Jazz Band</b> 3-7 \$5 <b>Jim Cutler Jazz Orch.</b> 8-11:30 \$5	28 <b>JAZZ JAM</b> with the <b>Darin Clendenin Trio</b> 8-12 \$8	29 <b>BIG BAND JAZZ</b> Magnolia Big Band 8-12 \$5	30 <b>Greta Matassa Jazz Workshop</b> 8-12 \$10	31 <b>LATIN JAZZ</b> Tumbao w/ Thomas Marriott 8-12 \$8		