

## **Bill Mays: CD, DVD, live performance reviews** **(most recent first)**

(You can do a word search for a specific recording or group, or a musician's name, and then scroll down)

### **Live Jazz: Bill Mays and Marvin Stamm in a Siskiyou Music Project**

**By Don Heckman, *The International Review of Music*, October 2015**

*Medford, Oregon.* Jazz in its purest form illuminated the stage in the performance by pianist Bill Mays and trumpeter Marvin Stamm at the Artistic Piano Gallery Sunday night. No drum set, no swinging big band horns, no funky fusion guitars. Only two gifted jazz veterans, applying their remarkable improvisational skills to an interactive display of what Stamm accurately described as a jazz “conversation.” And that was plenty. The best jazz, of course – is always a “conversation” between players, as they shape the music, on the run, in a compelling journey of spontaneous musical invention. Which is exactly what Mays and Stamm offered to their receptive audience in another memorable presentation by the Siskiyou Music Project. The duo of piano and trumpet (or, more often, flugelhorn) announced its creative effectiveness from the first note of the first tune – a soaring, rapid-paced excursion through a Lennie Tristano variation on “All the Things You Are.” It was a perfect display of both the technical adroitness of the Mays/Stamm duo and their individual artistry as improvisers. Both those qualities continued on throughout a musically far-ranging program. Among the many highlights: “Skylark,” “The Widow in the Window,” an appealing, melodic tune by trumpeter Kenny Wheeler; Dave Brubeck’s “In Your Own Sweet Way,” Thad Jones’ “Three In One,” Lars Jensen’s “Marionette,” Phil Woods’ “Goodbye Mr. Evans” and more. All of the pieces were honored in a way that recalled the original versions within the shifting jazz conversations between Mays and Stamm. There were intriguing solo excursions as well: Mays featured his impressive song writing skills by playing and singing his revision of the pop standard “Have You Met Miss Jones” which, in Mays version, was transformed into “Have You Met Hank Jones,” a tribute to jazz pianist Hank Jones. Mays was also showcased in a hard-driving, rhythmically irresistible stride piano classic, “Carolina Shout.” Stamm displayed his lyrical way with a ballad in a pair of warm-toned, emotionally gripping interpretations of “You Stepped Out of A Dream” and Willard Robison’s ’30s classic, “Old Folks.” Altogether, it was a musical experience that could have happily engaged the responsive audience for many more songs. Suffice to say that Mays and Stamm presented a “jazz conversation” that included everyone.

## Bill Mays Inventions Trio: Life's A Movie

By JACK BOWERS AllAboutJazz <https://www.allaboutjazz.com/lifes-a-movie-bill-mays-chiaroscuro-records-review-by-jack-bowers.php>

October 11, 2013

For pianist [Bill Mays](#)' Inventions Trio, the third time is indeed a charm, as it would be difficult to find music more charming than that performed by Mays, trumpeter [Marvin Stamm](#) and cellist [Alisa Horn](#) on Life's a Movie, the trio's third album together (and first for Chiaroscuro Records). This is "chamber jazz" of the highest order, with the classically trained Horn complementing perfectly the jazz-inflected sorties of Mays and Stamm in a program whose beauty is equaled only by its earnestness. The centerpiece is Mays' four-part suite Life's a Movie: 4 Cues in Search of a Film, which follows a four-part homage to [Bill Evans](#) and precedes Juquin Rodrigo's "Concierto de Aranjuez," [Chick Corea](#)'s sunny "Spain" (based in part on Rodrigo's theme) and a third suite, this one a salute to [Thelonious Monk](#). Mays comes by his "movie cues" naturally, having worked in Hollywood studios for more than a decade, during which time he appeared on hundreds of soundtracks. The trio plays it seamlessly, with Mays' muscular piano setting the tone, Stamm and Horn adding color and nuance wherever needed. The suite is comprised of a melodious "Main Title," haunting "Love Theme Bittersweet," high-spirited (and clamorous) "Chase" and rhythmically opulent "End Credits." Mays performs Evans' "My Bells" by himself, and is joined by the others on "Interplay," "Turn Out the Stars" and the endearing "Waltz for Debby." Stamm, always a pleasure to hear, is at his improvisational best on one of the more arduous numbers, Monk's "Trinkle Tinkle," as well as on the fast-moving "Spain." He switches to muted trumpet on the opening passages of the easygoing "Pannonica," then delivers a brief but cogent statement (in front of Mays' thundering piano) on "Straight, No Chaser." Horn, who we're told has learned to improvise and loves the challenge, has an extended solo here, sounding much like a member of France's storied Hot Club. Some of her best work comes when she plucks the cello like a bass, lending Mays and Stamm unwavering support. Her arco cello is especially inspiring on "Concierto de Aranjuez." This is a trio whose members clearly enjoy what they are doing, in all likelihood because they do it so well and love being together. Their camaraderie is readily apparent on Life's a Movie, as is the expertise of three musicians who seem able in effect to read each other's minds. The lone caveat: Mays' two-fisted piano is sometimes too prominent in the mix. Aside from that, about as persuasive as trio jazz can be.

Friday, November 19, 2010 New York  41° | 32°

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Getty Images

Phil Woods leads his group to Birdland this weekend.

## *Phil Woods Quintet*

### **Birdland**

315 W. 44th St., (212) 581-3080

*Through Saturday*

Who's to say that a quintet doesn't undergo a life experience in the same way that an individual person does? Born in 1974, the Phil Woods Quintet is enjoying a healthy middle age—in fact, even 15 years after Mosaic Records honored the quintet's 20th anniversary with a five-disc boxed set, the group remains one of the most dependably

exciting jazz ensembles on the scene, steadily touring and recording and going considerably stronger than strong. The quintet has long since established itself as one in which the individual members are among the best soloists in the business—particularly its 79-year-old alto saxophonist leader—yet the collective as a whole is positively off-the-charts. Whether playing jazz classics like "Godchild," standard ballads like "I'm a Fool to Want You" or its own originals, the Quintet achieves a dynamic cohesiveness that other bands can only dream about.

Many have compared the PW5 to a family, and appropriately, the group was born out of a personal encounter: When the woman whom Mr. Woods was dating in 1973 introduced him to her brother, drummer Bill Goodwin, the two began working together. Within a few months, bassist Steve Gilmore became the third member. The trio has been a going concern ever since: Essentially, only two trumpeters have shared the front line with Mr. Woods: the amazing Tom Harrell and, since 1992, the outstanding Brian Lynch. Notable pianists in the quintet are Hal Galper, Bill Charlap (who worked especially well with Mr. Woods and company on two recent volumes of "American Songbook") and, currently, Bill Mays.

Mr. Woods himself was already one of the stars of the saxophone long before he formed his most memorable ensemble. From the 1950s onward, he was the alto soloist of choice for nearly every New York arranger-conductor, particularly Quincy Jones and the late Neal Hefti. His skill at playing obligatos behind singers, and saying a lot in a small amount of space, is prized by pop stars from Billy Joel to Tony Bennett; as a guest star, he's at once a collaborator and a tough competitor, which he's shown in team-ups with colleagues like Zoot Sims and Lew Tabackin.

Even in Mr. Woods's 40s and 50s, the quintet only worked about half the year. But this is the group that has been the saxophonist's permanent "floating" musical home.

For its late set on Tuesday at Birdland, the PW5 began with one of Gerry Mulligan's many arrangements of one of his favorite compositions, George Wallington's "Godchild." From there the group samba'd sideways into the Sinatra classic "I'm a Fool to Want You." "Bick's Bag," a catchy original by Mr. Mays (which he has recorded with and named after guitarist Ed Bickert) led to a trio interlude that the pianist titled "Bird Songs." Rather than Charlie Parker, this was a lovely, lyrical collage of "Skylark," in which the melody was played so softly that it literally seemed to glide from the sky, and "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square," in which Mr. Gilmore's arco bass assumed the title role. Mr. Mays could have titled this section "Birds of Lullabyland."

The Quintet reconvened with "Willow Weep for Me" as a modal waltz set against the "All Blues" vamp. Next, "But Beautiful" served as a feature for Mr. Lynch's trumpet, and the fivesome wound up with a rollicking blues that seemed to quote everything at once. Mr. Woods announced it as "our theme song, 'Death and Transfiguration' by Richard Strauss." Any good life story needs a sense of humor.

# “Bill Mays SOLO!” (DVD)

Jazz Journal (UK), June 2010, Page 18, By Mark Gardner

## **BILL MAYS**

### **SOLO!**

*Cool Struttin’; Conception; Looking Back;  
Dolphin Dance; Interview; Freight Trane; Waltz  
For Debby; Pensativa; Monk’s Mood (54.00)*

Bill Mays (p). WVIA-TV, 4 January 2008. HD  
colour.

**[www.billmays.net](http://www.billmays.net)**

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A solo recital holds no terrors for seasoned keyboard campaigner Bill Mays, who, in an intimate studio with an intelligent audience, here produces a series of eight memorable performances of works by pianists who were early influences and helped to shape the accomplished stylist he is today.

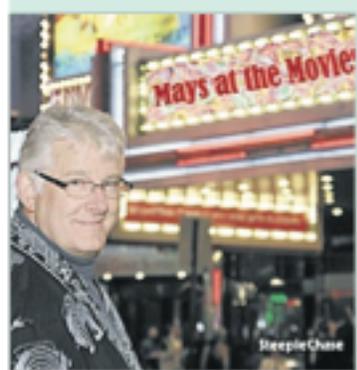
His agenda comprises compositions by Sonny Clark, George Shearing, Jimmy Rowles, Herbie Hancock, Tommy Flanagan, Bill Evans, Clare Fischer and Thelonious Monk. He brings his own special insight to these disparate tunes, showing on *Conception* and *Freight Trane* that he can bop with the best. His personal reading of Evans’s *Waltz For Debby* is pure delight, and on Fischer’s *Pensativa* Bill introduces a variant sound by judicious strumming of the piano strings.

Sound is good and the film is shot sensibly without recourse to arty tricks. With pleasant introductions and a useful but not overlong interview with the musician, this is a fine portrait of an artist at ease with himself and a well judged and interpreted batch of tunes by fellow composer/ pianists. Not to be missed.

Mark Gardner

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# “Mays At The Movies” (CD)



## HÖRKINO

Der hoch respektierte New Yorker Pianist Bill Mays gilt in der Jazzszene als musikalischer «Renaissance Man», als ein Generalist, der sich in prak-

tisch allen Sparten seiner Musik kompetent einzubringen weiss: Komponist, Arrangeur, Bandleader, gesuchter Sideman, Studio-musiker für alle Gelegenheiten etc. In «Mays At The Movies» kehrt er zurück zu seinen Anfängen als viel beschäftigter Studio-musiker in Hollywood, wo er auf unzähligen Filmsoundtracks zu hören war. Unterstützt vom Bassisten Peter Washington und von Billy Drummond (dm), improvisiert Mays über die wunderbare Eigenkomposition «Judy» und acht weitere Filmmelodien, welche es zu Jazzstandards gebracht haben. Und die Magie des Mays Trios «in action» lässt beim Zuhörer sogleich einen akustischen Film entstehen: Kino für die Ohren!

JÜRIG SOMMER

**Bill Mays Trio** Mays At The Movies (Steeple Chase). Erhältlich via [www.jpc.de](http://www.jpc.de), [www.billmays.net](http://www.billmays.net) ★★★★★

“Mittelland Zeitung” MZ & “Aargauer Zeitung” AZ, News dailies, Switzerland. June 6, 2010, by Jürg Sommer\_

## Movies for the Ears

Highly respected New York pianist Bill Mays is considered a true "Renaissance Man" on the jazz scene, i.e. Mays is respected as a master in all areas of his widely spread musical activities: composer, arranger, bandleader, studio musician for all styles of music etc. The current "Mays At The Movies" CD brings him back to square one of his impressive career that in his beginning led to a busy job as a studio musician in Hollywood where he was playing in countless movie soundtracks. Supported by bassist Peter Washington and Billy Drummond (dm) on this CD the Mays Trio improvises over the leader's fascinating original "Judy" as well as eight movie classics that became jazz standards. The Mays trio on this recording is no less than "magic in action" offering the listener a true acoustic movie: cinema for the ear!

Bill Mays Trio: Mays At The Movies (SteepleChase) (CD can be ordered at [www.jpc.de](http://www.jpc.de), [www.billmays.net](http://www.billmays.net)) Rating 5 stars

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## Mays at the Movies

Bill Mays | SteepleChase Records (2010)

By Dr. Judith Schlesinger

 Discuss  

**Bill Mays** has spent much of his career as a first-call studio pianist in Hollywood, accompanying singers like Sarah Vaughan and Al Jarreau, and playing on movie soundtracks. Moreover, his most recent CDs have involved his innovative third-stream group, The Inventions Trio, with trumpeter Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn. As a result, Mays's profile may be a bit lower than some who spend more time in the jazz performance spotlight. But he's also one of the most intelligent, fluent, and interesting players around. Mays never mucks with a tune just for the sake of putting a personal stamp on it—there's always the sense that thoughtful creative choices have been made



For example, in the opening "I've Never Been in Love Before," Mays changes the chord center four times, which not only adds new dimensions to an overplayed tune, but musically captures the blissful disorientation of the first-time lover. Similarly, on the next warhorse, "The Shadow of Your Smile," Mays's elegant, succinct playing strips years of schmaltz from the song; with the addition of the verse, he helps highlight its original beauty. Mays's compositional gifts are also on display here with the spirited "Judy," the tribute to his wife that's been heard in two movies so far.

The delightful *Willie Wonka* anthem, "Pure Imagination," has some temporal twists that bring out its lopsided structure (that nine-bar bridge, for instance), while this band digs deep into {Michel Legrand = 8674}'s "The Summer Knows"—usually played as a ballad—and swings it hard. Mays also does his homework, going back to Alex North's version of his "Love Theme from Spartacus" to restore what many other pianists, including Bill Evans, choose to cut from the piece.

Given the consistently excellent quality of this music, it's surprising that this group didn't rehearse—until you consider the caliber of bassist Peter Washington and drummer Billy Drummond, both busy, classy players who enhance any number of trio recordings. The artful delegation of their splendid solos adds color on tunes like "There's a Small Hotel" and "Charade," the burning closer, as does Mays' playful but subtle quoting. All told, *Mays at the Movies* is a thoroughly engaging CD, providing more evidence that Mays's position in the top tier of pianists remains secure.

Track listing: I've Never Been in Love Before; The Shadow of Your Smile; Pure Imagination; Love Theme from Spartacus; Judy; The Summer Knows; There's a Small Hotel; You Leave Me Breathless; Charade.

Personnel: Bill Mays: piano, vocal; Peter Washington: bass; Billy Drummond: drums.

RIFFTIDES, December 23, 2009, by Doug Ramsey

[http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2009/12/recent\\_listening\\_mays\\_weidman.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2009/12/recent_listening_mays_weidman.html)

# Rifftides

Doug Ramsey on Jazz and other matters...

## Recent Listening: Mays, Weidman, Drummond

Bill Mays, *Mays at the Movies* (Steeplechase). The pianist is a veteran of motion picture sound stages, but in this stimulating trio session he's free from click tracks, conductors and scores. With bassist Peter Washington and drummer Billy Drummond, Mays interprets nine pieces from films as disparate as *Cocoanut Grove* (1938) and *Burn After Reading* (2008). Highlights: his thorough exploration of the love theme from 'Spartacus;' the dazzling succession of key changes on "I've Never Been in Love Before," in 5/4 time; the inventiveness in his multifaceted composition "Judy;" his interaction with Washington on "The Summer Knows;" Drummond's cymbal splashes in "Charade." Mays sings "You Leave Me Breathless" at least as well as Fred McMurray did in *Cocoanut Grove*, and personalizes the harmonic changes of that beautiful, neglected song.



## WINNING SPINS BY GEORGE KANZLER

The piano-bass-and-drums trio so ubiquitous on the club scene today became common around the time bebop ushered in modern jazz. Swing Era piano trios often featured guitar rather than drums, or a horn like clarinet instead of a bass. But now we're so used to the standard format that a piano trio without bass and drums seems a throwback. Two pianists - the 60-something **Bill Mays** and the 30-something **Jeb Patton** - lead trios that generated this month's two Winning Spins. And though they came to prominence in different decades, they share an appreciation of this format as an ideal vehicle for bright, tuneful swinging.

Mays At The Movies (Steeplechase) marks a departure from the chamber jazz and mostly original tunes of Mays' Innovations Trio, which also includes trumpeter Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn. It also brings him together with new rhythm partners, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Billy Drummond. The one original here, Mays' "Judy," was actually heard behind the filmed action in two recent films. The other eight are songs from movies chosen by Mays "because I really like the songs." But that doesn't mean he doesn't take certain liberties with them as far as tempo, chords (Mays is a master of delicate, filigreed harmony) and even time signatures.

"I've Never Been in Love Before" from "Guys and Dolls" is not only kicked up to a brisk pace but also cast in 5/4 (i.e. "Take Five") time, while the four sections (AABA) of the song are each in a different key, rising a minor third each time. It all helps piano solo and accompaniment build to an edgy crescendo. "Pure Imagination" goes uptempo, deft single-note lines expanding to chords in the piano solo; "Charade" is another burner, but remains a waltz, with a drum solo accelerating to the finale. Mays went to the "Spartacus" soundtrack in order to expand its love theme with a long a cappella piano intro suggestive of Bill Evans's "Emily," followed by a bass-over-drums solo morphing into delicate interplay by piano and bass-over-brushes. A similar high level of trio interplay takes place during the improvised heart of "Judy" in polyphony as ostensible piano solo; and in the piano-bass exchanges of melody on "The Summer Knows." Mays, who has accompanied some of the greatest jazz singers (Sarah Vaughan, for one) assays a vocal on "You Leave Me Breathless" that recalls one of his own mentors, Jimmy Rowles.

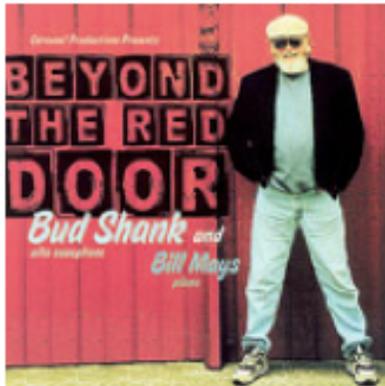
# Bud Shank/Bill Mays: “Beyond the Red Door” (CD)

Jazziz Magazine, June 20, 2009, by James Rossi

<http://www.jazziz.com/reviews/2009/06/20/bud-shank-and-bill-mays-beyond-the-red-door/>

## BUD SHANK AND BILL MAYS - BEYOND THE RED DOOR

20  
JUN



Bud Shank and Bill Mays

Beyond the Red Door

(Jazz Media)

At the conclusion of a particularly aggressive, unexpectedly quirky rendition of “The Touch of Your Lips” - an old, played-out standard if ever there was one - saxophonist Bud Shank guffaws into the mike. “Take that, Ray Noble,” he heartily chides the long-gone composer.

But even without verbalizing his individual credo of 60-odd professional years, Shank’s playing shows it’s all about attitude, and he still has the chops to convey his.

The man is an inspiration. With a style seeped in bebop and beyond, his swinging alto huffs and puffs its way out of some boxed corners with style and aplomb. No chance is too great. On a Zoot Sims’ “Red Door,” Shank’s time gets greasy while going after a few far-flung ideas - affecting more than a few Zoots-isms along the way. He then deftly trades choruses, eights, and fours with Bill Mays’ dynamic piano.

The duo’s well-documented balladry is a thing of beauty, aptly conveyed via the tastefully colored voicings and rhythmic inflections that are Mays’. His gorgeous touch and sensitive harmonic sense place him in the forefront of yet another crowded field. On the medley of “The Wind/The Peacocks,” Shank and Mays alternate virile intensity with sparse, plaintive phrases that ebb and flow as naturally as the cool Pacific. In fact, Beyond the Red Door might well be thought of as a sublime beach read, continually unfolding as with the best of novels. Relax on the sand under a huge umbrella, open this highly sensual book and enjoy. Gorgeous stuff.

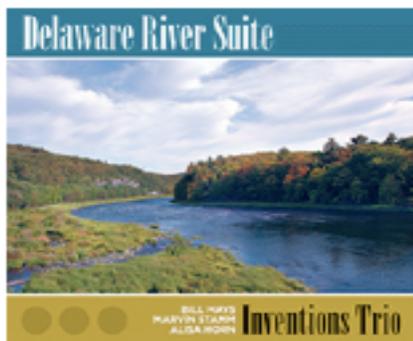
- James Rozzi

# Inventions Trio: “Delaware River Suite” (CD)

AllAboutJazz, June 28, 2009, by Ken Dryden

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=33180>

By Ken Dryden



**Bill Mays** , **Marvin Stamm**  &  
Alicia Horn: Inventions Trio  
*Delaware River Suite*  
No Blooze Music  
2008

Trumpeter/flugelhornist Marvin Stamm is an alum of several orchestras, including those led by **Stan Kenton** , Woody Herman, plus Thad Jones and Mel Lewis. In recent years he has been focusing on small group dates, including various configurations with pianist Bill Mays and a quartet with drummer **Ed Soph** .

The Inventions Trio consists of Stamm, Mays and cellist Alisa Horn. *Delaware River Suite* is their second recording and although Horn is far younger than the others and comes from a classical background, her warm sound is a fine addition to the longtime musical partners who are equally at home playing classical music. Starting off with Jobim's "Zingaro," the trio unfolds its many facets in Mays' superb arrangement, building upon its melancholy air with Horn alternating between arco and pizzicato. Stamm and Mays scored the medley of **Miles Davis**  "Sippin' at Bells" and Bud Powell's demanding "Dance of the Infidels," producing plenty of fireworks. Mays' magical setting of Villa-Lobos' "Bachianas Brasilieras #5 Movement 1" may get younger jazz fans to investigate the South American composer. The CD's centerpiece is Mays' seven-part title track, introduced with spoken commentary by the composer accompanied by sounds of nature. Each section stands on its own and there are several surprises in store. "Float" sounds at times like a free improvisation or a rough sketch for a film score while "Shohola Campfire & Campfire" is a delightful blend of many musical influences. The leisurely "Toward the Sea" concludes this memorable extended work, which hopefully will be an incentive for symphony orchestras to book The Inventions Trio for jazz pops concerts.

**Newark Star-Ledger, January 16, 2009, by Zan Stewart**

**UNUSUAL COMBO “Delaware River Suite” Inventions Trio (No Blooze Music #02)**

Pianist and composer Bill Mays’ Inventions Trio – with cellist Alisa Horn and trumpeter and flugelhornist Marvin Stamm--offers beguiling originals and covers in an ace, if unusual, combination. The heart of the group’s second CD is the 7-movement title suite, which begins with Mays’ spoken introduction on his life-long affinity for rivers – including the Delaware, near which he lives. On the perky “Rapid Ride at Skinner’s Falls,” the players deliver criss-crossing, contrapuntal lines, creating a beaming sonic landscape. Mays’ firm touch yields rich, ringing notes, Stamm’s warm, expressive tone buoys his smart ideas, and Horn uses her bow to issue resounding textures. “Float” is free-form leaning; “Shohola Hoedown & Campfire” has a bright, country-esque flavor. Mays’ rumbling piano lines underpin “Rollin’ Down the Water Gap.” The partnering of two classic bop blues variants – Miles Davis’ “Sippin’ at Bells” and Bud Powell’s “Dance of the Infidels”--is spot-on. Jobim’s “Zingaro” has a lovely, delicate quality, as does Villa-Lobos’ “Bachianas Brasilieras #5.” Mays’ trio appears January 23 and 24 at The Kitano, 66 Park Ave. at 38<sup>th</sup> Street, New York; (212-885-7000; kitano.com.)

# Inventions Trio: “*Fantasy*” (CD)

**AllAboutJazz, March 8, 2008, by Ken Dryden**

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=28469>

Marvin Stamm has worked with many big band leaders, including units led by Woody Herman, Thad Jones & Mel Lewis and **Stan Kenton** . But his lyrical style of trumpet and flugelhorn is best heard in small group settings. Beginning in 2000, he has recorded far more frequently as a leader himself, often with his good friend, pianist Bill Mays. Two examples of his recent work include a combined CD/DVD of a 2006 concert with Mays plus an unusual trio date led by the pianist, adding classical cellist Alisa Horn, that focuses primarily on classical themes, along with an original suite.

Stamm and Mays have been improvising on classical repertoire for some time and naturally decided to record some of their explorations for *Fantasy*. They completed a few duets together in 2001, including a jaunty take of George Gershwin's "Prelude No. 2", a stunning rendition of Alexander Scriabin's "Prelude Op. 11 #3" that segues into a shimmering interpretation of the South American favorite "Sometime Ago", along with an elegant take of Baroque master Johann Sebastian Bach's well-known "Invention #8" that makes a very logical transition into Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha", while also adding a bit of the 18th century to the bop standard. Their jubilant take of "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" also belongs, as this show tune from *Kismet* was actually adapted from a work by classical composer Alexander Borodin.

Stamm introduced classical cellist Alisa Horn to Mays and suggested they play together, which resulted in an instant chemistry. In 2005, they recorded several tracks as a trio, including a haunting take of Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" and a pastorale interpretation of French Impressionist Claude Debussy's "Girl With the Flaxen Hair". The centerpiece of this session is Mays' three-movement title track, a lively commissioned suite that showcases all three players at their very best. Although still finding her way as an improviser, Horn doesn't exhibit the stiffness that many famous classical players have shown when trying to play on a record date with jazz musicians. Clearly the inspired work of The Inventions Trio merits a return trip into the studio.

**Downbeat Magazine – December, 2007 (4 stars) by David French**

Bebop meets baroque (as well as impressionism, romanticism and modernism) on this rich and playful classical crossover CD. Mays, in duet with trumpeter Marvin Stamm, and trio with Stamm and classical cellist Alisa Horn, performs an original suite, “*Fantasy*,” as well as melodies chosen (almost all from the classical repertoire) for their “beautiful melodies and rich grist for improvising.”

The duets offer the clear highlights. On the Borodin-derived jazz standard “Baubles, Bangles And Beads” and George Gershwin’s “Prelude #2” they achieve a conversational

drift across genre lines and a sunny sound that recalls some of Chet Baker and Russ Freeman's work. The closer has them sailing through Bach's "Inventions #8," giving way to Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha." With the addition of Horn's cello on "Fantasy," Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" and Debussy's "Girl With The Flaxen Hair," the trio sounds more scripted, more dramatic and less fun. "Fantasy," at more than 20 minutes, is lovely, with many sections and moods, but at times the stirring melodies and genre mixing give it the feel of film music. On the whole, however, it's an unusual and unusually easy-on-the-ears disc. Its pristine recording and warm mix of voices would make an obvious treat for audiophiles.

### **JazzTimes Magazine – November, 2007, by Steve Futterman**

[file://localhost/Inventions Press Kit /Jazz I JazzTimes Magazine > Reviews > CD Reviews.webarchive](file://localhost/Inventions%20Press%20Kit%20/Jazz%20I%20JazzTimes%20Magazine%20>%20Reviews%20>%20CD%20Reviews.webarchive)

The improvisational element so vital to jazz may not be an a priori feature of classical music, but rare is the alert jazz musician who doesn't appreciate the melodic and harmonic riches to be found within the earlier genre.

Pianist Bill Mays is one such player, and with Fantasy, he explores the confluence of jazz and classical musics with unpretentious intelligence. His cohorts, trumpeter and flugelhornist Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn, are essential factors in the album's sagacious mix of compositional rigor and improvisational ardor. While the classically trained Horn successfully reveals her inner urge to venture beyond the written notes, Stamm, the experienced jazzman, makes splendid use of his dazzling tone and robust delivery to bring themes to life. Mays, for his part, seems delightfully free of proving himself worthy of either genre; he just goes his own confident way as player, composer and arranger.

The album rightfully draws its title from the centerpiece of the project: a three-movement fantasy that weaves Mays' attractive melodies together with integrated solos by the trio mates. Other than this opus, the threesome only confers on two other performances: luscious adaptations of Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" and Debussy's popular piece, "Girl with the Flaxen Hair."

The remaining tracks, recorded nearly four years before the trio performances, mate Mays and Stamm. "Baubles, Bangles, and Beads," the Broadway standard culled from a theme by Borodin, and Gershwin's "Prelude #2" receive bright renditions from two players obviously accustomed to each other's ways yet still juiced by the interaction. The most ambitious duet pairs Bach's "Invention #8" with Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha" (among smatterings of other bop classics), drawing on the contrapuntal natures of both compositions. Thanks to Mays and Stamm, Bach and Bird get along swimmingly.

### **Jazziz Magazine – October, 2007, by Ross Boissoneau**

Pianist Bill Mays knows and appreciates the history of jazz, but he's no hidebound traditionalist. Throughout his career, he's shown a penchant for exploring different combinations, and that's certainly the case with The Inventions Trio. On the opening "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," he and trumpeter Marvin Stamm engage in a playful musical conversation, and Stamm is a joy throughout. His playing has seldom sounded so effortless.

The third member of the trio, cellist Alisa Horn, makes her bow introducing the following “Vocalise” by Rachmaninoff. The three members balance one another nicely, with Mays exhibiting a mastery of the keyboard without dominating the music. Horn is the most delicate of the three, while Stamm’s playing varies from bright to wistful, sometimes within the same phrase.

The three movements of Mays’ “Fantasy” find the trio moving even further into classical chamber jazz, with Stamm employing a mute, then playing straight as he explores the melody. In the second movement, his growling and muted lines play counterpoint to Horn’s inquisitive cello before Mays joins in to gently guide the proceedings. Stamm and Horn take turns leading the way, with Mays always offering gentle support.

The program also includes Gershwin, classicists Scriabin and Debussy, and finally, those all-time tag-team favorites, Johnny Bach and Charlie Parker. It’s the concluding Bach/Bird medley “Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha” that brings things back from rarefied territory to swinging jazz, with the trio once again pared down to the duo of Mays and Stamm. It’s when these players are at their jazzy best that the disc is most successful.

### **ALL MUSIC GUIDE – September 24, 2007, by Scott Yanow**

Pianist Bill Mays and trumpeter Marvin Stamm have been longtime friends, and have worked together on an occasional basis through the years. Cellist Alisa Horn considers Stamm to be her mentor, and she was introduced by the trumpeter to Mays in 2005. This CD has four trumpet or flugelhorn/piano duets from 2001 and four numbers (including the three-part “Fantasy”) by the trio from 2005. Mays and Stamm have played classical duets as part of their repertoire in concert and, since Horn comes from classical music (though she is working at building up her improvising skills), the music often utilizes classical melodies including selections from Rachmaninov, Debussy, Scriabin and Gershwin. In two cases, the pieces are medleys that match together complementary classical and jazz pieces. These renditions of “Baubles, Bangles and Beads,” “Vocalise,” and Gershwin’s “Prelude No. 2” are particularly memorable and Bill Mays’ inventive and tasteful arrangements, along with the individual solos, make this a highly recommended disc.

### **RIFFTIDES – Doug Ramsey on Jazz and Other Matters – September 4, 2007**

-excerpted from “Hello Cello” [http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2007/09/hello\\_cello.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2007/09/hello_cello.html)

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, “Fantasy” (Palmetto)

Alisa Horn is the cellist in pianist Bill Mays’ new group, the Inventions Trio. She is a protégé of trumpeter Marvin Stamm, the other member of the trio. I wrote nearly a year ago about Mays convincing classical string players that they could swing when he recruited the cellist and violinist of the Finisterra Trio to perform Bach’s “Two-part Invention #8” with an overlay of Charlie Parker’s “Ah-Leu-Cha.” Horn has been convinced, too. The conviction didn’t come easily. She is added to the duo in which for several years Mays and Stamm have been melding jazz and classical music. A classical cellist ingrained with the notion that improvisation should be avoided at all costs because it could lead to (gasp) mistakes, she was terrified at the recording session. Here’s some of what Horn wrote in a news release that came with the advance copy of The Inventions Trio CD.

What if I play a WRONG NOTE? During the session I almost had a breakdown worrying about a shift that I had “missed” during an improvisation. No one else in the studio even heard the mistake or noticed it at all and these are some of the most experienced and well-trained ears in the business! I was almost in tears, worried over this horrible imperfection. Bill and Marvin looked at me and just said, “No one is ever perfect and that isn’t what this is about. Screw it!” Since that moment, I have a new outlook on my music and the meaning of “perfect” has changed. Now I understand that perfection is an individual’s perception of what the music is and this idea applies to both classical and jazz styles of playing. Horn is exquisite in the trio numbers on the CD, which include Debussy’s “Girl With The Flaxen Hair” and Mays’ three-movement “Fantasy for Cello, Piano and Trumpet,” an important new work. She is impassioned in Rachmaninoff’s “Vocalise,” and has a stunning introductory moment in the first movement of the “Fantasy.” Mays and Stamm, collaborators for years, have developed an empathy that verges on the mysterious. Their duo numbers on this album are among their finest work. In the trio pieces Alisa Horn complements their magic. She does not sound like a newcomer to improvisation.

The Inventions Trio will be a part of The Seasons Fall Festival next month, along with James Moody, Miguel Zenon, David Friesen, Karrin Allyson, Matt Wilson, Martin Wind, the Finisterra Trio and the Yakima Symphony Orchestra. I look forward to hearing them in live performance.

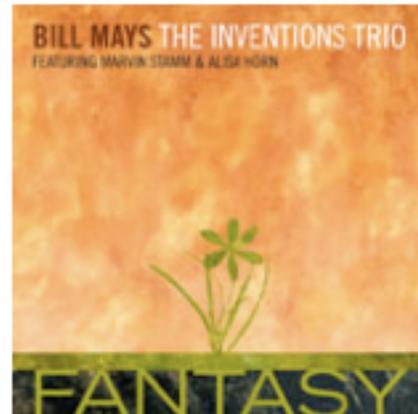
# Fantasy

Bill Mays | Palmetto Records (2007)

By Dr. Judith Schlesinger

 Discuss  

Between them, pianist/composer **Bill Mays** and trumpeter/educator **Marvin Stamm** have been around for approximately 634 years. These two have done it all, including duos and trios and quartets and quintets; big bands and studio work and TV and movies. They've also been friends for much of it, and aside from all the innovation and superb playing on this release, there's also the sound of a fond and enduring relationship.



That sound virtually defines the first track, a duo version of "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" where the piano and trumpet are so freely and happily interwoven that they sound like a pair of kids playing hide and seek. Such musical camaraderie continues throughout the program, which offers an intriguing blend of jazz and classical music. As Mays puts it, his goal is "to find the chamber music in jazz, and vice versa. He may well have reached that goal with this outstanding CD.

Four of the nine tracks are Mays/Stamm duets that were recorded in November of 2001. The gifted young cellist Alisa Horn joins them for the remaining five, as they become The Inventions Trio. But in truth, the whole CD is inventive—for one thing, the mix of piano, trumpet and cello is unusual in classical chamber music, where strings and brass rarely co-exist. It's not terribly common in jazz, either. Yet after hearing Mays' fascinating hybrid composition, "Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet and Piano, you end up wondering why it's not used more often.

Another one of this CD's pleasures is listening to Stamm's heraldic horn as it soars above the cello and piano; it must be said that few trumpeters, living or otherwise, can match the strength and purity of his tone. Also outstanding is the clever merging of Bach with Bird ("Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha"), and the Scriabin prelude that gets knitted into "Sometime Ago, done as a jazz waltz.

It's rare for classical music and jazz to nestle this comfortably together, but *Fantasy* is so tuneful and well-crafted that partisans of both sides will find much to enjoy—and those who already frolic in the third stream will be positively delighted.

**ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE – Critic’s Playlist – Aug. 24, 2007,**  
**reviewed by Jack Garner**

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, “Fantasy” (Palmetto)

The lyrical pianist has formed a new trio with the unusual configuration of a trumpeter (Marvin Stamm) and a cellist (Alis Horn) to explore the connections between improvised jazz and structured classical music, what an earlier jazz generation called “ThirdStream.” The resulting chamber jazz is eloquent and quite lovely, with a stronger rhythm foundation than you might expect from a small ensemble with no conventional bass-drums rhythm section. The material features a wide spectrum, from Rachmaninov and Debussy to Gershwin and Mays himself.

**THE BUFFALO NEWS: ENTERTAINMENT, MONDAY, AUGUST 20, 2007**

**Listening Post/Brief reviews of select releases**

*Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, “Fantasy” (Palmetto).* Trumpet, piano and cello is not your everyday jazz trio. That much is certain. That’s why this disc begins without Alisa Horn’s cello so that you can contemplate pianist Bill Mays and trumpet player Marvin Stamm playing “Baubles, Bangles and BeaDs” in a tradition that probably goes back to Earl Hines and Louis Armstrong playing “Weather Bird Rag.” But then Horn joins in and the strange but lovely ensemble richness presents itself with an improvisation on Rachmaninoff’s “Vocalise” and provides some odd but compelling stylistic back-and-forth between jazz and classical music throughout the rest of the disc. And all of it is shapely, graceful and completely convincing. ★★★( *Jeff Simon*)

**HARTFORD COURANT, August 10, 2007, OWEN MCNALLY**

BILL MAYS, THE INVENTIONS TRIO, Fantasy, Palmetto Records

Never once sounding pompous or academic, pianist/composer Bill Mays brilliantly blends chamber music and jazz with his Inventions Trio, injecting robust new life into familiar classical themes, jazz standards and original works.

Improvising on themes by Bach and Bird, rocking on Rachmaninov, jamming on Gershwin or swinging on Scriabin is all fair game for Mays and his nimble-witted co-inventors, the noted jazz trumpeter/flugelhornist Marvin Stamm and the classical cellist Alisa Horn.

The loveliest of the CD's nine tracks--each an exquisite balance of composition and improvisation--is the fresh take on Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair." It's as light-filled and wrapped in atmospheric, domestic serenity as a portrait by the Dutch Master Jan Vermeer.

Absolutely the most fun is the swinging, crisply contrapuntal marriage between a theme by Bach and Charlie Parker's bebop classic, "Ah-Leu-Cha."

Mays' a cappella solo on this hip hybrid is the perfect illustration of the blood-link between the surging, life-celebrating energies of Bach's keyboard music and the great Bud Powell's equally miraculous bebop piano inventions.

Horn's dark, resonant cello adds tonal texture and heightens evocative moods, as on Mays' three-movement tour de force, "Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet and Piano." And, yes,

the classically trained Horn can fit quite comfortably into a swinging groove, even in the extremely swift company of these two jazz masters of spontaneously shaped music.

### **MIDWEST RECORD RECAP, August 9, 2007**

BILL MAYS-Inventions Trio/Fantasy: With nothing to prove, after four decades of solid innovation and hard work, Mays simply wants to have fun. Always adept at mixing jazz and classical, the piano man does it again, but this time, he don't care if he's taken seriously. Not to say this set sounds tossed off, far from it, but Mays and co-horts are playing for the fun of it, using some various serious pieces as the starting point and letting things roll from there. Fusing Bach with Charlie Parker is an example of this fusion. After having made his bones by playing everything with everybody everywhere, he's earned the right to have a busman's holiday that turns out to be yet another tour de force. Jazzbos should take note.

### **Audiophile Audition 2007**

When I read that leading pianist Bill Mays' new group was created to explore the intersection of chamber music and jazz I was immediately interested. He is one of the few jazz artists who sometimes includes classical repertory into a jazz context - in common with people such as Roger Kellaway's Cello Quartet, jazz cellists such as Oscar Pettiford and Fred Katz, and going back to the Swing Era - the many big bands and groups like John Kirby's which often played classical themes. In the 1970s Mays was asked by jazz flutist Bud Shank to write a five-movement flute suite, which he did. (Odd that Shank now wants nothing to do with the flute anymore, calling his old group with Laurindo Almeida "The LA Snore.") In the 1980s Mays did a jazz arrangement of The Nutcracker Suite - which Ellington had also done earlier. He's also written sax quartets, works for the Aureole chamber ensemble, and scores for numerous TV shows and films. Trumpeter Stamm appears as soloist with symphony orchestras and as a member of the George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band. Cellist Horn's entire background until recently was entirely in the classical world. She played in the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and as principal cello in the Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra. She reveals in the album's note booklet how scary it was for a classically-trained musician to face improvisation. Horn was sure she played notes wrongly until her compatriots assured her there was really no specific wrong or right. This is a rather unusual makeup for a trio playing any sort of music, but it works beautifully - might I even say inventingly? - on the nine tracks. The Rachmaninov Vocalise has been transcribed dozens of different ways - in fact there is an RCA Red Seal CD compiling a bunch of them. The Trio's version is one of the finest I've heard. Gershwin's Second Prelude for Piano has also come in for some unusual transcriptions, and the Trio's is highly successful here. Other delights are the Scriabin Prelude and Debussy's Girl with the Flaxen Hair. May's own extended Fantasy - the disc's title tune - mixes the two genres with great skill and reminded me in some parts of Claude Bolling's chamber-jazz Suites.

### **"Live At Jazz Standard" (CD)**

French News, no. 199/December, 2005 ([www.french-news.com](http://www.french-news.com))

## **Lady D's Jazz Corner by Domi Truffandier**

I know what you're going to say: "Oh no, not again". But, yes, here he is again, our old friend Bill Mays – am I to blame if he's been releasing CD after CD of excellent music lately? Let's take a look, then, at 'Bill Mays Trio Live at Jazz Standard' (Palmetto Records PM2112), recorded in December 2004 by Mays' regular trio, featuring Martin Wind on bass and Matt Wilson on drums.

What do we see? Behind Judy Kirtley's fine cover photos (her website is well worth a visit at <http://www.judykirtleyphotography.com>), a nice collection of, well, standards, plus a couple of Mays originals. And, more importantly, what do we hear? Modern bebop with the Bill Mays touch, which means plenty of toying around with metrics and harmonies ('Have you met miss jones?' 'Willow weep for me'), clever arrangements, tongue-in-cheek humour, a constant interaction between the three musicians and frantic applause by an enthusiastic crowd.

I loved the album throughout, but confess a weakness for 'Squeeze me', which features some nice bass work by Wind, both behind Mays' pretty lines and during his own solo. Plus, there's a laid-back, gently bouncing atmosphere about this tune, which is simply exhilarating.

And, there's so much more to enjoy on 'Live at the jazz standard'! For instance, Mays' own dark, boisterous 'Music house' or a flawless rendition of Monk's 'Let's call this', interspersed with typical Monkish lines and fragments from some of his other compositions. Bill's own 'Euterpe' and 'How are things in Glocca Morra?' are showcases for the pianist's more lyrical side, while Wind is once again awesome on Ornette's 'When will the blues leave?' and, with the bow, on Charlie Chaplin's 'Smile' – one of my all-time favourite jazz standards...especially when it is played as beautifully and with as much feeling and creativity as it is here.

So, thanks for the music, guys – when's the next one coming?!

### **JazzTimes, November 2005 (pp. 137-138)**

#### **Live At Jazz Standard (Palmetto)**

Bill Mays, a literate, polished, mainstream jazz pianist, likes to do concept albums (the best of which was *An Ellington Affair*, on Concord, 11 years ago). His new Palmetto release, his 14<sup>th</sup> as a leader, is not one—unless "cutting loose" is considered a concept. It was recorded live at one of the most hospitable settings for jazz in Manhattan by one of the best engineers in the business, A. T. Michael MacDonald. Mays' freedom to open things up comes from the trust engendered by playing with the same trio for six years, with articulate bassist Martin Wind and droll drummer Matt Wilson.

"Willow Weep for Me" is deconstructed and reconstituted in plucked piano strings (a device that Mays used with rare musical expressiveness) and takes forever (about four minutes) to launch into a sprawling tour de force that lasts another six. Mays' Monk tribute begins with a stream-of-consciousness medley of many Monkian melodies before settling on one, "Let's Call This."

Not many pianists could organize a journey from "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" through Ornette Coleman's "When With the Blues Leave?" to Charlie Chaplin's "Smile." The witty and serious Mays nails all three, with major contributions from Wind playing arco, pizzicato and arco, respectively.

**Aargauer Zeitung, November 9, 2005 p. 39 (Swiss daily paper), by Jurg Sommer**  
**Bill Mays Trio: Live At Jazz Standard (Palmetto/MV) Joyful, Spirited**

Many pianists as well as piano trios are working inside a relatively narrow scope. Not so 60-year-old Bill Mays and his longtime trio mates Martin Wind (b) and Matt Wilson (dm). You might call their approach multi-stylistic openness. The members of this unit are well known for their musical wit, high musicality, imagination and the ability to react in no time to their partners, not to mention their technical know-how on the instruments that is absolutely amazing. Paired with all this is an almost unlimited desire to take risks and to go to the edges within the musical possibilities offered by the material they are working off. No wonder the live CD recorded at the sophisticated New York "Jazz Standard" in December, 2004 offers an impressive insight into Mays' trio music in front of an enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable audience. It's absolutely spellbinding to listen to the trio in action, working out new aspects in melody, harmony and rhythm off so-called worn-out standards that become true jewels in the hands of such talented artists. Surprising new light on old songs!

Pianist **Bill Mays**, now in his early sixties, is proof positive that aging needn't necessarily imply either slowing down or settling into a comfort zone. He has been an active collaborator with artists like **Bud Shank** (with whom he performed at this year's Ottawa International Jazz Festival), Shirley Horn, and Gerry Mulligan, but he's also established a parallel career as a session player on film soundtracks, including *Being John Malkovich*, *Jaws*, and *Rocky*.



Mays has always been considered—and with some justification—as something of an in-the-center disciple of the Bill Evans school. But within the mainstream, he's a bold improviser with a relaxed attitude that makes anything possible and surprise the norm. He has a broad stylistic reach and he's unafraid to go places where most mainstream pianists won't. He's also comfortable with both the inside and outside of his instrument, as likely to pluck, mute, and strum the strings as he is to play the keys.

Nowhere is this more evident than on his latest release, *Live at Jazz Standard*, featuring his regular trio of the past six years with drummer **Matt Wilson** and bassist **Martin Wind**. Surrounding himself with younger players, Mays is able to take a worn chestnut like "Willow Weep for Me and reinvent it as a blues-cum-gospel-cum-rock piece where limitation is simply not in the vocabulary.

In person, Mays comes across as lighthearted and fun-loving; and with Wilson he's got an equally joyous and engaged partner. Wilson has accrued a rich discography and a growing reputation for flexibility, including his supporting performance for the underappreciated but nevertheless iconic saxophonist **Dewey Redman** and guitarist Pat Metheny in *Montreal* this summer, and he brings a wealth of ideas to any table. But most importantly, whether it's the bluesy swing of Ornette Coleman's "When Will the Blues Leave, the gentle balladry of Charlie Chaplin's "Smile, or Mays' own altogether darker and impressionistic "Euterpe, his rhythmic and melodic instincts are sharp and always on point.

Wind's body of work may be smaller, but he's equally openminded. A nimble soloist on Mays' lithely swinging version of Rodgers and Hart's "Have You Met Miss Jones, he also possesses a rich arco tone that sets the tone for the graceful ballad "How are Things in Glocca Mora?

Mays may choose material by a long-time favourite like Duke Ellington ("Squeeze Me ) or liberally allude to a variety of Thelonious Monk compositions before settling into a quirky rendition of "Let's Call This, but as much as *Live at Jazz Standard* is an easygoing and approachable programme, it's also no museum piece. Mays' wealth of experience—even as he has been overlooked by the larger jazz-going public as a solo artist—means that while he is filled with reverence, he is always more than a stylistic imitator. It would be interesting to see his record collection, but a pretty good suspicion is that his listening habits mirror those of his surprisingly unprejudiced playing.

**NJ Star-Ledger, August 21, 2005, by Jill McManus**

"Bill Mays Trio Live at Jazz Standard"

(Palmetto)\*\*\* 1/2

Here on his latest CD, veteran jazz pianist Bill Mays demonstrates his affinity for the jazz trio. His playing, rich with spontaneity, passion and humor, is also steeped in familiar references. Interplay between Mays, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson -- his outstanding trio for six years -- suggests the Bill Evans model. On "Have You Met Miss Jones?," done as a high-spirited waltz, the space in Mays' briskly rolling lines lets Wind's springy tones breathe through; Wilson adroitly catches offbeat accents. "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?," bowed by Wind, is a nostalgic valentine. "Squeeze Me" saunters on fat chords, while Mays plucks the piano strings to open a mysterious "Darn That Dream." "Willow Weep for Me" is a compendium of blues strategies. Mays originals include "Music House," with a sly melody that gives way to a barrelhouse frolic with the drums, and the exquisitely plaintive "Euterpe."

**Hartford Courant, August 18, 2005, by OWEN MCNALLY**

**Bill Mays Trio (Palmetto Records)**

Perhaps because he has accompanied every kind of vocal stylist from Sarah Vaughan and Larry Gatlin to Al Jarreau and Kiri Te Kanawa, pianist Bill Mays has a deep understanding of how to listen empathetically to others. Mays' sensitivity comes shining through on this live session in a Manhattan jazz club as he interacts brilliantly with his skillful trio mates, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson. What results from Mays' openness is a united trio sound, a creative, democratic collaboration. Versatility and vitality also reign supreme on the trio's flashy, show-stopping number "Willow Weep for Me." A stomping, jubilant celebration, it mixes elements of jazz, blues, country, gospel, martial music and rock. Mays even reaches inside the piano's guts to pluck its inner strings, coaxing and cajoling a funky country banjo sound that would be right at home at the Grand Ole Opry. Variety abounds. "Squeeze Me" opens as a classically refined salon composition, then suddenly transforms into a mercurial swinger. "Let's Call This" is a reverential, yet witty Te Deum to jazz demigod Thelonious Monk. And "Have You Met Miss Jones?" swings with the tight yet breezy togetherness that was the hallmark of the classic Ahmad Jamal Trio. Wilson is a terrific drummer with endlessly fresh flowing ideas. And Wind is a talented bassist who can actually play arco (bowed) bass cleanly, without the more usual scratchy sounds and wobbly intonation.

**IRISH ECHO** <http://www.irishecho.com/newspaper/story.cfm?id=16870>

**By Earle Hitchner [July 27, 2005]**

California-born, New York City resident pianist **Bill Mays** is a former music director for jazz diva Sarah Vaughan (1924-1990) who has fashioned a fine solo career. Over the past six years he has also led a superb trio with the highly gifted drummer Matt Wilson and the bassist Martin Wind. Mays has a deceptively limpid, subtle style, unforced and uncluttered, yet steely resilient, and his work with Wilson and Wind has produced some stellar jazz. On "Live at Jazz Standard," coming out from Palmetto Records on Aug. 16, the trio perform the melody of "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?" from the 1946 Harburg-Lane musical "Finian's Rainbow." Mays's touch is light, not Lite, on piano

rhythm as Wind bows the melody on bass, then the two reverse, with Mays playing melody and Wind plucking rhythmic bass as Wilson joins on brushes. In the right alchemic hands, sappy can turn into something special, as it does here.

### **Oregon Jazz Scene. By George Fendel**

#### **LIVE AT JAZZ STANDARD**

Those in the know get their tickets early every time Bill Mays comes to town. He's the all-around, incredible, creative piano maven and in this magical live performance, he appears with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson. Together they bring freshness and spirit to "Have You Met Miss Jones," "Squeeze Me," "Darn That Dream," "Smile," "Glocca Morra," "Let's Call This" and more. An outstanding performance! (Palmetto, 2005; playing time: 72:15; 4 1/2 stars out of 5)

## **"Bick's Bag" (CD)**

### **September 2005 "Jersey Jazz" Joe Lang - "Bick's Bag"**

There are a plethora of jazz piano trio recordings available, and a lot of them are really good, so it takes something special to grab your ears and not let them go until the disc ends. Well, "Bick's Bag" (Triplet 1013) by pianist Bill Mays, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke does just that. Recorded at the Montreal Bistro & Jazz Club in Toronto in 2002, this album demonstrates what sheer joy can emanate from three players who just plain fit together, and have an enthusiastic audience on hand to propel them. The disc opens with the title track, a Mays original that says you are in for some fun. The tempo of the music changes from track to track, but the interest level for the listener remains high. Give your attention to their fascinating approach to "On the Trail," where Swainson states the theme while Mays plays around with variations of "My Baby Just Cares for Me." For the first four plus minutes of this ten-minute excursion, Swainson is front and center, making you wonder when his fingers are going to give out. Things go out on a high note with their version of Bud Powell's "Hallucinations." This is an album full of energy that should pick up anyone plagued with lethargy, and keep you flying if you are already up. ([www.tripletrecords.com](http://www.tripletrecords.com))

### **French News, no. 152, May 2005 ([www.french-news.com](http://www.french-news.com))**

#### **Lady D's Jazz Corner, by Domi Truffandier**

It's just one of those funny coincidences: most of this column will be devoted to a man whose name echoes the name of the month – an old acquaintance of ours, pianist Bill Mays, who definitely should be made an honorary member of the Jazz Corner!

#### **Bill and the boys**

(Too) few people are familiar with the name of Bill Mays. And yet, we've all heard him at least once. Who's never caught a glimpse of 'Dallas' or 'Kojak' on TV? Who hasn't seen at least one of those blockbusters: 'Shaft 2', 'Lethal Weapon', 'Interview With The

Vampire', 'Rocky', 'Mission To Mars', 'Being John Malkovich' or 'Fargo'? Bill is the pianist on the soundtracks of all these movies – worlds apart from his work as an all-round jazz musician, which led him over the years to work with such artists as Aretha Franklin, Al Jarreau, Gerry Mulligan, Sonny Stitt, Phil Woods, Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra and... Frank Zappa.

Once again when I asked Brother Bill to send whatever material he could think of for a review in your favourite monthly, I didn't expect to get a gig fat envelope containing two CDs, recent photos and plenty of information. A nice surprise, since the press book is crammed with interesting documents, including a fine article by Doug Ramsey for the American 'JazzTimes'. As for the music, it is once again excellent.

### **Old bottles, new wine**

'On The Road Again' (SBE Records SBECD024) is credited to Road Work Ahead, a quartet founded in the early 1980s by Bill, guitarist Peter Sprague, bassist Bob Magnusson and drummer Jim Plank, which recorded two albums for Discovery and did quite a bit of touring before its members "eventually made some life changes", as explained by Peter Sprague in the liner notes. That was the end of Road Work Ahead... until 2003.

What is so special about this quartet? As Sprague puts it, it is "a co-op band. Each member brings their own world of influences into the group through their compositions and arrangements (...) and what eventually comes out is music with a wide palette of colour". Need I say more? Probably. Let me add, then, that here's a CD that is excellent throughout, from the very first notes of Magnusson's 'Thea's Laughter', a straightforward bebop tune with a Latin tinge propelled by Jim's tasteful drumming, and on which Peter and Bill get plenty of space to stretch out, to the last chord of Jim Plank's bouncy 'Bar, Bark'; Bills tongue-in-cheek humour on this one is a treat, just like his arrangement of three Charlie Parker tunes, brought together under the title 'Bird's Blues', a hard swinging track on which the rhythm pair is truly impressive, and where everybody gets a chance to solo. Peter Sprague (who's blessed with one of the purest, most beautiful guitar sounds I've heard in a while) contributes a nice 'As It Is, As You Are' and a fine arrangement of Jobim and De Moraes' 'Modinha' – beautifully stated by Bob on arco bass. I'm telling you: this one is a treat!

*Strivin' To Break Even Records, P.O. Box 762, Del Mar, CA 92014-0762, USA*

### **Bills bag**

And so is 'Bick's Bag' (Triplet Records TR1013-2), recorded live at the Montreal Bistro and Jazz Club in 2002 by Bill, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke. There's so much to enjoy here: Terry's shuffle on Bill's own 'Bick's Bag' (a hard-swinging gospel-funk tune), virtuoso renditions of Coleman Hawkins' 'Bean and the Boys' and Bud Powell's 'Hallucinations' – 100% bebop 'a la Nays', our favourite brand! Not to mention heartfelt versions of Paul Simon's 'I Do It For Your Love' and Neil's own 'Paradigm' (check his rock-solid lines and long, breathtaking solo on Ferde Grofe's 'On the Trail', by the way). As for 'Laura', she's given a swinging treatment, a welcome change from years and years of slow, nostalgic renditions...thank you, gentlemen!

### **CODA Magazine, May/June 2005, Nate Forward**

In a world full of faceless mainstream pianists, Bill Mays never sounds like anyone but himself: warm, good-humoured and often downright funny. *Bick's Bag*, recorded at Toronto's Montreal Bistro, is above all a colourful album: he elicits a fresh mood and texture from every piece, and the improvising of Mays, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke is consistently fine – sometimes genuinely inspired. Mays' one original is the gossamer "Bick's Bag," a spirited farewell to the recently retired Ed Bickert; Swainson contributes the gracious waltz "Paradigm," which turns out to be one of the album's highlights. The rest of the program is a delightfully kenspeckle batch of standards and ought-to-be-standards, ranging from Frank Rosolino's classic "Blue Daniel" to a version of Ferde Grofé's "On the Trail" that treats the cornpone material with a genial wit recalling *Way Out West*. The production is slightly odd – there's way too much crowd noise, for instance – but it hardly matters when the music itself is pure pleasure.

### **Ted O'Reilly, February 2005 Wholenote Jazz Reviews Pt. 1**

#### **Bick's Bag, Bill Mays, Neil Swainson, Terry Clarke, Triplet Records TR 1013-2**

This 'equal members' trio recording shows the spontaneous side of its very professional musicians. These fine players all have many associations which are more formal (such as Mays' own trio, Swainson with George Shearing, Clarke with Jim Hall) but this live recording at Toronto's Montreal Bistro & Jazz Club captures them tossing ideas back and forth, jousting, trying to hit the high hard one in the pure joy of challenge-jazz. Each player *listens* and contributes, ready to go where the music itself leads.

In this sort of contributory music, the actual compositions played are of less value than what is done to them, but there's a lot of ground covered here: originals by Mays (the exuberant *Bick's Bag* written for retired guitarist Ed Bickert and once recorded by those two) and Swainson (*Paradigm*, quiet and thoughtful); standards like *Laura*, *On The Trail* (featuring Swainson) and even Paul Simon's *I Do It For Your Love*. Jazz tunes are *Bean And The Boys* by Coleman Hawkins; Frank Rosolino's waltz *Blue Daniel*; and the session's wrap-up *Hallucinations*, Bud Powell's bebop burner.

The music is well-recorded and naturally balanced but, having spent many a night at the Montreal Bistro, it seems to me that more than a little post-production enhancement has happened when it comes to the audience response, as it sounds like an attentive, enthusiastic 400 or so WHOOPÉE fans are there. So, if you don't mind that many folks in your listening room, be sure to invite Mays, Swainson and Clarke. They make a special trio.

Review: One of the great mysteries of a working band is that some nights are better than others. The factors that contribute to such a state may be myriad and yet elusive, depending as much on the band as the audience. It may be that the bartender is having a good night and every Rusty Nail served is smoky and perfect. Or maybe it is payday for a majority of the patrons. Whatever the causes, when that perfect storm hits, you don't

want to be anywhere else but that room. Bick's Bag by the trio of Bill Mays (piano), Neil Swainson (bass) and Terry Clarke (drums) captures a night when everything was going right. From the opening gospel style stomp of the title track to the wry and lovely hush cast by Paul Simon's "I Do It For Your Love" the band is in the pocket, obviously prodded on by their own fine efforts. The crystal clear quality of the recording also features an enthusiastic audience at the Montreal Bistro and Jazz Club, not shy about showing their approval and inserting themselves into the performances. It is our good fortune that such a night was pinned down on tape before it could fragment and float away in only the memories of those in the club that night.

### **Jazzreview. com 2005--Stephen Latessa - Bick's Bag**

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### **Geoff Chapman, Toronto Star, Thursday, Dec. 16, 2004 (K10 "What's On Disc)**

Here's delightful music, a tribute to retired guitarist Ed Bickert, a frequent collaborator of pianist Mays. The Montreal Bistro audience is noisily appreciative from the first notes of the funkily swinging title tune to the last at a session recorded on the final night of a week's gig there two Falls ago. There are languorous examinations of standards ("Laura") and newer pop classics (Paul Simon's "I Do It For Your Love") and Mays shows he still can bop at reckless pace with the best (Bud Powell's "Hallucinations"). Overall the music is relaxed and sophisticated, bass Swainson and drummer Clarke meshing comfortably as the versatile, authoritative Mays charts this pleasing journey. The audience keeps cheering, notably for the bounce and energy the trio puts into the Coleman Hawkins "Bean And The Boys" and the cleverly countrified "On The Trail." GC

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## Bill Mays: Mays' Days



April 2003

**Doug Ramsey**

In 1959, 15-year-old Bill Mays, the son of a fundamentalist preacher in California, had jazz revealed to him by a god of the piano.

Earl "Fatha" Hines, resident pianist at the Hangover Club across the bay in San Francisco, was making an appearance near the Mays home in Lafayette. Mays had been playing the piano since he was five and had solid classical training, but Bill Lotter, the choir director in Bill Mays Sr.'s church, wanted to expand the teenager's horizons.

Mays' parents, both musicians, agreed. The rekindling of Hines' career was half a decade away. His powers were undiminished.

"We walked in, and there was Hines playing on an old upright, a white piano," Mays says. "He had a piece of Masonite under the pedals, and he was stompin'. I immediately recognized the emotional content of what I was hearing. I had played gospel music and heard a lot of black gospel music when dad and I would visit some of the Baptist churches in East Los Angeles; they had Fender bass, drums, organ and piano, and it got smokin'. So when I heard jazz, I knew there was a connection, and I loved what I heard."

Choir director Lotter offered his next lesson a year later in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, where he took Mays to the Black Hawk. They sat behind chicken wire and drank Cokes in the area provided for children. That public-service exception to the liquor laws, set up by an agreement between Black Hawk owner Guidio Caccienti and Mayor George Christopher, made it possible for hundreds of Bay Area youngsters to experience world-class jazz. The band Mays heard there was the Miles Davis sextet.

"That's when I got the bug," Mays says, "when I heard Fatha Hines and Miles, and then on the radio I heard a record by the Lighthouse All-Stars. It was Bud Shank on alto, Stu Williamson on trumpet, Claude Williamson playing piano, Bob Enevoldsen on trombone, Stan Levey playing drums, Howard Rumsey on bass—a little big band. Dick Shreve wrote a lot of the charts. The arrangements were what really got me. They were wonderful. I think they made a big impression on me as an arranger."

Tall, smiling, full of enthusiasm and wry humor, the now 59-year-old Mays relaxes in the lobby of Portland's Benson hotel, where he is about to play a solo recital and duets with Bud Shank for the Jazz Society of Oregon. With a glass of Oregon pinot noir in hand, Mays reminisces about his musical progression.

Wherever the Reverend Mays' peripatetic preaching career took the family, his parents saw that young Bill's lessons continued. "My first teacher was up in West Point in that red clay Sierra Nevada country. Her name was Mrs. Hollingshead. Just exercises and hand position. I enjoyed practicing a lot. She gave me the greatest little candies at the end of the lesson, and a nice gold star in the book. That got me started right. When we moved to Los Angeles, they got me with another wonderful teacher, Ethel Bush. It was all technique; Czerny exercises, little songs and, eventually, Bach two-part inventions, easy Brahms, easy Liszt. I didn't get harmony and theory until I was in the service, as a Navy musician."

Mays joined the Navy in 1961, when he was 17, right out of high school. "I went to the Navy music school in Washington, D.C., and I probably got the equivalent of college harmony and theory in nine months. It was very intense."

The time in Washington exposed Mays to music that reinforced his resolve to have a career in jazz. One of the inspirations was the JFK Quintet, which included alto saxophonist Andrew White, trumpeter Ray Codrington, bassist Walter Booker and drummer Carl Newman. Mays heard the band often at the Bohemian Caverns.

Tenor saxophonist Leroy Locke and other Navy music school colleagues further influenced Mays with their record collections. "They knew the music and had me listening to Horace Silver, early McCoy Tyner, eventually Bill Evans. It wasn't until later that I went back and heard the earlier guys: Nat Cole, Jess Stacy, Dodo Marmarosa. When you graduated you got either the Navy Band in Washington or one of a host of land-based or ship-based bands. I got Coronado. It turned out to be great."

On the base at Coronado Island, just off San Diego, Mays' musical duties were light, and his free time was abundant. He made the most of the situation. "It was about four hours a day doing the Navy band thing, playing ship decommissionings, admirals' parties, playing the flag up in the morning. I'd hit the bass drum; they'd raise the flag. I had an upright piano in my little apartment off the base. I'd go home and practice the rest of the day and get my government check. It was terrific. I went out and heard music in San Diego. I heard Wynton Kelly there. I listened to Mike Wofford a lot. He had a trio with a bassist named Ted Blake, and Jim Plank on drums. Mike was a big influence on me at that time. I love his playing."

He even asked Wofford for a lesson once. Wofford listened to him play and said, "Just keep going in that direction." Later, Mays drove up to L.A. for a lesson with Jimmy Rowles, who listened and growled, "Just keep doin' what you're doin'."

Mays made it a point to show up at clubs where Rowles was playing. "Those were the real lessons," he says. "I watched how he pedaled. I always pay attention to peoples' pedalings, especially Hank Jones and Jimmy. That clarity of sound that Hank has-and that muddling of sound that Jimmy had. Jimmy could do magical things, both through his pedaling and the voicing of his chords, and he could make an out-of-tune piano sound better than it was. He just knew how to do it. He once told me, 'Here's the key to being a great accompanist: If you think of an idea, play half of it.'"

When Mays came to the end of his Navy hitch in 1965, the unit's recruiting officer tried to get him to reenlist. The appeal was financial security. "He said, 'You know, another 16 years, you'll be out of here when you're in your late 30s and begin drawing down your retirement pay.' I said, 'Thanks, but no thanks.' I had already purchased my red-spangled coat that I would be wearing in the Bill Green Orchestra. He was the club-date king of San Diego. It was an entertainment-hotel dance. Green played vibes, clarinet and tenor sax; we all sang, too. Bill had been a member of the Modernaires. We did that kind of harmony and sang 'Nancy With the Laughing Face' and 'A Cottage for Sale,' all those great tunes."

Mays worked steadily in San Diego until 1969, when he moved to Los Angeles. "I wanted to branch out and do everything that I could, including studio work, and I did everything. I worked at the Playboy Club, I worked the Gil Mellé jobs, the Carol Wax jobs-" Mays laughs-"Carol Wax looked like he was carved in wax, an old guy with a tuxedo and a baton and a lot of one-night party gigs, cocktail events, weddings. He would kick off the band by rolling his hand in a circular motion, stirring spaghetti. You could guess where 'one' was. He'd cut off the band at the end by waving his arms like one of those flight guys at the airport. You'd have to know a hundred of the most-often-played standards: 'Here's That Rainy Day' and 'Misty' and 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon.' But the checks were good."

During his early days in Los Angeles, Mays worked with Mike Barone's big band at Donte's and with saxophonist Tom Scott's band. He has also accompanied a number of singers-182, so far. Rowles recommended him for gigs with Bill Henderson, then with Sarah Vaughan. Mays laughs his way through a Vaughan story.

"I went over to her house. She pulled out a huge book of arrangements. I was a good reader, but I'd never seen any of this, and I thought the audition was going to last three hours. She started a tune, we got halfway through it and she said, 'You've got the job. Let's eat,' and she cooked me a big meal. She was a great cook, and that was a great gig: Jimmy Cobb on drums, Bob Magnusson on bass. It was like a family, in '72 and '73, being with Sarah. One of the best things about working with her was learning to play really slow tempos and not be afraid of them. I was paralyzed. Jimmy Cobb said, 'Hey, here's how you do it. Just think triplets. Subdivide the beat. Don't try to live from "one" to "two" to "three" to "four."' When he said that, I started to relax with the concept, and within a few nights I had it."

Soon after Mays landed in L.A., pianist Terry Trotter introduced him to the respected teacher Victor Aller. Aller took Mays to a higher level in terms of technique, sound production, tone and-of essential benefit to Mays' ambitions-sight-reading.

"I told him I wanted to get into studio work, and he said, 'You've gotta be a dynamite reader.' I was a fairly good reader, and he took me all the way, by getting a wide variety of music to read and having me play it at a slow enough tempo so that I would keep going and not stop. By learning how to read half a bar, a whole bar, as you're still playing the preceding bar; how to look at a piece of music and psych it out. How to be a quick study and find the part that's going give you trouble. How to work out the fingering and not leave it to chance, mark it in. The kind of things that you need whether you're at the Vanguard reading a Bob Brookmeyer chart or on a studio date doing something by Johnny Williams. When you did a movie score, you didn't have the luxury of taking music home and practicing. It had to be right then. They put it in front of you and you rehearse it one or two times and, bam, it's a take."

The hard work paid off. From 1973 to 1984, Mays did studio work six days a week, four to 12 hours a day. He was on hundreds of film and television soundtracks. He played jazz as often as he could.

"After my career was established, I used to turn down any and all studio work on Fridays and rehearse my band, which at that time was Ernie Watts, myself, Abe Laboriel on bass and Steve Schaeffer on drums. Or I would think nothing of going to Seattle with Howard Roberts, the guitarist, working a week, making a thousand bucks and turning down five thousand dollars of studio dates. I enjoyed the studios, I liked the money, and I always felt, 'I'm not gonna do this forever.' Shelly Manne was very encouraging. In fact, Shelly was one of those rare guys who would do studio work and play in his club at night, and I got to play and record with him, Bud Shank, Bobby Shew, Gary Foster. But there wasn't enough variety of people to play with in clubs, compared with New York."

Mays counts his recordings and club dates with Manne among the highlights of his career. "Shelly taught me what the joy of time was. I looked over at him on a gig one night and he was just doing, splang-lank-a-dank, dink-a-ting, dink-a-ting, dink-a-ting, dink-a-ting. That's all he was doing, and it felt so good, and I could play anything on top of it, and he was smiling like a 13-year-old kid. He said, 'I could do this all my life.'"

In 1984, Mays bowed out of the studios and made the transcontinental jump. In New York, he worked with Gerry Mulligan's quartet and big band, Clark Terry, Al Cohn, Bob Brookmeyer, Benny Golson and the Mel Lewis Orchestra. His own groups have played at Birdland, the Blue Note, Bradleys, Visiones, the Knickerbocker and the Village Gate. Mays made duo albums with guitarist Ed Bickert and bassists Red Mitchell and Ray Drummond for Concord and DMP. His trio with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson has recorded several CDs, including 2001's *Summer Sketches* (Palmetto), which received enthusiastic reviews, as did his duo album with trumpeter Marvin Stamm, *By Ourselves* (Marstam). The *Soccerball* (Nagel-Heyer) is another winner by Mays' trio, but it's under Wind's name, with German tenor saxophonist Peter Weniger.

In his newsletter, *Cadenzas*, Stamm wrote, "Can you imagine what it is like to play with someone who always makes you 'push the envelope,' encouraging you to reach down and create from your deepest resources? Someone who weaves such tapestries for you to meld with and then to take flight from, that you always feel as if you could ascend to great heights from that place? Well, this is what I experience working with Bill Mays."

Since his earliest days in Los Angeles Mays has collaborated with Bud Shank. He is the pianist on Shank's latest sextet CD, *On the Trail* (Raw Records).

"He's got so much energy and so much involvement in the music," Shank says. "Not only his head, but his whole body, gets into it. He transmits that to whomever he's playing with, as accompaniment, as a means of help and inspiration. Every once in a while I look over at him when we're playing, and he's sitting there smiling and laughing; laughing at himself, smiling at whatever's going on around him. It's not just humor; it's happiness, exuberance. It comes out in his playing as a soloist and it comes out in his playing as an accompanist."

Mays' latest trio release on Palmetto, *Going Home*, came about in part because of a national disaster. He and his wife, the photographer Judy Kirtley, have an apartment in New York and a house on Walker Lake in Shohola, Penn. He proposed to her in a kayak on the lake. Not long after, she was stuck in New York for days following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

"Something happened after 9/11. I kept traveling, but I felt ill at ease. Home meant more than it ever had," Mays says. "We got married in November, and all of a sudden the new CD just presented itself. I was playing the 'Going Home' theme from the *New World Symphony* by Dvorak with Marvin Stamm. I noted it on a piece of paper. I also put down 'Home,' from 1936, and I started doing a little chart on 'You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To,' and all of a sudden, the album was taking shape. I have a Swiss friend named Jürg Sommer, a writer, pianist and composer. He wrote a beautiful piece called 'Shohola Song,' inspired by the picture on my *Out in Pa.* album. I wrote 'Shoho Love Song' for our wedding. I wrote, 'In Her Arms,' 'On the Road' and 'Judy.' I always thought Herbie Mann wrote 'Comin' Home Baby,' but it's by Bob Dorough and Ben Tucker. Jimmy Rowles wrote 'Nosey Neighbors.' 'I'm a Homebody' is by Red Mitchell."

"I relied a lot on the fact that both Martin and Matt are composers and see the whole picture unfolding. They often dictate where the tunes are going as much as I do, and I like that. Red Mitchell and I had that kind of empathy. I also had it when playing duo with Ray Drummond."

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Mays is already thinking about his next CD project, another theme album. It is going to be made up of tunes with girls' names. He is inclined to record it with an all-female band. "There are certainly enough great women players," he says, though, with the slightest grin, he admits that he briefly considered, but rejected, cross-dressing for the session.

"Still, a nice taffeta...." He trails off and glances at his wife. Now she wears the grin.

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## **“Going Home” (CD)**

**Jazz Review, 2003, by Sheldon T. Nunn**

Jazz as a medium of entertainment has an enduring spirit. Through evolution, the genre has expanded its sphere of influence into over 100 different styles of music. One of the reasons for this continued longevity has been jazz's ability to survive in spite of numerous controversies and social indifference. The music seems to be the most misinterpreted subject of conversation in modern times, yet those of us who love jazz for what it has to offer anxiously await the next CD or magical performance. Pianist **Bill Mays** is one of those individuals the jazz world has come to know and anticipate.

As the former musical director for **Sarah Vaughan**, Bill Mays' preparation as a leader is well documented. Prior to working with Vaughan, Bill spent time with **Bud Shank**, **Bobby Shew**, **Gerry Mulligan**, **Ron Carter**, **Sonny Stitt** and numerous others. With the wide and varied experience Mays has acquired over the years, the natural order of things suggested he would record as a leader as well. Since 1982, Bill Mays has recorded numerous albums with a high degree of acclaim. He continues to do so in 2003 with his second release entitled '*Going Home*' on the Palmetto Record Label. Listening to this stellar trio of musicians consisting of Mays, bassist **Martin Wind** and drummer **Matt Wilson** brings to bear one of the reasons why jazz is America's only original art form.

'*Going Home*' is a dedication to three dynamic musicians who have made their home going jazz passage: drummer **Shelly Manne**, bassist **Red Mitchell** and pianist **Jimmy Rowles**, all of whom have had a tremendous impact on Bill Mays' life. The CD is also indicative of the different homes he has lived in throughout his life. His humble beginnings in Los Angeles, the home he made with his wife Judy, the camaraderie he has found in his trio, his apartment in New York, as well as the country home he maintains in Shohola, Pennsylvania. The overall theme of '*Going Home*' is quite compelling, inasmuch as the recording highlights Bill's prolific skills as a composer and arranger. The CD is filled with thoughtful nuances of rhythmic bop oriented improvised jazz. There are also melodic references to everything that is near and dear to Bill's emotional side, especially the very first track entitled "*Judy*" and the **Cole Porter** staple "*You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To*". These two songs, along with nine additional cuts are the essence of Bill Mays '*Going Home*'. Much of what has been done throughout the CD has been filled with a myriad of influences, including the track entitled "*Going Home*", which provides a unique jazz spin on **Dvorak's** classical composition '*New World Symphony*'. In every sense of the word we call improvised jazz, Bill Mays carries his listeners into a realm of creativity that is bold, empathetic and melodically enticing.

When one examines Bill Mays' testament to the ideologies of jazz, it is well worth the effort of experiencing everything he has accomplished as a solo leader. In doing so, the influences of **Earl "Fatha" Hines, Wynton Kelly, Art Tatum, Bill Evans, Horace Silver** and **Jimmy Rowles** are definitely heard throughout '*Going Home*'. These musicians helped shape the course of events leading to a career in jazz. Throughout the world of avid admirers and jazz connoisseurs, Bill Mays has become known as an innovator and major contributor. His keyboard talents have been highly touted and utilized on numerous soundtracks as well: including '*Shaft 2*', '*Sleepless in Seattle*', '*Being John Malkovich*' and the blockbuster movie hit '*'*. To put Bill Mays' career in perspective, jazz in all of its flavors continues to be a better place in history because he exists. With the onslaught of forces hoping to diminish the importance of America's music, recordings such as '*Going Home*' will make their jobs all the harder.

**Chattanooga Times Free Press, 2003**

**by Ken Dryden**

**Bill Mays Trio's Going Home strikes deep chords**

Bill Mays leads one of the best working piano trios (with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson) on the current jazz scene.

The songs selected or composed by Mays all have a *home* theme. It's no accident that the perky tribute to his wife, *Judy*, is immediately followed by an enthusiastic interpretation of Cole Porter's *You'd Be So Nice To Come Home to*. Mays introduces the first song gradually, backed by Wilson's hand drumming, as if to give listeners instrumental impressions of the many facets of his obviously delightful wife's character. It's no wonder he's enthusiastic to return home to her after enduring the headaches of the life as a touring musician. Mays' tense *On The Road*, his reflective *Shoho Love Song* and the gorgeous *In Her Arms* also merit high praise.

The late Jimmy Rowles composed *Nosey Neighbors*, which Mays coyly arranged to suggest folks who don't realize how boorish their continuous questions are. Classical composer Anton Dvorak's spiritual-influenced *Going Home* starts reverently then turns into a driving post-bop performance as the full trio is added. The pianist scored Bob Dorough's *Comin' Home Baby* as a strut, while Red Mitchell's hilarious *I'm A Homebody* is a piano solo with what is likely Mays' debut recording as a singer. Pick up this CD and it's a safe bet you will be going home in a flash to play this thoroughly enjoyable disc.

**Going Home**

**Bill Mays Trio | Palmetto**

For pianist Bill Mays, who like many jazz musicians has spent perhaps too much time on the road, going home is always an occasion to celebrate, which is precisely what he and his colleagues, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson, do on this clever and entrancing album, Mays' second for Palmetto Records. After making his home in Los Angeles for more than a decade, during which time his adaptable piano was heard on hundreds of movie and television soundtracks, Mays moved east to New York City in the mid-'80s, and shares a home there and another in pastoral Shohola, PA with his wife, Judy, a former opera singer who also makes going home a pleasure. Home is where

one nurtures friendships too, and Mays has dedicated the album to three of his closest musical soul mates, drummer Shelly Manne, bassist Red Mitchell and pianist Jimmy Rowles, all of whom have “gone home.” Rowles wrote the frisky “Nosey Neighbors,” Mitchell the Bob Dorough / Dave Frishberg-style finale, “I’m a Homebody,” on which Mays both plays and sings in a funky Rowlesian groove. I’ve not met “Judy,” but if she’s even half as charming as Mays’ sunny essay that opens the album, it’s no wonder he can’t wait to go home. She’s also idolized, by implication if not by name, on Cole Porter’s “You’d Be So Nice to Come Home To,” Mays’ “In Her Arms” and Dorough / Ben Tucker’s “Comin’ Home Baby.” Two lustrous ballads, Mays’ “Shoho Love Song” and Jurg Sommer’s “Shohola Song,” were inspired by the pianist’s Pennsylvania retreat, and Mays rounds out the amiable program with another of his compositions, “On the Road”; an agreeably updated and insistently swinging version of a hit song from the early 1930s, Peter Van Steeden / Harry Clarkson / Jeff Clarkson’s “Home”; and his splendid arrangement of “Going Home,” the largo from Antonin Dvorak’s Symphony No. 9, *From the New World*.

Mays, Wind and Wilson have worked together for some time now (including on Mays’ previous album, *Summer Sketches*), and know one another’s every move, often before it’s been made. Wilson’s drumming is low-key and supportive, while Wind keeps time like an animated metronome. Mays, who has been compared to his friend Rowles, espouses some of Jimmy’s mannerisms but has blended them with other influences to produce his own musical identity, which is what improvisation is all about. What this album is about are the many pleasures of going home, and it’s a pleasure to hear and appreciate.

Jack Bowers [http://www.allaboutjazz.com/reviews/r0703\\_039.htm](http://www.allaboutjazz.com/reviews/r0703_039.htm)

### **SUMMIT TIMES (Colorado)**

#### **Bill Mays Trio**

#### **Going Home**

#### **Palmetto Records**

Playin’ it pretty right from the start, Bill Mays (piano and vocals), Matt Wilson (drums) and Martin Wind (bass) render some shimmering musical portraits on *Going Home*, be it evoking pastoral trips to a scenic lake or be-bopping down a leafy back road. Mays caresses the keys to suggest such comforting tableaux, while Wilson and Wind accompany him with taste and restraint. With titles such as “You’d be so Nice to Come Home to,” “Shohola Song,” “Home,” “Comin’ Home Baby,” “Shoho Love Song,” “In Her Arms” and “Going Home,” the theme is clear: a familiar place with someone to care for.

“I’m a homebody/for me to stay at home’s the only way to go/get a homebody you’ll be glad you did . . . I’m a stay-at-home . . . cuz I can play at home and scratch my head and think/ and let those dirty dishes pile up in the sink/Whenever I am forced to travel far from home I seem to lose my sense of be-bop/ I’m a nest-builder I’d rather feather one than fly around the world . . . I’m just as happy to go where I can walk . . . I’m a

homebody, at least I'll get some rest/instead of playing I will try and smell my best," sings Mays before laying into a fun final jam.

### **Joe Lang (New Jersey Jazz Society), October 2003**

"Going Home" (Palmetto 2090) features pianist Bill Mays, accompanied by Martin Wind on bass and Matt Wilson on drums, playing an eleven-song program thematically related to the concept of home. Mays' impressionistic style results in a relaxed and engaging exploration of the various facets of his relationship to this theme. The opener, "Judy," is a song by Mays written for his wife. A friend of his, Jurg Sommer, composed "Shohola Song," inspired by the lovely area in Pennsylvania where Mays has a getaway home. Mays reflects on his country abode in "Shoho Love Song." Other songs like "On The Road," "Nosey Neighbors," "In Her Arms" and "Comin' Home Baby" explore other aspects of the life of a working jazz musician, or, in fact, anyone who travels extensively, and his relationship to the places where he lives, leaving them, returning, and the personal relationships that make a home so special. The closer sums up Mays feelings as he sings Red Mitchell's "I'm A Homebody." On a strictly musical level, this album solidifies Mays' standing among the finest practitioners of jazz piano playing. For those who share his deep feelings for home and family, his musical ruminations on "Going Home" will strike an empathetic chord.

### **Jazz Hot Magazine (France) October 2003**

#### **BILL MAYS TRIO -- Going Home (Palmetto/Culture)**

**By Patrick Bivort**

Loin de la surexposition aux médias de Brad Mehldau, Jacky Terrasson ou Danilo Perez, Bill Mays est un des pianistes qui a le plus de personnalité et d'histoires à raconter. Il est pourtant loin d'être un inconnu, lui qui a précédemment accompagné Woody Herman, Bud Shank, Lew Tabackin ou Phil Woods. Toutefois, ses enregistrements ont rarement connu le rayonnement espéré. C'est d'autant plus dommage que ceux-ci sont généralement des petites merveilles nous offrant un équilibre intelligent entre morceaux originaux («Judy», «Shoho Love Song» sur son nouveau projet) et reprises lumineuses («You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To» ou «Going Home» de Dvorak repris souvent par Art Tatum). Dédié à la mémoire de Jimmy Rowles, Red Mitchell et Shelly Manne, «Going Home», nous fait passer des moments précieux où l'émotion et l'exploration sont simultanément présents. Outre l'interaction magique entre les musiciens, Bill Mays laisse son empreinte sur la plupart des morceaux tout en incluant quelques passages de compositions classiques. Mais ce n'est jamais gratuit ou pour remplir négligemment l'espace durant son jeu. Comme Jimmy Rowles, il a juste une série de compositions dans sa tête qu'il replace, à l'une ou l'autre occasion, d'une manière très naturelle. Excellent.

A découvrir au festival Jazz Middelheim, le dimanche 17 août.

**Translation:** Far from being over-exposed in the media, as is the case for Brad Mehldau, Jackie Terrasson or Danilo Perez, Bill Mays is one of the pianists with the most personality and plenty of stories to tell. Although he is far from being unknown, having previously worked with Woody Herman, Bud Shank, Lew Tabackin or Phil

Woods, his records have seldom known the success they deserve. It is the more regrettable given the fact that they generally are small marvels featuring an intelligent balance between original pieces ("Judy" "Shoho Love Song" on his newest release) and some shining old standards ("You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To" or "Going Home" by Dvorak, often borrowed by Art Tatum). Dedicated to Jimmy Rowles, Red Mitchell and Shelly Manne, "Going Home" provides us some precious moments filled with emotion. Besides the magical interplay between the musicians, Bill Mays leaves his mark on most of the pieces while inserting a few fragments of classical compositions. But it is never gratuitous or meant to fill space during his play. Just like Jimmy Rowles, he has stored in his mind a trove of themes that he interchanges from time to time in a most natural style. Excellent.

To discover at the Jazz Festival of Middelheim, on Sunday, August 17th.

**Nate Dorward**  
**Coda, Sep/Oct 2003**

**Bill Mays Trio**

**Going Home**

**(Palmetto PM 2090)**

Bill Mays' new disc is dedicated to the memories of Jimmy Rowles, Red Mitchell and Shelly Manne, and the spirit of its dedicatees is audible in the CD's engaging mix of sweetness and sly-dog mischief. The programme is linked by the theme of home, domesticity and return. Predictably enough "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To" makes an appearance (though one could hardly have predicted how fresh the trio make it sound), and there's the Dvorak piece that also lends the disc its title, but the rest of the setlist is very unfamiliar. The theme of Jimmy Rowles' "Nosey Neighbours" emerges in a wry, sidewise fashion, and the piece is shot through with Rowles' characteristic wisdom and humour. Much the same droll minimalism turns up in the delightful "Judy," one of Mays' own compositions. The pianist's friend Jurg Sommer wrote "Shohola Song" as a tribute to the Mays family's favourite rural retreat in Pennsylvania: the pianist's improvisation is so direct an extension of the melody it's as if he's telling the listener, "Yes, it really *is* a lovely place, and a lovely tune: you'll understand if I don't need to add much more." Nor need he have.

It's rare that one encounters a mainstream piano album performed at such a well-judged dynamic level. This is mostly a very quiet album, but the quietness is nothing like the dull background-music discreetness of countless piano-trio discs. It is instead genuinely purposeful: this is music that's quiet so that you can hear what's going on. It's a particularly fine way of hearing the work of the drummer Matt Wilson, whose fertility of invention seems if anything encouraged by the low volume level: no matter what's going on in the music, it's always a temptation to zero in on what he's doing. Given an appropriately lustrous, deep-set studio sound by producer Matt Balitsaris, *Going Home* is a deeply satisfying example of the art of the piano trio.

**By Hans-Bernd Kittlaus**

After 9/11 many American artists reflected the disaster in their work. For Bill Mays the tragic events reminded him of the importance of "home", which in his case is Shohola, a small town in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The CD is dedicated to three former friends/colleagues from days when he still called California his home: pianist Jimmy Rowles, bassist Red Mitchell, and drummer Shelly Manne. With them he not only shared his preference for intelligent and swinging jazz, but also his special liking for humorous lyrics. His version of Red Mitchell's "I'm A Homebody" is not bad for someone who's not a singer! The main focus though is this excellent trio with German bassist Martin Wind, who contributes some melodic solos, and drummer Matt Wilson. Their long collaboration shows in their blind understanding and their effortless communication. New originals by Mays, like "Judy" or "Shoho Love Song", stand up to standards like "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To". The arrangements range from hard swinging to feel-good groove to ballad. Overall, this is one of the best recordings of a "classic" piano trio of the last years.

**Kulturama (Radiomagazine Switzerland) 15/2003**

**Jazz-Tip--By Bruno Rub**

**Warmth and Clarity**

**Bill Mays Trio: Going Home**

The jazz audience is experienced in selective perception. Certain periods in jazz history almost faded out of people's awareness. One example is West Coast Jazz and some of its prominent central artists like drummer Shelly Manne, bassist Red Mitchell, or pianist Jimmy Rowles. Pianist Bill Mays (born 1944) still knew them and learned to appreciate their talents. He dedicates his new CD to these gentlemen and reminds us that he himself has not always received the kind of recognition that he deserves. This is due to the fact that for a long time he mainly made a living as a studio musician and as accompanist to artists like Sarah Vaughan and Gerry Mulligan. However, for a number of years, Mays has been producing one beautiful trio album after another with comforting regularity. Together with wonderful bassist Martin Wind and sensitive drummer Matt Wilson Mays never denies Bill Evans as the main inspiration of his transparent conception. But his music has a very personal and warm coloring, as demonstrated in a composition by Swiss pianist and composer Jurg Sommer.

**BILL MAYS TRIO/Going Home**

**Volume 26/Number 9, March 14, 2003**

**MIDWEST RECORD RECAP**

**CHRIS SPECTOR, Editor and Publisher**

Currently hot with two art house soundtracks, Mays and his smoking trio pay tribute to the concept of home, whether going home as some late, admired players have done, or going home, like to where the heart is. A moody, well tempered release that flows wonderfully and shows him at the top of his game. Long revered for his work with well-

respected jazzbos, this major player shines mightily here and creates a wonderful atmosphere you should get into.

**EJAZZNEWS.com, April 5, 2003, By John Stevenson**

**<http://www.ejazznews.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=807&mode=thread>**

LONDON - "Going Home" (Palmetto) from film-score composer and ace jazz pianist Bill Mays is a great addition to the history of the jazz trio format -- a format that was given significant character several decades ago by the Nat King Cole group.

Mays fronts a musical equilateral triangle of sorts. The equality of contribution from band mates Martin Wind (bass) and Matt Wilson (drums), conduces to the overall symmetry of the trio's dynamic. Mays's playing echoes the great piano-playing tradition of other greats such as Art Tatum, Horace Silver and Bill Evans.

The CD is dedicated to three seminal artists who have all "gone home": drummer Shelly Manne, bassist Red Mitchell and pianist Jimmy Rowles. The recording also signifies the pianist's different homes: his early start in Los Angeles, the musical home of his trio, his Manhattan apartment, and his country retreat of Shohola, Pennsylvania.

The disc opens up with a tribute to Mays's wife, "Judy", a slow burner featuring Wilson who shapes out a drum pattern similar to the one found on Sonny Rollins's "I'm an Old Cowhand". Another nod in Judy's direction follows with the Cole Porter mainstay "You'd be So Nice To Come Home To". Mays's long-time friend Jurg Sommer, was so impressed by the serenity of Mays's retreat that he composed "Shohola Song" - rendered with great passion and verve by the trio. Mays performs his arrangement of "Home" before upping the ante on his own composition, "On the Road". Notable too, is the unique interpretation the small group lends to the excerpt from Dvorak's New World Symphony. Mays reveals hidden vocal talents on Red Mitchell's calypso-inflected "I'm A Homebody".

## **"Summer Sketches" (CD)**

**Aargauer Zeitung 6/15/01 (Swiss daily newspaper)**

**by Jurg Sommer:**

Legendary baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan said that Bill Mays was definitely the best piano player he ever played with. And the incredibly versatile Mays is known in the competitive New York scene as a musician with an almost unlimited scope of talents. His long-time and absolutely congenial partners, bass player Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson, joined Mays for an extended concert tour in Europe last Fall after which they went to the recording studio for the yet young but impressively active "Palmetto"

jazz label. Well-timed for the season, "Summer Sketches" is a collection of summerly compositions, a palette including Italian chanson "Estate" as well as "Summer Night" and the Michel Legrand movie theme "Once Upon A Summertime": ingeniously crafted "chased work" with an abundance of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic finesse throughout.

**Jazz Podium, May 2001, page 70**

**Bill Mays Trio "Summer Sketches" Palmetto PM 2070      By Jorg Konrad**

Bill Mays is one of these eclectic piano-playing talents, who do not seem to be limited by stylistic barriers. He keeps working in the classical field, accompanied Sarah Vaughan in the 70s and later Paul Winter, wrote compositions for Saxophone Quartets (!) and remains a sought-after studio musician for a variety of movie soundtracks ("Fargo", "Shaft 2", "Rocky", or "Being John Malkovich"). For his 13th album as leader, Mays teamed up end of October 2000 in New York with bassist Martin Wind, and drummer Matt Wilson, whose playing is characterized by soft ecstasy and emotional finesse. They decided on a special and personally inspired song cycle. The idea for "Summer Sketches" must have come up in one of those moments, where an upcoming long and cold winter makes you long for sun and warmth. Mays makes the ten compositions sound like a sentimental sign of hope for better times. "Once upon a summertime", "Summer Night", or "Summer" are atmospheric and dense standards that Mays interprets with great harmonic and dramatic sense. Even his own composition "Fireflies", which is of a more rhythmic character, fits wonderfully in this emotional but never sentimental excursion of musical gems.

**Entertainment Weekly, April 27, 2001**

**Bill Mays Trio (Summer Sketches-Palmetto)  
by Steve Futterman**

A musician's musician for far too long, pianist Mays deserves wider recognition for the outstanding work he's done with his latest trio. Flanked by two exceptionally alert and responsive players—bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson—Mays exhibits his fluid, speak-softly-but-spare-no-intensity style on a thematic program of seasonal standards and group originals that blossom under the ensemble's telepathic interplay. And who knew so many gorgeous songs had summer in their titles?

**JazzTimes, July/August, 2001**

**Summer Sketches, Palmetto PM-2070 (51:49)  
by Doug Ramsey**

Pianist Bill Mays, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson follow up their excellent but unheralded Out In Pa. CD of 1999 with this collection based on music having to do with summer. One of the masters of color and touch among today's pianists, Mays makes the most of possibilities in original compositions by members of the trio and an attractive batch of works by others. The songs include his own "Fireflies," a piece of

pointillism that manages to evoke the subject of the title without hitting the listener over the head with its cleverness. Wilson's "(Gotta Go To) Summer School" stutters its way into a blues groove, encourages plenty of drum accents and gives Mays an opportunity to explore the piano's double life as a stringed instrument by doing some plucking. Bassist Wind's contribution is the impressionistic "Early Autumn," which features—guess what—a bass solo, a good one. Mays rescues Russ Freeman's "Summer Sketch" from its undeserved obscurity and gives it a sensitive performance. The trio also does Benny Carter's "Summer Serenade," nicely observing its samba spirit. The Brazilian companion piece is "Estate" ("summer," in Portuguese), with Mays and Wind sharing the melody. Wind's brushwork on "Estate" is notable for its quiet swing. The remaining pieces are "Summer Night," "The Things We Did Last Summer," with Mays' and Wind's stimulating changes, and "Once Upon A Summertime." This album would be good company out on the deck on a starry night or maybe even better in front of the fireplace during a snowstorm.

### **Cadence Magazine, September, 2001**

Bill Mays is another pianist who may be more recognized for his work with others—Sarah Vaughan, Art Pepper, and Mel Lewis. But Summer Sketches is one of eleven albums on which he was the leader; among them his own Maybeck Recital Hall concert from 1992. His cohorts this time out are seasoned rhythm men who have also served as session leaders in their own right. On this occasion, however, there's no telling who's the leader because the three of them function as a fully integrated unit, no component more dominant than the others. Although the initial reaction to the "summer" theme may be one of skepticism, once the music starts, all reservations disappear; each tune can stand on its own. The pieces tend to be highly arranged with exquisite ensemble work, the "unison" rhythmic passages between piano and drums on Mays' "Fireflies" being but one example. Highlights abound: Wind's gorgeous bowed reading of "The Things We Did Last Summer"; the intriguing metrically-altered blues "(Gotta Go To) Summer School"; Wilson's ready response to Mays' every phrase on "Summer Night." All in all, this album is a first class piece of work, well conceived and brilliantly executed.

### **Amazon.com, May 3, 2001 Swinging into Summer with "Summer Sketches" by George Burks**

"Summer Sketches" is great news for fans of straight-ahead jazz. This CD features Bill Mays on piano, Matt Wilson on drums and Martin Wind on bass. As the title suggests, the theme of the album is summer. Some tunes are originals penned by the musicians themselves, while others are instantly recognizable pieces by venerable tunesmiths. The musical moods shift from languorously romantic ballads ("Estate") to impressionistic musings ("Fireflies") to stomp-your-foot blues ("Gotta Go to Summer School") to the yearnings created by the unexpected use of bowed bass for the lead into "The Things We Did Last Summer." Mays, as usual, plays with lush lyricism, intelligence, eloquence and humor, stamping each tune with his interpretation, yet always allowing the essence of the song to come through. He is a jazz treasure of protean abilities, who can re-invent a song, yet who manages always to let the music speak for itself. His formidable

pianistic technique is seemingly effortless, but he never allows his prowess to interfere with the music's statement. Wind and Wilson ably abet him here. The trio employs thoughtful interplay and improvisation, yet they are always cohesive. Listening to this CD, you can almost see the musicians watching one another, picking up sonic cues. This musical symbiosis is helped by the transparency of the recording and the even balance among the instruments. There is something here for any lover of jazz.

**International Society of Bassists magazine**

**Bill Mays Trio "Summer Sketches"**

**by Tom Knific**

Pianist, composer, resident artist for the ISB conventions, and friend to bassists everywhere, Bill Mays has released a pastoral CD whose music reflects his love of summers, and particularly, those at home. "I love summer anywhere, but especially in Pennsylvania--the Delaware River, the herons, egrets and bull frogs down at the lake's edge, the bats, the blue jays and barn swallows, and especially the sights and sounds of a summer night: tree frogs, crickets, owls, fireflies and the "click-click" of katydids in Pennsylvania." This collection of three originals and seven standards represents various aspects of the season.

Two standouts are the originals of Mays and the ever playful and creative percussionist, Matt Wilson. Mays' "Fireflies" is a collection of meters (4-5-6-4-5-7-8-9, but who's counting?), with a melody sounding all the more percussive via hands in the piano muting. The piece deconstructs in collective improv, and then gathers itself for a recapitulation. Matt Wilson seems always to be able to offer another perspective on things, whether it is his relationship to the snare drum, his mallets, the space he knows just where to put, or in this case, his composition.

Whereas all other works on the CD have romantic, impressionistic, or nostalgic references, such as "Summer Night", "Summer Serenade" or "The Things We Did Last Summer", Matt wrote "(Gotta Go To) Summer School", and offers a wonderfully bent shuffle in the process. Bassist Martin Wind sounds strong throughout, and is featured regularly. He projects a hearty sound and attack on all tracks. "Estate" brings him to the forefront melodically, with possibly a hint of phrasing from Joao Gilberto. He solos extensively on his own "Early August", and performs the theme in duet with Mays on "The Things We Did Last Summer", as well as solos on the challenging changes of Benny Carter's "Summer Serenade". Martin has a centered and classic approach, which allows the listener to understand what he is thinking. He also looks for the blues elements in most of what he plays, which is a strong element of his expressive side.

Bill Mays performs artistically throughout, from his own composition, to his solo on "Indian Summer" in "5/4", to his minute long introduction to "Early August" and through the last chord of "Once upon A Summertime". His musicality encompasses so much, and yet, after years of listening to him, it is easy to say he continues to grow. And isn't that, after all, the greatest of compliments.

# Marvin Stamm/Bill Mays “BY OURSELVES” (CD)

**Jazz Improv Magazine**

**by Michelle Labieniec Despard**

**Musicians:** Marvin Stamm, trumpet and flugelhorn; Bill Mays, piano (Time: 70:01)

**Selections:** By Myself; You and the Night and the Music; The Lamp is Low; The Widow in the Window; Judy; Beautiful Love; Waltz for Mia; You Must Believe in Spring; Airegin; Madrugada; Con Alma. *By Ourselves* is a duo recording by trumpeter and flugelhornist, Marvin Stamm and pianist, Bill Mays. This is a fine recording where every note is clean, clear and beautifully articulated. Each phrase is carefully presented with the most exquisite taste. These two fine musicians demonstrate the true artistry of duo playing which in itself poses many challenges. When there are only two musicians, each person is very exposed and carries more responsibility. Duo settings are interesting because very often depending on the instrumentation, the full rhythm section is not present, as in the case here, leaving much freedom and space. These may be challenges for most but is not apparent in the rapport between Stamm and Mays. Both have been session musicians for most of their careers. Marvin Stamm has worked and recorded with the likes of Stan Kenton's Orchestra, Woody Herman, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis and Benny Goodman. Mays on the other hand accompanied Sarah Vaughn and Al Jarreau along with countless others. The two met while playing with their own bands and kept promising to play with each other. They appeared on each other's recordings and finally found themselves able to devote time to a duo which eventually led to this recording. This CD has some very interesting little gems on it making the musical choices somewhat eclectic. Thoughtful and sensitive describe standards such as **By Myself**, **Beautiful Love**, **Con Alma** and **You and the Night and the Music**. The music is tastefully crafted between these two artists. A clever twist to **The Lamp is Low**, is the use of Maurice Ravel's **Miroirs** as an introduction. A little tryst with the classical venue. Bill Mays also charms us with two very nice originals entitled **Judy** and **Madrugada** which is a Latin tune. A special tune that strikes me is Kenny Wheeler's **The Widow in the Window**. Both Stamm and Mays thank him in the liner notes for writing "one of the most haunting ballads ever," and I would have to agree. Whether you are an avid jazz fan or a newcomer to jazz, this CD would be an excellent addition to your collection. The instrumentation lends itself to an almost classical venue while remaining very listener friendly. It is wonderful to hear such a class act communicate on equal ground and fully demonstrate the beauty of their instruments. The music unfolds organically the way it should in performance. This recording is the result of not only outstanding musicians and professionalism in duo form but also demonstrates two good friends coming together for the simple joy of music making.

## Cadence Magazine by David Dupont

Studio veteran Marvin Stamm did time with Thad and Mel's big band and numerous other groups. His artistry here, with just the ultra-tasty piano of Bill Mays in support, belies the notion of the soulless studio hack. Stamm and Mays for that matter have soul to match their ample technique. Stamm's tone is full and luscious, and his lines are not so much bursting with notes as they are bursting with melody. And Mays, ever the willing accomplice, complements Stamm's torrents with dancing lines of his own. Mays' puckish and wry solos balance Stamm's offerings, which are full of ardour. Mays is also a sympathetic accompanist, as on **You and the Night...** where he plays figures that seem to complete the trumpeter's thoughts. The duo selects apt material that offers both the melodic and harmonic resources that merit extrapolation, including the lovely ballad, **Judy**, and the atmospheric **Madrugada**, both by Mays, and Kenny Wheeler's evocative **The Widow in the Window**. This is one of those sessions where it's hard to pick out highlights because everything is so tasty.

## The All-Music Guide by Ken Dryden

Trumpeter and flugelhornist Marvin Stamm grew frustrated with the lack of recording opportunities, so in 1999 he began the Marstam label to distribute his work. On this duo date, he's joined by pianist Bill Mays, someone he has worked with often; the results are consistently outstanding. Stamm's captivating sound on either horn is matched by his perfect intonation, plus the fact that he allows the music breathing room even on the most uptempo numbers. Mays' creative approach to the piano brings new life to even the most familiar songs. Following Stamm's unaccompanied introduction to **By Myself**, both he and Mays demonstrate the kind of give-and-take in supporting one another that is essential in a duo setting. In addition to another Howard Dietz & Arthur Schwartz, a lovely take of **You and the Night and the Music**, the CD includes **The Lamp is Low**, with a playful Mays introduction and some of Stamm's most lyrical trumpet playing; a romp through Sonny Rollins' **Airegin**, featuring Stamm's rich flugelhorn; and a warm rendition of Dizzy Gillespie's **Con Alma**. Mays also contributed two originals: **Judy**, with its tricky changes; and **Madrugada**, a beautiful Latin ballad co-written with Alfred Kwiatek. Jazz just doesn't get any better in a duo setting.

## The Jazz Zine ew by Peter La Barbera

Marvin Stamm has been around a while. Still, he's not a jazz household name, though he ought to be. Many listeners may remember him from the Kenton days when he played with the mellophonium orchestra. Since then he's been involved with many aspects of playing music, from the studio to the stage and has gained a considerable amount of experience. This CD, in collaboration with the wonderful pianist, Bill Mays, is

a sort of culmination of where music has taken Marvin Stamm to date. Frankly, I'd not personally heard much of Stamm in the last fifteen years or so, until hearing these two recent CDs. While, more than the other horns, there are many prominent jazz players on trumpet: Roy Hargrove, Tom Harrell, Claudio Roditi and Wynton Marsalis just to barely skim the surface, Marvin's name should be included with these contemporaries. His playing is articulate, fluid and has the full range of all the emotions embedded into his style. On this duo recording with Bill Mays he shows us his virtuosity and appeal that's a joy to experience. I think Mr. Stamm's identification is clearly labeled during the introduction with the first forty-three seconds of **By Myself**. This unaccompanied moment is the type of music that music teachers tell their students to listen carefully to before they dissect it and learn it note by note. The choice of tunes for their musical venture is interesting and varied. **You and the Night and the Music** is respectful to the beauty of the original line. Bill Mays takes an adventurous and swinging exploration solo and feeds a balance of tasty chords to give Marvin room to add his creative impressions to this evergreen. **The Lamp is Low** is one of those haunting melodies that, given the right day and circumstances, can reduce me to tears. The collaboration between these two stellar artists is uncanny. Good duo playing in jazz probably goes beyond the musicianship. There must be a special bond or friendship and understanding that must intertwine with the music. You get that sense in listening to this interpretation. **The Widow in the Window** is a haunting original by Kenny Wheeler. Bill Mays demonstrates his writing skills with an infectious line titled, **Judy**. He weaves a pleasurable solo quoting some Benny Golson and *I'm Confessin' that I Love You* into the mix of the solo. Marvin treats Victor Young's **Beautiful Love** with a very gentle respect and tenderness and does not stray too far from the melody in exploring. For me, it takes something special to undertake this and making it still sound like jazz. **Waltz For Mia** by Ted Nash sounds like it was written around the chords of *I Thought About You* and offers some nice exchanges between Stamm and Mays. Marvin's exquisite tone and control are very evident in **You Must Believe in Spring**. His approach is beyond beauty and almost poetic while Mays does most of the inner searching with layers of remarkable alternates to the original melody line. Marvin concludes by going deeper within himself to continue to search for the essence of this timeless Michel Legrand original. **Airegin**, the Sonny Rollins masterpiece, swings hard without the gymnastics. Another very pretty line by Bill Mays, **Madrugada** is a quiet moment with much of a Brazilian feeling. The set ends with a tribute to the master; **Con Alma** by Dizzy Gillespie is played with sentiment and concludes a set of great duo performance by Stamm and Mays.

**By Herb Young**

**Marvin Stamm (tpt) Bill Mays (pno) Recorded at NYC in 1999**

By Myself/You And The Night And The Music/The Lamp Is Low/The Widow In The Window/Judy/Beautiful Love/Waltz For Mia/You Must Believe In Spring/Airegin/Madrugada/Con Alma TT: 70:01

Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines placed the bar very high back on December 5, 1928 when they recorded "Weather Bird" as a duo. There have been several other trumpet and piano duet selections and albums since then. Bill Mays, for example, recorded a duet long play recording with Bobby Shew in 1978 that is very good. However, the compact disc we have here has been, in my mind, the most successful effort since that fateful day in 1928. There is chemistry between the two players that words defy. You need to hear it and experience it. This type of offering is very risky business. There is no place to hide and if you don't have it you have one big "train wreck". Not to worry, it doesn't happen here.

The program of 11 selections is nicely balanced between some ballads, a couple of jazz standards and a couple of tunes not at all familiar to this reviewer. A case in point in the latter category is "The Widow In The Window". The long beautiful tones from Mr. Stamm's trumpet are a joy. There are many more examples of this man's excellence with the trumpet. Bill Mays, throughout, is just full of surprises. His solos just amaze you. His support to Marvin's trumpet blowing is right there, not too much, not too little. I could go on raving about this disc, however, best you get a copy and find out for yourself. The recording may be a bit hard to find, but can be found at [www.marvinstamm.com](http://www.marvinstamm.com). --

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## **"MAYS IN MANHATTAN" (CD)**

**JazzTimes, September, 1997, by Sunsh Stein**

**Bill Mays, Mays in Manhattan, Concord Jazz CCD-4738 (64:35)**

What fun to arrange, stamping a project with your creative imprint. Pianist Bill Mays does just that on Mays In Manhattan. With the well known ("Autumn In New York") and lesser known (Lennie Tristano's "317 E. 32nd St."), Mays takes a trio and sextet ride around the isle of Manhattan. Mays channels his natural exuberance through his sextet arrangements. The surprise infusion of horns after his solo opening in "Manhattan" gets our attention. And passing the melody line of "New York State Of Mind" from one player to the next, starting with Ed Neumeister's trombone, gives this tune an unexpected freshness and texture. Also adding warmth, sizzle and swing are trumpeter Marvin Stamm and saxophonist Jon Gordon. The trio tracks, however, are unarranged, with bassist Sean Smith and drummer Tim Horner traveling spontaneously on Mays' wavelength. These pieces have a different feel, presenting a Manhattan that's less cacophonous but a tad darker. The Bronx may be up and the Battery down, but Bill Mays is all around the town. Take a ride with him.

## **“AN ELLINGTON AFFAIR” (CD)**

**Downbeat, April 1996 (4 stars) by Elaine Guregian**

Paying tribute to Duke Ellington is one of those dangerous propositions. First, it sounds like a good idea: great music, broad appeal. Then, with any luck, it occurs to the person making the recording that there had better be some way of distinguishing this effort from all those other tributes out there.

Working with the late Carl Jefferson of Concord, Bill Mays hit upon a solution that works. This recording avoids the most overworked Ellington compositions and gives a fresh quality to the well-known ones it does include. Dissonances added to the harmonies and a 5/4 meter transform “Satin Doll” into a more brooding tune than would seem possible after hearing, say, a perky Stephane Grappelli rendition. What’s interesting is that the interpretations are neither completely nostalgic nor totally modern but a savvy mixture of the two. This versatile trio can conjure up a boogie-woogie feel on “I’m Just A Lucky So And So” that’s not so far from an Ellington recording made in the ‘30s, or summon images of Charleston dancers kicking up their heels to the ricky-tick time of “Dancers In Love.” Then on the “Flower” medley, Mays shows the influence of post-Ellington pianists, notably Bill Evans. Mays himself commands a range of expression that can create a sweeping quality, as on “Something To Live For” or a sparer, quieter approach on “Don’t You Know I Care (Or Don’t You Care To Know).” His playing on “Day Dream,” set at a sleepy tempo, is especially appealing for the way he relaxes and explores all the reaches of the keyboard. As ever, Goldsby and Nash keep a solid time feel behind him. One curiosity on the disc is the frenetic, boppish “Wig Wise,” which has a dense texture similar to Ellington’s 1962 recording with Charles Mingus and Max Roach (Money Jungle, Blue Note). In the end, it’s sensitivity to the legend of Ellington that allows Mays, Goldsby and Nash to go their own way on this tribute.

## **“LIVE AT MAYBECK” (CD)**

**Jazzscene (Jazz Society of Oregon), September, 1993**

**Bill Mays Shines On Solo Piano Recording**

**by George Fendel (4 1/2/ stars)**

Chalk up another top echelon performance in this never-ending series of solo piano recitals. Mays broke the hearts of his West Coast following (including many musicians) by moving to New York several years ago. He returned west for this concert and wove a spell for the always attentive Maybeck audience. Some of my favorites: A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square (remember please that it’s Berkeley as in Sir Charles not as in the bay area city); a Mays original called Boardwalk Blues with a theme-like quality to it; the ultimate test (Mays gets an “A”) for pianists, Strayhorn’s Lush Life; the rarely heard Guess I’ll Hang My Tears Out To Dry with haunting verse intact; a romp through Fats

Waller's Jitterbug Waltz and a medley of two tender beauties, Why Did I Choose You and Never Let Me Go. Mays strides his way out of Maybeck with Jelly Roll Morton's Grandpa's Spells, a little piece of perfection. Mays is one of a new breed of pianists: deep in the tradition and dedicated to it. This recording provides the evidence.

**Concord Jazz, Playing Time 57:58 (4 1/2 stars)**

## **LIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS:**

**RIFFTIDES, October 8, 2007, By Doug Ramsey**  
[http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2007/10/moody\\_and\\_mays.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/2007/10/moody_and_mays.html)

## Moody and Mays

The Seasons Fall Festival wrapped up over the weekend in Yakima, Washington, with concerts that featured two Bill Mays trios. James Moody also starred, performing at eighty-two with the wisdom of age and the energy of a teenager.

Friday night, it was Mays, piano; Marvin Stamm, trumpet and flugelhorn; and Alisa Horn, cello - the Inventions Trio. Their [recently released CD](#) is superb, but their collaboration has taken on profundity and polish since they made the recording two years ago. Their reworkings of Rachmaninoff, Borodin and other classical composers, their treatment of standards and new pieces by Mays and Stamm, had the audience enthralled. Mays' six-part suite inspired by the Delaware River's run from the mountains to the sea was a journey encompassing grandeur, nostalgia, folksy humor including a hoedown, and avant garde audacity. It also incorporated spoken segments of regional reminiscing that disclosed the musicians' unsuspected talents as vocal actors.



**Inventions Trio**

For years, Stamm and Mays have performed as a duo exploring the possibilities in classical themes. The addition of Horn, the young cellist, has resulted in a group capable of a remarkable store of textures. She has extensive classical training and rich technique, but is relatively new to jazz. Under Mays' and Stamm's tutelage, she has learned to swing when she's bowing, and to play pizzicato a la Oscar Pettiford, Percy Heath and Ron Carter. It was a joy to witness the passion she brought to the performance. Mays and Stamm are jazz and studio veterans whose discipline and versatility make possible this group's demanding chamber music. They achieve complexity without sacrificing swing or zeal. They are a pleasure to watch as well as to hear. Few groups have as much fun making music as this trio.



**Wilson, Mays, Wind**

One that does is Mays' trio with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson. Two years ago they inaugurated the former Christian Science church as a performance hall. Their appearance at The Seasons has become an autumn event, and they were as astonishing as ever. One of the great piano trios of the day more than lived up to their reputation. With Wilson aboard, there is always bound to be a surprise. In 2005, it was his action-theater piece having to do with free range chickens and the chant, "Set them free." Last year, he crafted a musical setting for Carl Sandburg's poem *Choose* and conscripted the audience as a Greek chorus. This time around, Wilson debuted a composition inspired by a swimming party the night before in his hotel pool, possibly involving minimal clothing. He called it "Yakimaquatics" and introduced it with a drum solo that incorporated the breast stroke, the backstroke, the butterfly and the crawl, all executed with rhythmic exactitude and leading into a melody with a harmonic pattern possibly influenced by Pat Metheny. Fun and games out of the way, Mays, Wind and Wilson dug in. It was a fine first half.

Following intermission, the Mays trio became the rhythm section of the James Moody quartet. Moody had his famous flute along, but it never left the case. He stayed on tenor saxophone through the set, except when he was singing or telling uproarious stories. In a pre-performance discussion, he spoke about the harmonic education he received early in his career from Dizzy Gillespie and Tom McIntosh. In concert, he demonstrated the extent to which that harmonic sense has progressed in the past sixty years or so. Applying chord extensions on top of chord extensions, he danced through "Woody'n You" and "Giant Steps" with dazzling mastery. If the audience had Coleman Hawkins in mind when Moody began "Body and Soul," his ingenious creation of new melodies and his audacious expansion of the chord pattern brought them thoroughly up to date.

Mays, Wind and Wilson were in swinging lock step with Moody throughout the concert, but their participation went far beyond accompaniment. They gave the old master nudges that inspired him to explore beyond what in more routine settings is often a polished bag of phrases and devices. Clearly, he was pleased with the collaboration. When Mays was soloing, Moody stationed himself in the curve of the piano, listening intently. When Wind was bowing one of his virtuosic arco solos, Moody edged nearer. When Wilson soloed, Moody stood beaming at him.



**James Moody**

Of course, he did "Moody's Mood For Love," singing his own famous solo and, in split throat-tones, the piano solo from the original 1949 recording. Earlier, he said that audiences never let him get away without doing it, so he builds it into his every appearance. The Moody concert was a rousing and entertaining conclusion to more than a week of stimulating music.

I once wrote (in [Jazz Matters: Reflections on the Music and Some of its Makers](#)):

Like every art form, jazz has a fund of devices unique to it and universally employed by those who play it. Among the resources of the jazz tradition available to the player creating an improvised performance are rhythmic patterns, harmonic structures, material quoted from a variety of sources, and "head arrangements" evolved over time without being written. Mutual access to this community body of knowledge makes possible successful and enjoyable collaboration among jazzmen of different generations and stylistic persuasions who have never before played together.

The Moody concert was a demonstration of that truth. I overheard the rehearsal. It went more or less like this:

Moody: Do you know "Woody'n You?"

Mays: Yeah, we know that.

Moody: "Giant Steps?"

Mays: Sure.

Moody: How about "Invitation?"

Mays: Yep

Moody: Okay. We'll be cool.

And they were.

Yakima, Washington, where I live most of the time, has more attractions than [trolleys and the legacy of William O. Douglas](#). Among them is a new place in which to hear music. Well, it's not a new place. It was built in 1917 and until recently was the Church of Christ, Scientist. Over the past few decades, the congregation, like many of its counterparts across the country, shrank. The church is moving to smaller quarters. After the possibility that the building might become an athletic facility or, worse, be torn down to make way for a parking lot, a family successful in the building trade and devoted to music, acquired it and determined to make it a concert hall.

As the Strosahl brothers, Pat and Steve, were reaching their final decision, they invited a few people to sit and listen to music in the main hall of this gorgeous



building, which might have been beamed over to Eastern Washington from the Italian Renaissance.

The test performances included a piano trio playing Beethoven, a group of singers from the Seattle Opera, a brass quintet and a jazz ensemble. The listeners included Brooke Cresswell, the conductor of the [Yakima Symphony Orchestra](#); [Jay Thomas](#), the eminent Seattle trumpeter; Thomas's wife, the singer [Becca Duran](#); several other professional musicians; and me. After the second sound check, we arose from the pews and gathered under the magnificent dome to evaluate the sound. Our consensus and advice: don't change a thing. The room has the best natural acoustics I have heard since I listened to a string quartet from the back of St. Nicholas Church in Prague and the music was so clear that I might have been sitting in the midst of the group.

After negotiating an obstacle course of applications, permits, approvals and, in general, dancing a bureaucratic tango daunting even to seasoned builders, the Strosahls emerged with approval in the nick of time for their first concert. That was good, because they had hired the Bill Mays Trio to be the premier performers in what was now called The Seasons Performance Hall. Their plan is to concentrate on jazz and classical chamber music, incorporate tastings of the Yakima Valley's celebrated wines and make The Seasons an attraction not only for residents but also for visitors who flood into the valley to tour the vineyards and wineries.

The launch was a success. An audience of 350 heard Mays, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson—fresh from an engagement at Jazz Alley in Seattle—in an inspired two-hour concert. In the spirit of the name of the hall, Mays created a program of pieces that alluded to all of the seasons. They included an adaptation of a movement of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," "Autumn Leaves," "Spring is Here" and "Snow Job," Mays' transformation of "Winter Wonderland." True to the sound check, the hall was a listener's dream. Amplification of the nine-foot Steinway was not only unnecessary but would have been a prosecutable crime. The dynamics of Wilson's drumming were crystalline, down to the tiniest whispers of his brushes and the subtlest pings and dopler effects of the little bell he sometimes flourishes. Wind cracked his bass amplifier almost imperceptibly, only enough to enhance the balance. It was a rarity in jazz today, an acoustic performance, warm and intimate, without electronic shaping or manipulation.

When the big department stores abandoned downtown Yakima, either to disappear entirely or move to an asphalt wasteland on the edge of town, it wasn't long before most of the small stores, without retail anchors to bring shoppers, drifted away. It is a problem common to many medium-sized American cities that have been, to use a generic term, Walmartized. There are dozens of plans and suggestions, many of them harebrained, to breathe life back into downtown. The Strosahls, bypassing commissions, committees and councils, have taken initiative with a cultural approach. With luck, community support, the right kind of publicity and advertising campaign, and bookings that maintain the quality of the opening event, The Seasons could be a catalyst for a downtown Yakima revival.

**By WILL FRIEDWALD - A Special Double-Bill**

The fourhanded piano duet is a long-standing jazz tradition in formal concert settings. It's not uncommon for two heavyweight pianists to get together and trade notes and ideas for an evening, as the legendary Hank Jones and Barry Harris did in October under the aegis of Jazz Forum. But I can't think of an occasion when a club has presented a piano duo team as a recurring attraction, as Birdland is doing this week with two outstanding pianists named Bill, namely Charlap and Mays.

Although Mr. Mays (whose latest album, "Live at Jazz Standard," has just been released by Palmetto) is more than 20 years older than Mr. Charlap, both men were initially known for their associations with Gerry Mulligan – in fact, it was Mr. Mays who helped Mr. Charlap get the job with the late saxophone giant. Messrs. Charlap and Mays played as a duo last year at Merkin Hall, but their eight-show run this week will allow the twosome to coalesce in the way other ensembles would from steadily working together.

If the opening set on Wednesday night is any indication, the double-Bill is off to a flying start. Mr. Charlap said afterward that he and Mr. Mays had made a point of not deciding beforehand what they were going to play, yet one clear-cut theme was evident: Throughout the performance, they found new and interesting things to do with standards and their variations.

The duo began with "Pennies From Heaven," or rather, the minor-key variant on it composed by Lennie Tristano, titled "Lennie's Pennies." Yet where Tristano's version barely disguised Arthur Johnston's melody, Messrs. Mays and Charlap's treatment obscured the work of both previous composers.

Where "Pennies" was a completely theme-less improvisation, the second tune, "It's Easy To Remember," was all melody. Both men decorated the tune with flourishes, and whenever one man's flourish would evolve into a distinct melody, the other pianist would steer it back to the tune. "Easy To Remember" set a precedent for relevant quotes: Mr. Charlap briefly supplemented the Richard Rodgers melody "Rhythm-a-ning," Thelonious Monk's most famous line on the same changes. Later still, the team injected Charlie Parker's most famous blues, "Now's the Time," into his lesser-known "Bloomdido."

The standout ballad of the set was an elaborate construction of three songs reflecting on the nature of youth: "Last Night When We Were Young," "Blame It on My Youth," and "Young and Foolish." The playing of both Bills was so sensitive here that it brought to mind yet a third piano-playing Bill (Evans). The two pianists were so together on this piece that what Mr. Mays referred to as "18 feet of piano" (meaning the two 9-foot grands) seemed like a single giant instrument played by one colossal musician.

The twosome essayed a pair of Latinate numbers to very different effect. "Pensativa" – by yet another pianist, Clare Fischer – was treated as it is traditionally, meaning as the most famous of all North American-born bossa nowith another, "It Might as Well Be

Spring.” Then, in “Dance of the Infidels,” he supported Bud Powell’s variations on “I Got Rhythm” with *vas*. By contrast, Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “Zingaro” began with the angular approach of an Argentinian tango, and then briefly became a Bach four-part invention before Mr. Mays brought it home with lightly dissonant secondary intervals that suggested Chinese music.

The two Bills concluded with “Nice Work If You Can Get It,” enhancing the Gershwin standard with the same sort of chromaticisms the composer himself favored in his piano performances. It seemed clear that the more familiar the terrain the two Bills were on, the more their collaboration started to turn into a competition, and the more cut-throat their jousts became. Halfway through, they were trying to out-melody and out-improvise each other; by the end, they were even trying to out-coda each other. Zing! Take that! Nice work, indeed.

**The GLOBE AND MAIL by MARK MILLER**

**Thursday, November 24, 2005 Page R7**

**Mays gets swept up in the moment**

At the Montreal Bistro In Toronto on Tuesday November 22, 2005

Bill Mays was on something of a tear at the Montreal Bistro on Tuesday night. Just in from Salt Lake City, Utah, on "a flight from hell," as he put it before the evening's first set, the veteran, New York-based pianist took a couple or three tunes to settle down, and then . . . and then he was off.

In any other context, this could be a dangerous strategy. Mays is an impulsive improviser at the most relaxed of times. Here, energized, he was thinking in tangents -- all toots and left turns of the sort that would normally leave the heads of any visiting soloist's local accompanists spinning. Mays, however, has a long-standing association with his Toronto bandmates at the Bistro this week, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke. Wherever he went, they were right at his heels from the outset and usually running with him head-to-head by the time he had shifted into high gear. This is one of the finer jazz piano trios around in that respect, operating as it does on comparably high levels of soft-handed skill, knowing style and keen anticipation. All three qualities were immediately apparent in its opening pieces of the evening, Frank Rosolino's waltz *Blue Daniel*, Coleman Hawkins's boppish *Bean and the Boys* and Mays's own *Ballad for Barbara*. The Hawkins tune was in fact the highlight of the set for Mays's long, unflagging solo, one scintillating chorus after another, with neither hindrance nor hesitation. But if Mays already seemed to be on a tear, he was really just warming up for all that followed with the standards *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* and *Willow Weep for Me*.

His *Nightingale* was encyclopedic, from A to, well, A -- Ahmad Jamal to Abdullah Ibrahim -- with Swainson and Clarke catching the historical references and adding a few footnotes of their own. Mays played the piece every which way, inside the piano and outside the box; if, in all of its digressions, it wasn't quite as exhilarating as the headlong *Bean and the Boys*, it was no less wild a ride.

Mays's *Willow* was similarly inspired, though heavier of hand, as perhaps befitting the tune's bluesy overtones. But the pianist's enthusiasm briefly got the better of him as he forced, rather than carried, the performance to its peak. A rare lapse, yes, yet one that served as a reminder of the degree to which Mays will allow himself to be swept up in the moment, which is precisely when and where the greatest jazz is likely to be played -- in the moment.

*The Bill Mays Trio perform nightly through Saturday at the Montreal Bistro*

### **Bob Agnew October 26, 2005**

#### **Pianist Bill Mays Plays Closed Concert In Santa Barbara**

Famed jazz pianist Bill Mays performs around the country and around the world. He was born and raised in California, but in the 80's moved to New York. He now resides in Milford in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, just an hour from Manhattan. In New York, he has played at such noted venues as the Blue Note, Birdland, Bradley's, Carnegie Hall, the Guggenheim Museum, Lincoln Center, Steinway Pianos, the Village Gate and the Village Vanguard . In contrast, during his recent road tour, he did a single on one Monday evening late in October at the mountainside, Santa Barbara home of John and Diana Slais. There, he played solo for nearly three hours much to the unmistakable pleasure of some thirty fans crowded into the Slais living room. Slais, a jazz pianist himself, provided his guest with a seven foot Yamaha concert grand piano, in tune and receptive to the creative, well-honed talents of Mays whose artistry knows no bounds: He not only is an exceptional pianist, but composes and arranges, as well. A first call musician in Los Angeles during the lush studio days of the 20th century, his long and varied background qualifies him for all of the distinction he presently enjoys. Casually dressed and informal with his audience, Mays opened his program with one of his favorites, the Hoagy Carmichael-Johnny Mercer song, "Skylark." No stoic at the keyboard, he spices his performance with expressive facial reactions to the music he is producing, as well as other rhythmic body motions. The man loves what he's doing and he shows it, with the audience being the beneficiary. Referring to the late Benny Carter as being an "inspiration to all of us" because of his active, creative musicianship through a long life into his nineties, he dedicated his next selection to him. It was Carter's tune, "Summer Serenade." He also paid tribute to Thelonius Monk with "Panonica," one of Monk's beautiful ballads. Mays then fulfilled a request from the audience for stride piano by playing the "Jitterbug Waltz" in that style after discussing his favorite pianist, the progressive, inimitable and still working, Hank Jones. Jones, at one time or another, tackled all the styles from stride to bebop. Mays concluded his first set with Charles Mingus' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," followed by Johnny Mandel's "Shadow of Your Smile" and Miles Davis' "Four." Mays considers Mandel to be one of the greatest of modern composers and believes his score for the movie, "The Sandpiper," to be a classic example of that craft. Referring to the Concord Records Maybeck Concert series featuring great jazz pianists, including Bill Mays, host Slais requested Mays to play his composition, "Thanksgiving Prayer," from his Maybeck concert. That began the second set, followed by the Jimmy Van Heusen tune, "Darn That Dream." Then, complying with request to do Billy Strayhorn, Mays selected "Lush Life," one of the most outstanding of

that composer's famous songs. He noted the incredibility of Strayhorn writing such sophisticated, mature lyrics when he still was in his teens. Mays then effectively sang them to illustrate his point before brilliantly concluding it as an instrumental on the piano. Asked to do "Christopher Columbus," it was a memory-scratcher, but he came up with it, based on a bit of its melody and took it from there, improvising in a matchless way. He honored Oscar Levant with "Blame It On My Youth," coupling it with the Sam Lewis-Victor Young hauntingly beautiful, "Street of Dreams." He recollected Johnny Green with "Body and Soul," superimposing its melody on Chopin's Etude in E-flat minor, did "Willow Weep For Me" (composer Ann Ronell), saluted the greatness of David Raksin with renditions of "The Bad And The Beautiful" and "Laura" and concluded with Jelly Roll Morton's "Grandpa's Spells." Kudos to John and Diana Slais for having given a fortunate few of the Bill Mays fans a rare opportunity to hear him in a concert of this nature. For those of us who prefer the intimacy of club settings to listen to jazz, as opposed to a theater stage, this was the epitome of up front and close.

**Glen's Falls Post Star, August 21, 2002**

**Bill Mays Trio fits beautifully with Luzerne chamber festival**

**by Geraldine Freedman**

When cellist Bert Phillips asked jazz pianist Bill Mays to bring his trio to play with the classical musicians for Monday night's concert at the Luzerne Chamber Music Festival, he probably didn't realize what an inspiration that idea was. The evening was not only a fabulous success; it was also illuminating to hear how well the two styles work together. Of course, most of that credit goes to Mays' skillful and graceful ability as an arranger. Every piece that mingled jazz reference with the classical molds sang because of the fluidity during the style breaks. Initially, Phillips, violinists LaMar Alsop and Ron Erickson and pianist Toby Blumenthal played Vivaldi's Concerto in D Minor. They played the three contrasting movements with good energy, feeling and strong pulses. Then Mays' Trio, which included the estimable bassist Martin Wind and imaginative drummer Matt Wilson, got to work. They took fragments of melodies that the violinists and cellist had played as the basis for their improvisations and created a very recognizable but totally new three-movement piece.

Everyone jammed in the first movement. The second movement was a ballad with Mays playing an eloquent lingering solo. The final movement centered around Wilson and his inventive alterations of tone and rhythm. After intermission, everyone but Phillips played Dick Hyman's catchy "Your Own Iron."

The Mays Trio then played a set of its own with many tunes coming from their latest CD, "Summer Sketches" (Palmetto). In "The Things You Did Last Summer," they were assisted by Alsop on a 1918 strobe violin - a sort-of violin with an attached amplifying horn that was used prior to electronic amplification. Alsop improvised some nice lines. In the funky "Early Morning Blues" - Wind's tune dedicated to his young son Christopher - the trio dug in with great finger-snapping zeal. Wilson's "Free-range Chicken" was cute and clever. In these and the other tunes, the trio showed a light touch with improvisations very centered in melody. Their work was very accessible, tasteful, swinging and full of joy. Everyone but Blumenthal joined in a romp through Mendelssohn's Trio in C Minor, which constantly shifted back and forth from classical to

jazz. It was an amazing display of musical imagination. Mays was equally impressive with his classical technique, his gentle touch and his sensitivity to chamber music ethics. Also performed was Piazzolla's "The Four Seasons" with Alsop, Phillips and Blumenthal.

### Naples, Florida News, 2003

#### Jazz trio's improvisation on classical compositions brings staid crowd to its feet by Joe Longsteth and Peg Goldberg

Given a choice between: A. Endless numbers of TV commentators dueling for ratings as they rehashed the president's speech which left no doubt as to the imminence of war; or B. Sitting back and enjoying a duel between classical and jazz musicians Monday night at the Sugden Theatre in downtown Naples, a capacity crowd chose the latter.

Again this year Classic Chamber Concerts brought back the Bill Mays Trio, whose prodigious musical talents range from classical to gospel and from pop to jazz. Together with the trio's hosts, the Philadelphia Piano Quartet, the audience was saturated with music beginning with new age Bach and ending with revisionist Mendelssohn during their 2 1/2-hour program.

In between dissection and reinvention of those classical composers, however, the trio and members of the quartet threw in a raft of other offerings to saturate even the most voracious of jazz improvisation appetites.

Mays, who has performed on more than 100 recordings, has a list of concert credits and film soundtracks that is awe-inspiring even to his peers. Singers such as Frank Sinatra, Barry Manilow, Sarah Vaughan and films such as "Being John Malkovich," "Fargo," "Lethal Weapon" ... you name them, he's had his nimble hands somewhere in their music.

Bassist Martin Wind, a native of Germany, is a past winner of the Thelonius Monk Competition, on faculty at New York University, and is a bass wunderkind. He caressed a whole new set of sounds out of his bass, to the delight of the normally staid crowd. Rounding out the trio was drummer extraordinaire Matt Wilson, awarded 1997's Best New Artist by the New York Jazz Critics Circle.

And, lest we forget, the Philadelphia Piano Quartet provided some toe-tapping moments of its own throughout the program.

The evening began innocently enough with J.S. Bach's Concerto for Two Violins, Cello and Piano in C Minor. Once the traditional arrangement was complete, however, Mays et al. took over, and 250 years fell away as Mays and his cohorts twisted and massaged Bach's composition like silly putty. In their hands it was transformed into a 21st century beauty queen complete with sculpted nails and 5-inch heels.

Not satisfied to let the Bill Mays Trio undertake their arrangement without a little help from quartet members, violist/violinist LaMar Alsop added a superb bit of clarinet work to the number. The audience loved it.

Next up were two selections from Astor Piazzolla's "The Four Seasons." The contemporary Argentinian composer, who died in 1992, did for sensual tango music what the Strauss family did for waltzes: made everyone who heard them beg for more. This time Alsop, performing on a superb violin made for him by his now 90-year-old brother enchanted the audience yet again.

Not that there was any hint the tones he rendered on the violin during that number were a fluke, Alsop then joined the Bill Mays Trio for an adaptation of an arrangement by Frank Vignola entitled

"One Beautiful Evening." And beautiful it was. There is something about the purity of sound produced by that violin, in the hands of a magician such as Alsop, which literally can bring tears to one's eyes.

Lots of toe tapping and rhythmic nodding followed, as "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart" burst forth from the Steinway. Soon the drums and bass were in a mad scramble to leave no stone unturned, no note not stripped naked and reconstructed. The audience burst into cheers at its conclusion.

The intermission afforded a bit of a breather for those of us whose neurons were on overdrive. Then, just in case any person in the audience has never experienced the rush that comes from literally absorbing liquid silver glissandi into their senses, the trio afforded the audience just that opportunity during "Home," an arrangement by Van Steeden/Clarkson. A couple more offerings and the audience was reduced to Jell-O by Cole Porter's "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To"; a few lines from the Desert Song's "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise"; Dvorak's "Going Home" (New World Symphony); with a bit of "Oh Danny Boy" thrown in for good measure.

As a final auditory treat of the evening, Mendelssohn was awakened from his eternal sleep to hear the upstarts take on the fourth and final movement from his Trio in D Minor, Opus 49.

And take on they did, adding Norman Carol, violin, and Bert Phillips, cello to their trio. At the program's conclusion, what followed was the most raucous cheering these reviewers have heard in any Classic Chamber program.

**Toronto Globe & Mail, November 28, 2002, Print edition, Page R7**

**Bill Mays, Neil Swainson, Terry Clarke at the Montreal Bistro in Toronto by Mark Miller**

There is still, it seems, a little mileage left on the piano trio in jazz. Bill Mays, Neil Swainson and Terry Clarke had it out for a spin on Tuesday at the Montreal Bistro. The ride was terrific. In fact, the ride belied the casual circumstances of this engagement, circumstances familiar to Bistro patrons who've seen many a visiting star at work with a local rhythm section. Pianist Mays, the visiting star, is up from New York for the week: bassist Swainson and drummer Clarke, the local rhythm section, are regulars among the club's rotation of accompanists. The three musicians have played here before, though, a fact that goes some way toward explaining their remarkable rapport. But there's something more involved, something particular to Mays alone. It can surely be no coincidence that he established the same sort of sympathetic relationship at the Bistro with another Toronto musician, guitarist Ed Bickert, during the 1990's. The point is this: Mays plays on pure inspiration, that exalted level where mere technical concerns have been long forgotten. Swainson and Clarke have the skill and sensitivity to respond comfortably in kind. The result is jazz of a sophistication and sheer spontaneity that's rarely heard in any Toronto nightspot – unless, apparently, Mays is on the bandstand. Then, anything is possible. He is an impetuous improviser, digressive and sometimes even distracted. He's also secure in the knowledge – or should be – that he will not lose

Swainson and Clarke on the way. They'll figure out where he's going and arrive at the same place in good time. Of course, a typical set – Tuesday's first, for example – isn't entirely without its routines. More than once, Mays and Swainson zipped in unison through a tricky bebop theme; that's not the sort of operation normally undertaken without some prior consultation. Mostly, though, the trio simply sailed along, blue-skying its way from the opening medley of Charlie Parker's Sippin' At Bells and Bud Powell's Dance Of The Infidels to the closing Cole Porter standard You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To. The result left much to inference, flirted frequently with abstraction and still made perfect sense. That's as close to the state of the jazz art as any three musician's could hope to get.

**Los Angeles Times, September 20, 2002**

**JAZZ REVIEW**

**A Lighthearted Vibe: 'Bach Meets Bird'**

**By Don Heckman, Special to The Times**

Bill Mays dropped into town Monday night, displaying the musical skills that have been the wellspring for a long, diverse artistic career. The New York-based pianist, once a Southland regular, has a résumé filled with far-ranging achievements, from his time as music director for Sarah Vaughan in the early '70s to his participation in hundreds of television and film soundtracks during a 12-year stint in Los Angeles recording studios, as well as writing arrangements for a list of artists that includes Woody Herman, Shelly Manne, Bud Shank and Phil Woods. Mays' performance at the Jazz Bakery with bassist Tom Warrington and drummer Joe LaBarbera was, however, the work of a player who—despite his many other activities—has remained firmly in contact with the sheer pleasures of jazz improvisation,.

And the nods of approval and smiles of appreciation he frequently tossed in the direction of his two companions underscored how much fun he was having during an evening in which the emphasis seemed to be upon upbeat, briskly swinging music.

In his interpretations of standards, Mays' experience as a vocal accompanist and a composer-arranger were ever-present in his solos. Well-crafted, filled with intriguing melodic counter phrases, his choruses unfolded with the logic and the connectiveness of preconceived compositions. He enhanced his improvisational choices with an impressive degree of tonal coloration and variation.

The most entertaining number in Mays' set was a humorous but musically engaging combination of Bach and Charlie Parker, "Bach Meets Bird," in which he blended elements of the Bach Two Part Invention in F and Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha," with bits and pieces from other bop tunes tossed in for good measure. It was a good example of the sort of lightheartedness that serves jazz well opening up the music to listeners leery of improvisational journeys through more discordant musical landscapes.

**The Toronto Star, November 27, 2002**

**Exhilarating Pianist Deserves His Day In The Sun**

## **By Geoff Chapman**

“Oh, it’s a long, long time from May to November...” Well, the first line of “September Song” doesn’t quite say that, but it’s a strong reminder that there’s only four more days of November left to catch Bill Mays at the Montreal Bistro, where the brilliant American pianist began a short stay last night. Mays is certainly one of those “been there, done that” jazzmen. He’s accompanied great singers like Sarah Vaughan, done commercials, worked in a hotel band, played on the soundtracks of films like Fargo and Lethal Weapon and spent so much time in studios that he didn’t really get around to immersing himself in jazz until the 1980s.

He’s still not known enough, which is absurd. His opening set was a marvel, as after limbering up on the piano stool he started with the bebop lines of “Sippin’ At Bells” and “Dance Of The Infidels”, immediately establishing darting dialogues with his excellent T.O. companions, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke. These getting-to-know-you exchanges were so slick and so sophisticated you’d swear the trio had been rehearsing hard all afternoon. They hadn’t, yet they performed so intuitively throughout the set that a listener could believe he or she was hearing behind the notes. It all seemed so relaxed and at the same time so spontaneous, so exhilarating and so exuberant that the very process of invention at the heart of jazz seemed to be illuminated. Mays, with his unerring ear for the ebb and flow of the music, nonetheless remains faithful to the off-centre. There’s a real wit throbbing away under a mostly calm exterior, and he spent copious time switching keys and tempo, dropping in quotes from other songs as well as simulating other styles. All this was evident when he tackled “Willow Weep For Me”. There were moments of Monk (Thelonious), helpings of Hines (Earl) and stride piano games as he matched percussive chording with weighty ornamentations over Swainson’s surging pulse and Clarke’s superbly adept counterpoint. Even the chorus swaps with his sidemen were amazing feats of imagination, and all this turn-on-a-dime expertise makes one wonder why he’s not had a stellar career. “Comin’ Home Baby” was a minor key jaunt over hardshuffling beat, Mays teasing phrases unmercifully, offering up spicy single-note runs and daring his comrades to develop rapid-fire, three-way conversations. He allowed a brief respite with his ballad “Ballad For Barbara”, which was dainty but deep felt, before closing with an abandoned romp through “You’d Be So Nice To Come Home To.”

### **Jazzmozaiek—June/July 2003 (Belgium)**

#### **Jack van Poll meets Bill Mays in Manhattan**

Our Capetonian (not for long anymore) correspondent and pianist Jack van Poll went to New York and visited his old friend and bass player Martin Wind, but he also arranged a meeting with pianist Bill Mays, who once made his recording debut in Europe on Jack’s September label and who will be, with his present trio, one of the revelations of this years Jazz Middelheim (LDB).

While in Minton’s Playhouse, at the end of 1944, a new sound relegated the era of swing to the past, a piano player was born in Sacramento CA, who today is making a name of himself as one of the piano greats. Bill Mays was confronted with Jazz for the first time, listening to a recording of Earl “Fatha” Hines. He started his career when he was sixteen and has since then appeared on more than 150 recordings, including 15

records as a leader. Although I don't want to trivialize this miraculous harvest, I have to admit that I am most impressed by his recent three recordings. When I asked which piano players had a great influence on him, he pulled out names that I did not expect from him. Without missing a beat he mentioned McCoy Tyner and Sonny Rollins.

After pushing him a bit further he added Horace Silver, Jimmy Rowles, Hank Jones and Don Shirley to the list. So then I tried to find out which younger players he admired and also there he came up with a pleasant surprise, mentioning names like Mike LeDonne and Larry Goldings. Bill is a great fan of his own rhythm section. Bassist Martin Wind is performing this summer with Pat Metheny and often sits in on the Monday nights with the Village Vanguard Orchestra. Matt Wilson has next to the trio his own successful quartet and recently brought out a new C.D. (Humidity on Palmetto; see 'New on C.D.') We have all felt, that since the launch of the Euro, compact discs have become even more expensive, but prior to that various mergers and joint ventures, notably in the States, have occurred. In the process many smaller labels have been lost inside the big multinationals like AOL Warner, BMG, Sony and others. The end result was, that many 'recording artists' were sidelined as deadwood.

And so many Jazz artists are since then in the process of producing their own recordings, including Bill Mays. In Bill's case I have to exemplify this with a preceding story. What I never realized is that Bill listened to the young German bass player Martin Wind for the first time, during the North Sea Jazz Festival '93, when Martin and Hans van Oosterhout performed there with my trio. Not long after that, Bill recorded two C.D.'s for September Records and for Challenge with Martin and Keith Copeland on drums. Martin and Bill have been working together now for over seven years. Somewhere along the line the much-praised young talent on drums, Matt Wilson joined the trio. It was with this trio that Bill Mays launched his own production, "Out in P.A." A gem of a recording; too bad it is hard to find in the record stores. It looks like it that the mergers in the record business are not over yet, but the good news is that recently some clever independent small labels have emerged, like Dreyfus, MaxJazz, Nagel Heuer, Arkadia, SharpNine, and Palmetto." Summer Sketches" and the brand new "Going Home" have been issued on Palmetto and show a personal branded approach by this Bill Mays trio. Here are three talented musicians who perform their own writings and in addition present original renditions of some well-chosen Standards. Above all, it is Bill Mays, who on their latest C.D. presents four of his original compositions that are more than a match to the Standard repertory. Bill admits that the combination of this balanced and experienced trio, plus the commitment and motivation of the Palmetto label, are the key of their recent success. JazzTimes recently published a laudatory article on Bill Mays and after the commercial success of "Summer Sketches" the brand new "Going Home", promises to score high in the charts. Does this open all doors for the trio? Bill doesn't complain, but it is obvious that to keep yourself on your feet in New York, is not that easy. The Jazz club scene has changed and Jazz ain't what it used to be! Opening the Newspapers you'll see that Barbara Carroll performs in "Birdland" and James Cotton in the "Blue Note", but also the Don Byron Sextet in the "Village Vanguard". Apart from club- and studio gigs, the trio performs at private jazz parties. This new development gives you a better listening audience, which is a great advantage for the musicians, plus it pays better in most cases. There is also a tangible change of attitude from the so-

called 'classical' world, in so far that there is a more prominent interest in those circles for Jazz musicians and their music. The Jazz cruises that have been advertised over the last years in the summer issues of the U.S. Jazz magazines are a great success, also in this case resulting in a closer relationship between the musicians and their audience. Our interview took place during lunch. Bill just arrived from a studio recording and had to rush to a 'live' recording for a website concert. This illustrates that the life of a Jazz musician is a many sided adventure. During this coming Jazz Middelheim the Bill Mays trio is going to be one of the highlights of the Festival.

**Mark Miller, Toronto Globe And Mail, Friday, Nov. 26, 2004**

The empathetic Can-Am trio of pianist Bill Mays, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Terry Clarke has its origins at the Montreal Bistro in Toronto, where *Bick's Bag* was recorded in 2002 (and where the trio is back for the CD's launch, through tomorrow). This is very much a "live" band—loose and spontaneous, though perhaps less unrestrained here than it has been on some nights at the club. The program has a familiar, mainstream look, one Paul Simon song aside, and while the playing doesn't breach the mainstream's stylistic banks, the level of skill and imagination involved is consistently and impressively high. —*Mark Miller*

**Toronto Chamber Jazz Septet**

**The Toronto Star, 2001**

**By Geoff Chapman, Music Critic**

**Septet's Debut A Taste Of Jazz Light**

Last night's debut concert by the newly minted Toronto Chamber Jazz Septet was a taste of jazz light, but mercifully never became jazz smooth, that musical opiate for the inattentive masses. The ensemble assembled in a full Glenn Gould Studio was led by versatile pianist-composer-arranger Bill Mays, a New York-based artist who recently recorded the same heady brew of anthems from jazz, Broadway and classics with the Manhattan Chamber Jazz Septet. It wasn't a silly season stir-fry, though it was a grand excuse to use a cartel of composers beyond category. How else can you have Claude Debussy, Thelonious Monk, Mel Torme, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Rodgers and Hammerstein and Maurice Ravel on the same program? Mays recruited four leading Canadian reedmen: P. J. Perry, Phil Dwyer, Vern Dorge and John Johnson to go along with pulse kings Neil Swainson on bass and Terry Clarke on drums. The leader himself augments his arranging skills with the finesse of Jimmy Rowles, the spirit of Art Tatum and the drive of Horace Silver on the keyboard. An elegant My Bells was followed by the show tune made famous a second time by jazz guru John Coltrane, My Favourite Things, whose cadences were clearly among yesterday's sax players' favourite things. This was followed by an unlikely Brazilian slant on Debussy's Clair De Lune before Perry's forceful bellows on baritone sax upped the thrill index again, as it led to equally quirky skirmishes among the players tackling Monk's Stuffy Turkey. Mays' own Christmas Thanksgiving Prayer was soulful and rich, while Ravel's Pavane was enlivened by Dorge flute. Just as this appealing show concept was showing signs of bogging down in neo-schlock, a spirited trio take on Snow Job provided the kiss of jazz life. The closing

Mays versions of six movements from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite were absolutely splendid with bravura sax soloing--the epitome of chamber jazz.

**Aargauer Zeitung Baden (CH), Switzerland 11/25/99**

**Highest Art of Trio Playing: "Jazz in der Aula" with Mays/Wilson/Wind**

Announced for his first concert in Baden five years ago, pianist Bill Mays' style was described as highly influenced by legendary Bill Evans. At times, that concert still supported this characterization. In the meantime, Bill Mays has stepped out of any body's shadow and developed his very own style. His second concert at "Jazz in der Aula" with Martin Wind on bass again, and Matt Wilson on drums was strong evidence for this improvement. The concert is characterized easily: wonderful music from three musicians with a congenial partnership. The ingredients were perfect, deep interplay on one hand, and individual brilliance and virtuosity on the other. The fun the musicians obviously had made evident that there was always room for humor and spontaneity besides the more creative/intellectual moments. A few standards and compositions by all players formed the repertoire. They also included dedications to the centennials of Hoagy Carmichael and Duke Ellington with a romantic arco-bass version of "Skylark", a darkly harmonized piano-solo rendition of "Stardust", as well as a relaxed swinging "Dancers in Love" featuring Matt Wilson's melodic brush work. Martin Wind presented four of his more complex works, Bill Mays one of his earlier lyrical songs, and Matt Wilson his funny "Free Range Chicken". Matt Wilson is a discovery: the term "drummer" almost doesn't do him justice. He accompanied the compositions goblin-like with percussive and colorful effects, whirled along their rhythmic framework, dove into the improvisations by piano and bass picking up motives and moods. Piano and bass were never dominant that way, since there was a constant flow of ideas between the three. Martin Wind's bass solos were going from horn-like lines to symphonic bowing technique and were always clear and meaningful. Bill Mays, on the other hand, went further into the compositions with his well-considered way, without touching their emotional context, re-composing and varying melodies, while always staying in tune with the thematic outline.