

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

CONCERT REVIEW: A new form in town

JOSEF WOODARD, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

February 22, 2012 5:55 AM

Saturday was good news day for jazz fans in the Santa Barbara County area, a crowd which has been under-served of late, in terms of the all-important live musical item. Alto saxist Lanny Morgan, one of the strong Los Angeles-based players for decades, was the featured guest of the night for a new series in town, the "Famous Jazz Artist Series," run by Cambrians Charlie and Sandi Shoemake, on vibes and voice, respectively, and the cause of stellar mainstream jazz was duly served.

All the pieces seemed in place on Saturday night in the nicely-acquitted Terrace Dinner Theater in Solvang, a room with a full-service stage and an accommodating ambience. The group settled in and launched this new local jazz entity — with luck and patronage — to the tune of "Green Dolphin Street." They ended two hours later with the balladic poise of "It Never Entered My Mind," one of several Rogers and Hart tunes cleanly sung by Mrs. Shoemake.

In fact, the new Solvang series is a logical extension of the Shoemakes' series which goes back more than a decade, and hundreds of shows in Cambria. The new Solvang limb of the series made possible by Ruth Hoover, an Angeleno transplant to the Santa Ynez Valley who once ran the Los Angeles jazz club Carmello's and who has been trying to get jazz going in the Valley for many years.

L.A. jazz connections ran strong here. Gifted vibist Mr. Shoemake mentioned that he played with drummer Steve Schaeffer in a weekly stint at the popular L.A. club Donte's in the '70s, and Mr. Morgan was a bandmate with Ms. Shoemake in Sy Zentner's big band more than 50 years ago, before the Shoemakes became a couple. Bassist Tony Dumas and pianist Joe Bagg are strong, first call jazz players from the L.A. area.

All in this group are fine players, individually and in ensemble form, with no rehearsal required in this "standards" mode gig. As Mr. Shoemake mentioned, his jazz series has included some 600 shows by now, and without a single rehearsal, due to the tricky logistics of bringing musicians in and out of town, far from the urban thicket.

Front and center, although never overstaying his welcome in the spotlight, was Mr. Morgan, now 77, and a veteran with a fleet but fluid bebop-informed style on his horn. He impressed with tunes such as Tad Dameron's "Good Bait," Charlie Parker's "Scrapple from the Apple" and a slow-then-fast version of "Secret Love." Mr. Morgan is one of those players respected in jazz circles whose wealth of work in film, TV, record dates and other studio work made his "day gig"

work part of the fabric of American mass public consciousness and collective memory.

That's all well and good, but the driving ethos of jazz, whatever the age, is what the players make happen in the here-and-now context of a live shows. On this night, Mr. Morgan and the other musicians cooked up some joyful, intelligent and probing jazz in a mainstream manner. It was an auspicious beginning for what hopefully will be a monthly jazz hang in Solvang.

email: life@newspress.com

All Content Copyright © 2012 Santa Barbara News-Press / Ampersand Publishing, LLC unless otherwise specified.