

THE ARTS



PHOTOS COURTESY GENE MAHON

From left: Tom Stoddart, Erik Wendelken, Jake Vohs and Andy Bullington. The quartet will be playing two sets of live jazz every Wednesday night, beginning this week.

Nantucket's little jazz renaissance

Local musicians rush to fill the demand for live jazz and blues

BY MARLI GUZZETTA
INDEPENDENT ARTS EDITOR

Whether you like it or not, there is a part of your brain that only jazz understands. It is the part that teeters crookedly to a great idea, the part that needs both excitement and relaxation at approximately 11 a.m. on a sunny Sunday morning.

This summer, that part of your brain should be happy to learn that live jazz is having a bit of a moment on Nantucket, with the biggest ensembles playing two dinner sets at the Rose and Crown on Wednesday night and a looser set on Friday evening (6 – 9 p.m.) at the Muse.

Rick Ulmer, owner of the Rose and Crown, said his reasons for bringing live jazz to his restaurant and bar on Wednesday nights are “purely selfish.” \

“Jazz allows for interpretation in a way that’s completely unique and isn’t replicated by any other form of music,” said Ulmer, who loves Coltrane, Monk and Miles. “In a live jazz show, the music takes on the personality and the mood of the people who are playing, more than it does in other forms of music.”

The people who are playing, in this case, are Tom Stoddart, Andy Bullington, Erik Wendelken and Jake Vohs — year-round musicians who consider the R&C gig a unique opportunity.

“I think it’s incredible,” Bullington said.

“The music couldn’t be better, and I think it’s awesome that the Rose and Crown is trying to bring in more families to listen to music earlier in the evening.”

Stoddart agreed that the time of the sets is key: “It’s great getting some different music on the island at accessible times,” he said.

Playing Chicago-style jazz and blues from the late ’40s and ’50s, the quartet will pull from names like Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon, Horace Silver and Lee Morgan, as well as “Little Walter” Jacobs, Freddie King and Muddy Waters. They’ll be playing instruments from the suspenders-and-handkerchief days of shack jazz — including a 1953 arch-top guitar and a stand-up bass.

The only jazz club on Nantucket to-date was Gene Mahon’s Roadhouse — a venue that was an icon in its day (late 70s and early ’80s) and that brought in some of the best jazz and blues players on the Eastern seaboard.

“I am very excited that there is so much support for this kind of music and hope that it will open the possibility of bringing in more entertainment of this type from off island,” Stoddart said.

Ulmer said he’s wanted to bring regular jazz and blues nights to the Rose and Crown ever since he bought it. “It’s something that’s been missing on the island,” he said. “But on the selfish side, I just love jazz and blues. I would do it seven nights a week, if I could.”

EARTH GOD THE BLUES QUARTET PERFORMING JAZZ AND BLUES

Featuring Andy Bullington on guitar, Erik Wendelken on upright bass, Jake Vohs on drums and Tom Stoddart on harmonica and sax; spotlighting jazz and blues from the late 40s and 50s, with jazz drawn from such artists as Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon, Horace Silver and Lee Morgan.

Wednesdays, 6 – 8 p.m., Rose and Crown

FAT CAT JAZZ AND BLUES QUARTET

Featuring Jason Sullivan on guitar, Erik Wendelken on upright bass, Jake Vohs on drums and Tom Stoddart on harmonica and sax; showcasing a wide format of Jazz and blues, from Sonnyboy Williamson to Grover Washington, Jr.

Fridays, 6 – 9 p.m., The Muse

BLUE MOOD GUITAR AND HARMONICA DUO

Featuring Andy Bullington on guitar and Tom Stoddart on harmonica; focusing on ’50s blues from Chicago, Texas and Arkansas, like Little Walter Jacobs, Big Walter Horton, Jimmy Reed, Jimmy Rogers, Magic Sam, Freddie King and more.

Mondays, 6 – 9 p.m., Jetties Beach