

Where Magazine Interview

1. how did the three of you get together? how would you describe yourselves and the music you play.

MY BASSIST, BILLY, I HEARD ABOUT BEFORE I MOVED HERE, FROM HIS FORMER BANDLEADER IN HONG KONG WHO SOMETIMES PLAYED PIANO FOR ME (DAVE PACKER). EDMOND I MET AT THE REGENT BAR WHERE HE PLAYED with THE DON GOMEZ TRIO. IN FACT, DURING THE SIX MONTHS IT TOOK ME TO GET A REGULAR GIG HERE, WHAT I DID WAS TO DRIVE FROM MY CHANGI HOME ALMOST NIGHTLY TO "SIT IN" FOR FREE FUN WITH TWO BANDS, ONE BILLY PLAYED IN AND THE OTHER EDMOND PLAYED IN. WHEN I GOT THE JOB AT RAFFLES I NEEDED AN UPRIGHT BASSIST AND BILLY WANTED TO JOIN, I ASKED EDMOND TO JOIN THE BAND WHEN MY FORMER DRUMMER QUIT SUDDENLY. I'M BLESSED TO HAVE THEM BOTH.

WE PLAY SWINGING JAZZ STANDARDS, BOSSA NOVA, SOME BEBOP AND BLUES, ORIGINALS, AND REQUESTS.

2. what are you favourite styles of jazz?

DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT STYLE YOU CALL IT, IT GETS RATHER CONFUSING WITH SO MANY DIFFERENT LABELS WHICH MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. BUT I LIKE THE BANDS OF ART BLAKEY AND JOHN COLTRANE IN THE EARLY 60'S, HORACE SILVERS MUSIC OF THE 50/60'S, SOME OF MILES' GROUPS, AND MANY OTHER THINGS. IT'S EASIER PERHAPS TO SAY I LIKE THE MAJOR STYLISTS' OF THE MUSIC, LIKE THOSE ABOVE AND PEPPER ADAMS, WES, JARRETT, DEJONETTE, HAYNES, HERBIE, BARRY HARRIS, WYNTON KELLY, ROLAND KIRK, MONK, MINGUS, ETC...

THESE GUYS TRANSCEND LABELS, IT'S JUST GREAT MUSIC!

3. how is it like playing jazz in asia/singapore as compared to other places?

WELL WE'RE PLAYIN' IT OFTEN COMPARED WITH NOT PLAYIN' IT MUCH! AND WE GET PAID FOR IT!

ONE BIG THING THAT TAKES GETTING USED TO COMPARED WITH THE STATES, IS THE LACK OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSE FROM THE AUDIENCE. ASIANS ARE LESS LIKELY TO SHOW EMOTION, STIFF UPPER LIP AND ALL THAT, BUT IN THE STATES, THE AUDIENCE CAN GET VERY INVOLVED WITH THEIR BODIES AND MOUTHS, SHOWING BOTH THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR THE MUSIC OR EVEN THEIR DISTASTE.

4. who or what inspired you guys to pick up jazz? why the particular instrument each of you play? who/what influenced yr music?

MY MOTHER THOUGHT PIANO SHOULD BE THE INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE, BUT IN MY YOUTHFUL IGNORANCE, I THOUGHT PIANO WAS FOR SISSY'S. I KNEW THAT I WANTED TO PLAY DRUMS! BUT MY STEPFATHER, IN HIS NOT SO YOUTHFUL IGNORANCE, SAID, NO WAY WAS HE GOING TO HAVE ME PRACTICING SUCH A LOUD INSTRUMENT INSTRUMENT IN THE HOUSE. SO GUITAR IT WAS. EARLY FAVORITES WERE HENDRIX AND RITCHIE BLACKMORE.

5. talk about interesting places or people you guys met, played with or played for.

WELL, THERE'S THE TIME ONSTAGE RICHIE COLE SHOCKED ME BY LIGHTING A MATCH UNDER MY ASS TO INDICATE I WAS 'BURNIN'! THEN THERE WAS THE TIME THAT JIMMY RANEY SPENT A WEEK LIVING IN MY HOUSE WHILE WE PLAYED TOGETHER AT NIGHT, HE DRANK SO MUCH COFFEE THAT HE STAYED UP ALL MORNING AFTER THE GIG TALKING ABOUT MOZART, PAINTERS AND NOVELISTS'. A VERY WORLDLY ARTIST.

THE TIME I GOT SLIDE HAMPTON TO PLAY FOR A JAZZ FESTIVAL I ORGANIZED - I'M STILL IN AWE OF HIS TOTAL MUSICALITY, DEDICATION, AND MASTERY, AND SUCH A HUMBLE, GENTLE MAN FOR SUCH A MUSICAL GIANT. I'VE SHARED OTHER INTERESTING PERSONAL TIMES WITH PIANIST JOANNE BRACKEEN, CURTIS FULLER, AND HERB ELLIS. I COULD GO ON ALL DAY TELLING STORIES... SOME WOULD BE EDITED (SCENSORED) FOR SINGAPOREAN AUDIENCES THOUGH.

6. what would you guys be if you didn't become jazz musicians?

for greg, I'VE THOUGHT I'D MAKE A GOOD FASHION DESIGNER OR PHOTOGRAPHER. AN ENTREPRENEUR OF SORTS? A MONK OR MINISTER, PERHAPS, WHO KNOWS? IT'S A STUPID QUESTION. I LIKE THE CHARACTER IN SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S NOVEL 'THE RAZOR'S EDGE', WHEN ASKED BY SOCIALITES WHAT HE DOES, HE RESPONDS, "I LOAF". but seriously, I HAVE BEEN A PROFESSIONAL CHEF AND SALESMAN IN THE PAST.

7. tell me a bit about the "greg chako swingtet" and "world beat".

WORLD BEAT IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE BANDS, I JUST LOVE BEING SURROUNDED BY GOOD DRUMMERS AND LOTS OF PERCUSSION. RHYTHMN IS BY FAR THE NUMBER ONE ELEMENT OF MUSIC, AND IN THIS BAND I CAN, AS A SOLOIST, REALLY EXPERIMENT WITH THE BEAT. IT'S A HIGH ENERGY GROOVING SHOW BAND AND WE JUST JAM

THE SWINGTET CONCERT I DID ON JUNE 20TH AT CHIJMES, WAS A SPECIAL BAND PLAYING SOME COMPLEX COMPOSITIONS NEVER BEFORE PLAYED HERE. I HOPE THERE'S MORE OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY WITH THIS GROUP AGAIN, BECAUSE IT'S SO CHALLENGING AND REFRESHING TO PLAY THIS MUSIC WHICH IS SO DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE ALL PLAY ON OUR NIGHTLY GIGS. IF THE JUNE 20TH BAND DOES PLAY ELSEWHERE IN THE FUTURE I'LL RENAME IT, BECAUSE I HAVE ANOTHER BAND CALLED THE SWINGTET, WHICH DOES ONLY 30/40'S SWING MUSIC SUITABLE FOR LINDY HOP DANCING. THAT BAND JUST FINISHED A VIDEO WITH THE JITTERBUGS SWINGAPORE WICH IS AVAILABLE NOW.

8. yr email's signature says: "One cannot become a guitarist if he has not bathed in the fountain of culture" - Agustin Barrios Mangore. what does that mean?

I THINK IT MEANS ONE MUST IMMERSE ONESELF WILLINGLY INTO THE MULTI-CULTURAL MELTING POT, AND BE CLEANSED OF PREJUDICE AND PRE-JUDGEMENT. MANGORE BY THE WAY, IS A GIANT VIRTUOSO OF GUITAR AND COMPOSITION, SOMETIMES CALLED IN SPANISH, THE "WILD MAN FROM THE JUNGLES OF PARAGUAY". LOTS MORE TO BE SAID OF HIM.

ACTUALLY THAT SIGNATURE IS BUT ONE OF A FEW, MAYBE IT'S TIME TO CHANGE IT? HERE'S A NEW ONE FOR YOU: "I'D RATHER BE DIVING".

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