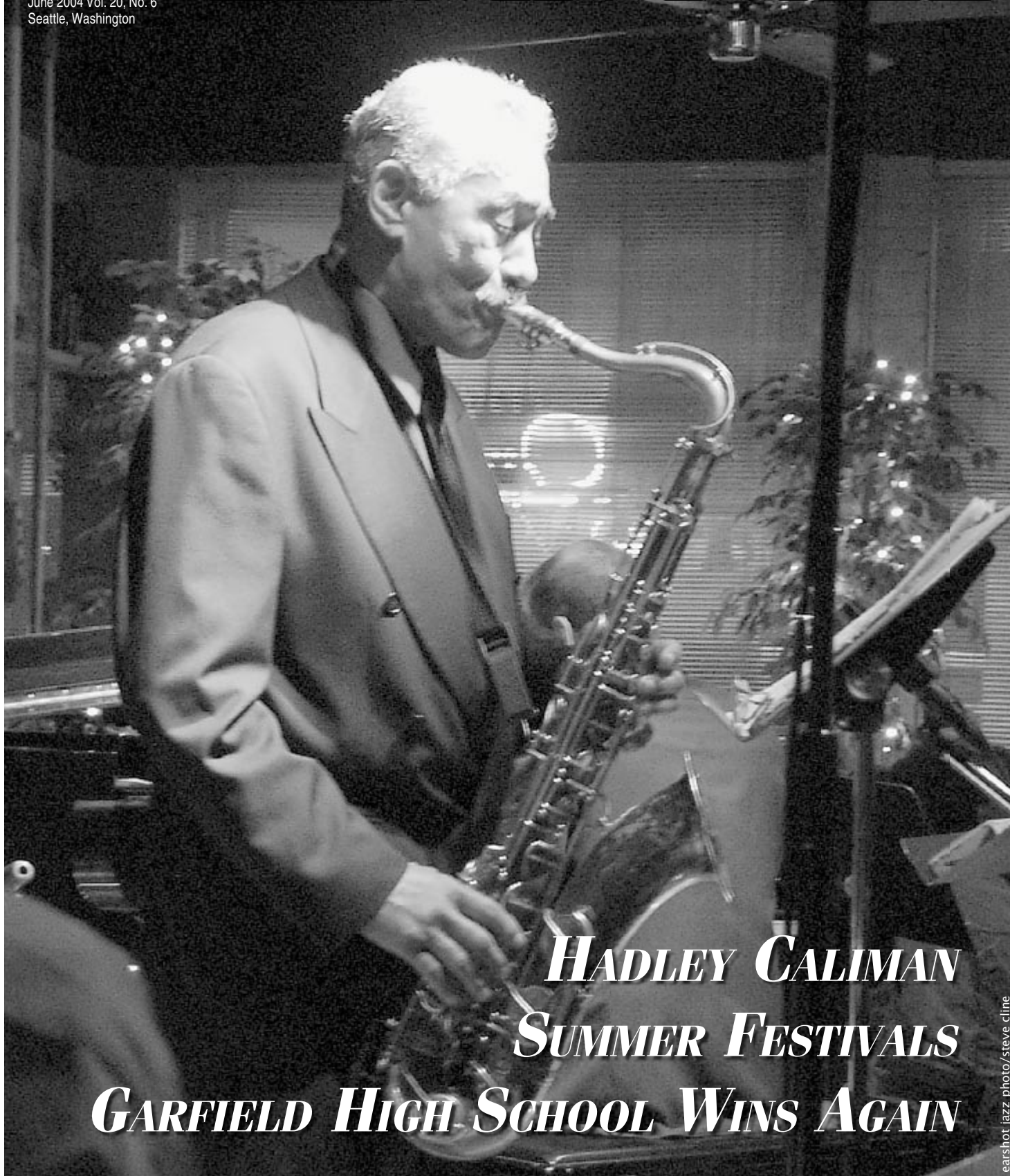


*A Mirror
and Focus
for the Jazz
Community*

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EARSHOT JAZZ



*HADLEY CALIMAN
SUMMER FESTIVALS
GARFIELD HIGH SCHOOL WINS AGAIN*

earshot jazz photo/steve cline

Hadley Caliman's Survival Skills

BY TODD MATTHEWS

One Saturday evening last January, the Hadley Caliman Quartet was wrapping up its first set at Tula's restaurant and nightclub in downtown Seattle. Caliman, a tenor saxophonist, had just led the group through a spirited set of Bebop standards that was easily familiar, yet charged enough to keep the roster of expert musicians — Jeff Johnson on the bass, Randy Halberstadt at the piano, and Byron Vannoy behind the drums — creatively challenged and inspired. As Caliman exited the stage, Halberstadt grabbed a microphone. "Ladies and gentleman," he announced, "there is a saxophonist here tonight who is turning 72 years old." Halberstadt pointed to Caliman. A moment later, a waiter appeared from the club's kitchen carrying a large birthday cake marked with glowing candles.

Caliman was surprised by the gesture.

The crowd applauded and cheered.

The evening was remarkable for several reasons.

At seventy-two years old, Caliman is hardly slowing down. The January set would last well after midnight. The show would be followed by performances at the Seattle Art Museum in February, The Triple Door in March, monthly appearances at Tula's, and a series of performance dates that would send him back and forth between Seattle and San Francisco. Moreover, Caliman's responsibilities in the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra (SRJO) recently expanded, particularly after the passing of Don Lanphere (a veteran of the early-1940s New York Bop scene) last fall. And Caliman had spent the later part of 2003 in the studio with his quartet, recording his first album as a leader after nearly two decades.

The evening was also remarkable in the context of Caliman's storied career: he learned jazz in the late 1940s in clubs that lined Los Angeles's Central Avenue...



formed a friendship and mentoring partnership with Dexter Gordon that lasted right up until Gordon's death in 1990... nearly killed his jazz career due to drug addiction and incarceration... found a musical redemption of sorts in the rock-and-roll genre during the 1970s (specifically as a sideman with Carlos Santana and the Grateful Dead)... and settled into teaching jazz at Cornish College of the Arts (he retired in 2003 after twenty years on the faculty).

The Tula's performance in January was a reminder for the artist and the audience of just how much an individual can experience over the course of a lifetime, how many setbacks and accomplishments one

can live through. Caliman endured seven decades of arguably unequaled challenges (kicking a drug addiction, serving time in prison) and triumphs (performing with the likes of Gordon, Freddie Hubbard, Earl Hines, Elvin Jones, Bobby Hutcherson and Eddie Henderson). The audience that night was treated to what truly amounted to a living legend — that title is thrown around in jazz a lot, but Caliman is the real deal — in full form. It was unclear that night which camp had the better story to tell: the concertgoer fortunate to see Caliman perform, or Caliman himself.

Several months later, speaking with Caliman near his home in Poulsbo,

Washington, he was reflective. "I'm lucky," he explained. "Maybe God is answering my prayers now. I know that he does answer prayers for me. It's just been me. If I could have just gotten it right, it would have been cool. He was doing his job, I just kept screwing up and misjudging." Caliman paused. "I've still got a long ways to go. I want to play forever. That's the main business at hand."

THEY CALLED HIM 'LITTLE DEX'

Although Caliman was born in Idabel, Oklahoma in 1932, he is so closely associated with the early Bebop scene in Los Angeles that it's easy to think of Southern California as his birthplace. L.A.'s Central Avenue clubs (the Cotton Club, Club Alabam, The Downbeat, Club Araby, Club Finale) first opened Caliman's eyes to jazz. The studios in nearby Hollywood were including jazz in films and on recordings. The predominantly African American high schools in South Central Los Angeles boasted small big band programs with a number of talented young musicians. At Jefferson, Caliman's high school, an anonymous donor provided tubas and saxophones. An instructor was hired and a big band was born. Caliman joined that big band (along with another tenor saxophonist, Wilbur Brown) and learned charts by Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

The high school band was only *part* of Caliman's education in jazz. The clubs and its touring musicians helped foster his musical interest. "When I was a kid at that age," recalls Caliman, "it was nothing to see musicians live. Duke Ellington? Count Basie? Lionel Hampton? You got the chance to see the guys and know them. There's a band that Eddie Vinson used to play with — The Cleanheads. Every time they came to town, I saw that band. I knew the guys in the band."

Another important influence on Caliman was the great tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon. Caliman's family lived on the same street as Gordon's. The young saxophonist had listened to his records in high school, and emulated the lanky, gifted Gordon. "Everyone was trying to sound like Dexter or Lucky Thompson back then," says Caliman. "I had all Dexter's records." Caliman wasn't

shy. He introduced himself to Gordon — 4 years his senior — and they connected. Gordon sometimes borrowed Caliman's horn. "That's how I really got to know him," he adds. "I had the same kind of saxophone that he had." In one instance, Gordon had dropped his saxophone, damaging the instrument. He visited Caliman and asked if he could borrow his horn. "Of course!" Caliman recalls, laughing. "I thought maybe some notes would stick up in there!"

The connection was made. Gordon provided instruction to Caliman. Caliman, in turn, became known as "Little Dex" around the Central Avenue scene. Unfortunately, the pair had something else in common: both musicians were junkies. Caliman's Bebop career was starting to take off. He was performing at clubs around Los Angeles, and touring with various combos and ensembles. Cocaine, heroin, and crime however, were bigger influences than Bebop. In the early-1950s, Caliman would find himself in prison alongside his mentor and idol — Dexter Gordon.

A CAREER NEARLY DERAILED BY CRIME AND ADDICTION

Caliman's first run-in with the law was in the 1950s. By his own admission, Caliman (along with his girlfriend at the time) burglarized an office in Los Angeles, stole the company's checkbook, and began forging checks in order to pay for their drug addiction.

The police were soon onto Caliman and his companion.

The pair fled to Idabel, Oklahoma then moved to Cincinnati (his girlfriend's hometown). Her father was the top juvenile officer in the city, and helped Caliman find a job delivering flowers. Shortly thereafter, her father learned about their run-in with the Los Angeles law enforcement, and Caliman was offered a choice. "Her father told me, 'I'll help you anyway you want,'" Caliman recalls. "You can run or you can turn yourself in."

Caliman turned himself over to the authorities. The pair was flown back to Los Angeles and thrown in jail. She was



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See Caliman, page 10

Johnson. “The guy played exactly like Charlie Parker,” Caliman recalls, clearly in awe and still amazed by the musician. “This guy was self-taught. He played out of the side of his mouth, he couldn’t read a note, but he could play exactly like Charlie Parker. We would go down to the yard and play. I learned a lot of stuff in prison. Nothing about technique or tone or armature or finger position — just blowing. Just making a loud sound.”

Caliman was returned to Chino shortly before his release. He joined Gordon, Roy Porter, Honsey Matthews, and other jazz musicians. Caliman and Gordon would walk the yard and talk about music. A teacher from Pomona College taught the inmates dictation, theory, and even some classical music. “I tried to play the clarinet,” he says (he would later use that instrument on recordings with Carlos Santana during the 1970s, in addition to his own recordings). “Dex tried to play the flute. We just did different stuff. And then we would have jam sessions.”

Caliman was eventually released from prison. But things were hardly any easier. “Prison turned out to be a stigma,” says Caliman. “You were dead. ‘Oh, yeah, I’m a trustworthy person. I just got out of jail. I can get a good job.’ No. It was an economic squeeze. If you came out of prison, the only job was being a jazz musician. As a jazz musician, the environment was really bad for someone with an addiction. So it might be better if you got yourself a straight job. Don’t play music anymore.”

Quitting music was not an option. Kicking his drug addiction was equally as challenging. Caliman’s choice was both difficult and mature. It was a choice that would also turn his life around and rescue his jazz career. “I started paying attention to the horn,” he says, frankly. “I realized that drugs were keeping me from the horn. I was through with that [stuff]. If there was a room full of drugs, I didn’t want any of it. It was hard to turn it around, but it was the last straw. That was it. I wanted to play my horn. I wanted to play my saxophone and stay out of jail.”

STARTING OVER AGAIN

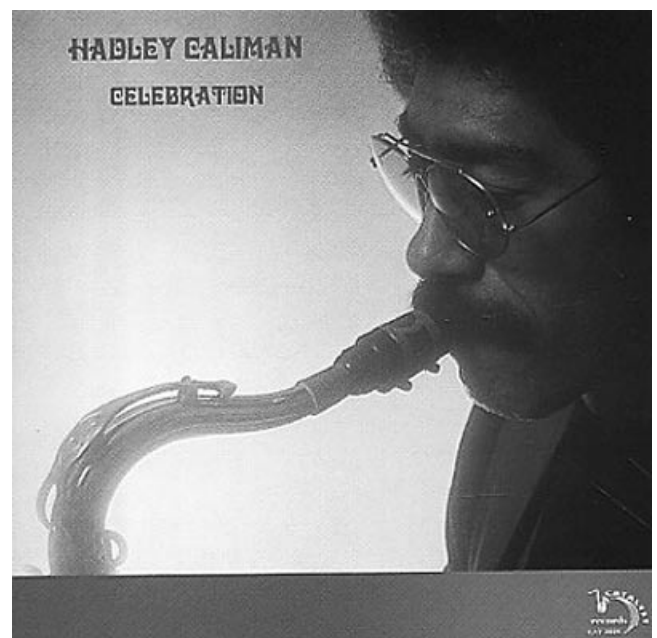
Caliman began to network with other musicians in Los Angeles. He went to Sunday jam sessions. He hooked up with Bobby Hutcherson, performing at a gig six nights a week for nearly three years. He also made a living working at recording sessions. He performed at casuals and dances. Anything to keep him away from drugs.

A phone call from Gerald Wilson also helped. Walter Benton had quit Wilson’s big band, and Caliman was offered the spot. He headed to Salt Lake City with the group. “It was a totally different thing,” says Caliman. “It really encouraged me. I had lots of solo space, and Gerald really liked me.”

A similar phone call from Louis Gaska, inviting Caliman to play with Mongo Santamaria, provided more opportunities. Gaska had kicked Bobby Capers out of the group, and he needed a tenor horn. Caliman joined the group and performed for a month at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas, a month at the El Matador in San Francisco, several years at various clubs in New York City, and a long recording stint in Philadelphia.

Caliman eventually quit the band and returned to Los Angeles, where he recorded with Leonard Feather, Joe Pass, Joe Harris, and others. Caliman also spent the 1970s recording with rock musicians. He recorded a number of sessions (and subsequently toured) with Carlos Santana and The Grateful Dead. “There was so much money on the rock and roll side,” says Caliman. “It was phenomenal.”

Caliman had turned things around. He had a solid professional career. Most



importantly, he recorded four albums as a composer and bandleader: *Hadley Caliman* (1971), *Iapteus* (1972), *Projecting* (1975) and *Celebration* (1977). Prior to these recordings, much of Caliman’s studio work consisted of side projects with other musicians. Caliman’s albums were different. He wrote most of the songs, and his soloing abilities were punctuated. The first two albums are on vinyl only (and collector’s items for hardcore jazz fans). The other albums were re-released on compact disc in 2003 by Catalyst Re-

See Caliman, next page



photo by Jim Wilke

Hadley Caliman (pictured standing to left of piano) will appear with the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra on June 12 at Nordstrom Recital Hall in Seattle and June 13 at the Kirkland Performance Center. Caliman will also appear at Tula's on Sunday afternoon, June 8 with Reggie Goings and on Friday, June 25 with his own quartet.

cords. *Projecting* consists of seven original tunes (five written by Caliman, the majority Latin-inspired) and features Hotep Cecil Barnard on the piano, Kenny Jenkins on the bass, and Brent Rampone on the drums. *Celebration* features Barnard again on the piano, David Williams on the bass, and the drummer Elvin Jones (a musician most famously associated with John Coltrane, Gil Evans, and McCoy Tyner). Again, the majority of tunes are originals. "Presenting Mr. Jones" is a tune written by Caliman specifically for Jones. And Caliman and Jones perform "Two For T" — a song they co-wrote. Caliman also spends equal time on tenor saxophone and flute throughout the tracks.

The liner notes (written by Zan Stewart of Jazz Radio KBCA) for *Celebration* capture Caliman's mood and moment at the time:

Hadley Caliman, woodwind artist and composer, is a gentleman of spirit, tenacity and dedication. After years of making concessions to the world of commercial music in order to survive, he has emerged with a powerful philosophy towards his life and his music. The music and the people, they come first now. He

[is] working with people who appreciate his style and compositions. The point seems to be that the man is at home in his universe.

LIFE IN WASHINGTON STATE

In 1980, Caliman and his then-girlfriend moved to Washington State. They landed in the town of Cathlamet (his girlfriend had family there), located along the Lewis & Clark Trail. He spent some time looking for students to teach, but otherwise had very little success as a jazz musician. "If you want to lose your momentum as a jazz player," says Caliman, "move to a little country town like Cathlamet and teach. Nobody knows who you are." A local country bar wanted to include jazz on its music lineup. The owner asked Caliman to arrange for the musicians. "I didn't know who to hire. The first band was pretty disastrous. They were all locals. It was like 'Waiting For Guffman.'"

Caliman was also performing at gigs in Portland. And he started looking to Seattle for work. He introduced himself to Julian Priester — an instructor at Cornish College of the Arts — who offered

See Caliman, page 15

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8pm set:

What Remains: A Requiem/concerto for Guitar (2004)

Tom Baker-fretless guitar

9:15pm set:

Me More Real (2004)

Stuart Dempster-didjeridu, temple bell

The Beauty of Unfamiliar Things

Sheri Cohen-movement with music by Matthew Sperry

Elegie

Ian Rashkin with string ensemble

Improvisation

Lori Goldson-cello

Susie Kozawa-found instruments

10:30pm set:

Lament

Christian Asplund-harmonium, viola

Tom Baker-fretless guitar

Stuart Dempster-trombone, didjeridu

Greg Campbell-percussion, voice

Joyful Mourn

Wally Shoup-saxophone

Construction 1

Christain Asplund with Ian Rashkin

Matthew, Can You Sperry Me Again?

Stuart Dempster-trombone

other performers

Midnight set:

Metaphone Sounding by Dave Knott

Caliman, from page 12

Caliman a substitute teaching position. That position later turned into a full-time teaching job. He retired in 2003.

Caliman presently divides his time between SRJO, his own quintet, and a number of performances in San Francisco (with musicians he has worked with for nearly thirty years).

"I really like the SRJO," he says. "It's forcing me to read music again. And the camaraderie is good, too. I had seen them, but I didn't know them. I heard Jim Wilke playing one of our songs on the radio yesterday, and it sounded good. That sax section sounded good."

He is most excited about the quintet

he leads. The group entered the studio last fall, recording seven tracks, including: "That Old Black Magic," "Delilah," "Close Your Eyes," "Linda," "You Leave Me Breathless," and "Soul Train." Those tunes are performed regularly at the group's performances. The result is amazing. During a show at The Triple Door earlier this year, Caliman kicked the evening off with "Commencia" — a jumpy, fast-paced Latin tune that gave the audience a jolt. He also introduced the song "Linda" — a ballad (written for his wife) that floated and dipped in melodic beauty.

"Playing with Hadley is very physical," says the group's drummer Byron Vannoy. "He's from the old school of driving Bebop, and it's very physical stuff. It's a workout with him every time. The guy is seventy-two years old, and he will run you into the ground if you don't rise to his thing. He's a wonderful musician and a great person, and he's got a lot of life. There's a spirit in this certain generation of jazz musicians that, I hate to say it, I don't see it in a lot of generations younger than them."

"He is the sweetest person," adds Linda, Caliman's wife. "In all that he has been through in all of his life, he is untainted. It's a spirit. The spirit has remained intact. He's not been jaded or been cynical by all that he has seen."

Caliman really enjoys each performance. The magic that can happen between musicians is his goal. Rather than trying to control the musicians and their performances, Caliman is often standing in the corner between solos, clapping along with the audience when he hears what he likes. True, he is the star and headliner. But he also knows how to pick his musicians and concede the stage. And his quartet has a signature Caliman sound that speaks to experience, talent, and improvisational excellence.

As of this writing, Caliman's new album is stalled. The engineer recently changed studios. Caliman would like to record some additional tracks and find a record label, but he needs to find another engineer, book the studio time, and schedule the musicians. He remains undeterred. He's confident that the album will be completed and released. "I'm play-

ing better," he says. He's not bragging. A musician like Caliman doesn't need to brag: his body of work speaks for itself. "If you listen to those old recordings, there's no comparison. And the thing is, I wasn't playing all that bad before. I'm just playing better than ever now."

Vancouver, from page 13

The improvisational band incorporates tinges of rock, techno, and other styles, all to good effect. (See, also, July 4)

Elsewhere, **Kiran Ahluwalia** sings jazz-inflected Punjabi folk songs (Performance Works, 9pm, \$15). She performs ghazal love lyrics, from an ancient improvisatory tradition still vibrant in India, Turkey, and other countries. With **Rez Abbasi** (guitar), **Ashok Bidaye** (harmonium), and **Ravi Naimpally** (tablas).

Sunday July 4

On the festival's final day, one of Canada's finest, **Michael Blake**, returns. His **Blake Tartare** plays for an hour in the afternoon (Festival Hall Stage, 2:15), and then appears on a Blake double bill in the evening (Vancouver East Cultural Centre, 8pm, \$19), where he also is with impressive and musically highly progressive Vancouver 17-piece band, **Hard Rubber Orchestra**, which has premiered three Blake commissioned works, and hit the road to the future as soon as it was formed in 1992.



Evan Parker