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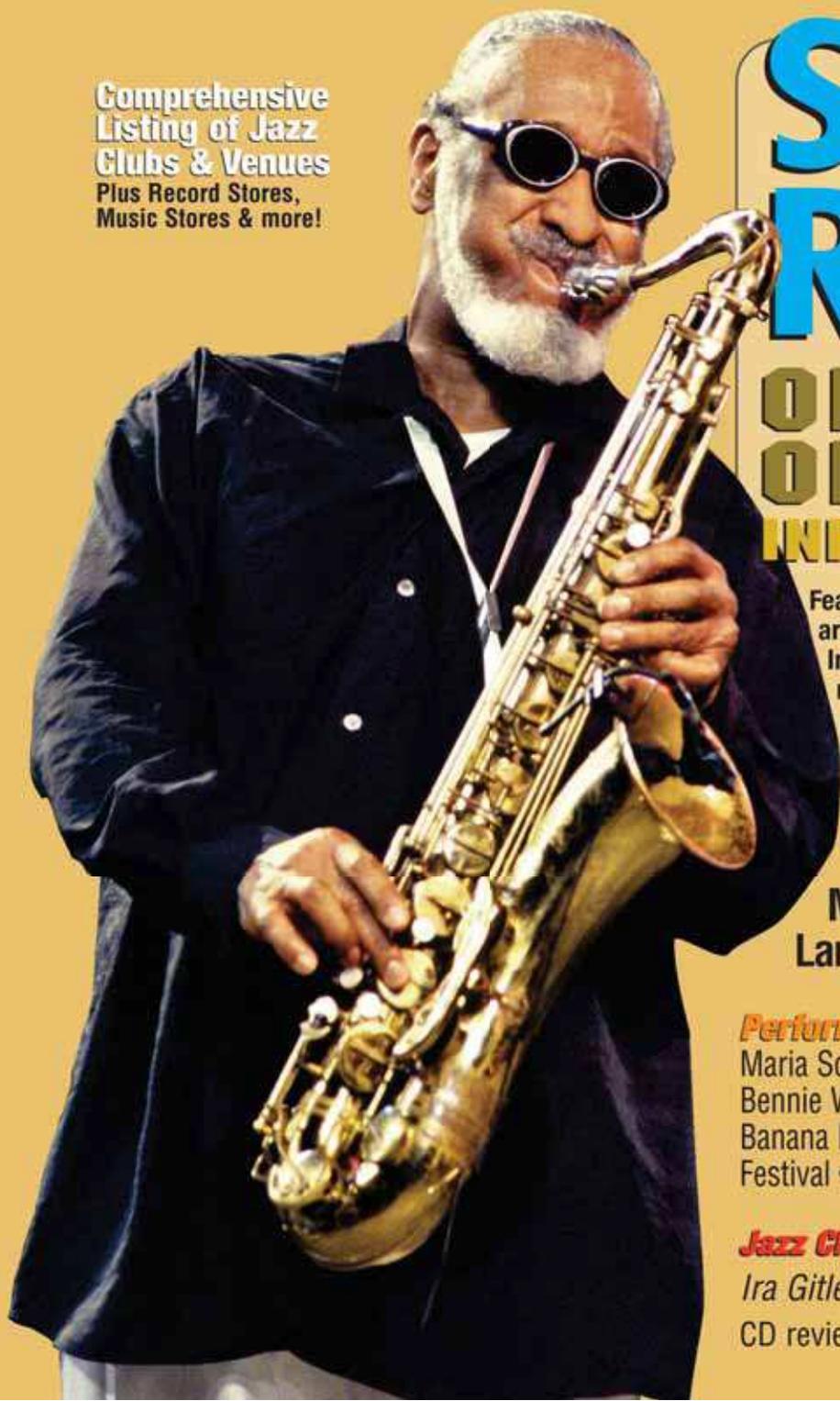
JAZZ IMPROV **FREE** New York Jazz Guide & Directory Serving New York, New Jersey and Connecticut

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Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam Live at Nuyorican Poets Café November 22, 2005

By Mercy Monet

If you love banana pudding, and love jazz, then you need to be at the next Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam, hosted by Rome Neal at the Nuyorican Poets Café in the East Village, 236 East 3rd Street, between Avenues B&C. Rome Neal is not only the host, but also whips up the meanest banana pudding you've ever tasted. It's his gift to the jazz fans and performers who attend the monthly jam sessions.

Neal came up with the idea of producing and hosting a jazz jam while going out and attending several jazz jams. He did this during his research efforts to develop and perfect his one man show, "Monk," written by Mr. Laurence Holder. Neal plays the man himself, the late, great, Thelonious Monk. As an actor, Rome has achieved critical acclaim and rave reviews for his portrayal of the great Monk. Neal wanted to bring back the excitement and creative energy of the 1940s and 1950s. During those times there were an abundance of clubs, venues and performing spaces where musicians and actors could go and express themselves, and further develop their creative skills. He had the perfect space to do this in: the Nuyorican Poets Café, where he is the Artistic Director and a performer himself. There, he is actively involved in theatre, producing, directing, acting and singing. Rome Neal has received five AUDELCO Awards and an OBIE Grant, with the Café's founder, Miquel Algarin, a veteran and accomplished actor and producer in his own right. Rome's acting abilities and artistic endeavors have also garnered him a Monarch Merit Award for his outstanding contributions in the New York Theatre.

The recent Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam on November 22nd started off with a bang! The fabulous trio of pianist John DiMartino graced the stage, with Norico Ueada on bass and Mark Taylor on drums. They proceeded to entertain the audience with swinging tunes and the melodious sounds of beautiful classic jazz standards. After anointing the atmosphere with sweet, relaxing and exciting sounds of joy, the stage was set for the jazz jam. Rome got up and sang, danced and recited some poetry before playing host to the artists who had come to contribute their artistic expressions. A line-up of singers, instrumentalists, and poets came up to the stage and entertained the audience with their talents.

Rome has been successfully producing and hosting the Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam for three years, with the help of sponsors who believes in his efforts of keeping the art of jazz and live music alive. It's been a hard journey, but through hard work, perseverance and persistence, Mr. Neal has made it happen, and it continues to

grow. Neal welcomes all aspiring artists to attend. He reaches out to the young students from local colleges, who don't get an opportunity to express their creative skills and endeavors, including developing their original works in progress. In doing so, young people are exposed to live performances and live jazz. It's a great idea and sorely needed.

Every person who attends is invited to get a helping of his delicioso banana pudding, and after sampling some of it, they head back to the bar for more! It's a great place to sit back and relax, eat some pudding, drink and enjoy the live performances and music.

The next upcoming Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam on Tuesday, December 27th, will feature the great Bob Cunningham and his trio with Greg Bandy on drums and Ms. Bertha Hope on piano. The Jam starts at 9:00pm, but there will be a special show at 7:00pm featuring Bill Lee and his Mo' Betta Quintet. Mr. Bill Lee has composed musical scores for his son, Spike Lee's, feature films, including, *Mo' Betta Blues*, *She's Gotta Have It*, *Do the Right Thing* and *School Daze*.

If you don't get a chance to catch that one, don't miss the first Banana Puddin' Jazz Jam for 2006, on Tuesday, January 31st at 9:00pm, which will include the fantastic Donald Smith, jazz pianist, and his trio with Bernice Brooks on drums, and Dave "Jake" Jacobs on bass. They will be bebopping and swingin' hard! There will also be a special screening at 7:00pm, of Rome Neal's one man show "Monk." Of course, you will also be treated to his scrumptious banana pudding.

I also want to mention that during the jam session, the audience participates in writing a group poem which is recited at the end of the jam session by a member of the audience while accompanied by the house band. An excerpt from the group poem created while I was there said it all: "Love the jazz, love the pudding, love the musicians, love the space, can't think of a better way to fill my time and space, the music, the artists, love that banana pudding!"

Django Reinhardt New York Festival Live at Birdland November 10, 2005

PERSONNEL: Dorado Schmitt, lead guitar and violin; Angelo Debarre, electric guitar; Ludovic Beier, accordion and accordina; Pierre Blanchard, violin; Brian Torff, bass; Samson Schmitt, rhythm guitar; Gordon Lane, drums; Lew Tabackin, tenor saxophone; Roger Kellaway, piano; David Langlois, washboard.

By Dan Adler

The annual Django Reinhardt Festival at Birdland in NY is now celebrating its sixth consecutive year. Playing to packed houses for an entire week, the all-star cast of French gypsy musicians is joined nightly by some of the great local American players, and the results are always extremely satisfying.

The evening opened with producer Pat Phillips giving some background on the Festival and on the players. Pat and Ettore Stratta are jointly responsible for putting together this spectacular festival and have now expanded its scope to other major US cities.

The music opened with the great Angelo Debarre playing a solo guitar piece. Angelo, who still lives in a gypsy caravan in France, surprised us all by playing a hand-made electric guitar rather than the more common acoustic guitar associate with Django's early years. Angelo's awesome technique, sensitivity and authentic gypsy feel were immediately apparent, and one of my table-mates described the experience as "visceral."

The entire program was well thought out, building the excitement slowly by introducing the musicians in various small groupings. After the solo piece, Angelo was joined by American bass player (and the group's musical director and English announcer) Brian Torff as well as Samson Schmitt (Dorado's son) on rhythm guitar and Ludovic Beier on accordion. Beier is a phenomenal musical talent who plays in the gypsy tradition and also dabbles in other musical settings.

The second half of the two-hour set featured the second guitar virtuoso on the program, Dorado Schmitt, in a variety of settings. First he played in trio, and then he was joined by violinist Pierre Blanchard, whose playing had traditional Grappelli elements, as well as some traces of Jean Luc Ponty. Their rendition of Django's classic ballad "Manoir de mes Rêves" was beautiful and very poignant. They followed with a great Dorado Schmitt original samba, which sounded very modern.

The two American guests on the program were Lew Tabackin on tenor saxophone and Roger Kellaway on piano. Tabackin joined the group for several numbers including "What is This Thing Called Love?"—with the entire group quoting "Hot House," proving that they are well-versed in bebop as well as swing. Roger Kellaway opened his portion of the program with a long solo-piano introduction to "Honeysuckle Rose" where he brought together shades of Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson blended with his own brand of musical magic.

To top off the set, all performers joined in for two gypsy jazz classics: "Minor Swing" and "Dark Eyes" with a dazzling display of virtuosity and intensity that provided a great climax to the set.

The most noticeable aspect of a great gypsy jazz performance such as this is that it seems to appeal to a very wide audience in a powerful way that few other forms of jazz can achieve.