

STRAIGHT AHEAD

Witness Stand

Before he came to Des Moines, South African pianist Witness Matlou had a vision of what life would be like in the U.S. "Jazz would be everywhere," he said. "After all, America is the birthplace of this wonderful music."

Although he might not have found jazz happening every night of week at clubs throughout the city, Witness did find a welcoming jazz community. With plans to enroll in Berklee School of Music this fall, we wanted to share the following profile of Witness that appeared in the Des Moines Register.

The jazz pianist Witness Matlou is a little guy, with small hands and wiry fingers. He speaks with a quiet voice and seems almost bashful. But when he knocked out a few chords last week to fire up the Drake University jazz band's set at Adventureland Inn, in Altoona, all that hesitation disappeared. His hands hovered low, pouncing on the keys with the kind of ease that comes only with natural talent.

When he closed his eyes, he could have been in a practice room back at school or the church in his native South Africa. No matter where the keyboard is, the exchange student, and newest star of the local jazz scene, is at home.

"That's the cool thing," said local jazz fan Abe Goldstien, who met Matlou at a jam session at Java Joe's Coffeehouse. "With jazz, there's no country, there's no age. Everyone works together. Witness grew up in South Africa, probably not speaking a word of English, but he could still walk into a Des Moines session with guys who grew up on a farm somewhere, and they could work through a tune."

Kabelo Witness Matlou was born in Johannesburg and grew up speaking a minority Northern Sotho dialect known as Sepedi, which is laced with tongue-clicking sounds. His first memories of playing the piano are from church, where music was a big deal. "Seeing people dancing, singing, all the happiness in church. That's what got me into music," he said over

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Editor's Take

A long time ago, I took a course in Jazz History to fulfill a requirement for my college major. As a "jazz trumpeter", I had done my fair share of listening to Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Maynard Ferguson, and Clark Terry. I thought that I had my bases pretty well covered. This jazz history class, of course, opened my eyes, ears, and brain to the circumstances and personalities that really made jazz happen in this world.

As I learned about how the music evolved, one thing became very clear. The music was primarily learned, shared, and taught by musicians on the bandstand. In other words, knowledgeable musicians had to be generous enough to let less knowledgeable musicians learn by listening and then doing, on the bandstand. The music flourishes when shared. Generosity, allows the music to grow.

Des Moines is a model city in this regard. We welcome anyone who wants to play this great music. Our jazz community is one of the most generous communities in the country. As you will read in this issue, our community regularly welcomes new musicians to our jazz scene, while at the same time creating situations where young

and old musicians, alike, can learn their musical trade. The Community Jazz Center's jam sessions allow very young and inexperienced players to perform with professionals on a regular basis. My son, Ben, attributes his success in college to his time spent at the jam sessions. He learned how to start, end, and "fake" tunes at the jam sessions, as well as how to deal with musicians.

But the student jam sessions are not the only place where musicians are being generous. My son, Andy, regularly "sits in" with groups across the city. These musicians are welcoming, patient, and giving of their musical space so that the less experienced can become comfortable in the jazz environment. This openness allows people who move into town easy access to the music scene.

This town appreciates jazz in all its forms. We seem to understand that musicians are always learning and growing. Just look at the variety of offerings that Jazz in July brings to our listening public.

We also have a great respect for history in this town. I think this is because new musicians both young and old can rub shoulders regularly with the icons that have built and sustained the jazz music scene in this city. Great musicians come to Des Moines and stay. And they share. Be proud of your jazz community, Des Moines. We are keeping this music alive and allowing it to grow and flourish.

Joel Poppen

CELEBRATE DES MOINES' JAZZ HISTORY
**CJC JAZZ HALL OF FAME
RECEPTION & CONCERT**
SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24
WATCH FOR DETAILS

Things Are Always Swingin' In Johnston Thanks To JSJB

Created in the fall of 2002, The Johnston Station Jazz Band and Performing Arts Group is keeping the music swinging in this suburb of Des Moines. The JSJB & Performing Arts Group consists of a traditional jazz big band a smaller combo. The big band provides audiences with the music of the 30's, 40's and 50's, flavored with a little classic jazz and other styles, depending on the audience. The combo performs more modern/progressive jazz with an emphasis on improvisation skills.

The band was named in honor of those Johnston senior citizens who still hold on to the memories of the "good old days" when the community was known as "Johnston Station." The band is dedicated to Jimmy Selland, the first conductor who passed away in August 2003.



Catching Up With Nick Leo

Editor's note: It's always nice to hear from students who spent their formative years in music participating in CJC programs.

My name is Nick Leo and I grew up in Des Moines.



I became interested in jazz when I was in sixth grade. Scott Davis was my general music teacher and he persuaded me to take lessons from Susie Miget, which I did until I graduated from East High. During that time, I was involved with the CJC, playing at the jam sessions and playing various CJC combo gigs at the Iowa State Fair and at Jazz in July.

I went to the University of Northern Iowa and studied jazz and classical piano. I also spent the 2006/07 academic school year studying in Coimbra, Portugal, where I spent a lot of time checking out the local music scene.

I returned to Des Moines after I finished my degree and now spend my time teaching and playing in groups. I currently play salsa, cumbia, and latin jazz with Salsa Vibe, jazz and r&b with the Paige Harpin group, folk with the songwriters Dustin Smith and Brooks Strause, soul music with the Iowa City group Bermuda Report, and the occasional trio or quartet jazz gig around town.

I teach piano lessons out of my home and also through Rieman Music and Drake University.

You can visit me at myspace.com/nickleomusic.

Fall For Jazz At Caspe Terrace

Like the leaves of autumn, jazz comes in many shapes and colors. That's what "Fall For Jazz" is all about — an opportunity to experience the beauty and diversity of jazz with three individual and unique concerts scheduled for the fall. Working in conjunction with The Caspe Terrace in Waukee and the Waukee Area Arts Council, local jazz enthusiasts Abe Goldstien and his wife, Jackie Garnett, are pleased to announce a fall series of jazz concerts.

September 29: TRIO X (Joe McPhee, Dominic Duval & Jay Rosen)

This group of legendary musicians has been playing together as a unit for close to a dozen years. They stretch and bend the shape of jazz, performing originals and standards in a fashion that truly brings meaning to jazz critic's Whitney Balliett's definition of jazz — "the sound of surprise." This is Trio-X's third appearance in Des Moines.



October 12: Pianist Jon Weber



The history of jazz piano comes alive in the hands of pianist Jon Weber. From ragtime to modern jazz, Jon plays it all. His vast knowledge of tunes is matched by his stories about the musicians who made those tunes famous. Bring your requests, because chances are Jon knows them and will be happy to play them for you!

November 16: Benjamin Herman Quartet

Dutch jazz returns to The Caspe Terrace with saxophonist Benjamin Herman and an evening dedicated to Dutch jazz pianist Misha Mengelberg. Herman, who studied with Iowa-born jazz musician Dick Oatts, will be joined by guitarist Anton Goudsmit (who thrilled the audience last year in Waukee with trumpeter Eric Vloeimans), bassist Ernst Glerum and drummer Joost Patocka.



All concerts, except for Trio-X, will be at held The Caspe Terrace in Waukee, a venue ideally suited to the intimacy of jazz. Due to a scheduling conflict, the Trio-X concert will be held at Arts Central, the new performance venue of the Waukee Area Arts Council in the center of Waukee. The Waukee Area Arts Council hosts a "Meet The Artist" dessert reception following each concert.

Tickets for the entire are \$60.00 (\$20 a performance). Tickets for individual concerts are \$25 in advance and \$30 at the door. Student discounts are available. Those people who order advance tickets for the entire series will have an opportunity to win a CD from each performer as well as a chance to have dinner with each performer prior to the concert.

For more information, contact Abe Goldstien at 515-279-6452 or via email at abe@trilixgroup.com.

AND THE WINNER IS ..

Like a working musician, guitarist Ross Clowser shows up early to the gig to set up his equipment. But Ross is not truly a working musician yet. He is a freshman at Waukee High School; and this really isn't a gig, it's another CJC first Sunday of the month jam session.

A regular at the monthly sessions since the seventh grade, Ross stands on the stage, with guitar in hand, taking it all in, and always eager to step into the forefront with a bluesy guitar solo. This summer, Ross will be expanding his jazz knowledge by attending Susie Miget's summer program. CJC was pleased to present Ross with a \$400 scholarship for that program during the June jam session.

Ross was one of five "jammers" who had attended the March, April, May and June sessions, which qualified them for a drawing for the \$400 scholarship. The other four students — Nathan Sparks, trumpet/piano; Alec Packer, tenor; Zach Stoll, drums; and Logan Hacker, baritone — each received a \$100 scholarship to any summer Iowa jazz program of their choice.

We had an opportunity to talk with Ross about jazz and his future in music.

CJC: What attracted you to jazz?

Ross: I started playing in jazz band in sixth grade and that got me hooked. As I began to play more and listen to more jazz I discovered the freedom and passion behind it. I also listened a lot to my guitar teacher, Willie Shay, who plays a fantastic solo jazz guitar, and I just loved it.



CJC: What do you like about the jam sessions?

Ross: I love being able to experiment with the music and try new things. It taught me how to play with other people and how to sight read music more proficiently. It also is just so much fun to listen to everyone improvising and having fun.

CJC: Any favorite guitarists?

Ross: I like Grant Green, Django Reinhardt, Wes Montgomery and Charlie Christian just to name a few. I am particularly fond of Charlie Christian because he really pioneered bebop, rock and roll and so much of what we listen to today.

CJC: Who do you like to jam with?

Ross: I like to jam with everyone. Playing with others is a magical thing. It's like having a conversation, someone says something and someone else

responds. Being a part of the rhythm section is a blast too. You get to back someone else up and respond to what they're doing simultaneously, but you're not the star. You're helping someone else get that good feeling deep down when everything works out right. It's just an amazing thing.

CJC: What do you see ahead for you and music?

Ross: I just made Waukee Jazz I and I'm hoping for a successful season as a freshman. I would also like to make the Iowa All-State Jazz Band sometime in the future. After high school I really want to attend Julliard and become a professional musician. I think it would be just great to do something this cool for a living, and so much fun.

CJC: Any words of encouragement for other young musicians thinking about coming to our jam sessions?

Ross: Come! It is a lot of fun and it is a very supportive environment. Don't worry about whether or not you think you can play, because jam sessions help you improve, and don't worry about getting up in front of people either, because the folks who come are some of the nicest people I have ever met. So, grab your instrument and come to Java Joe's on the first Sunday of the month. I promise you won't regret it.

Who else is playing around town? Find out at
dmcommunityjazzcenter.org

STRAIGHT AHEAD

Straight Ahead is published quarterly by the Greater Des Moines Community Jazz Center. We welcome any and all contributions to this newsletter, including book, concert and CD reviews, editorials, concert news and any other information that would be of interest to CJC members. Please send your articles and information to Abe Goldstien, c/o Trilix Marketing Group, 4000 114th St., Urbandale, IA 50322. Materials can also be e-mailed to abe@trilixgroup.com. For information about advertising in *Straight Ahead* or to receive future copies of the publication, contact Phyllis Leaverton at 515-276-0777.

Witness Stand continued from front page

a recent lunch in a noisy dining hall. He taught himself how to accompany the gospel choir. Since his family didn't own a keyboard, he often practiced in the sanctuary after hours. His mother scolded him whenever he stayed too late.

When Matlou was in high school, he met “Monk” Molelekwa, the father of a successful jazz pianist who had died just a year or two earlier. Molelekwa, whose friends nicknamed him after Thelonius Monk, took Matlou under his wing and invited him to take lessons at the jazz center he had founded in honor of his son. He also helped the boy go to college, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where the American jazz pianist Darius Brubeck (Dave's son) had spent years building a prominent jazz program.

“Monk was the only person who understood what I wanted to achieve,” Matlou said. From there, it was just a short jump, through a study abroad program, to the United States “to study jazz in the country where it came from,” he said. He chose Drake after scanning its website and watching YouTube clips of the school's jazz band. “I liked what I saw,” he said. Soon enough, the praise was mutual.

“He’s doing great,” said Jim Romain, who teaches a course on jazz improvisation. “He has really great ears, so he learns very quickly.” His biggest challenge, Romain said, is pushing himself to the next level.

“He has to edit himself a little bit more,” he said. “Sometimes he falls back on technique instead of developing new ideas. It’s easy if you have a lot in your fingers to just try to play everything.”



Witness had an opportunity to meet saxophonist Joe Lovano at the Twin Cities Jazz Festival. Chance are he will run into Lovano at Berklee, where the saxophonist is a frequent guest artist.

Matlou is getting some serious practice around town, both with Drake groups and on his own. He played a coffeehouse session at Temple B'nai Jeshurun and gave a lecture on South African jazz at the public library. He played a set awhile back with Sam Salomone at the Continental, the swanky bar in the East Village.

“He’s played with every player around town, I think,” Goldstien said. “I’ve just been so amazed at how warm and open the jazz community is about having him play.” When band leader John Morgan needed a last-minute pianist for a gig in Ames, Matlou filled in, sight-reading a stack of old music from the big band era. “I think that might have been the first time Witness ever played a polka,” Goldstien said.

Aiming for bigger jazz world

Des Moines may not be a hotbed of jazz, like New Orleans or New York, but it’s likely Matlou has had a fuller experience here than he could have had almost anywhere else. “Had he gone to Boston or Chicago, he wouldn't have had the opportunity

to meet the people he has met,” Goldstien said. “It’s more competitive out there, and he probably would have ended up hanging around more students.”

But Matlou has seen at least a glimpse of the bigger jazz world. Drake alumnus and retired McDonald’s executive Fred Turner invited the school's jazz students to play for a party earlier this year in Chicago, and Matlou recently hopped on a Greyhound to Denver to audition for the prestigious Berklee College of Music, in Boston. He made the trip at the urging of another Drake grad, Penny Furgerson, who hosted him over winter break. “He’s very shy, but I could see he had great talent,” she said. “We got to talking, and he said he had always wanted to go to Berklee.”

By a stroke of luck, she had taped several of his performances on campus and posted them on YouTube for his family and friends in South Africa. The clips came in handy when he sent in his application to Berklee, which recently sent him an acceptance letter and a partial scholarship.

Furgerson is helping Matlou raise the rest of the money he’ll need for tuition. She’s contacting long-lost friends and acquaintances, including Sanford Allen, the first African-American violinist in the New York Philharmonic, as well as the opera singer Simon Estes, who once roomed with Furgerson’s late husband at the University of Iowa. It’ll take some work to get Matlou to Berklee, but Furgerson has high hopes. “He’s very quiet -- he’s not promoting himself -- but he really deserves the opportunity, because I think we’ll all be enriched by his talent,” she said. “He’s got a lot going for him.”

Former Chicagoan Looks At Des Moines' Jazz Scene

Editor's Note: Having spent 30 years in the Chicago area and being familiar with the jazz scene there, pianist Nick Reiser, a recent transplant to Iowa, offers some perspective on the Des Moines jazz scene.

On Des Moines Musicians:

What I have found here is a welcoming and supportive jazz community of very dedicated people who are committed to spreading the gospel of jazz and to developing the players. Yeoman work in this area has been done by Abe Goldstien and the house band for the monthly CJC jam sessions at Java Joe's. I am struck by the quality of some of the musicians here. I think many of them are as good as anything Chicago has to offer. The main difference is that they are modest and accessible, not always the case elsewhere.

On Live Music:

Des Moines people still prefer live music, by and large, which is great.



Things can get done here due to the lack of bureaucracy, the low cost of things, and accessibility (translation: no traffic jams and a compact metro area). This makes it easy to get to a diversity of jazz experiences like the Caspe Terrace jazz series with its world-class jazz talent or the weekend lineup at clubs like Chuck's, The Continental, Suites on Locust and others.

On Jamming:

No woodshed, electronic or otherwise, can replace the experience of playing with others. Dave Rezek's Saturday series at the Des Moines Social Club is a nice addition to the scene which also includes CJC jam sessions, Synergy events (of which I serve on the board) and the CJC Big Band. Perhaps the new facility at Drake will add even more opportunities for musicians to jam.

On The Future:

As for training the performers of the future, I think we have some terrific resources in Des Moines including CJC, Susie Miget's Creative Music School and Synergy. Des Moines needs to be heralded for the work of the Jazz Hall Of Fame (remember to join CJC on October 24 for this annual event). But there is always room for more community connections and places to speak the jazz dialect.

Congratulations To Our Seniors

Leah Schmidt, Southeast Polk High School

"Going to the jams is a great way to not only practice your ability to improv on the spot, but also to meet people in the area that are interested in jazz," says saxophonist Leah Schmidt, who will be heading to the University of Northern Iowa to study music education.



Alec Packer, Waukee High School

Alec will be headed to the University of Northern Iowa as a double major — music and business finance. We know Alec for his tenor sax playing at the jam sessions, but he's also an accomplished clarinetist.

"I really enjoyed the relaxed environment of the jam sessions, where all feel welcome to play, listen and learn," says Alec.

Congratulations to these recent high school graduates as well:

- Ryan Hays, bass
- Chris Oatts, alto sax
- Jeff Oatts, drums
- Eric Oatts, tenor sax

Notes & Tones

From Victor Verney: **Local Jazz On The Web At "Des Moines Amplified"**

Speaking as both a journalist and a jazz enthusiast, I've wanted to get involved in radio for many years. My chance has finally arrived with a weekly one-hour online radio show with a new start-up project here in Des Moines known as "Des Moines Amplified"— www.worldwideamplified.com. I'm hoping that this will become a way to throw a spotlight on the many talented, dedicated and (in my view) horribly under-appreciated jazz players, educators, and impresarios in central Iowa. You can access my show, "Jazz Matrix", via the Internet, even you they can't listen to the "real-time" live broadcast (which will be on Tuesdays from 1 to 2 p.m).

From Iowa State Center: **Upcoming Concerts**

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy

Sunday, October 24, 2010 | 7:30 pm

If you love the irresistible energy of swing music, you are in for a huge treat when the multi-platinum swing band Big Bad Voodoo Daddy takes the stage at Stephens. A singular stand-out among the numerous bands that launched the Swing revival of the 1990s, BBVD takes its name from an autograph by blues legend Albert Collins.

The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra

Sunday, January 23, 2011 | 4:00 pm

If you love Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman or Dizzy Gillespie, you'll appreciate how The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra (SJMO) recreates big band jazz the way its composers and arrangers originally intended. SJMO serves as orchestra-in-residence at the national Museum of American History and offers its own radio series, *Jazz Smithsonian*, heard on public radio stations across the country and in six nations.

For ticket information visit center.iastate.edu or call toll-free 1-877-843-2368.

From KFMG-Radio: **Jazz Is Back On The Air**

After a hiatus of several months, jazz is back on the air in Des Moines. KFMG-FM (99.1) resumed broadcasting in mid-June. If you live within 10 miles of downtown Des Moines you can probably get the station on your FM radio. If not, we're streaming 24/7 at kmfg991.org. We're pleased to announce the return of outstanding lineup of jazz every Sunday:

6:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.: Sunday Morning Jazz Show

A relaxing way to start out your Sunday. Great jazz, old and new, vocals and instrumentals, old school and contemporary jazz all presented by our host, Cecil White.

5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.: Straight No Chaser — This ain't no downstream, candy-coated elevator music. This is serious jazz for serious fans. Welcome to Abe Goldstien's world.

7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.: Jazz Gumbo — This show sizzles with N'awlins jazz and spicy southern sounds from Sam Salomone's extensive personal collection. When it comes to famous Hammond B3 players from Iowa, we got Sam and his gumbo.

9:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.: Sunday Night At The Savoy — Bob Hunter gives us another hour of great jazz with his show featuring Jazz vocalists singing those classic jazz standards.

10:00 p.m. - 1:00 a.m.: C Notes — End your weekend with Cecil White and the sound of contemporary jazz.

JAZZ UP YOUR SUNDAYS AT JAVA JOE'S

JAM SESSION:

FIRST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH, 2 TO 4 P.M.

CJC BIG BAND:

THIRD SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH, 2 TO 4 P.M.

Community Jazz Center
2921 Patricia Drive
Urbandale, Iowa 50322-6863

CJC Membership Form

School [\$35] Patron [\$30] Adult [\$20] Student [\$10]

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Fax Number _____ Email _____

Volunteer Interests/Skills _____

Date: _____

Return to: CJC Membership Chair, 2921 Patricia Drive, Urbandale, Iowa 50322-6863