

Local Jazz History

Young listeners - The missing Ingredient

Almost all who are familiar with today's jazz scene agree that the Boston area is rich with young as well as seasoned jazz performers. Unfortunately, almost all of those talented musicians have come to learn that there is a critical shortage of young jazz appreciators. The reasons for this are all too obvious: The parents of most of our young people were brought up on rock 'n' roll; music education in the public schools was one of the first victims of Proposition 2½; and the entertainment industry and virtually all commercial radio have focused on lowest-common-denominator marketing to protect their bottom lines.

It would make little sense establishing a Jazz Center on the waterfront without addressing the need to enlighten and educate a new generation of listeners and dancers. Therefore, efforts are being made to make the region's public schools major tenants in the Jazz Center.

Modeled after the Tsongas Industrial History Center in Lowell, Boston's Jazz Hall could be set up to welcome schoolchildren throughout the school year. And, it would be not just for the musically gifted. All would be exposed to the dance and fun of the music with the "Swing Era" as its theme.

During the tourist off-season, it would make sense for our waterfront hotels to offer discounted rates for out-of-state educators to bring their children to Boston, not only for an exposure to "Swing Era" history and the art of jazz but also for visits to the New England Aquarium, The Constitution and Freedom Trail, and the planned Immigration and Maritime museums, which will also skirt the East Boston waterfront.

There are some signs that the times are already changing for young adults, who are beginning to search for "real music" after discovering the shallow emptiness of the "new age", "soft", and "world" bastardizations of our American art form. The Kendrick Olivier's young energetic band is steadily building a young following in Cambridge, Brighton and Brookline and, word is, they have already earned a regular set at Scullar's Jazz Club. Meanwhile, swing dances are becoming a craze throughout America.

The message for young people to "get real" in their musical knowledge and experience can be tied to organizations whose interests could well be served by such an enterprise:

- The public school systems throughout the region.
- The Berklee College of Music, New England Conservatory, Boston Conservatory, the Harvard, MIT, BU and Northeastern jazz programs.
- WGBH, WICN, WHRB and other noncommercial music broadcasters.
- Concord, Brownstone and other recording companies that have been working with Boston-area jazz artists.
- The Sher Music Company, publisher of "The Real Book.."
- The Coca-Cola Company as it relates to the "Real Thing" theme.
- The potential benefits to Boston's waterfront hotels, restaurants, the convention center and tourist-oriented businesses are obvious.