

Riffs

Jazz Ambassadors Honored:

Meridian International Center will celebrate the jazz musicians who took part in Cold War-era U.S. State Department tours through a photo exhibition at its Washington, D.C., gallery beginning on April 4. The organization is also planning a mid-April event with Dave Brubeck to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his 1958 State Department tour.

Details: meridian.org

Stomp in Big Easy: The seventh annual Ponderosa Stomp will take place April 29 and 30 at the House Of Blues in New Orleans. Syl Johnson, James Blood Ulmer, Eddie Bo, Zigaboo Modeliste and others are slated to perform.

Details: ponderosastomp.com



Loueke's New Direction: *Karibu*, the Blue Note debut from guitarist and vocalist Lionel Loueke, is due on March 25. Details: lionelloueke.com

Duke Signed: Keyboardist George Duke has signed a recording deal with Heads Up. His first disc for the label is slated for a September release.

Details: headsup.com

Cachao Collected: Bassist Israel "Cachao" Lopez's Havana-recorded descargas from 1957-'61 have been compiled on *Cachao Descargas: The Havana Sessions* (MVD Entertainment Group). Details: mvdb2b.com

Snow Recollections: Mark Miller's new book, *High Hat, Trumpet And Rhythm* (Mercury), recounts the life of singer and trumpeter Valaida Snow.

Details: themercurypress.ca

RIP, Carlos Valdéz: Percussionist Carlos "Patato" Valdéz, who played with the likes of Herbie Mann, died of respiratory failure in New York on Dec. 4. He was 81. Valdéz helped develop the tuneable congas.

Billy Martin (left), John Medeski and Chris Wood of Medeski Martin and Wood



Jazz Musicians Increase Focus on Youngest Possible Audience

During the past several years, rock and hip-hop musicians, often new parents themselves, have been creating a kind of family friendly music: Take away the toddler- and child-appropriate lyrics, and the compositions, arrangements and playing are solid enough for even the most discerning adult ears.

An equally welcome trend has developed in jazz, as artists either create jazz versions of children's "standards" or write music for children based on, or infused with, jazz elements. The former typically draws upon timeless tunes learned in elementary school or heard around the campfire. The latter often teaches concepts such as colors; musical ideas, including tempo; and jazz practice.

Greenfield's next family project, *Let's Go Everywhere* (Little Monster), is due out in early March on Dots & Lines. It features more jazz arrangements of classic children's songs but with new, environmentally conscious lyrics. "Rock-A-Bye Baby" is transformed into "Rock-A-Bye Rain Forest," for example.

Medeski Martin and Wood's music has long conveyed a childlike sense of wonder, according to the group's keyboardist, John Medeski.

"I hear people saying their kids love our music," Medeski said. "Since our music is already for kids, it was a matter of writing with that target audience in mind."

The band's *Let's Go Everywhere* (Little Monster) was released in early January and features MMW-esque originals and covers, with

vocal contributions by bassist Chris Wood and his brother, guitarist Oliver Wood.

Medeski also participated in the debut *Baby Loves Jazz Go Baby Go!* album, which was produced by Andy Blackman Hurwitz, *Baby Loves Disco* co-founder. Trumpeter Steve Bernstein served as the driving force on the disc as bandleader and arranger. Verve released the album in 2006, and Hurwitz penned a series of children's books starring cartoon characters such as pianist Duck Ellington and vocalist Elephant, all characters introduced on *Go Baby Go!* Each of those books came packaged with a CD recorded by a mostly different all-star group, and tracks from those were compiled and released last September on the two-disc, 40-track *Baby Loves Jazz Greatest Hits Volume 1 & 2* (Baby Loves Everything).

"I go to New York from Philadelphia once a week, and half of the time it's for the *Baby Loves Jazz* stuff," Hurwitz said. "I don't think it's ever peaked. People are still going to have kids."

Children's author and illustrator Darwyn Cooke and Brooks Dalby took his love of music, his experience with retailers and his knowledge of the local Nashville session musician scene to produce a jazz, jump-blues and boogie-woogie album, *Jazz & Swing For Kids* (The Tigers/RED), under the Genius + Love moniker. "I wanted to use Count Basie, Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong and Leadbelly as sources of inspiration for a kids' album that wouldn't drive their parents crazy," Dalby said.

Trombonist Doug Beavers' *Jazz, Baby!* (Origin) puts family favorites in a grand setting. He said that this disc was meant to tap into a burgeoning trend.

"[Co-Executive Producer] Bob Saul and I didn't know about any of the other stuff," Beavers said. "It was just an honest thing we were like, 'Let's just make some kids music for big band. How cool would that be?'"

—Yoshi