

Register-Star

www.registerstar.com

Weekend

VOL. 230, No. 157

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, AUGUST 9-10, 2014



David Lee/Columbia-Greene Media

Armen Donelian (left) and some of the students in the workshop listen as bassist Nick Edwards, of Red Hook, and guitar player Dan Rothstein, of Ancram, work through a version of "Body and Soul" during one of the Friday morning workshops conducted in Donelian's studio in Greenport.

GREENPORT

Jazz sounds comes to Greenport

By John Mason
Columbia-Greene Media

On this mid-August weekend, music is everywhere, as Hudson's streets are filled with the sounds of New York state's largest free music festival.

Meanwhile, tucked away on a quiet street in southern Greenport, the eighth annual Hudson Jazz Workshop is taking place.

Ten jazz musicians from as far away as Copenhagen and

Please see Jazz, page A11

Jazz

Continued from page A1

Mexico and as near as Ancram and Red Hook have gathered to study and play with three jazz standouts, pianist Armen Donelian, saxophonist Marc Mommaas, the workshop's co-directors, and this year's special guest, double-bass player Reggie Workman.

Workman is truly a legend, having played on Coltrane's early albums, "Ole Coltrane" and "Live at the Village Vanguard," as well as with Art Blakey, Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Thelonious Monk, Yusef Lateef and Herbie Mann.

The workshop culminates in a concert featuring all 13 musicians, for which admission will be charged, 3:30 p.m. Sunday at the Hudson Opera House.

During a master class Friday morning, Donelian and three students listened to a piano/bass duo improvising. Afterward, Donelian urged the bass player to put more melody into his accompaniment.

The bass player said he preferred the simplicity of comping behind the melody. "When it gets too messy, I don't like it," he said.

Donelian said there's a lot of space in a two-person combo.

"Listen to Bach," Donelian said. "There's a melody here and a melody over there. You're putting yourself in a box; you don't have to. I'm trying to give you the experience of what that feels like."

After a guitar-bass duo, one of the students praised them: "I don't hear showing off," he said.

"That's the tendency I'm trying to wash out of me," said the guitarist.

Meanwhile, Mommaas was leading a combo of five horn players in improvisation on "All the Things You Are."

He urged them to sit out at times and try to keep the form going in their heads.

"If you lose the form, stop playing," he said. "That's my general rule with a band. If you don't know where you are, take the horn out of your mouth, instead of playing a bunch of nonsense. The band members will get you back in there, if they're your friends."

"One of my most valuable times is when I'm on stage not playing," Mommaas said. "I'm hearing the changes for the next soloist. If you hear

(them) do something really great, keep it in your mind and do something with it, so you enlarge your vision."

Donelian, who started as a classical pianist, and is also influenced by the music of his Armenian heritage, has been in some of jazz's greatest combos, such as those of Sonny Rollins, Chet Baker and Billy Harper, and has led his own groups since 1981.

He has also been teaching jazz since 1986, and has written two standard textbooks on ear training.

In 2007, rather than travel around the world teaching, he decided to bring the students to his Greenport home.

"This is our eighth year doing this," Donelian said. "I never thought we'd get to this point. We're attracting people from around the world. We have collaborations with the Amsterdam Conservatory, the Rhythm Conservatory, the Manhattan School of Music and the William Paterson School of Music in New Jersey."

They've been able to raise enough scholarship money to foot the bill for four of the 10 students.

"We try to keep the size of the workshop small so we can go into depth with each student in these small sessions," Donelian said. "They're at a level that's high enough we don't have to be involved with teaching musical grammar and vocabulary. We're helping with fine-tuning artistic choices, listening more to each other, as opposed to playing with formulas they've learned."

"They're necessary formulas," he said, "like learning a language. You learn how to duplicate sounds, then learn how to read, write, play, conceive — symbols are notes. Learning the mechanicals. The next level is the creative level, transcending the mechanicals for self-expression."

But just as important is the collaborative experience.

"There's a sharing of the musical space that happens in a jazz combo," Donelian said. "At different points, people are taking on different functions. Even when doing the ensemble function, there's a self-expressive function that's not only available, but expected of them. They're not just wallpaper."

Mommaas is a leader of the group Global Motion, has played with many lumi-

naries such as Tony Moreno, Tim Horner and Donelian. He is an international guest lecturer on jazz at many institutions.

"(The workshop) is not so much about the master class," Mommaas said. "It's about investigating different musical concepts to expand our palettes — the harmonic concept, the linear concept, something in a tune you want to get deeper into."

"This year is our highest level overall," Mommaas said. "There are always one or two who excel, but this year, there are more."

This year's students include bass players Nick Edwards, of Red Hook, and Lasse Moerck, of Copenhagen, Denmark, guitarist Dan Rothstein, of Ancram, sax players Joe Hanna of Louisville, Kentucky, Miguel Rodriguez, of Hawthorne, New Jersey, Donna Wood, of Endicott, and Matthew Woroshyl, of New York City, pianists Samuel Martinez-Herrera, of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and Xavi Torres, of Amsterdam, Holland, and clarinetist Jerry Weimer, of Breezy Point, Queens.

"The idea is that everyone here can play," he said. "Now, to develop and expand your own language. We use small-band formats, duos and trios, which means you're more naked, your weaknesses will come out, if you have to hold the form, but there's nobody doing it for you."

"A lot of time, people are so glued to the page," he said. "You need a good inner pulse; you have to have enough freedom to tell the whole story while that's going on."

Jazz is complicated, Donelian said, "because improvisation requires an understanding of the composer's skills. Improvisers require ear training that brings together the composer's knowledge with the performer's technical training."

"When these guys play, they're thinking about chords, harmonic content, making connections between that harmonic context and the next note they're about to play," he said. "An actor playing Shakespeare has certain lines to memorize; improvisation is a lot more like a standup comic — you're always on your feet."

To learn more about the workshop, go to www.hudson-jazzworks.org/.