

arts

Prestige Concert Series begins at the Birmingham Bar & Grill

Trying to keep up with Oliver Jones

by Leslie J Furlong

On this past Friday and Saturday the Halifax jazz community was treated to performances by celebrated pianist Oliver Jones. This marked the beginning of the Birmingham Bar and Grill's Prestige Concert series, which is promising to showcase top performers in the jazz field on a regular schedule, hopefully bringing a love for jazz to a wider audience.

CONCERT
Oliver Jones
The Birmingham Bar and Grill

Despite the impressive list of Mr. Jones' awards and accolades that filled out the press release, I must admit near-total ignorance of his achievements, as well as his music, before having read it. Despite this, or perhaps even because of it, I found myself being drawn into the music that he created along with the rhythm support of locals Skip Beckwith on the big bass and the infectious drumming of Anhil Sharma. Though billed as backup for Oliver, both Beckwith and Sharma drew praise from the crowd at a level almost equal to the headliner himself. Their collective sound was the sound of excitement, of dancing on the edge of some sharp drop, never stumbling, never falling over.

"Here in Canada, we don't always have the amount of venues that we need," Oliver explains to me after Friday's second show. Between the questions that I ask him he takes sips from his red drink. I don't know what it is. It's just red. "In Halifax I'm very happy to see we have one club that's working.

Since Pepe's stopped we haven't had a regular jazz club, which is very much needed."

I agree with him, all the while finding it ironic that the much-hyped Halifax music scene only seems to include bands with amplifiers. "I'm not saying



DALPHOTO: MICHAEL GRAHAM

anything against the new music that's happening," he continues, "but I'd like our young people to get an equal opportunity to listen to as much jazz as they can. At least get the opportunity to hear it live. This is what this music is all about."

It's right about then that this attractive blonde comes up to our table, all smiles and perfect teeth, telling him that he had made a lousy day a much more tolerable one when she heard him play. He returns the smile and thanks her. This event repeats itself throughout the interview with a number of different people, and each time he smiles.

When she leaves, Oliver continues. "I just hope that things work out so that places like Halifax, Ottawa, the smaller cities, will be able to afford one or two jazz clubs, 'cause that's where you really learn. You can study all you want, but if you can't get out there and play, then you are really fighting an uphill battle."

This talk of training and playing and education eventually gravitates to the threatened performing arts programs at Dalhousie. Jones, a professor at both Laurentian and McGill, shakes his head. "It was quite a shock when I heard that Dalhousie may close their Music Department. It would be probably one of the biggest tragedies in the academic world because in this area we need a lot of help. The arts are a very important part of a student's growth,

and without the Dalhousies and the Acadias and the Saint FX's this really would be a void. It's too important to us."

As our discussion came to an end, I decided to come clean with him. Outside the big names, like Holliday, like Davis, like Parker, I had a slim education in this music. I asked him what I should do to broaden my scope of knowledge, and his advice turned out to be common sense.

"The thing about it is listen. The word jazz consists of so many styles of music. All the pop music we hear extends from the jazz idiom. There are so many different things to pick from so try never to limit yourself and say you only like this kind of thing. There is a wide spectrum of styles out there. With the more you listen to, you will acquire a taste for it and it goes on and on and it never stops. The music only gets better."

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#5 NUTS TO YOU!

so then she said...

DOINK-

KISS ME

Damn that squirrel, his goose is cooked!

Careful Pascal don't fall!

Hey stop that! Now he's throwing nuts again!

RRIPPP...

YAAA!

Nice buns Pascal... for a guy!

maybe you should just let him be...