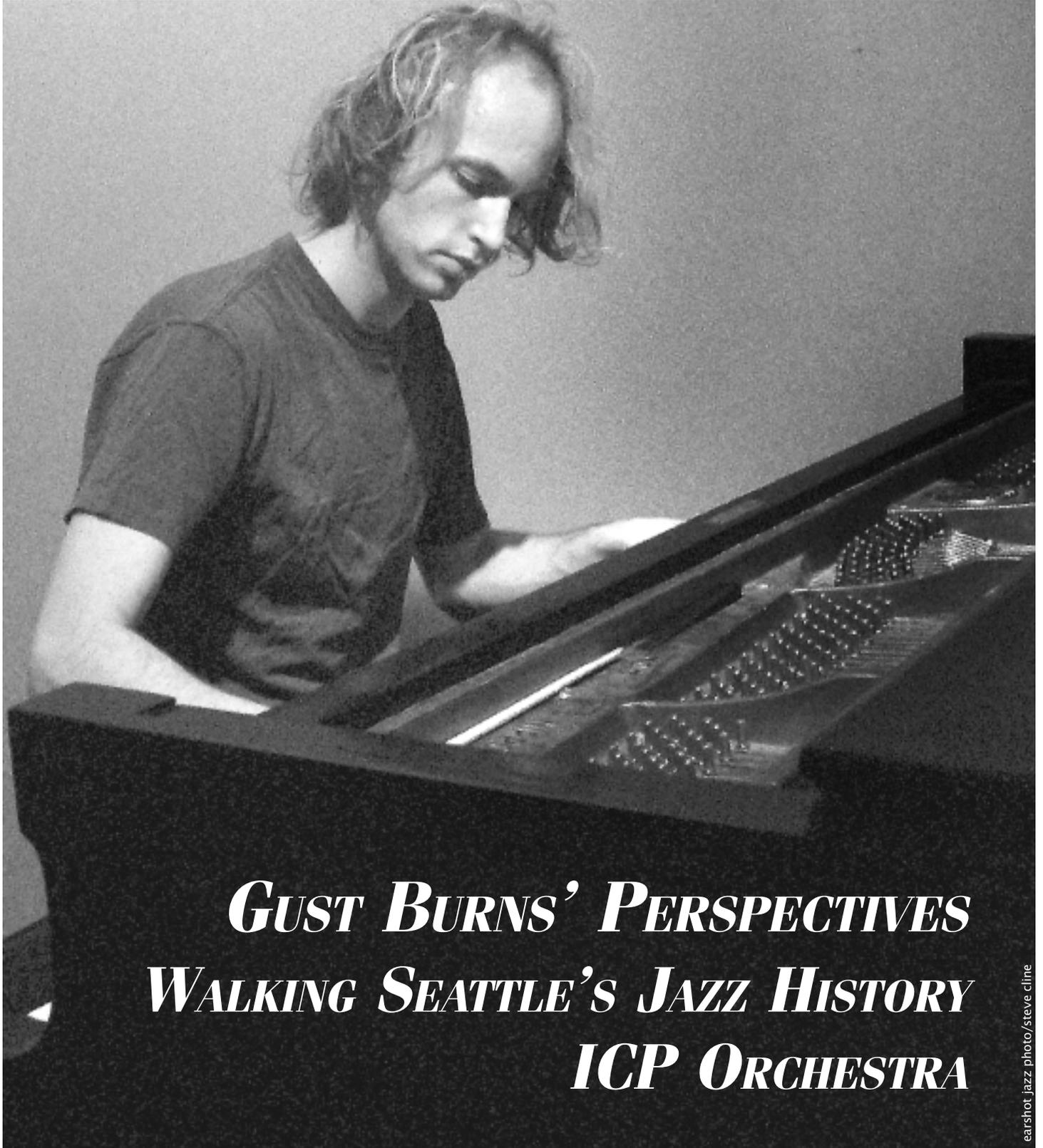


**A Mirror
and Focus
for the
Jazz
Community**

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GUST BURNS' PERSPECTIVES
WALKING SEATTLE'S JAZZ HISTORY
ICP ORCHESTRA

Gust Burns: Building a Free Improv Community

BY TODD MATTHEWS

If you are a fan of free improvised music, and happen to live in Seattle, your evenings are probably booked. Interested in checking out three or four free improv shows per week? No problem. Seattle's free improv scene is charged right now. The Monktrail Creative Music Concern (a collective of free improvisers) have maintained a six-month residency at Coffee Messiah, and have received the recognition of some established institutions recently (the group performs regularly at the Baltic Room, The Rendezvous, and Alibi Room; moreover, the collective recently picked up honors from Earshot Jazz magazine: a Golden Ear award for Emerging Artist/Group of 2002). The Seattle Improvised Music Festival celebrated its 18th event last month, drawing performers from as far away as Germany and Canada. Polestar Music Gallery is in its sophomore year, drawing larger crowds than ever. And individual free improvisers such as Adam Diller, Gregory Reynolds, Bob Reese, and Greg Sinibaldi are working tirelessly to bring free improv venues and performances to the area.

Another major force behind this scene is the pianist and composer Gust Burns. Since arriving in Seattle, Burns has worked with the top area free improvisers, and carved out several serial events worth noting. Last November, he created the After Ears Festival, which ran parallel to the Earshot Jazz Festival. He also joined the board of the Seattle Improvised Music Festival, where he helped select this year's line-up of performers. He currently produces the *Sound of the Brush* series — a weekly, Monday night showcase of free improvisers. "Something like this needed to be happening," says Burns over tea at Bauhaus on Capitol Hill. "Different people playing together and making new connections. That's the main reason this series was started."

Burns was born in 1978 in Tacoma, Washington. He began piano lessons in the fourth grade and studied jazz with Tacoma/Seattle pianist Craig Hoyer in

high school. Burns attended the University of Washington, where he studied jazz piano with Marc Seales. He later transferred to Western Washington University (WWU) in Bellingham, where he spent two years studying improvisation and composition with Canadian virtuoso pianist Paul Plimley. In December 2000, after a six-month stay in the Bay Area (where he collaborated with bassist Damon Smith), Burns returned to the Northwest. "I just started trying to make stuff happen," he explains. "Getting things done on a weekly basis — that wasn't really happening when I came here."

What exactly is free-improvised music?

That question will exist as long as this music is created. Is it avant-garde jazz? Is it experimental music? Is it fusion of some

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kind? The inability to easily categorize this music has largely resulted in its marginalized status, and has left countless free improvisers defending their art.

"I'm not totally decided on this issue," Burns says, attempting to define the music. "So many people use the terms 'improvised music' or 'improv' to refer to a certain genre of music. I think that is a mistake. Within the fields of musics that use improvisation, either exclusively or integrally as a basis for creation, there are a wide varieties of approaches, theories, methods, actions, and sounds — far more varieties than can be contained in any one genre."

Indeed, the vocabulary that many im-

provisers are dealing with includes areas of jazz, the free jazz of the '60s, classical music, 20th century avant-garde, and the sentinels of free improvisation — musicians such as Eddie Prévost, Evan Parker, Cecil Taylor, Derek Bailey, and Jamie Muir.

"What is free improvised music?" Burns adds. "It's a method. Free improvisation is a method of making music. It's not idiomatic. It doesn't follow a set of rules or guidelines."

Perhaps more important than *defining* the music is *creating* the music. The integration and combination of improv in compositions is what most interest Burns. "I'm looking for ways to use improvisation in composition — or vice versa, I guess — in ways that work," he says, commenting on his songwriting process. "For the most part, [I totally] eschew the head-chorus-head, unless it's an interesting variation, and actually allows some integral part of the composition to exist because of the improvisation. The improvisation supplies material to the composition. People have been working with this, but it hasn't been explored to its full potential."

Burns is currently in the process of recording new music on a series of CDs he will be producing through the summer: one CD per month on his newly purchased 1926 Yamaha grand piano. The limited edition discs will appear in hand-made cases, complete with original artwork, at a cost of \$40 for all six discs. Burns's fans started receiving the discs last month.

"All the musicians involved are just donating their time," he says. The CDs will feature solo, duo, trio and large group arrangements. "It's a lot of fun for me."

In March, Burns, along with Earshot Jazz, will kick off a new series, called *Prospettiva Plural*, at the Center on Contemporary Art (CoCA). The series will allow audiences to see different musicians coming from different perspectives with the same instrument.

See Burns, next page

New Music Series to Showcase Generations, Perspectives

BY PETER MONAGHAN

Prospettiva Plural

Sunday, March 16, 4pm
Center on Contemporary Art
1420 11th Ave (between Pike & Union)
\$8 donation

Too rarely do various generations of jazz come together for frank, open-minded encounters. “Especially,” says pianist Gust Burns, “in Seattle, where there’s pretty much absolutely no communication between people who think of themselves as straight-ahead, and free improvisers.”

In his latest presenting project, which gets under way this month, Burns will begin to remedy that. A relative newcomer to the city who has already taken the initiative to start a variety of regular and occasional gatherings of improvisers, he now presents, in collaboration with Earshot Jazz and CoCA (Center of Contemporary Art), a series of Sunday-afternoon performances by improvisers playing the same instrument but hailing from different parts of jazz’s historic and stylistic spectrums.

In the first installment of the series of concerts (which will take place every third Sunday of the month, at 4pm) Burns will present sets by himself, his former teacher Craig Hoyer, and Wayne Horvitz – a lineup that promises not just variety but high-quality playing. Bringing together two or three different audience groups is not just a way to capitalize on their numbers, says Burns. More importantly, “it’s about trying to emphasize the continuity between the different players, instead of focusing on differences and borders,” he says.

Another unusual aspect of the concerts is that most of them will present solo performances. The April 20 concert will feature tenor saxophonists. On May 18, Burns will bend the solo-performance rule by presenting piano-based duos.

Gust Burns

(See cover story)

Craig Hoyer

The Tacoma veteran has played piano and organ since age five. Initially, he

learned keyboard and harmony by ear watching his parents. He studied at Whitman College, Berklee College, and the U.S. School of Music in Virginia, as well as privately with Gary Peacock, Michael Longo, Jerome Gray, and others. He has performed with Woody Shaw, Stanley Turrentine, Randy Brecker, Perry Robinson, Roswell Rudd, the Seattle Symphony, and Steve Allen, and on Christopher Young’s movie scores for *The Gift* and the upcoming *Devil* and *Daniel Webster* and other films. He has arranged for the Spectrum Dance show “Voices of Jazz, Danced”, and the upcoming stage musical, “Bucket of Blood.”

In the Seattle area he recorded and performed with Bert Wilson’s adventurous band, *Rebirth*, for 16 years, as well as with Greta Matassa, Jay Thomas, Michael Powers, Mark Smason, Fred Radke & the Harry James Orchestra, HB Radke & the Jet City Swingers, Andrienne Wilson, Chuck Metcalf, Stephanie Porter, Becca Christel, and others.

He views as one of his best accomplishments his being able to pursue a career in creative music without having to travel outside the Seattle area while his 13 year-old daughter Hilary has been growing up.

Wayne Horvitz

This versatile leader is without doubt one of the most positive things ever to happen to jazz and jazz-related music in Seattle. Horvitz has led a variety of outstanding bands, from his 1980s New York combo, *The President*, through such Seattle favorites as *Pigpen*, *4+1 Ensemble*, and acoustic, electric, and electro-acoustic versions of his riveting quartet, *Zony Mash*.

Through those projects, and a great generosity of spirit, he has mentored a whole generation of younger Seattle players. Like his frequent collaborator, guitarist Bill Frisell, his compositions are marked by an exquisite sense of melody and emotion that draws not just from jazz, but from the whole palette of American musical forms, all seamlessly incorporated. Of his piano playing, the prestigious British

monthly, *The Wire*, said: “Horvitz is economical yet lyrical, never venturing far from the strong melodic hooks which characterize his compositions, but constantly working small surprises. An irresistible antidote to gray days.”

Horvitz has traveled the world with his music, playing with many leading lights of the new-jazz world, including Bill Frisell, Butch Morris, Bobby Previte, John Zorn, and Fred Frith. He has completed commissions from the NEA, *Meet The Composer*, *Kronos String Quartet*, *Seattle Chamber Players*, and others, and has collaborated with many choreographers, filmmakers, and theater producers (see www.waynehorvitz.com). He is currently working on a large-scale project about the union icon, Joe Hill, with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Burns, from previous page

“I am interested in the idea of regionalism — in building a musical community that will develop its own aesthetic perspective and attitude,” comments Burns. “This is more and more important as the world becomes more connected, and there is more of a blur of information and a blur of acquaintances and connections within the world in general, and the arts and music worldwide. The notion of a musical community becomes important. That musical community includes musicians and audience members.”

Burns’s contribution to the scene will afford area residents the opportunity to experience free improvised music and form their own definitions of the music. Free improv as a means for musical enlightenment? Perhaps. Burns adds, “One of the main powers of this music is the ability to make people think about different issues.”

Gust Burns will be performing a special solo piano concert at the Center on Contemporary Arts (CoCA), along with Wayne Horvitz and Craig Hoyer, on Sunday, March 16, at 3:00 pm CoCA is located at 1420 11th Avenue in Capitol Hill.