

JerseyJazz

Journal of the New Jersey Jazz Society

Dedicated to the performance,

promotion and preservation of jazz.

Volume 36 • Issue 10

November 2008



Pam Purvis

Having A Ball

Story and photos by Tony Mottola

The recent release party for Pam Purvis's *I Had a Ball* CD at Cecil's Jazz Club in West Orange was just that — one big party — with everyone on hand having (what else?) a ball. There was so much kibitzing, schmoozing and chit-chatting among the crowd of musicians and civilians on hand for the Saturday night shows that there was only time for an abbreviated third set before last call and lights out.

The evening's first set, however, was full-sized and began with style, if without fanfare, as the *I Had a Ball* rhythm section of Brandon McCune, piano, Calvin Jones, bass and the CD's producer and club owner Cecil Brooks on drums, quietly took the bandstand and slowly grooved their way into "Invitation," eschewing the tune's usual Latin beat for a super funky take. Woodwind master Bob Ackerman then joined the group and offered an airy version of Charles Lloyd's "Forest Flower" on flute, and an original, "Blues for Cecil," on sax. With the crowd

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Brandon McCune



Singers Carrie Jackson, Marlene Ver Planck and Laura Hull joined Pam for the celebration.

thus warmed up, Mr. Ackerman took the mike to introduce the evening's headliner, who also happens to be his wife.

Ms. Purvis opened her set with a bravura turn on "With a Song in My Heart," and delivered the lyric like a mission statement. Singing is evidently what the lady is all about. Her set, like the new CD, mixed standards with some pop tunes, but there isn't much standard about the way she presents the material. Pam Purvis clearly likes to re-invent well-trod songs and, aided and abetted by Cecil Brook's varied rhythmic and stylistic repertoire, her music continually engages the listener's imagination with something new and different.

"I went in (to record the CD) expecting to swing everything," she told *Jersey Jazz*, but under Brooks's direction a whole palette of other rhythms and colorations came into play.

The seven-number set was highlighted by the CD's infectious title cut, a raucous run through "A Night in Tunisia" and a moving, presentation of Michel LeGrande's classic "You Must Believe in Spring," sung in memory of a departed friend. The show's closer — the '60s pop smash hit "Ode to Billy Joe" — made good use of the singer's Southern roots, and easy drawl.





Left: with bassist Calvin Jones.

Right: Bob Ackerman.

Photos by Tony Mottola.



Pam grew up in Louisiana and Texas, but she began singing jazz in West Paterson, New Jersey at Amos Kaune's Gulliver's club. She was there in the heyday 1970s when she met and sang with the likes of Chuck Wayne, Joe Puma, Gabor Zabo, Joe Morello, Jack Six and other regulars at the legendary McBride Avenue bar. Among the other regular musicians she performed with was multi-reed player Bob Ackerman, whom Purvis says she "decided to keep."

And Cecil Brooks III, drumming.



The couple have been married and working together for 25 years, and have collaborated on eight recordings. They've traveled to Europe and Mexico to perform as well as throughout the U.S. and, of course, New Jersey.



A young bassist soaks up inspiration.

Pam also teaches jazz singing privately and in colleges, most recently at Union County College, Tennessee State University and Stockton College. She and Bob are both NJJS members and Pam is Musical Director for the Society's Generations of Jazz outreach educational program.



To learn more about Pam and hear some of her music, visit: www.pampurvis.com.

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