



Dave Brubeck plays this weekend both in Monterey and at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City. Here is Jim Harrington's article about the 88 year old jazz legend from today's Mercury News.

[Event info and tickets, click here.](#)

BRUBECK CELEBRATES 'TIME OUT'

By Jim Harrington for the Mercury News, 09/17/2009

These days, it's hard to imagine that a jazz album could be both avant-garde - and commercially successful.

That's the reality in 2009, with jazz representing only a small fraction of the music industry's overall sales and the genre's most adventurous releases usually attracting the least amount of attention. It was a different story a half century ago. With rock 'n' roll still in its infancy, jazz music was popular music - and jazz music was exciting.

Never was that more true than in 1959 - 12 months of musical creativity often called "jazz's greatest year." That was the year of Miles Davis' "Kind of Blue," John Coltrane's "Giant Steps," Bill Evans' "Portrait in Jazz," Ornette Coleman's "The Shape of Jazz to Come" and "The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall," all landmark recordings.

It was also the year that Bay Area native Dave Brubeck delivered his true masterpiece, "Time Out," a startlingly original work that was equally avant-garde and accessible. The album was a huge hit upon release, has grown even more popular through the years, and now ranks as one of the biggest-selling jazz albums of all time.

With Brubeck and his quartet celebrating the 50th anniversary of "Time Out" this weekend with dates Saturday at the Fox Theatre in Redwood City and Sunday at the Monterey Jazz Festival (where it will be the centerpiece of the festival's final day), it's a good time to look back at this seminal work:

The 50th anniversary of the Class of '59 has been a major cause for celebration among the worldwide jazz community. That seemingly every "real" jazz festival, from Stanford to Montreal to Monterey, has seized the opportunity to toast '59 shows how much that music still means to fans.

"Quality music like that just holds up," says Peter Williams, artistic director for Yoshi's jazz club. "There was so much innovation in the music of that time. You listen to that music today, and still just shake your head at all the creativity." That's certainly true of Brubeck's "Time Out."

The 88-year-old pianist-composer, who graduated from Stockton's College of the Pacific (now University of the Pacific) in 1942, was already a major star by the time he went into Columbia Record's 30th Street Studio in late June 1959 to begin recording "Time Out." His work on "Jazz Goes to College," in particular, helped land him on a 1954 cover of Time magazine, becoming only the second jazz musician (after Louis Armstrong in 1949) to receive that honor.

Still, no one could've expected that "Time Out" would become such a popular phenomenon - especially given the kind of exotic music that Brubeck and his quartet (alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, bassist Eugene Wright and drummer Joe Morello) were cooking up for the disc.

Brubeck wanted to do something entirely different with the album - make it an experiment in unusual time signatures.

At the time, and really since the beginning of time, most jazz songs were written in a standard 4/4 signature. Brubeck and his crew blew up that blueprint and instead went with a crazy 5/4 on 'Take Five,' an outlandish 9/8 on 'Blue Rondo à la Turk' and other unorthodox meters-bar lines for the album's remaining five tracks.

'Not all experiments work - that's why they call them experiments,' says Geoff Roach, executive director of San Jose Jazz. 'But if you listen to 'Time Out,' none of it sounds forced.'

'Dave wasn't afraid'

Saxophonist Bobby Militello, who has performed in Brubeck's quartet since 1982, still clearly remembers hearing 'Time Out' for the first time and even then thinking how different the album sounded compared to everything else he was listening to in 1959.

'It was the first time that you sat and listened to a record and there wasn't just a (4/4) swing. Yet, there was a groove and it was rock solid,' he recalls. 'It was so foreign-and that's what made it so fun.'

It was a great time to be a jazz listener, Militello says, since so many artists were pushing the boundaries of the genre.

'There you are - in 1959, I was 9 years old - and the stuff you were listening to was the (music) that broke the barrier from where we are and where we are going,' he says. 'And you have this Brubeck thing that says, 'This has nothing to do with where you were,' and that's what kept me buying records.'

'There was a transition going on, and Dave was a big part of that. Dave wasn't afraid.'

And neither were the listeners. Whether or not they picked up on the avant-garde nature of the album, fans simply flew to "Time Out" and its surprise radio hit, "Take Five." The album's immediate and overwhelming success eclipsed that of all the other landmark jazz releases of the day.

And, yes, that includes "Kind of Blue." Davis' best-known album may now rank as the top-selling jazz album of all time, having been certified quadruple platinum, but its success was slow in coming. "Kind of Blue" wasn't certified Gold (sales of 500,000) until 1993, while "Time Out" hit that mark in 1963.

In a nearly unprecedented rise for a jazz instrumental album, one that wasn't packaged as a film soundtrack, "Time Out" hit No. 2 on the pop charts, where it remained for three years. It would also become the first jazz album to sell more than a million copies, while "Take Five" became the first million-selling jazz single.

"Time Out" would help popularize the West Coast jazz sound - a softer, more melodic alternative to the hard-bop style favored by New York players - yet the greatest measure of its success may be that the material remains so popular 50 years after the album came out. When the current quartet starts playing the piece in concert, "people start applauding immediately," Militello says. "It's like the national anthem."

Given the unparalleled success of "Time Out," it's somewhat amazing that the rest of Brubeck's career didn't end up being anticlimactic. Yet, he's managed to embrace the record without letting it define him, continually following his muse and fashioning a body of work that is second to none. Brubeck now has some 160 major works to his credit, ranging from orchestral and ballet scores to solo piano recordings and symphony dates, and-despite dealing with some health issues, including a recent hospitalization for a viral infection-he remains one of the most prolific and active musicians in the game.

"He's someone who has transcended that record," says Tim Jackson, artistic director for Monterey Jazz. "He's clearly moved on in many different directions, in many different ways. He's never been an artist that rested on his laurels."

Read Jim Harrington's Concert Blog at blogs.mercurynews.com/aei/category/concerts .

On September 19, San Jose Jazz brings the Dave Brubeck Quartet to the historic Fox Theatre in Redwood City for one day only.

What: The Dave Brubeck Quartet

When: Saturday, Sept. 19, 2009 | 2pm

Where: Fox Theatre, 2223 Broadway, Redwood City | [MAP](#)

Cost: \$37 - \$67

Tickets: Call City Box Office at 415-392-4400 or [order online now](#) !

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