

CROSS CANADA CURRENTS

Tickling the Ivories in Africa

Canadian pianist Oliver Jones pulled off a rare coup in Africa last spring. Playing the masterpieces in his field, including his own, Canada's newest jazz ambassador established an identity that endeared him to some 10 000 new listeners, and some 20 000 tapping feet.

Oliver Jones and accompanists Dave Young on bass and Archie Alleyne on drums endured the sweltering African heat as the trio brought full-capacity crowds to their feet in Nigeria, Egypt and the Ivory Coast.

As modern jazz goes, all the concerts were superb. Both the audiences and the critics raved. Performing pieces by the likes of George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and Oscar Peterson, along with Jones' own material, The Oliver Jones Trio mesmerized audiences with virtuosity and talent.

Born in jazz-rich Montreal in 1934, Oliver Jones began playing tunes on the piano when he was only two years old. At the ripe old age of five, he made his first public appearance — a concert at his family's church. Jones, who has the rare gift of perfect pitch, began formal classical training at age seven and two years later began studying with Daisy Peterson — the sister of Canadian jazz-giant Oscar Peterson, Jones' childhood friend.

Oddly enough, Jones did not seriously venture into jazz until he was 46 years old. Till then, he had spent the better part of two decades on the road as accompanist and musical director for Jamaican pop-singer Kenny Hamilton. Prior to that, Jones performed with various musicians in

clubs and hotels in the Montreal area. But 1980 was the turning point when Jones settled back in Montreal and became convinced that he could make a living playing jazz.

Since 1982, the soft-spoken pianist has toured internationally, made numerous recordings and quickly risen to become one of the most critically acclaimed players in jazz today.

According to Jones, his 1989 African tour was "the most memorable experience of my life." Even six months later he is still reeling from it. "Learning first-hand of African culture and visiting the countries where jazz originated was so important to me," said Jones. "My ultimate pleasure was exchanging ideas with African musicians and comparing the directions jazz has taken since the drumbeats of Africa many centuries ago."

First Biodegradable Magazine Wrapper

Last fall *Harrowsmith*, a Canadian magazine known for its investigative environmental articles, became the first magazine in North America to use a biodegradable mailing wrapper. Since then, other magazines and businesses have been seeking information about the see-through pouches.

The plastic film used for the pouches is made with a special cornstarch additive produced and marketed by the Canadian St. Lawrence Starch Company Ltd. of Mississauga, Ontario. The company acquired the rights to the patented technology in 1985.

The additive speeds up the natural decomposition of plastic, reducing the process to between 2 and 6 years, from the usual 200 to 400 years. Some plastic films with high levels of the additive have decomposed in as little as 44 days.

The biodegradable plastic contains cornstarch, vegetable oil, and polyethylene. The starch and the vegetable oil play an important role in the decomposition process. The starch attracts and is consumed by micro-organisms. The resulting holes throughout the plastic weaken it and increase the surface area exposed to the environment.

The vegetable oil is an auto-oxidant. It reacts with the natural metal salts found in soil and water to produce peroxide. The peroxide attacks the bonds within the plastic, causing further disintegration. Once the bonds are broken, living organisms such as bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes can consume the remaining material.

Although the product has been around for several years, 1988 marked the first time it was available in a form suitable for making mailing wrappers. *Harrowsmith* started using the wrapper as soon as it was commercially produced.



Archie Alleyne