

# SOUND BOARD



ERIC ZADAN

PHOTO BY KEVIN PASSMORE

## Lasting legacy

### Jazz students thrive at local studio

By Leslie Benson

When I was growing up in the suburbs, I was never a huge fan of jazz. Instead, I was the kid listening to my parents' collection of 1950s do-wop tapes and hippie-era vinyl. However, since breaking away from that routine, my musical tastes have expanded. I have a newfound respect for jazz, courtesy of the Jazz Arts Studio, a professional atmosphere in which budding musicians, many of whom are in their late teens, can study closely with one of the city's best jazz pianists and instructors, Eric Zadan. A professional-level establishment, the Jazz Arts Studio enables young people to nurture a love of jazz while honing their performance skills within a supportive environment.

"My first indoctrination to jazz was through Big Band jazz," Zadan said. In 1981, Zadan performed frequently at Gilly's with his Dynasty Big Band. During that time, he found inspiration from Clifford Brown, a predecessor of Miles Davis, pianist Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett and Oscar Peterson. Soon, he "became more oriented toward small groups, where improvisation was more the focus," and turned to performing in jazz ensembles. "As a pianist, it's a double-edged sword. You can play solo but there isn't as large a chance for interaction," Zadan said. "When I was younger, I moved toward jazz for the spontaneous interplay between musicians."

Zadan began his musical studies in 1963 at the tender age of 4. By the time he was 14, he was studying with Audley Wasson. "Audley had an intense amount of impact with an unrelenting passion for music," Zadan said. "He was an expressive

musician and teacher." While in high school, Zadan performed in a televised concert as a guest soloist with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. Frank Brown, director of jazz at the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, later instructed Zadan in jazz piano.

In the late 1970s, Zadan began his career in education. He taught jazz piano at the University of Dayton and at Sinclair Community College. In 1990, after one of his students won a state jazz competition, he decided to concentrate more on the process of training musicians. Zadan opened the Jazz Arts Studio in Kettering in 1995 and moved it to its current Dayton location the following year.

The Jazz Arts Studio curriculum revolves around private lessons, theory and improvisation classes, and combo and repertoire classes. Not limited just to pianists, the program also schools those who play jazz-oriented instruments such as bass, percussion, guitar, saxophone and trombone. According to Zadan, about one in three students who audition is accepted to the program.

"As is always the case, there are always those few people who pepper the landscape, get ignited in this and want to play," Zadan said. "The art form compels them. To move to a higher level, it's a question of efficiency, direction, and (it's) a constant, evolving process. Standards are very high in today's world."

According to Zadan's students, in order to succeed at the professional level, it takes organization, self-discipline, maturity and courtesy. For

their most recent repertoire class, held Sunday, Sept. 22, the students spent up to 30 hours rehearsing for their performances during a two-week time span.

"Eric is pushing us to be great players as well as great people," said pianist Tom Lipps, a student of Zadan's for seven years. "He teaches us not to settle for 'good enough.' He sets the bar just out of our reach."

As for the benefits of repertoire classes, Lipps added, "It provides us with a goal to shoot for, an actual deadline and performance experience."

Repertoire classes, usually held every six weeks, represent a stepping-stone in a student's studies. Although a relaxing and informative atmosphere, the performing student must prepare for an in-depth critique afterwards. However, the aspect of "students playing for students" allows musicians to express honed skills to others.

"It's one of the most nerve-wracking things in the world, but it prepares you for gigs. It's difficult to play in front of your peers, but they're all supportive and have all been through it," said bassist and pianist Lars Miller, a student of Zadan's for three years.

"When you work hard on something, it means a lot to you," added tenor saxophonist Matt Warner, a student of Zadan's for more than three years. "It makes you grow as a musician and as a person. To me, it's a series of experiences. You keep getting better each time."

Precise, complex and passionate ensemble and solo performances are common during repertoire

jazz, even when (it's performed) on stage, can become a backdrop for people's conversations," Zadan said. "I've seen a bit of a lack of respect for the art form. Dayton is too slim a market. Unfortunately, sometimes jazz can be an afterthought."

Despite the slim market, Zadan gives credit to Gilly's owner Jerry Gillotti for keeping the bar high.

"Gilly's is the premiere showcase for jazz," Zadan said. "He always has been a true fan, a lover of the art, and welcomed people to his shows. He's been a strong force of jazz in this community for a long time."

No stranger to the local scene, Zadan has performed live since his teens. In recent years, Zadan stopped performing a 40-week stint of gigs at the Pacchia Jazz Room after drummer Josiah Wolf moved to New York. "I was very close to (bassist) Ben (Freelove) and Josiah. It would not have been the same with his departure," Zadan explained.

During a series of concerts with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra in the early 1990s, Zadan played piano with Mel Torme. He also performed with Henry Mancini and many lesser-known musicians. "Dave Carpenter, a bassist I grew up with, is now on more than 200 CDs. We used to play a lot together in my early 20s."

Zadan opened 5th Avenue, a Dayton nightclub, in 1985 (now closed), which featured such artists as B.B. King and Doc Severinsen and has been performing for years with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra.

Although Zadan used to perform live nearly every night, education is his main focus now. "(Jazz) is my life; it's what I do everyday. To me, it means the opportunity to create and express (emotion) and foster that in others as well," Zadan said. "It's America's true art form. Jazz is essentially spontaneous composition. An audience member can witness a composer in action."

His devotion to making positive impacts in the lives of

young people is sincere. "The greatest achievements are seeing how they apply what they've learned in music and in life," Zadan said. "The best catalyst for growth is dissonance. I take students out of their (musical) comfort zones. Experiences here are integral to where you'll go next in life. You learn to pursue things with dedication. It changes the way you think about things."

*Any serious student proficient in jazz who is at least of high-school age is welcome to audition for training at the Jazz Arts Studio. Contact Eric Zadan at 223-0100 or visit [www.jazzartsstudio.com](http://www.jazzartsstudio.com). The Jazz Arts Studio is located in downtown Dayton at 211 S. Main St., Suite 940.*



PART OF ZADAN'S philosophy stresses repertoire and combo classes. Combo 1 is saxophonist Matt Warner, pianist Elliot Cardinaux, bassist Lars Miller and drummer Mike Minarcek.

classes. The musicianship level on display at these jazz workshops could easily stand up to the quality of performances at area venues that host jazz, if not surpass them. Unlike any recital, there is more discourse between students during these classes.

"A kinship forms after students work together," Zadan said. "When you work hard toward common goals with someone, you form a bond."

The next step after repertoire classes are jazz performance boards, during which students receive strenuous grading. "It's the crown jewel of what we do," Zadan said. Zadan's current students perform at such local jazz venues as the Pacchia Jazz Room in downtown Dayton and Crossroads in Beavercreek. "Too often is the case locally when