



May 2006

Edited by Dick Parker and Jim Torok

Coda is the e-mail supplement to the Twin Cities Jazz Society *JazzNotes*. *Coda*, emailed by the first of each month, contains items too new or lengthy for the printed version of *JazzNotes*, and is available to those who choose Jazz Notes by email. Readers are encouraged to submit CD reviews, news items and articles to torok001@umn.edu.

Please e-mail *Coda* as an attachment to friends who might be interested in joining the Twin Cities Jazz Society. They can send an e-mail to tcjsnews@usinternet.com or call (763)862-5694.

A profile of Kerry Ashmore, musician and journalist

By Nancy Hite



Kerry Ashmore in his trademark "gun" pose

Kerry Ashmore, leader of the Minnesota Dixie traditional jazz band, reveals that "the true epiphany of my musical career came when I dropped a bowling bowl on my toe". Just twelve years old, he had been playing guitar for about a year, taking lessons and imitating the sounds of guitar-playing neighbors. The damaged toe wouldn't heal, and kept getting infected, so the doctor said to stay off it for a while. Staying off his feet

meant spending two or three hours every day after school practicing the guitar, using songbooks from the time. To this Kerry attributes a speedy development of his musical ability.

Around this same time, his parents started going to Diamond Jim's to listen to the jazz, sometimes bringing Kerry along. He quickly began paying attention to the banjo, and his parents noticed and provided one as a gift for his 14th birthday. He began lessons with the highly recommended Bill Peer, banjoist in Doc Evans' band, but oddly enough Peer taught him mainly pop tunes and only a very few traditional jazz compositions, such as "High Society" and "Jazz Me Blues." Kerry's first public performances were in high school at talent shows and concerts. His first big break came when St. Paul Central High School (Kerry attended rival Highland Park High in St. Paul) was putting on the show "Mame" and needed a banjo player for the orchestra. Kerry signed on and cites it as a great learning experience and a lot of fun.

The young banjo player started professional gigs at age 17 at Shakey's pizza parlor. He performed three nights a week at first, and then expanded to five nights a week. About a year later, he met Dick Henninger, who hired him to work at the Fireside Lounge, where he then worked his way through college playing two nights a week with a piano player. At the U of M he majored in music education, with some emphasis in journalism. One day, on his way to a meeting in Coffman Union, he turned the wrong way down a hallway and found himself in the university radio station offices. Fascinated, he ended up working at KUOM through the rest of his college years. His love for journalism rivaled his interest in music education, but since he was so close to graduation, he completed his selected major.

In the meantime, he connected with a group of musicians who were hired to play at Valleyfair Amusement Park for the summer of 1976. At age 22, Kerry joined veteran trad jazz players Bill Evans or Russ Hall on trombone, Roy LaRumby on trumpet, Jim Torok on clarinet, and Nate Earp on tuba, Jack Smasal on drums, and vocalist Shirley Jones. Valley Fair hired them as a "house band" to play 70 hours a week, both days and evenings. For a young student, the money was great, and the experience of playing with a full jazz band was wonderful. The introduction to Nate Earp and Jack Smasal led to the birth of the trio Rhythm Section, which performed throughout the metro area in 1979 and '80, including regular gigs at Fiorito's in downtown St. Paul.

Several years later, Kerry was hired to play at a bowling alley in the tiny township of Hilltop. The pay was low, and so to keep costs down, he ended up playing with some kids from Washburn High School. He was still with Nate and Jack, and they were joined by three 16-year-olds: Charlie Caranicas, Fred Richardson and Steve Pikal. Kerry says it was quickly apparent that those three were destined for great jazz careers. They played together as a band Kerry had organized that went by the cumbersome name of "Minneapolis, St. Paul and New Orleans Dixieland Jazz Band". The name didn't take off, but the musicians certainly did!



Kerry Ashmore on clarinet, Jim Torok on cornet,, Joy Judge on trombone with other Pig's Eye Jass Band members in the Grand Old Day parade.

Although Nate and Jack went in a different direction musically from Kerry around 1990, Kerry kept working with Fred, Steve and Charlie, and added Tom and Bob Andrews to form the band Minnesota Dixie. During this time, Fred and Kerry realized that each wanted to play the other's instrument – banjoist Kerry wanted to learn clarinet, and clarinetist Fred wanted to learn banjo. So they switched instruments and taught each other. Steve Pikal also added string bass playing around this time while continuing with his performance on trombone.

Minnesota Dixie is the band Kerry currently leads. The personnel can take many configurations, depending on the venue and demand. As a trio, the group usually includes Pikal, Richardson and Kerry. There also is a quartet dubbed the "shopping center band" due to the large number of gigs played at shopping malls, which is composed of Kerry, Torok, Ralph Faville on trumpet and Ted Schreyer on tuba. Minnesota Dixie can also expand to five with Joy Judge on trombone, or six or more by any configuration of the above.



The "shopping center band," from left to right: Kerry Ashmore, Ted Schreyer, Ralph Faville (partly hidden) and Jim Torok at Northtown Center.

Kerry is also well known as a local newspaper publisher. He bought the *Northeaster* in 1981, and added the *North News* ten years later. He loves reporting and interpreting what is going on in the community, informing people about what they need to know, and printing news that leads people to action. He calls it "writing the history of the community as it goes." He says he has fun almost every day at the paper, and it gives him the flexibility to play music at both regular and irregular hours.

Kerry believes that traditional jazz will never die because it is the roots of every form of pop music since its inception. He points out that a competent modern jazz player has to be a competent traditional jazz player because they are using the same structure, the chords move the same ways, and they are building on the same foundation and rules. He strongly believes that improvisation is a skill that can be taught and learned; and he contributes mightily to the development of young jazz players by volunteering his time as an instructor. With Torok, he has taught at several area high schools and middle schools. Several of their former students now play professionally, two of them with the *Pig's Eye Jass Band* along with Kerry and Jim. In Kerry's opinion, the music education establishment is woefully underpreparing students by insisting that they read scores and telling them that's jazz. Calling reading music scores "the musical equivalent of paint by number," Kerry laments the lack of teaching collective improvisation in schools and colleges, because, therefore, students never have a chance to learn about it.

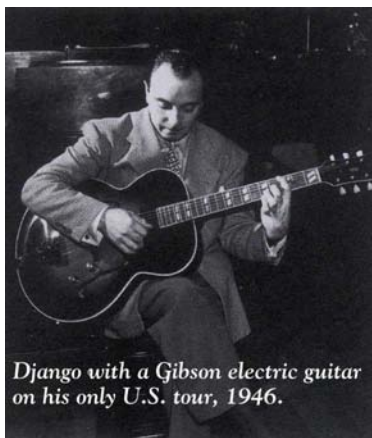


Kerry with Jim Torok and three of their current or former students on saxophone, trombone and tuba. Northeast Middle School music teacher Tim Martin is at left.

In discussing his music career, Kerry is quick to point out that he has had a collage of mentors who have advised him and provided helpful feedback. He says, "sometimes the best feedback was by fellow musicians who had quite a bit to drink on the gig, and felt uninhibited enough to tell me what they actually thought while we were driving home."

He notes also sober feedback by others, such as the Andrews Brothers and Jim Torok. Very few people have been able to make a living as jazz musicians. Kerry had to make a decision early on about whether music would be his sole career or not. He says, "I love music too much for it to be my career. This way I can make decisions about what music I want to perform based on what I want to do and not because I am desperate for the money." It's important to him to stay true to traditional jazz with its wonderful collective improvisation, even if it means fewer music jobs.

Minnesota Dixie performs annually for the Mardi Gras Brunch at Jax Café, and to welcome Santa Claus at the Northtown Shopping Center. They have played at Club Underground under the Spring Street Tavern in northeast Minneapolis, and are frequently seen around town at community park celebrations.



Django with a Gibson electric guitar on his only U.S. tour, 1946.

Clearwater Hot Club and biographer Dregni to celebrate paperback issue of 'Django'

By Dick Parker

Hot Clubs have been thriving in recent years amid a renewed appreciation of the infectious rhythmic, richly melodic style of string jazz practiced from the mid-1930s into the early '50s by Django Reinhardt and his followers. The music of the Quintette du Hot Club de France is,

well, hot, and not only is Minnesota home to several excellent bands of the genre, it's a Minnesotan who has written what's regarded as the first major critical biography of Reinhardt.

Michael Dregni's "Django: The Life and Music of a Gypsy Legend," drew favorable reviews when it was published in 2004. Dregni, of Minneapolis, has produced a thorough biography of Django, who has been called the greatest guitarist who ever lived, a free spirit who also caused exasperation among fellow musicians, employers and those responsible for the business side of his career.

Django toured the United States only once, with Duke Ellington's orchestra in 1946, and he played in Minneapolis in November of that year. Unfortunately, no review of his performance exists. The Minneapolis

Tribune music critic had to head back to the office to make his deadline before Django's concert-closing set started.

Dregni's biography was just released in paperback, and to celebrate that publication the author will speak and the Clearwater Hot Club will play May 14 at the Suburban World Theater in Minneapolis. The celebration, from 4 to 6 p.m., is sponsored by the neighboring Magers and Quinn Booksellers store at 3038 Hennepin Ave. S. (<http://www.magersandquinn.com>)

Dregni reveals that Reinhardt's legal name was Jean, but virtually everyone knew him by the Gypsy name Django, which means "I awake." The sponsors of the May 14 event point out that he was "an important influence on Les Paul, Charlie Christian, B.B. King, Jerry Garcia, Chet Atkins, and many others. ... Dregni's portrait of Django Reinhardt offers vivid snapshots of the jazz scene in Paris: Josephine Baker, Bricktop, Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, and countless others."



MICHAEL DREGNI
and CLEARWATER HOT CLUB (left)
Sunday, May 14, 4-6 p.m. Suburban World
Theater 3020 Hennepin Ave. S., Minneapolis
For further info: David Unowsky, 612-822-4611
davidu@magersandquinn.com



Author Michael Dregni



Paula Lammers to be Featured at Grand Marais Jazz Festival

Paula Lammers, rapidly emerging as one of the most versatile vocalists in the Twin Cities, will be appearing at the Grand Marais Jazz Festival May 6 & 7. She will be accompanied by musicians Chris Lomheim (piano) and Tom Lewis (bass).

The Paula Lammers Trio will open the concert Saturday night and will be featured at the Sunday Jazz Brunch. Paula is also a voice teacher and

sings in several genres from opera to jazz. She will conduct a vocal workshop on Saturday afternoon, covering topics from vocal health to the connections between music and emotion and how it manifests itself in singing.

Paula holds a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Minnesota, a B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College and has taught voice in high schools, colleges, and in her private studio. She currently sings with several Twin Cities jazz bands, is a member of the singing quartet on the Zephyr train in Stillwater and has been a member of the Minnesota Opera chorus for the past four seasons.

Paula released her first CD, *A Blanket of Blue*, in 2005. It has received high praise from jazz critics everywhere, and is being played on over 100 radio stations on three continents. It was produced by Billy Peterson and Darren Rust. This appearance is being made in conjunction with the CD release promotion.

Reviews, sound samples, and CD purchasing information may be found at Paula's website: www.paulalammers.com.

Contact Information:

Paula Lammers, Nightingale Jazz, (952) 891-5910, paula@paulalammers.com

Trumpeter Geoff Bull Emerges from Down Under

Geoff Bull appeared with the Mouldy Figs at the Mainstreet Bar and in Hopkins on April 30 and will play with Bill Evans' New Orleans Jazz Band at Mitch's Supper Club, 1305 W. 7th St., St. Paul, on Tuesday, May 2, from 7 to 10 p.m. Bull has visited New Orleans and the Twin Cities occasionally for decades and was a guest star at the Emporium of Jazz in Mendota in its heyday.

Sundays in May at the Club Underground

Here's the lineup for the Sunday afternoon jazz series for May:

5/7 The Pig's Eye Jass Band

5/14 Bill Evans Jazz Band

5/21 South Side Aces

5/28 Silver Derby Syncopators (Chuck and Charlie DeVore, Bill Evans and Dave Wilkening)

All shows are from 4 to 7:30. Cover charge \$5, which not only goes toward the music but it also buys you a gift certificate raffle ticket! Free Parking!

Peggy Dunnette
Club Underground/Spring Street Tavern
355 NE. Monroe St. (Spring Street and Monroe)
Mpls., MN. 55413
612-627-9123

Jazz at the Red Ginger Asian Bistro in May

The Red Ginger is a restaurant that has just begun a policy of live jazz and blues on Fridays and Saturdays from 8:00 to 11:00 pm. It is located at:

5999 Rice Creek Parkway

Shoreview, MN 55126

(Right off Hwy 35W and County Rd. J.)

www.redgingerAsianbistro.com

Chinese, Japanese and Thai Cuisine, Full Bar, Recently renovated, No Cover

Debut Weekend was Friday, March 24th and Saturday, March 25th

Friday, May 5th – The Jaztronauts

Saturday, May 6th – Jazz Deluxe

Friday, May 12th – Chill7

Saturday, May 13th – Charmin Michelle Quartet

Friday, May 19th – Eric Graham Trio

Saturday, May 20th – TBA

Friday, May 26th – State Champs

Saturday, May 27th – Tom Pletscher Duo

Charmin & Shapira

NEW SUNDAY BRUNCH!! May 14th, 21st & 28th 11a-2pm at

Willie's Wine Bar & Coffee Shop 1100 Harmon Place, Downtown Minneapolis

612-332-8811 www.experiencewillies.com

Tuesday May 2nd Charmin will be celebrating her birthday at **Rossi's!** 6-10pm

Ed Berger in rare appearance with the Brad Bellows Sextet and Bill Lang at the Artists' Quarter

Eddie "All-Star" Berger returns to the stage at the Artists' Quarter, Sunday, May 7th, at 7 p.m. This is Ed's first public performance since November 2003 and he will be featured with the Brad Bellows Sextet. The sextet has been rehearsing monthly since September of 2005 and although Ed has been battling various health issues he is sounding better than ever.

Special guest for this evening will be the Bill Lang Trio. Bill has been playing solo saxophone in various restaurants in the Twin Cities for several decades and his unique talent is showcased especially well in his seldom-seen but exciting trio.

Music will start promptly at 7 PM with the Eddie and the Sextet playing the 1st and 3rd sets, and the Bill Lang Trio playing the 2nd set. This is a rare opportunity to hear a living legend and should not be missed.

ARTISTS' QUARTER – 408 St. Peter Street, St. Paul
(651) 292-1359

<http://www.artistsquarter.com>

The Twin Cities Jazz Society and the Hopkins Center For The Arts. Inc. present

A SAX SUMMIT

hosted by Laura Caviani

A "Jazz From J to Z" concert featuring local sax legends: Kathy Jensen, Dave Karr, Irv Williams and JazzAx with Greg Keel, David Milne, Michael Walk and Pete Whitman.

This outstanding talent will be backed by Twin Cities gifted pianist and composer, Laura Caviani and her trio; comprised of Phil Hey, drums, and Gordy Johnson, bass. Concert includes world premieres of new works by David Milne and Laura Caviani.



Laura Caviani

Date & Time: May 20, 2006 – 7:30 pm

Featured Artists; Irv Williams, Dave Karr, Kathy Jensen and JazzAx, backed by the
Laura Caviani Trio

Showplace: Hopkins Center for the Arts, 1111 Mainstreet, Hopkins, FREE PARKING

Tickets: \$24, TCJS Members/Seniors \$19.50, Students, \$12 Call Hopkins Center for the
Arts, 952 9791111 for information and tickets. Thanks for supporting Twin Cities Jazz!