

## Lew Tabackin Reviews

**NY Times**

July 20, 2007

Music Review

Sounds to Quiet a Crowd While Recalling Faded Times

By BEN RATLIFF

On Wednesday, Lew Tabackin played at Smalls, a square, shallow basement club in the West Village where the drummer sat about an arm's reach from the end of the bar. There was some talking in the back at the start of the set, and at first Mr. Tabackin played near a microphone. But then the talking stopped and the place felt like a soundproof room.

Mr. Tabackin, playing tenor saxophone, walked away from the microphone and started moving with his phrases, jerking up a knee and rearing his head back; his natural sound suffused the place for the rest of the set. He used the microphone again only to play the flute - which he does better than most flute players in jazz, with a sound that starts strong and doesn't flicker away.

But the sound of his saxophone playing was the draw. It had a slight rasp, soft subtines in the low notes and even control through the registers; he scattered stylized shakes of vibrato all through his playing. His phrasing isn't that eccentric but can intimate eccentricity, with jumbles of intervals, gargling sounds, long streams of notes. He always acknowledged the swing accents of the rhythm section and the arrival of the next bar. And his soloing was full of larger-scale form, too: like Coleman Hawkins, he built up his big statements to a single, brusque falsetto shriek, then closed off the thought with a sense of symmetry.

The set contained a few originals, a ballad standard full of fast, braying lines ("I'll Be Seeing You") and some '50s jazz that ran parallel to bebop: Oscar Pettiford's "Tricotism," Thelonious Monk's "Eronel" and "Ask Me Now." But its subtext held two larger truths about jazz. One is that we should take jazz's old, disappearing virtues of sound and form where we find them. The other is that someone like Mr. Tabackin might be best appreciated in a place that can fit only about 100 people - a lousy business model, perhaps, but one that lets a listener really feast on sound, wallow in it and remember it.

Mr. Tabackin developed his craft in the late '50s and early '60s, which means he's old enough to know the importance of a big, round saxophone sound. This was the standard set by jazz tenor players through the middle of the last century - those, like Hawkins, who played in big bands, with singers, in roadhouses and dancehalls, who had to make their mark on popular ballads that dancers knew in their bones.

But he was also the right age to absorb the Sonny Rollins trio records from 1957 and 1958. Those records were buoyant and playful, full of the sense of discovery that a saxophonist could sound good leading a band, without a chordal instrument like guitar or piano, and that playfulness set the dimensions for Wednesday's set. One original piece, "Studio F," sounded like a cousin to the melody from Mr. Rollins's "Freedom Suite," but the similarity was much more general. The trio's bassist, Boris Kozlov, and its drummer, Mark Taylor, played bouncing melodic figures with limited volume; they were pursuing a durable ideal of swinging without getting in the way. And Mr. Tabackin, within precise limits, let himself go.

**Washingtonpost.com**

Mike Joyce

Lew Tabackin, Saluting Smartly

"The Kennedy Center's "100th Birthday Tribute to Coleman Hawkins" at the KC Jazz Club on Saturday night fell in the category of "better late than never." Far, far better. Hawkins, who was actually born in 1904, established the tenor sax as a prominent voice in early jazz and subsequently achieved both commercial and critical success. Saturday night veteran tenor-man Lew Tabackin took on the daunting task of evoking Hawkins's deeply resonating tone and bold stylistic innovations. There were reminders of Hawkins's seemingly effortless transition from swing to bop, his daring forays into unaccompanied tenor sax performances, and his commanding (and often surprising) way with a romantic ballad.

Like the evening's honoree, Tabackin displayed great harmonic and rhythmic assurance as he moved through a series of mostly quartet arrangements that featured an exceptional array of talent: pianist Mulgrew Miller, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Mark Taylor. The performances included a melodically intriguing salute to Hawkins's landmark recording of "Body and Soul"; a short, unaccompanied improvisation inspired by Hawkins's unprecedented "Picasso" period in the late 1940's; and a warmly evocative, brush-stroked rendering of "Self Portrait (of the Bean)," which recalled the late reedman's collaborations with Duke Ellington.

During the concert, part of the Kennedy Center's ongoing "1940s and the Arts" series, Tabackin briefly veered from the tenor sax program so as not to disappoint anyone who came to hear him play flute. As it turned out, though, some of the melodic twist he brought to Jerome Kern's "Yesterdays" didn't sound far removed from Hawkins's bountiful legacy."

**Star-Ledger**

Tuesday June 15, 2004

Zan Stewart

Fine music abounds at Jazzfest

"Low Tabackin salute to Coleman Hawkins

Good music was in abundance on Sunday's program of the Aventis Pharmaceuticals New Jersey Jazz Society Jazzfest 2004. Marking the 29th anniversary of the NJJS event, Jazzfest was also held Saturday, both days on the grounds of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison.

A particular highlight was tenor saxophonist Lew Tabackin's celebration of Coleman Hawkins (1904-1969), whose centennial. Along with Count Basie's and Fats Waller's, was being feted at the festival. Performing in Dreyfuss Auditorium, Tabackin worked sans microphone, and his handsome, expansive sound - variously grainy, breathy, crying, and ringing -- easily reached the back row.

Tabackin teamed with trumpeter Randy Brecker and drummer Mark Taylor, two veteran associates, pianist David Hazeltine and bassist Dennis Irwin. The set ran from tunes that Hawkins wrote, such as "Rifftide," to his hit in 1939, "Body and Soul."

The tenor man described "Rifftide" as a "New Jersey tune," because it is almost identical to a Thelonious Monk composition known as "Hackensack" In characteristic fashion, Tabackin was a powerhouse, using short, swinging thoughts, phrases where he smeared his notes, and dashing lines to deliver his mainly song-like message. The consummate Brecker, with a warm-to-crackling sound, played bold, high notes in a Dizzy Gillespie vein, happy, swinging ideas a la Louis Armstrong, and deft, intricate lines that recalled Fats Navarro. Hazeltine, Irwin and Taylor were likewise top-drawer."

## **The Columbus Dispatch**

Thursday October 28, 2004

Curtis Schleber

Drew Jr., Tabackin take menu of classic tunes, make 'em cook

"The words jazz and hit might seem contradictory together. But when a jazz piece becomes familiar to a large audience, it serves to welcome the listener. That was the case when the Columbus Jazz Orchestra opened its "Swingin' At The Southern" series last night.

The program was a home run for the ensemble not only because the musicians sidestepped the shopworn tone of such tunes as Jumpin' at the Woodside, Someday My Prince Will Come and Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me, but because guest pianist Kenny Drew Jr. and saxophonist Lew Tabackin nearly outshone the material.

Drew dazzled with remarkable technical ability, displaying chops that showed his classical training and a terrific pedigree. (Drew Sr. is a highly respected pianist who recorded with John Coltrane, Dexter Cordon, Buddy Rich and many others.)

Drew Jr. poured it all out during an extended introduction to Ellington's It Don't Mean a Thing (if it Ain't Got That Swing), deconstructing the melody at a blinding pace. The orchestra came in at a fraction of the tempo, accenting the piano. The streams conflicted at first and then joined in a bracing outing that included the "kitchen sink" from Drew and a smoking solo from saxophonist Michael Cox.

Drew's medley of Ellington's Single Petal of a Rose and Prelude to a Kiss featured a lovely pastoral Rose

The Columbus Jazz Orchestra will present " The Jazz Hit Parade, with saxophonist Lew Tabackin and pianist Kenny Drew Jr., at 8 tonight through Saturday night and 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday in the Southern Theatre, 21 E. Main St. Tickets cost \$24 to \$48, or \$5 for ages 13 to 18t at the Jazz Arts Group office (6142945200, Ext. 3), the Ohio Theatre box office (614469-0939) and Ticketmaster outlets (614-431-3600).

Tabackin's contributions were on a higher level still. A veteran of 30 years co-leading the Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band with his pianist wife, Tabackin is a brilliant and emotive improviser at the top of his form.

Among the spotlights last night, Billy Strayhorn's Chelsea Bridge not only provided the evening's high, but one of the most powerful performances the Columbus Jazz Orchestra has hosted in several years.

Tabackin opened with an extended unaccompanied solo that twisted marvelously, celebrating and re-examining the song's lush melody. When the band joined, he continued to explore the tune with a structuralism akin to Sonny Rollins' and a storytelling ability that recalled Lester Young. He found the gorgeous contradictions in the song: It is muscular and gentle, emotionally starved and erupting in feeling. His performance was simply as good as it gets.

He not only made memories but also spurred the group on to a fabulous ensemble performance. Singer Dwight Lennox caught the favor for those tunes as well."

## **Globe and Mail**

Thursday November 11, 2004

Mark Miller

### Tenor Soloist Makes Great Sax

"Come the 21st of this month, the jazz world will celebrate the centenary of the legendary tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins's birth. Lew Tabackin himself a tenorist at least partly in the Hawkins tradition, got off to a head start on Tuesday at the Top o' The Senator in Toronto.

If it wasn't for Coleman Hawkins," Tabackin mused midway through the evening's opening set, "I don't know what we would sound like. We'd probably still be in vaudeville." He went onto Wall of Hawkins's "firsts" in the history of the saxophone in jazz.

A case could be also made for Sidney Bechet's significance in the transformation of the instrument from its beginnings as a novelty item, but bechet played soprano and his centenary was seven years ago. So Hawkins is the man of the particular hour/month/year, and Tabackin paid his respects with two tunes, neither of which was Body and Soul, the balled chat Bean - ore Hawkins was known - recorded to such enduring effect in 1939.

No, Tabackin chose instead to play Hanid (that's "Dinah" backwards) and Duke Ellington's Self Portrait (of the Bean), each offered in dose approximation of Hawkins's large-than-life style - his hearty tone, his shuddering vibrato, his sometimes gruff expressivity, his deceptively modest harmonic and melodic ingenuity and his rhythmic vigor.

And never mind the tunes; the fact that a saxophonist of Tabackin's generation and contemporary leanings - he's 64, Philadelphia-born - could find such clear inspiration in a musician whose career dates back to the mid-1920s speaks volumes about Hawkins' lasting impact on jazz.

It also speaks well of Tabackin that, under normal circumstances (the extended version of How Deep Is the Ocean that opened Tuesday first set, for example), he has personalized Hawkins's influence in combination with more recent developments in jazz. His own sound is lighter and has attack striving in a decidedly boppish manner his solos hurtle along, though without ever quite getting ahead of themselves or spinning out of control.

He dances when he plays - dips, knees-ups, back arches, two steps to the rear and a couple sideways, all is if to counterbalance the risk and reach so typical of his improvisations. And he hikes to blow long, unaccompanied cadenzas, either to set up or wind down whatever tune is at hand. That's another bow to Hawkins,, whose 1948 recording of Picasso established an early and high standard for such sob ventures.

Tabackin's fondness for self sufficiency was certainly no reflection on the tidy support that he was receiving, as required, from his three Toronto musicians at the Senator, pianist Mark Eisenman bassist Steve Wallace and drummer Joe Poole. Indeed, there was a fascinating subtext to the performance as Poole, making his "big league debut with a musician of Tabackin's international stature, worked his way smartly from a rather nervous start to a very confident finish."

## **Der Bund**

11/17/04

Full Blast and Risky Tricks

"Lew Tabackin belongs to a rare species, being a Jazz Archaeologist and Adventurer all at once! The first night of his Bern concerts, the 1940 born American presented himself in extraordinary shape!

The ideas and the air would just NOT run out! His risky though precise tenor tricks have, from a dramatic point of view, a lot in common with the swordfights in pirate flicks: It's about flashy spectacle and ways of getting out "exit-less" situations.

The hero tenorists of the pre-bop era, with their "raspy" timbres, as well as Parker's ability or Sonny Rollins' sarcasm are important inspirational sources for Tabackin who who becomes sort of a turbo saxophonist! His awareness of history was proved by dedicating part of the set to the late great Coleman Hawkins, who established the tenor sax, almost alone, as the jazz instrument par excellence!

"Body and Soul," the tune that catapulted Hawkins into the jazzolympe in 1939, obviously couldn't be undermined. He plays ballads warm-heartedly as well as in doubletime. Especially beautiful was Tabackin's interpretation of Ellington's "Self Portrait of the Bean." Another Duke "Sunset and the Mockingbird" was performed extraordinarily on flute. Again, he demonstrated to be an expressive virtuoso on this chosen instrument. Backed by a true elite trio, the Italian Dado Moroni, who offered stride- jumps as well as McCoy Tyner voicings, Peter Washington (bass) and Lewis Hash (drums) who were swinging with sovereign authority!

Tabackin said: "I wanna leave a good impression behind!" This he achieved in outstanding fashion!"

**L.A. Times**

Thursday July 24, 2003

Don Heckman

A Gallery of Tabackin's Artful Improv

"Opportunities to experience the art of jazz improvisation are rare. What one hears at most jazz performances is the craft of jazz improvisation - its technique, its virtuosity, its entertainment.

Although that offers plenty of attractions, there's something even more special in hearing jazz that moves into the heart of the mysterious process of improvisation as artistic expression.

Which leads to tenor saxophonist, Lew Tabackin's appearance this week at the Jazz Bakery. Working with the empathetic support of bassist Boris Kozlov and drummer Mark Taylor, he played an opening set Tuesday that was a stunning example of a musician in full pursuit of his creative muse.

Tabackin began on tenor saxophone with an exploration of "Sweet and Lovely," establishing an immediate high point for the evening with a series of organically expanding, growingly complex variations. Starting with melodic paraphrases, he gradually moved into rapidly executed arpeggios interspersed with occasional high-note shouts, reaching a peak of expressiveness in bursting streams of double-time passages.

Tabackin offered a brief apology at the close of his set, noting that the trio had just flown in from the East Coast. If he was implying that he intends to take his music to another level - and even if he doesn't - the balance of his week at the Bakery will be one of the don't-miss jazz experiences of the year.

Other compelling material followed -- Lew Tabackin's touching ballad "Broken Dreams," Duke Ellington's rarely heard "Serenade to Sweden" and a high-speed romp through "Without a Song." On another original, inspired by Kobo Abe's novel (and the subsequent film) "Woman in the Dunes," he switched to flute, his solo's roving circularity darkly reflective of the story's sense of enigmatic isolation."

## **Saxophone Journal**

May/June 1998

Tim Price

Tenority

Concord Records

"Without a doubt Lew Tabackin is one of the greatest tenor saxophone players the world has ever heard! Tenority is one of Lew's most important recordings to date because it showcases him at his most creative level, on saxophone. It exemplifies just how virtuosic Lew's playing has become. He flies through all registers of the tenor with flawless precision and grooves hard constantly. His history and career as a musician shows one of the most important aspects of jazz as a craft. He speaks the language of jazz as a true jazzman. Lew has lived and played with all the masters. You can hear in his creativity that his course of study was on the bandstand. Jazz is a recognizable language, unfortunately, there is little chance in today's world to experience or be a part of jazz in a live setting. Schools will teach you the "grammar" of jazz and the "vocabulary" of jazz but they will never be able to teach you how to use the language so that it is recognizably jazz. You must listen, listen, and listen constantly. This is something that is really missing in many players today. That is why I urge all of you to check out Lew Tabackin now!

He is one of the finest examples of a true player. A man guided by his own agenda, one of today's most luminary jazz artists. If you play the saxophone and never heard of him, or got the chance to hear his music, it's about time you did. His use of the body of sound is most inspiring. By that I mean, the sound he gets on the tenor. It's one of the best in jazz. His time feel and the way he shapes his phrases is extraordinary. His breath control and use of long lines, multiphonics, and doing it on standard songs is astounding. The disc here is a beautiful collection of Monk, Berlin, Gershwin, Al Jolson, Raye, and DePaul as well as some choice Tabackin jazz originals. The first five cuts feature

pianist Don Friedman. He really shines here and is the ultimate band player. I enjoy his solos, his note choices are well informed, and he blends the random and the abstract together well. Friedman's flawless precision has always knocked me out! On the cut 5 through 7, trumpet master Randy Brecker is added. This is one of Tabackin's most important counterparts here. This document with Lew and Randy is of extreme importance to the world of jazz. The coherent playing of Brecker and the definition of Lew's sound is inspiring. Brecker and Tabackin simply challenge the conventions of official musical culture and structure. I've always loved the exhaustive scope of Randy Brecker's solos with his very careful attention to the many separate threads of his subject matter and his distinctive point of view. His trumpet playing is a revelation and a delight. Randy is one of the most important musicians and composers of the last twenty-five years. There is simply very few that meet his level today. Peter Washington on bass and the ever swinging Mark Taylor on drums lends a constant air of excitement to the date.

This recording Tenority is simply an incredible construction of music by Lew Tabackin. All aspects are superb. As you listen to this historical CD and let your ears and mind make friends with it, beyond analysis or words, you'll find yourself traveling through exciting and vivid territories of jazz. This is music of great craft and imagination by tenor master Lew Tabackin. As such, it's a date that promises to give pleasure for years to come. Keep on Lew!"

## **The Times**

Friday June 6, 1997

Live performance at Pizza Express, WI

### Champagne Flute

"The Philadelphia-born Lew Tabackin is a frequent poll-winner, both for his contribution to the big band he co-leads with his wife, Toshiko Akiyoshi, and for his flute playing, Chris Parker writes. Live, though, he concentrates his formidable improvising powers on the tenor saxophone. As if to emphasize the point, for this five-day engagement he is appearing as part of a trio - completed by the British drummer Mark Taylor and Belgian bassist Phillippe Aerts - so he is able to luxuriate in the relative harmonic and rhythmic freedom resulting from the absence of a piano.

It was clear Tabackin meant business as soon as he led the band into their first tune, Come Rain or Come Shine; instead of treating Arlen's familiar melody as an easy-paced warm-up lope, he subjected it to a vigorous examination, investigating its possibilities with a thoroughness that recalled not only the rhapsodic self-absorption of Coleman Hawkins, but also the fierce intensity laced with playfulness that characterizes the solos of Sonny Rollins, one of Tabackin's strongest influences.

The latter was brought to mind even more readily by the approach Tabackin took with a follow-up number, Me and My Shadow. Like Rollins, he is an expert at molding apparently unsuitable tunes into perfect improvisational vehicles. Thus, in his hands, the apparent drawbacks of Shadow - it's slightly plodding tempo, the superficial banality of its melody - were transformed into advantages. Tadd Dameron's bog anthem, Hot House, was skillfully woven into a lively trio workout, and Duke Ellington's Serenade to Sweden proved hospitable to some smart double-time tenor passages.

But no Tabackin live performance would be complete without his celebrated flute playing, and he chose two typically varied showcases for it. John Coltrane's Wise One involved some finely judged work from Aerts, and Juan Tizol's A Gypsy Without a Song was both cogent and fluent, showing off Tabackin's pure, full-bodied sound to perfection.

Either would have been a highlight of a flautist's concert - the fact that they were almost incidental to Tabackin's superb tenor display served only to underline just what a consummate musician he is."