

## San Jose Jazz winter series - 9 'special' Sunday shows at the Improv

[By Richard Scheinin](#)

When Geoff Roach began mulling over possibilities for this year's Winter Jazz Series in downtown San Jose, he found himself thinking about jazz clubs versus jazz concerts. Fans always enjoy heading to a club - Yoshi's in Oakland or San Francisco, the Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz, among others - to see a top band refining its repertoire and concept before moving on to the next club.

That's exciting, witnessing that process - the ongoing creation of a group's identity. But Roach, executive director of San Jose Jazz, wanted to distinguish his organization's 22nd annual winter series by booking some singular concert events. "You know, special things," he says. "So we started putting together the types of events where you couldn't go into a club to hear them."

Maybe the "something special" would be an artist who's just breaking onto the scene (singer Robin McKelle, Jan. 17). Or maybe it would be a well-known musician who tends to play in prominent bands, but not so often as the leader of his own groups (drummer Antonio Sanchez, March 21). Or else someone who enjoys tweaking the typical concert format by going multimedia (singer Pamela Rose, Feb. 14) or by telling stories about life in the trenches (saxophonist John Altman, Jan. 31).

Here's what Roach and his colleagues at San Jose Jazz came up with: nine Sunday-afternoon events from Jan. 17 to March 21 at the Improv on South Second Street. Well, yeah, you're right. The Improv is a club - but a comedy club. Something different.

**Jan. 17. Robin McKelle.** This singer has been generating buzz with a pair of big-band albums. Her proponents liken her to Anita O'Day and Nancy Wilson, while McKelle has described her own affinity for Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin and Donny Hathaway. This writer hasn't yet seen her, but notices something promising about the quartet she plans to bring to the Improv: It includes a terrific pianist, Xavier Davis, who knows singers. He was part of Betty Carter's trio years ago.

**Jan. 24. John Worley and Bari Bari.** This excellent trumpeter brings along a strong rhythm section and three baritone saxophonists: Aaron Lington, Fil Lorenz and Geoff Roach himself. Usually, Bari Bari pays homage to Pepper Adams and Gerry Mulligan, two late legends of the baritone. This time, with help from two additional saxophonists - Kristen Strom and Johnnie Bamont - it tackles the music of Charlie Parker and Lester Young, playing some of their famous solos as transcribed and harmonized for a large horn section.

**Jan. 31. John Altman.** The British-born saxophonist met Judy Garland onstage at the London Palladium - at age 3. He co-composed "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" for Monty Python. He arranged all the music for the onboard orchestra in "Titanic." His "Jazz Goes to the Movies" program will focus on music, though one hopes he will take plenty of time to yack between numbers. The members of his L.A. quartet have stories, too. Bassist Putter Smith gigged with Thelonious Monk years ago and played the role of Mr. Kidd, James Bond's nemesis, in "Diamonds Are Forever." Drummer Frank DeVito played on Sinatra's "Witchcraft," the Beach Boys' "Surfin' USA" and Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe." (Altman also performs with a big band at a Jan. 30 party and fundraiser for San Jose Jazz at the San Jose Athletic Club, 196 N. Third St. Tickets and information: 408-288-7557, extension 2335.)

**Feb. 14. Pamela Rose.** The jazz and blues singer is something of a cultural historian, too, with a deep interest in "the great gal composers of the jazz era," as she puts it on her Web site ([www.wildwomenofsong.com](http://www.wildwomenofsong.com)). Among those who fascinate her: Ida Cox, Alberta Hunter, Kay Swift, Dorothy Fields, Peggy Lee. At this Valentine's Day show with her band, Rose tells the story of these and other women, with the help of visuals, narrative - and song.

**Feb. 21. Wayne Wallace.** One of the Bay Area's master players, trombonist Wallace has worked with everyone from Sammy Davis Jr. to Con Funk Shun to Tito Puente and Pete Escovedo. His recent CD, "The Reckless Search for Beauty," integrates Afro-Caribbean and Brazilian stylings with elements of R&B. Now Wallace brings his Latin-jazz quintet to the Improv to explore contemporary intersections between Duke Ellington's music and Pan-Caribbean and South American sounds. Wallace, a super arranger, is expected to take on portions of Duke's incomparable "Latin American Suite";

**Feb. 28: Hot Club of San Francisco.** This is a cooking group, an all-acoustic quintet inspired by the "Gypsy jazz" of Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli. Nothing fancy, just three guitars, bass and violin. But they tend to bring down the house; they've been doing it for nearly 20 years.

**March 7. Brian Bromberg and the San Jose Jazz Orchestra.** Since the '80s, Bromberg has pushed the virtuoso possibilities of the bass, whether playing acoustic, electric or synthesizer versions of the instrument. He's not to everyone's taste and is hard to pin down: Will Brian play smooth? Straight-ahead? Fusion? Metal? But if you want to get blown away by someone who simply can play anything he dreams up on the bass, check out Bromberg in this unusual meeting with a full-on big band.

**March 14. Third Annual Silicon Valley Composer Showcase.** Composers, if you live in Silicon Valley, it's time to get in touch with Geoff Roach ([geoffr@sanjosejazz.org](mailto:geoffr@sanjosejazz.org)). Submit your music for consideration by a panel of judges who will select their favorites for performance here by the 18-piece Full Spectrum Jazz big band.

**March 21. Antonio Sanchez.** Two summers ago at the Monterey Jazz Festival, this great drummer built a wall of vibration that was almost beyond belief. He was leading a quartet much like the one he brings to the Improv, which will include saxophonists Donny McCaslin and Dave Binney and bassist Scott Colley. Maybe you know Sanchez from his work with Pat Metheny; it's time to check out another side of this magician.

[For more info and tickets for the Winter Series, click here.](#)

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