

Music @ St. Alban's

Sunday Concerts in Davidson

Concert Notes – October 24, 2021
Earle Cheshire-Wood

John Lewis

Pianist, composer, and founder of the Modern Jazz Quartet, John Lewis entwined classical and jazz. Growing up learning piano classics and hearing his aunt's jazz tunes - and later being exposed to jazz in New York, Lewis synthesized the two genres with precision and poise. Performed today is his jazz standard *Afternoon in Paris*, the *Concorde* and *Vendome* fugues recalling Bach with their interweaving individual melodies (hence the quartet's later released *Blues on Bach* album of '74). On the album, *Django*, there is the "gypsy jazz" title track sorrowfully saluting Romani guitarist Django Reinhardt who had passed the year prior to recording. Another tribute tune of the album you can anticipate is the gracefully energetic *Delaunay's Dilemma*, dedicated to the French jazz critic.

Milton Jackson

Milt "Bags" Jackson was the vibraphonist of the Modern Jazz Quartet known for his improvisation, blues, and swung solos. His namesake composition, *Bag's Groove*, was popularized by Miles Davis's slower adaptation of Jackson's faster bebop tempo. *Blues in C Minor* is featured on the *Blues on Bach* album and offers a more relaxed sound with its toying, rubato tempo. Milt's *Bluesology*, along with *Bag's Groove*, became jazz standards.

Softly As In a Morning Sunrise

Softly As In a Morning Sunrise is on the same album as *Concorde*, but was originally written by Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein II for an operetta. It was first composed as a heartbroken tango and was ironically sung jovially in the film version of *The New Moon* operetta. Since then, artists including John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Frank Sinatra have put their own spins on the work.

All the Things You Are

Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein wrote this piece for the 1939 musical *Very Warm for May*. Its chorus has caught the eye of jazz musicians because of its solid chorus and tricky modulations that challenge improvisors like Milt Jackson. Hammerstein's praising and romantic lyrics often accompany the song, as they did in the 1944 film, and mirror the common summer love story of the early '40s.

Summertime

In winter of 1933, George Gershwin started composing *Summertime* attempting to emulate the African-American folk music of the time. DuBose Heyward's 1925 novel *Porgy* served as the song's inspiration. However, despite its minor key, the melody curiously resembles the African-American spiritual,

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child. Activist and singer Paul Robeson recorded *Motherless Child* in the 1930s and listeners can easily replace its words with the lyrics of *Summertime*. Credit is complicated further once realizing *Summertime*'s resemblance to the Ukrainian lullaby *Pipi-pipipee*.

La Ronde

La ronde is the second of André Caplet's *Cinq Ballades françaises* for voice and piano that were published in 1921. But, Caplet is most widely known for his orchestrations of his close friend Claude Debussy's pieces. He composed in the impressionist style of his time, pressured into music by his impoverished family. *La Ronde*'s fluctuating tonality is just part of what makes it so engaging. Caplet used text painting, or composing to reflect the literal meaning of lyrics, which allowed for more dramatic interpretations from musicians.

Autumn in New York

The Modern Jazz Quartet's cover of this tune appears on the *Django* album, but the original composer was Vernon Duke. Yet another jazz standard, *Autumn in New York* was a poem written with homesickness while Duke was in Connecticut. He put it to music, not expecting it to be a hit. In fact, the song was neglected until it was performed on the radio by the Harry James and Charlie Spivak big bands.