

Talking and Bebopping with Ron Davis

Taking in the sounds of Toronto Jewish Music Week with the famous jazz artist.

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"I'm a Jew, I play jazz -- Jewish Jazz." jokes Ron Davis, the first of many artists to participate in Toronto Jewish Music Week performances.

According to the internationally acclaimed composer, the Toronto and Toronto Jewish jazz scene is one of the best right now. "Toronto is a jazz haven."

Davis played beautiful renditions of various Jewish jazz artists, which brought a warm and jovial tone to the room. His presence was magnetic and his comic stories definitely held up with the audience.

With pieces like "It Might As Well Be Spring" and the fun bebop sounds of Sunny Rollins, I ventured to close my eyes and daydream a black-and-white silent movie in a swanky jazz joint from the 1940s. His music takes you to a different place and you're no

longer watching him perform, you're feeling the performance.

Davis also treated us with compositions of his own work and shares a delightful story regarding his new album, *My Mother's Father's Song*.

His mother, Alice, used to tell him a story about her father's restaurant in Warsaw, Poland, which was a popular spot in the 1930s for politicians. She claimed it was so well-known that they had written a song about it. However, she couldn't remember anything about the piece and no family members were able to confirm details, which ultimately led him to believe that the story was probably fictitious. Some years later at the Polish pavilion at a fair, the story finally became a reality and the song was rediscovered. Naturally, Davis immediately took the opportunity to learn to play, "Bal u Grubego Joska" or "Party at Fat Joe's," paying significant homage to his family.

Lucky for us, after telling the story he played the emotional and historically rich song. I was moved by the journey that this piece of art had taken before fate brought it Davis and his family.

After an incredible hour of music and jazz-ucation (jazz-education), I had the opportunity to sit down one-on-one with the performer.

On inspiration:

"It varies, it varies extremely. There are songs that are written in passion, in anger, songs written straight from the head, or songs written just from basic pleasure. But I will say this -- there's a line by Phillip Roth in the book *Every Man*, and it says 'Amateurs worry about inspiration, the rest of us get up in the morning and just go to work.' It's such a part of my fabric that

I can't possibly separate inspiration and actual composing or playing."

On advice for young artists:

"There are two parts to this answer, the second part is the good news. The bad news is that before you go into the arts as a profession [realize] that it's a business, and when you're in the music business there can often be far more business than music. The good news is this, if you're prepared to do the work and you love your art enough to devote your life to it [suffer the same slings and arrows as anybody suffers], and still find a place to make your art, it's the best thing in the world."