

Music

Variety marks Moe's music

Interview by Mike Spindloe

Jazz fans are in for a rare treat this weekend when the "Dizzy and Moe Super Jazz Show" hits the Jubilee Auditorium for two shows, Friday and Saturday night. That's Dizzy and Moe as in the legendary Dizzy Gillespie, trumpeter extraordinaire, and Moe Koffman, saxophonist, flute player, and a longtime stalwart of the Canadian and international jazz scene himself. On the phone from Toronto, Moe provided us with some insights into his long and varied career as well as what the future holds in store for him.

First of all, although Moe and Dizzy have played together many times, beginning about six years ago, they have known each other for much longer. In fact, Dizzy was one of Moe's early musical influences. As Koffman explains, "my roots really come from the bebop era, so I was highly influenc... ed by the

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Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's 'school' of jazz." And although Gillespie — who has been playing professionally since 1935 — turned 70 last October, he maintains a full schedule "travelling and performing all over the world, all the time," according to Koffman.

Koffman has been a well-known figure on the scene since 1958, when he recorded his own "Swinging Shepherd Blues." As the liner notes to a recent "best of" collection noted, "(it) remains the most requested song wherever and whenever we play, and we will continue to play it until we learn it." He laughs when I quote this back to him and remarks that "it's very difficult but I'll get it one of these days."

Koffman's extensive discography includes a number of "concept" albums based on

various themes. As well as several albums based around reworkings of classical pieces in a jazz style, there are also works like *Museum Pieces*, based on the exhibits at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and an album featuring song titles based on the names of the planets.

On the future possibility of doing such concepts Koffman is pessimistic: "It's unlikely because even though some of them were successful at the time, it's an expensive situation to get into, and the record companies won't finance a project like that when the returns are likely to be low."

Indeed, Koffman's last two albums, *One Moe Time* and *Moe-mentum* have featured a more straight-ahead jazz style, although *Moe-mentum* featured a reading of "Green-sleeves" and *One Moe Time* included the "Adagio" section of Bach's "Magnificat," which was originally part of CBC production of that famous work in a jazz/rock style which became a concert and television documentary.

Koffman has also continued to play classical music in a studio context, professing that "I don't like to do just one style of music or be classified as one type of musician." He also finds time in his busy schedule for work on film scores and commercial jingles, and has also just finished recording a new album for release this spring using the same band which will play the Jubilee this weekend and which appeared on his last album.

They are, for the record, Ed Bickert on guitar, Kieran Overs on bass, Bernie Senensky on keyboards and Barry Elmes on drums. They have been with Koffman for varying lengths of time. Bickert by far the longest, but Koffman attaches superlative adjectives to each name as he lists the names over the phone. The new album also features appearances by Dizzy Gillespie. And, Koffman says, we should be hearing some of the new material this weekend.

In what may have seemed like an uncharacteristic move, Koffman recorded an album of easy listening tunes for K-Tel in the U.S. a few years back, *The Magic Flute of Moe Koffman*. While admitting that it was "strictly a television marketing thing," Koffman feels that it was a worthwhile effort nonetheless: "It was meant for an older age group and it



Photo: Robert Bellarsson

Moe Koffman to play with musical influence Dizzy Gillespie this weekend.

gave me a chance to get away from jazz for the moment."

As for the future of jazz, Koffman doesn't see any radical changes occurring: "What we have now is these little islands of people playing one type or another, but the younger generation is playing a mixture, so everything is gradually evolving into one. Out of that something new might come." Koffman's own recent work corresponds with this statement, incorporating a variety of styles consis-

tent with his desire not to be pinned down to one genre.

Koffman is looking forward to visiting Edmonton again, although he wonders why he has never been invited to the Jazz City festival and is somewhat wary of the press here: "Last time the guy who reviewed the concert started off by describing what I was wearing. He said that I looked like a banker." Conservative appearances aside, the Moe and Dizzy show should be a good one.

Olympic artistic efforts

by Elaine Ostly

Olympics is more than sports, ABC broadcasters, and endorsements — it's art. If you don't believe me, check out the Olympic Arts Festival. The range of art forms and performers is astounding. The major events of the Festival pertain to dance, music, film and literature.

Dance groups featured in the Festival included La La Human Steps, the Joffrey Ballet, and Shumka. (Diversity is the key word here.) The Alberta Ballet company is performing *The Snow Maiden*, which Brydon Paige was specially commissioned by the Olympic Arts Festival to choreograph.

One of the aims of the Arts Festival is to bring together performers from around the world. This non-competitive contact should result in a sharing and appreciation of foreign styles of art. Performing with the Alberta Ballet Company is Vadim Pisarev of the U.S.S.R., and he is certainly making an impression on the company.

"Every day he does something that amazes," says Shona Smith, a dancer with the Alberta Ballet. "He has brought a lot of enthusiasm with him too — a lot of drive."

Pisarev has won gold medals in several international competitions in Helsinki, Moscow, Paris and Jackson, Miss. He is a soloist with the Don State Ballet in the Ukraine.

Pisarev is accompanied by the ballet mistress and choreographer, Ulamai Skott, whose Russian style is evident in the classes she leads. The Russians have also added their input on the Russian point of view, in presenting this ballet based on an old Russian folktale.

Says Smith: "It's a very different training. It's very strengthening... we jump a lot more in class... She (Skott) concentrates a lot on the upper body and arms, which is good

because sometimes you forget to dance so much. Vadim can do both — combine the ease of it all with incredible technique."

Shona Smith will be performing the lead in *The Snow Maiden* in the second cast, when the company tours Thunder Bay, Lethbridge and Saskatoon. Marianne Beausejour will dance the lead in Calgary, and also in Edmonton, where *The Snow Maiden* will run from February 23-25.

Writers from around the world were present at the Festival, giving readings and participating in panels. Participants included Marie-Claire Blais of Quebec, Sven Deblanc of Sweden, Lawrence Ferlinghetti of the States, and Jan Kaplinski of the U.S.S.R.

Rudy Wiebe, writer and professor at the U of A, participated in the Festival, calling it "one of the best I've been at." The reason for this success was partly because of the writers involved, but "mostly because of the fantastic crowd." Wiebe cites the presence of 350 people at each reading (paying \$7.50 per ticket), and 200 people at the final panel as examples of this public support. "Calgary is a very literate place," he says.

Calgary, then, has proved itself to be a city that encourages the arts. The dimensions of the Olympic Arts Festival offer proof of this appreciation. This is the largest and most promoted Arts Festival ever produced at a Winter Olympics, and the next host city should follow its lead.

Unfortunately for those of you going to the Olympics during reading week, many of these events have finished. But keep your eyes open, especially in the area of music. One event that will be running until Feb. 28th which you just can't miss, is the International Olympic Philatelic Exhibition. It features stamps from all four corners of the world!

What can I say, this Festival has got it all.

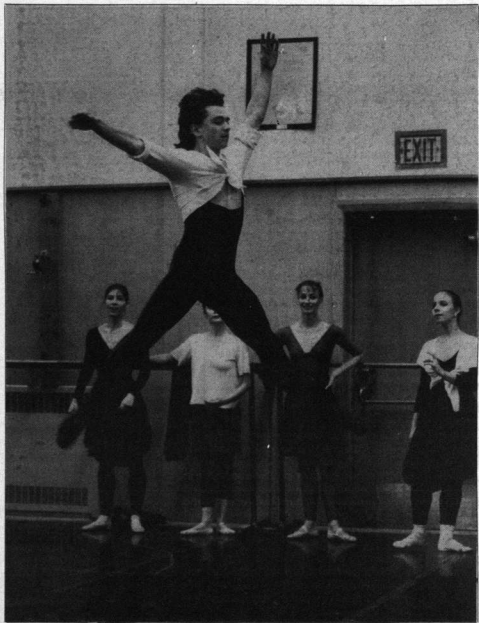


Photo: Rob Guberman

Ballet star from the U.S.S.R. flying high.