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Jazz pianist Trompeter is a one-man industry

August 28, 2008

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By MYRNA PETLICKI Contributor

Jim Trompeter has been captivated by music all his life. "I was so lucky to have a grandmother, Irene Webster, who played jazz piano. I used to sit and listen to her. My mother was a pianist and my father was a disc jockey, so music was a big part of our house in Wilmette."

That early exposure had a lasting effect on the Wilmette resident, who has carved a successful career as a jazz pianist and composer. His current musical activities sound like enough work to keep a half-dozen people busy.

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Performing at the Chicago Jazz Fest, writing music for "Oprah" and a new documentary film, teaching, putting out a CD and composing music for video games keeps Wilmette pianist Jim Trompeter busy.

JIM TROMPETER

1:10-2:10 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 31 at the Chicago Jazz Festival, Jazz on Jackson Stage, Jackson Blvd. between Columbus and Lake Shore Dr., Chicago. Free. Visit www.chicagोजazzfestival.us and www.jimtrompeter.com.

To start with, he is preparing for a solo piano performance on Sunday, Aug. 31 at the Chicago Jazz Festival. Then there's a CD to promote, recorded live with his quintet at The Green Mill, where his group frequently performs. Add to that a steady gig writing music for the "Oprah" show, a composing project for a new documentary, a faculty position at Roosevelt University teaching jazz piano and jazz arranging, and a booming sideline as a commercial jingle writer. Did we mention his full-time day job composing video game music?

Trompeter is particularly excited about his upcoming solo turn at the Chicago Jazz Festival. "I've played there with other people, but to be headlining and doing solo piano presents an interesting opportunity and a challenge," Trompeter said. "The pianos they always have are so beautiful. I'll look out and see the skyscrapers. It's a unique experience."

His selections will include "This is New," "You Go to my Head," "Donna Lee" and "Smile," plus several other numbers.

Grist from the Mill

The enthusiastic musician is also looking forward to the upcoming release of "Jim Trompeter Quintet Live at the Green Mill," which was recorded in October. Among the eight selections are "Stella by Starlight" and "Polka Dots and Moonbeams." A CD release party is planned at Chicago's Green Mill on Oct. 24 and 25.

Growing up, Trompeter studied jazz piano with local teachers Alan Swain and his wife, Jennifer. He continued his studies at the University of Miami, where he earned a bachelor's degree in jazz piano performance and a master's degree in jazz arranging and orchestration.

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"I love to perform. Unfortunately, I don't get to do it very much because I'm so busy with other aspects of doing music," Trompeter said.

He finds those other aspects equally exciting, though. One recent project has been scoring "Prisoner of Her Past," a documentary by Howard Reich about his mother's reliving her childhood in Eastern Europe during World War II. It is being directed by Gordon Quinn, executive director and co-founder of Kartemquin Films.

Piano pool

"We chose [Trompeter] out of a pool of people that we were looking at. We're very impressed with his work," Quinn said. "We're using jazz as the main musical theme in this film."

Quinn described the working relationship with Trompeter as "a back-and-forth creative process. He comes into the editing room. We'll play him a scene with temp music in and then talk a little bit about why we think it's working. He'll go off and compose a couple of different things. We listen to them and we'll lay them into the scene." The film should be ready for release in November.

Regarding that day job, Trompeter declared, "I'm very lucky. I was asked to become a composer at WMS, an amazing company, working on products for casinos." As a senior composer for the past four years, he is assigned a game and creates all the music and sound effects.

Trompeter's list of activities sounds overwhelming, but he relishes every one of them. "To have the opportunities in the music business is really rare and special," he said. Listen to his music or, better yet, talk with Trompeter, and you will agree that he is rare and special, too.

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