

# jazz AVENUES



BY STEVE MONROE

## A 'Live' landmark

Among the hundreds of jazz fans enjoying their standing-room-only places in the back of the Washington Convention Center ballroom, while Jimmy Cobb's band delivered some classic sets that night in September at the Congressional Black Caucus' annual jazz forum, was one tall neatly dressed gentleman just smiling and taking it all in.

Michael A. Thomas was quick to greet an old fan, however, and let him know he had his latest CDs for sale, the Michael Thomas Quintet's "Live at Twins Jazz" discs, volumes I and II.

He reached down into his backpack and pulled them out.

"Here you go man ... enjoy," said Thomas, and he autographed one of the CD covers with his trademark flowing signature, a style that is reflected in his regal trumpet sound and his band's "right now" feel for the music.

Indeed the "Live at Twins Jazz" recordings qualify as a landmark for local club recordings. It's a raucous – apart from a couple of sensitive, warmly done ballads – finger-popping set of two nights of Thomas and crew at the city's landmark U Street nightspot.

The quintet is Thomas on trumpet; Zach Graddy, tenor sax; Darius Scott, piano; Kent Miller, bass; and Frank Williams IV, drums. In celebrating the band's 10th anniversary, Thomas says of Twins, that the club was "specifically chosen because of its atmosphere and 'real folks'... patrons can feel relaxed enough to get into the music and still dance if so inclined."

So from the rousing "Mike's Blues" and "A Peck A Sec" on volume I of "Joe's Intro," to "Andrew Speaks" – featuring guest artist Andrew White on tenor sax – and "It Is What It Is" on volume II, the band and the crowd have a good time.

Thomas' spearing, melodic trumpet lines are in vintage form, Graddy is bluesy, funky and always swinging on sax, with Scott adding an elegant touch with his piano work over Williams' artful drum-work. Thomas and Miller shine together on the classic ballad "Candy," in particular, and Thomas is expertly melancholy on "I Remember Clifford."

Recorded and engineered by Ganntt Kushner, at



The quintet is featured on "Live at Twins Jazz" volumes I and II CDs.

Gizmo Recoding Studio in Silver Spring, the live sets area, according to Whitmore John's liner notes on the volume II disc, "This is Michael's fourth recording as an elder and the first time as just the musician/producer. Prior to that he played on, produced and engineered the recordings of his quintet in his basement studio."

However it came together, we listeners are the lucky ones, with each tune giving us a real feeling for these nights out at the club with a top jazz group.

## Ben's the Boss

Congratulations to our own Ben Williams, 24, who won the first place in October's Thelonious Monk International Jazz Bass Competition.

Williams, 24, a Duke Ellington School of the Arts and Michigan State University graduate, won a \$20,000 scholarship and a recording contract with Concord Music Group. Williams is a member of Blackout, Stefon Harris's hip-hop-influenced band.

Each finalist performed two pieces with a rhythm section featuring pianist Geoffrey Keezer and drummer Carl Allen, and was joined for their second piece by vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater. Williams performed Oscar Pettiford's "Tricotism" and Juan Tizol's "Caravan." Williams is to be in town this month for a date with Blackout, Nov. 14 at the Kennedy Center.

## Mid-Atlantic Jazz

And congratulations to Paul Carr, saxophonist,

bandleader, educator – and now festival impresario. Carr's Jazz Academy of Music has announced the launch of The Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival, to be held Feb. 19-21 at the Hilton Executive Meeting Center in Rockville. The Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival will reignite what was formerly known as The East Coast Jazz Festival, founded and produced for 15 years by vocalist and educator Ronnie Wells, until her untimely death in 2007.

The 2010 festival's lineup is to include performances by pianist Mulgrew Miller, saxophonist Bobby Watson, trumpeter Terrell Stafford, vocalist Janine Carter, drummer Lewis Nash and many more. ★

## November Highlights:

Christian McBride, Nov. 7-8, Blues Alley ... Sophie Millman, Nov. 9, Blues Alley ... Joe Sample, Nov. 12-15, Blues Alley ... Eric Byrd, A Ray Charles Tribute, Nov. 13, Westminster Church ... Lenny Robinson, Orrin Evans, Nov. 13-14, Bohemian Caverns ... Luis Faife, Nov. 13-14, Twins Jazz ... Stefon Harris and Blackout, Nov. 14, Kennedy Center ... Claudia Acuna, Nov. 17, Blues Alley ... Buck Hill & Trio, Nov. 20, Westminster Church ... James King Quartet, Nov. 20-21, Twins Jazz ... Lee Konitz Quartet, Nov. 21, Kennedy Center ... Bobby Felder Big Band, Westminster Church, Nov. 27.

## November Birthdays:

Lou Donaldson 1; Phil Woods 2; Arturo Sandoval 6; Hubert Laws 10; Ernestine Anderson 11; Sam Jones 12; Hampton Hayes, Idris Muhammad 13; W.C. Handy 16l Don Cherry 18; Coleman Hawkins 21; Teddy Wilson 24; Paul Desmond, Nat Adderley 25; Randy Brecker 27; Gato Barbieri 28; Billy Strayhorn 29.