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Creativity Soars Upstairs

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To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there's no music, no choreography, and the dancers hit each other.

Jack Handey

Harrison Goldberg: Inspired By Music, Baseball, Art, And Life On The Coast

Musicians of all kinds can be impressive but it's clear I'm a sucker for the Saxophone. In the 1970s and 80s I worked with a long list of marvelous musicians in pop, Americana, R&B, AC (adult contemporary), jazz, classical and more. And I collected vinyl records and CDs for years. But like music lovers of all genres, I had my real favorites and surprisingly (to me) I had a respectable jazz collection of a couple of hundred titles. The appreciation for jazz began with a visit to a record store in Chicago's Old Town and the random purchase of a used vinyl gem: Jazz Workshop Revisited, a live album by saxophonist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley on the Riverside label. Some weeks

or months later there was the purchase of the new John Coltrane album, A Love Supreme. Music is at once both personal and social, and finding common ground as listeners or as performer and audience, plays on our emotional component. Moving to the coast I've made any number of new friends. And one of them is a particularly impressive musician.

On first glance, Harrison Goldberg appears to be like so many of us. On the Mendocino Coast we are all influenced by the environment, and I'm not just talking weather here. There's an effort to enjoy the coastal life: work, creativity, romance, intellect, and so on. In short, living. That being said, on closer inspection and getting to know Harrison, you can see that he savors life here and incorporates the influences into his creative gifts. Most obvious are his musical gifts. He's a multi-instrumentalist,

but the heart of his music is about the sax. He doesn't just perform. He writes, he records, he pushes himself to continue the creative journey.

There he was, on stage, during a recent performance at Point Arena's intimate pub 215 Main. As he started playing "Take Five" I wondered at first just why he'd elect to perform one of the most recognized songs on the planet. As he played, the familiarity was there, yet to his credit he made it sound fresh, and not clichéd.

Harrison Goldberg was much like other impressive players I've known and heard. But it was, after all, a trio. Seeing him on stage, there appears to be a distinction between the extrovert composer-musician as a performer, and his slightly more understated role as emcee. Between songs he tends to defer intros and outros to those performing with him, making certain they each receive sufficient attention, before introducing himself with a bit less volume. Harrison has the chops, yet he doesn't work at making himself the single center of attention. For example, Goldberg placed a noted emphasis on the vocals and piano work of Rob Ellis, and bassist Joel Kruzic. And deservedly so. The result is that you listen to the whole, ultimately forming your own opinion as to which part of the performance, which one of the three musicians spoke most directly to you. This approach—at least as viewed through my observations at a recent show—make the performance far more enjoyable.

A surprising side of Harrison's creative output is his painting, which includes a gallery opening at Red Shoes Gallery, 1040 North Dutton Avenue, Santa Rosa this month. His use of color, texture, and inspiration are compelling and worth seeing in person. Samples of his art are on his website—www.harrisongoldbergarts.com. Opening receptions on Friday and Saturday June 24 and 25. The paintings will be on display through mid-July.

Recently Goldberg has been developing a project he's titled "Imagine If Jazz Were Like Baseball", and before you jump to any conclusions, this isn't a casual (or trivial) take on jazz and jazz musicians. And the work is certainly not meant to be a transposition of, for example, earlier cleverness like the 1910 baseball poem by Franklin Pierce Adams, "Tinker to Evers to Chance". Rather this is Goldberg flexing his creative muscle and

offering a thoughtful, enjoyable, and highly-listenable experience as he talks through his imagined game, supported with an appropriately-flavored jazz rhythm section.

Like professional athletes across multiple sports, jazz musicians have long had nicknames. Digging deep we might find that one or two were perhaps a little less than organic (created by a musician as a self indulgent sobriquet). But the vast majority were gifts from other players or fans or family members. Louis Armstrong, for example, was reportedly called Satchelmouth early on, some say due to his large mouth. Apparently even Satchelmouth needed a nickname, hence the abbreviated Satchmo. In addition to Armstrong, Goldberg brings numerous familiar nicknames to the project. Names like "Bird" (Charlie Parker), "Trane" (John Coltrane), "Cannonball" (Julian Adderley), "Count" (William James Basie), "Duke" (Edward Kennedy Ellington), and so on. Although you need the soft musical backdrop to fully appreciate the effort, here's a brief passage from "Imagine If Jazz were Like Baseball":

"It's bases loaded with two outs
in the bottom of the ninth
Three to two count on the batter
and the game is all tied up.
Then back up to the plate he steps,
Cannonball Adderley, his fearsome alto
Brushing a wide chest.
The crowd yells Mercy, Mercy!
And you can hear that horn man
blowing loud and steady,
Swinging mightily with his sax."

Goldberg's imagery is playful, thoughtful, evocative. In this brief excerpt from his creation we can easily see Adderley standing in the batter's box with his saxophone, not a bat. And the baseball-loving crowd knew immediately that "Mercy, Mercy!" was the perfect cheer. With luck this new creative work will find its way to a recording in the near future so that we can all savor it at home, without requiring a drive to the ballpark. After all, music and the images it conjures up are to be enjoyed wherever we are most comfortable. But Harrison knew that from the first moment he started creating "Imagine If Jazz were Like Baseball". Catch Harrison Goldberg at one of his regular performances on or near the Mendocino coast. You won't be disappointed. In fact, it might be the cure for what ails you.



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