

DEAS IS from the canon

From Wynton Marsalis to Adrian Cho, festival shows revel in repertory music

BY ALEX HUTCHINSON

If you're a rock musician in a group that specializes in playing the hits of your long-dead musical heroes, they label you a "cover band" and book you for Wednesday nights at second-rate clubs.

If you're a classical musician that does the same, in contrast, you're called a "symphony orchestra" and booked at the National Arts Centre.

Jazz, as usual, falls somewhere in the middle — some critics say repertory bands are the only thing keeping the music alive, while others say they're stifling innovation. Most agree, though, that the Wynton Marsalis-led Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, which kicks off this year's TD Canada Trust Ottawa International Jazz Festival tomorrow night at Confederation Park, is about as close as jazz comes to having a big-city philharmonic devoted to propagating its musical heritage.

It's a role that Marsalis relishes. After all, as he said when he last visited Ottawa in 2005, "if you only play your own music, that's fun to do, but it's very limited. It's like only reading your own books."

This year's festival offers Ottawa fans a chance to see several radically different approaches to the classic jazz canon, ranging from museum-quality historical recreations to more rough-hewn attempts to capture the spirit of famous bands.

Marsalis, the 46-year-old New York-based trumpeter, has led the JLCO in tribute projects that have honoured, most recently, the music of saxophonist John Coltrane and bassist Charles Mingus. The band's last visit to Ottawa, in 2001, featured a set of Louis Armstrong's music to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.

But Marsalis's nods to the past have



ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Adrian Cho and his band, the Impressions in Jazz Orchestra, will perform a tribute to bandleader Stan Kenton, using the original arrangements when possible.

also taken the form of ambitious original works that revisit and reshape musical influences in new ways, like the JLCO's 2006 Congo Square project that honoured a famous part of old New Orleans, and *Abyssinian 200*, a gospel-tinged celebration of an African-American church in New York City that debuted in April.

The program for tomorrow night's concert will be decided on the spur of the moment and called from the stage, a band spokesperson said.

Ottawa's preeminent repertory group, the Impressions in Jazz Orchestra led by bassist Adrian Cho, takes a

more literal approach to recreating the past. They appear at Confederation Park on June 30 with a tribute to innovative and prolific bandleader Stan Kenton, whose career spanned four decades from the 1940s to the 1970s.

The request for a Kenton homage came from the festival's programming director, Jacques Emond, who is also a huge fan of Cho's projects.

Cho has selected 14 pieces from what he views as Kenton's best period, from the mid-'50s to the late '60s, using the original arrangements where possible.

"The set is chosen to appeal to a

JAZZ FESTIVAL REPERTORY MUSIC

- The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, tomorrow, Confederation Park
- Le Big Band Caravane, June 22, NAC Studio
- Big 3 Palladium Orchestra, June 28, Confederation Park
- Nimmons 'N Nine...Now!, June 29, Confederation Park
- Adrian Cho, with Impressions in Jazz, June 30, Confederation Park

The Jazz Festival runs tomorrow through July 1. Tickets & times: www.ottawajazzfestival.com or call 613-241-2633.

wide range of people," he said in a telephone interview. "There are some swinging standards, as well as some more contemporary pieces."

That goal — broad appeal, luring people who may not even realize that they like jazz — has been one of the hallmarks of previous Impressions in Jazz projects, which have covered eclectic territory ranging from 19th-century songs associated with slavery to music from spy thrillers and science fiction movies.

As a result, Cho sees his concept of what belongs in the jazz canon as much broader than the Lincoln Center band's. "We do some of the usual repertory stuff, but we try to go beyond that," he said.

Impressions in Jazz is also unusual in the trouble they take to perform the music as it would have been heard originally.

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Jazz: Fans eager for old music

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To recreate the distinctive Kenton sound, the 22-piece ensemble will include two French horns, as well as a bass saxophone — one of only five in Canada, Cho says. The result is a modern, power-packed version of the classic big band sound. "It's certainly, as most Kenton is, big, bold and brassy," he says.

A more traditional take on the big band will be offered June 22 by another National Capital-area group, Le Big Band Caravane. The 21-piece ensemble, under the direction of vocalist Kieran Milne, will present a tribute to bandleader and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, featuring California-based Lee Schipper on vibes.

BBC is a throwback to the days when jazz was popular dance music, so one of the chief attractions of Hampton's music was its "showmanship and dynamism," according to the band's artistic director, Jean-Pierre Moisan.

The band has acquired about 10 Hampton charts. Some were commissioned for the occasion, including classics such as *Flying Home* and *Hamp's Boogie Woogie*. They'll also play some standards associated with Hampton, such as *On the Sunny Side of the Street*.

While the band has been rehearsing the new tunes since January, the challenge is far greater than simply learning the charts, Moisan says. "We'll try to bring out the spirit of Hampton, and everything that means."

Recapturing the frantic dancing energy of a legendary band will also be the goal June 28 when the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra performs at the festival's now-traditional Saturday night Latin show. The group takes its name from the Palladium, the New York club where mambo caught fire in the late 1940s and '50s. The Big 3 were Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and Machito, each of whom led bands that helped to define the genre. Fronting the current band are Tito Puente, Jr., Tito Rodriguez, Jr., and (you see the pattern here), Machito's son, Mario Grillo.

The most Canadian of this year's tributes comes from Nimmons 'N Nine...Now!, a 10-piece Toronto group playing original arrangements from Phil Nimmons's groundbreaking Canadian band of the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike the other tributees, Nimmons is still alive. Now 85, he appeared in Ottawa at the 2006 festival, playing spontaneous duets with pianist David Braid, 52 years his junior — and he made it clear he wasn't interested in rehashing the ground he'd covered five decades earlier. "If you want to hear those tunes, you can listen to my old records," he told the audience.

Nimmons's attitude may illustrate a

general truth — that those musicians whose work proves to be worthy of tribute are usually more interested in looking forward than back — but it doesn't mean there's no place for tribute bands. Audiences are often eager to hear old music, whether for the fond memories it conjures, or simply because it's good music. And as the Marsalis/JLCO group demonstrates, drawing from the past can still be a forward-looking enterprise — which is why tomorrow night's festival opener is one of this year's must-see shows.

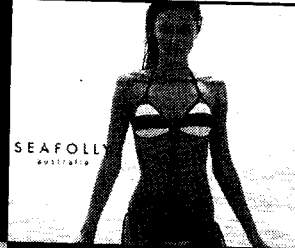
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CONTROL



What's New This Week

With a sound all their own, Joy Division was one of the most influential bands in music history. The tragic story of the life and times of their lead singer Ian Curtis is retold in the acclaimed film *Control*. In honour of the DVD release of *Control*, Dose.ca and showcase.ca are giving you the chance to win you and a friend a trip to London, England with accommodations, spending money, plus a pair of Converse trainers and a copy of the *Control* DVD. Secondary prizes include Converse trainers and *Control* DVDs. Enter online at dose.ca/contests



Top 10 Angry Movie Characters: In honour of the raging mad *Incredible Hulk*, we're taking a look back at some of our favourite angry film characters. Check out the full list at dose.ca/angry



Foley Artist: Canadian comedy legend Dave Foley talks about the ins and outs of comedy, his TV show *Last Comic Standing* and the latest *Kids in the Hall* tour. Read the interview at dose.ca/foley