

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Mark Lewis

Saxophone, Flute, Piano
Bremerton, WA

Which styles of jazz are you most and least connected with?

I try not to stylize. I like good music. I'm connected to all of them because I consider jazz history part of jazz present. It gives you freedom to create your own music within music. You can be more individual, but you can also have

projects like a flute and piano CD.

Do you have any major performances on the horizon?

I have a concert coming up with David Friesen on February 15 here in Bremerton. We're going to improvise jazz standards together. Many people

are not used to listening to just the bass and the sax. I thought, rather than do original music and completely blow their minds, I would do standards so they would have something to hang on to, because with David it will be creative enough. He could play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" over and over and over again, and it would be creative enough to play a three-hour concert. The second one that I'm looking forward to is on Bainbridge Island on March 2. That's with my quartet and it's featuring Ray Ohls, who is a phenomenal piano player. Being a great technician on the instrument doesn't mean you'll be a great musician, but Ray is both. He's also humble, which is nice, because it's a lot easier to work with people who know that music is a gift. It will be a good group because Bob Merrihew will be on drums, and Ted Enderle on bass. He's a fine player. He was in my trio, as well.

What is your most significant achievement as a performer?

Playing with my group in Holland...any concert I've done with them. And I think

it's moved people very much. The energy is very good with the people in the band. *Naked Animals* and *The Seven Angels* were two albums we did, but it's really the live performance that signifies music. Recorded music is just the skeleton. It's nice to listen to if that's all you have, but live is so much better. It's like the difference between watching TV and actually living life.

Who in jazz history do you most admire?

There are many I hold in high regard. One name

that comes to mind right now is Charles Mingus, because Mingus kept going and his music never lost its integrity. He was willing to suffer and did suffer for it. He was willing to give everything up. Others would be Miles Davis, Eric Dolphy and Charlie Parker, to name a few, because they never lost their music...and John Coltrane. They never stopped playing music. They played it through their lives. They always progressed.

Has a teacher or other musician ever put you down?

Some have put me down, but I try not to remember those things. I'm sure I could probably dig one up, but I prefer not to.

Describe a recent growth in your performance ability.

I would say that it's a fine nuance that I really can't describe. I've just matured with age. I think jazz is an expressive awareness of who you are at all times. And that means your technique needs to be as close as possible to what you hear. Hearing promotes technique and technique promotes hearing. I wouldn't say I have more technique than I did 10 years ago, but I might have more restraint. Finding restraint is just as important as playing.

Has jazz lost the "It" factor?

It's never been the popular music. It's always been music for people who are a little different. I don't think jazz has lost the "It" factor, but music has. What they're doing today is synthesized and programmed and that, to me, is not music because music has to have soul. Music is the soul of humanity. Jazz is the ultimate soul of humanity because it's the most intellectual, mature, responsible music we have. It has to be real. It has to be earnest. A lot of other music doesn't have to be. It can be fun. Jazz has to be humble, as well, but it also has to have strength and pride—pride in the gift you've been given so you can show it to someone and not be ashamed. Not pride in yourself, because when you play music at a high level, you don't even think of self, you aren't even there. The music is there and you listen to it. You're not playing it. You are it.

Why do so many straight-ahead jazz artists think it's wrong to strive for commercial success?

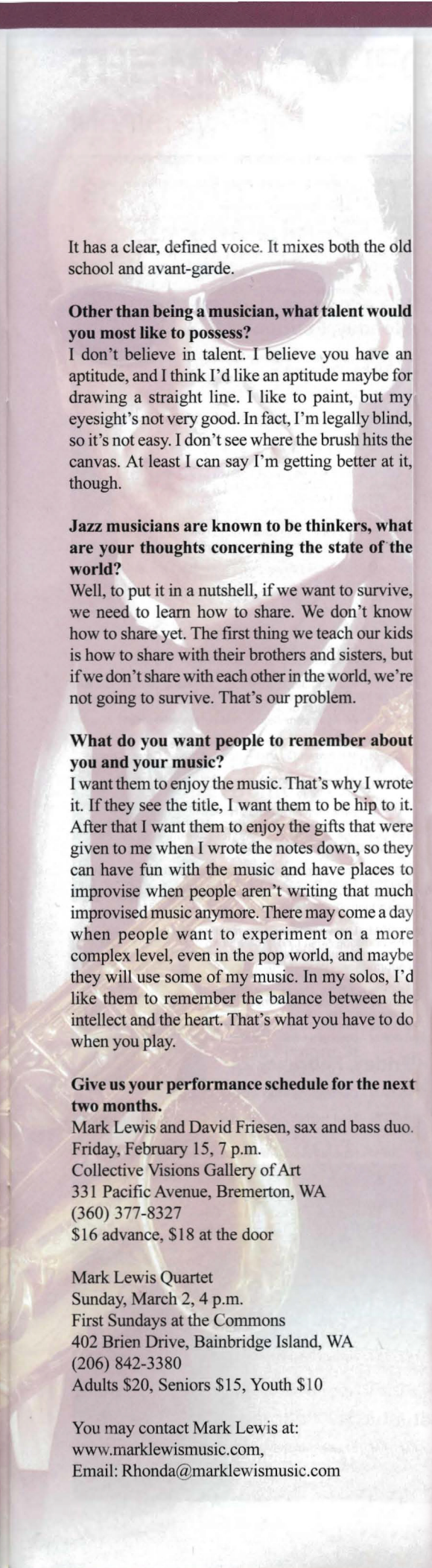
If you want to be a commercial musician, it's not wrong, but to strive for commercial success is not important. A real musician will strive for musical success. That's the most important thing. That's how serious the music is. That's how much dedication it takes.

What's unique about the Northwest jazz scene?

more fun because you have to use your mind more. You have to create at all times. You can change styles within a solo and refer to other styles within a solo.

Tell us about your most recent recording project.

Right now I'm working on a project that is just playing anything I want and recording it. When I get enough, I'll put it all together in a 60 minute CD. I'm not really concerned with what style or instruments are on there. I'm also finishing up other



It has a clear, defined voice. It mixes both the old school and avant-garde.

Other than being a musician, what talent would you most like to possess?

I don't believe in talent. I believe you have an aptitude, and I think I'd like an aptitude maybe for drawing a straight line. I like to paint, but my eyesight's not very good. In fact, I'm legally blind, so it's not easy. I don't see where the brush hits the canvas. At least I can say I'm getting better at it, though.

Jazz musicians are known to be thinkers, what are your thoughts concerning the state of the world?

Well, to put it in a nutshell, if we want to survive, we need to learn how to share. We don't know how to share yet. The first thing we teach our kids is how to share with their brothers and sisters, but if we don't share with each other in the world, we're not going to survive. That's our problem.

What do you want people to remember about you and your music?

I want them to enjoy the music. That's why I wrote it. If they see the title, I want them to be hip to it. After that I want them to enjoy the gifts that were given to me when I wrote the notes down, so they can have fun with the music and have places to improvise when people aren't writing that much improvised music anymore. There may come a day when people want to experiment on a more complex level, even in the pop world, and maybe they will use some of my music. In my solos, I'd like them to remember the balance between the intellect and the heart. That's what you have to do when you play.

Give us your performance schedule for the next two months.

Mark Lewis and David Friesen, sax and bass duo.
Friday, February 15, 7 p.m.
Collective Visions Gallery of Art
331 Pacific Avenue, Bremerton, WA
(360) 377-8327
\$16 advance, \$18 at the door

Mark Lewis Quartet
Sunday, March 2, 4 p.m.
First Sundays at the Commons
402 Brien Drive, Bainbridge Island, WA
(206) 842-3380
Adults \$20, Seniors \$15, Youth \$10

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