

Arts & Entertainment

Saxophonist Berg returns with Stern

interview by Mike Spindloe

Tenor saxophonist Bob Berg returns to town with guitarist Mike Stern for two shows at the Yardbird Suite on Wednesday night, reprising their well-received Jazz City appearance of last year. On the phone from his home in New York City, Berg talked about his recent career as a solo artist and his work with Stern and Miles Davis, punctuated with occasional admonishments to his young children to keep the noise down.

Berg's background as a saxophone player goes back to age 13, when he was assigned to the horn for the school band and "took to it naturally," he says. "I started on alto but as soon as I tried the tenor I knew that was it. It fit my own inner voice." Berg attended the High School for the Performing Arts in New York and then Juilliard, where "I got the classical saxophone discipline. It's a mode of approach

"...in America the musical part of the culture is the best in the world."

that will make you very technically proficient."

In 1984, after years of touring and recording with people like Horace Silver and Cedar Walton, he joined Miles Davis's band, remaining with Davis for three years and playing on the album *You're Under Arrest*. For Berg, "it was an interesting experience. I learned a lot about my own character, and it was a good opportunity to play for large audiences." Asked about Miles, he chooses his words carefully, noting that "I quit the band, but it was good to play with him regardless of the kind of music you're playing. He has amazing capabilities as a performer."

More recently, Berg has been collaboratively involved with Mike Stern, playing on the guitarist's last two releases, while a

third is imminent. Berg calls Stern an "inspiring player. He has more rock background than me, which shows in his music."

Berg has also done several solo projects, the most recent being an album called *Short Stories*, on the Denon label. He balks at describing this record, but says that "it's somewhat similar to where I've been with Mike." A new solo album, entitled *Cycles*, will also be released within the next few months.

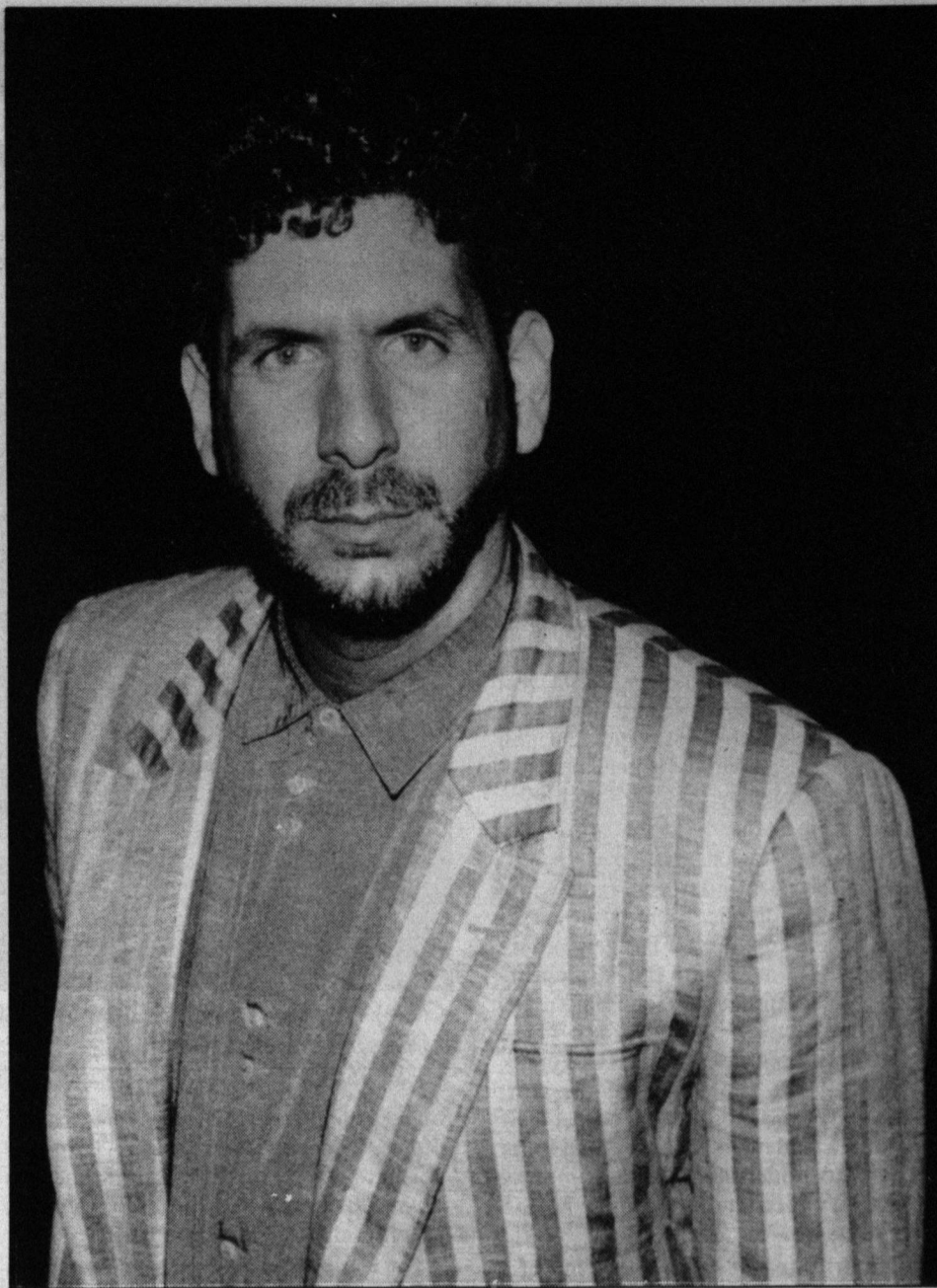
Berg works out of New York City, which he says is "sometimes not the greatest place to live, but it's been home all my life. It's a good place for access to other musicians and to recording facilities." After having spent time in Italy and Sweden, Berg prefers America to Europe, even though he feels that Europe is generally "culturally much nicer than America, except for music; in America the musical part of the culture is the best in the world."

While Berg cites the standard list of influences on his music (John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins), he insists that he is not a traditionalist: "I don't like labels. I go where my instinct tells me to go." He does feel, however, that there are extremes in music today between the esoteric and commercial material being produced.

"My music, and Mike's, is somewhere in between. We try to use familiar settings for our music at times, but not always. I can totally understand the push towards commercialism though, because, especially in America, money is so important to what you can accomplish."

Berg blames the media, especially radio, for creating these categories: "There is a station in New York that plays nothing but the most commercial jazz. Then there's another that only plays music with two minute spaces between each note, and then of course there's the all-Sinatra station. You can overcome that though; an artist like Pat Metheny is not calculatedly commercial, but it still sells."

As for the future, Berg plans to "do the thing with Mike and do some records of my own. I just want to play my own music, take charge and do my own thing."



Tenor saxophonist Bob Berg pays a return visit to Edmonton, playing the Yardbird Suite this Wednesday with guitarist Mike Stern.

Personal Growth rides dialogue and characterizations to success

Learning To Live With Personal Growth
Workshop West Theatre
through January 22

review by Kevin Law

Poor Jeff. He's an urban social worker in a bit of a rut over a vague personal crisis of values. His wife Marla is a lawyer with a socially mobile bent. He's not sure if he wants to join his wife in Yuppiland, but he's equally unsure if he is making an impact in the lives of his welfare clients. Add to Jeff's life a carefree, boisterous real estate speculator and an uneducated single welfare mother and you have a wry, contemporary comedy called *Learning To Live With Personal Growth*.

Ottawa playwright Arther Milner has fashioned an engaging play about moral responsibility and personal success that is socially satirical and personally thought provoking.

Milner has Jeff play directly to the audience, making him the central character around which the other people in his life revolve in sequential flashback. It is a bold move that works, giving the audience a more secure sense of familiarity with Jeff and his story as he speaks directly to us, like an old friend explaining a life exigency.

All of Milner's characterizations are pointed and genuine. Larry Yachimec is affably superb as slightly ambivalent and confused Jeff trying to understand what he really wants. His performance is perfectly understated, building an excellent rapport with the audience. Darlene Bradley as his wife Marla is excellent as well. She presents a metropolitan attitude that is humorously conservative and self-centered, a parody that surely some people live.

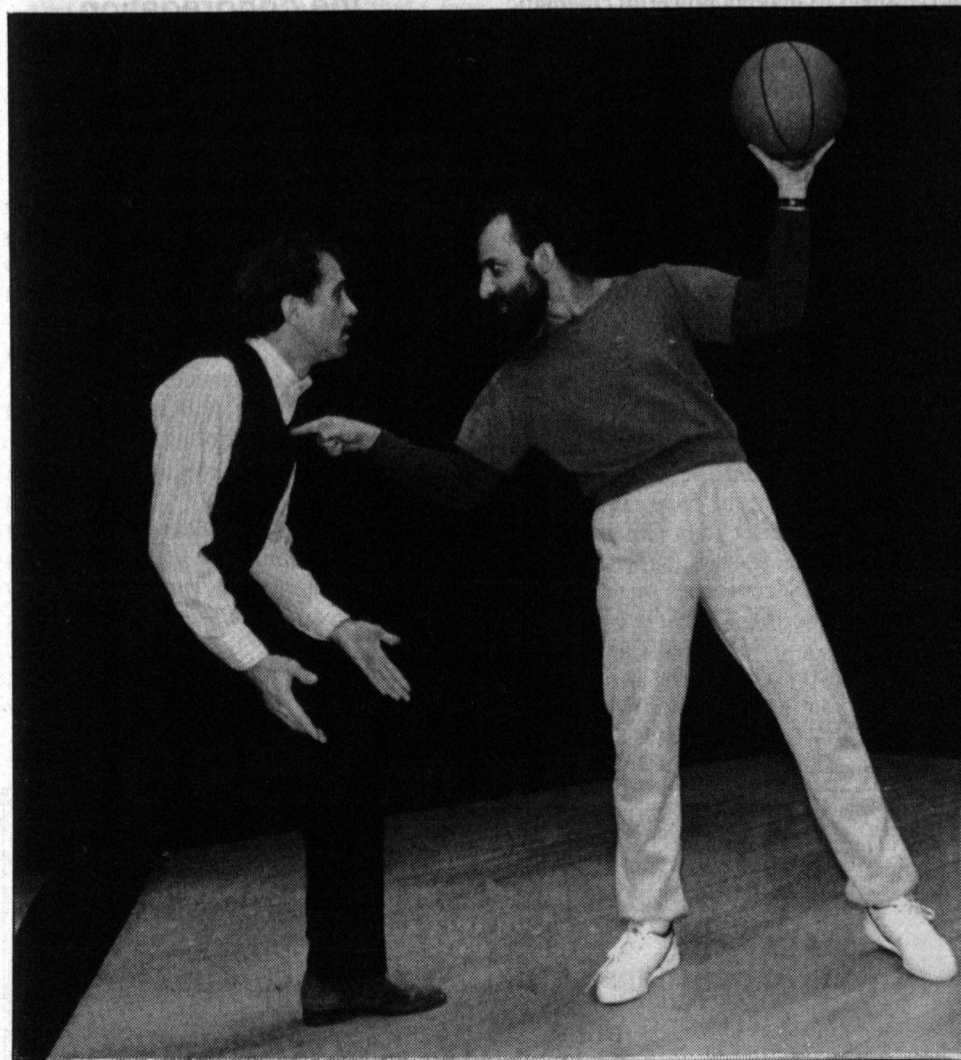
Ginny, nicely played by U of A grad

Davina Stewart, is the welfare mother Jeff spends an increasing amount of time with, possibly falling in love with her. Of the many intriguing questions Milner presents in the play, his socialist perspective seeps through in his image of the dark gap between rich and poor. But Milner never moralizes; the play's brilliance is in creating small, realistic twists in character. Ginny is an example. Is she a product of society or is her bleak life a product of self?

Link, too, the aggressive, somewhat shady investor played by Blair Haynes, is a true character that probably inhabits dark corners at discos. "Everyone is having a good time," he tells Jeff. Link "lives in a beer commercial" with all the selfish Yuppie connotations that go along with it. When he makes Jeff and wife rich through a sleazy real estate scheme, the moral dialogue really gets interesting, and Milner deserves credit for not presenting a pat ending.

The flashback style of the play's structure keeps the pace swiftly moving forward. It is not intrusive or confusing as Marla, Link, and Ginny pop in and out of each scene in reference to Jeff's monologues. But the transition from one character to another is sometimes too fast, leaving little time for the emotion of a moment to be played out and expressed. At 80 minutes, the play's shortness could be better served with a few extra minutes of emotional response in some of the faster scenes, but these are small queries that do not really detract from the play's overall effect.

There is much ironic, witty dialogue and presentation of character in *Learning To Live With Personal Growth* as well as exposition of thoughtful contemporary issues with no easy answers that will leave one arguing right and wrong after the final curtain. Catch it if you can.



Blair Haynes as Link (right) gives Larry Yachimec as Jeff a pep talk about personal growth in Workshop West Theatre's current production.