

Detroit pianist Michael Malis steps out on his own



Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press Staff Writer

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(Photo: Michael Malis)

JAZZ

At 27, pianist Michael Malis is part of a gaggle of young and versatile Detroit jazz musicians reinvigorating the current scene. Malis' pedigree is saturated with the city's jazz history. He grew up in Grosse Pointe, studied with pianist Bess Bonnier in high school, fell into the orbit of trumpeter Marcus Belgrave and eventually studied with one of Belgrave's most important proteges, pianist Geri Allen at the University of Michigan. Fluent in idioms across the spectrum, he sounds comfortable accompanying a singer, swinging a standard, surging into modal, post-bop territory or playing free of traditional conventions.

This weekend, Malis celebrates the recent release of his first CD, "Lifted from the No of All Nothing" (Polyfold), at the Kerrytown Concert House. It's an uncommonly mature and distinctive debut. He essays nine original compositions that push his simpatico trio (Benjamin Rolston on bass and Stephen Boegehold on drums) into exploratory territory. The music is loose and spontaneous, alert to dynamics and textural variety while balancing formal detail and discipline with freedom. Malis' compositions are not all memorable, but

the best of them create a rewarding arena for intuitive improvisations and the interactive rapport of the trio.

If you're looking for music that swings in the traditional sense, you won't find it here, but there are strong grooves that lock into the beat, as well as discursive passages that breathe with spacey lyricism. Malis' flexible touch and attack can sound sumptuous, splashy or spiky, and his well-developed technique allows him to get around the piano easily. He also has an impressive way of spreading out the rhythm between his two hands to create a fulsome sound that comes from playing the entire instrument. His sweeping approach, the way he projects a feeling of progressivism, reminds me a bit of his teacher, Geri Allen, without mimicking the specifics of her style.

Malis' trio has spent a lot of hours on the bandstand together developing its own language, both on its own and as the backbone of the quartet led by saxophonist Marcus Elliot, yet another gifted young player in Detroit. The CD offers one status report. A live concert offers another.

8 p.m. Friday, Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor. 734-769-2999. www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com (<http://www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com>). \$15-\$30 (\$5 student).

CLASSICAL

One of the royal names in American music, the Juilliard String Quartet arrives for a two-day residency under the umbrella of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit. Two programs are on tap, each with a different focus.

- Starting in the 1950s, the quartet forged a landmark relationship with the modernist composer Elliott Carter, one of America's most important 20th Century composers, that lasted for the rest of his life and included recordings of all five his string quartets. And what a life it was, lasting until 2012, when Carter died at 103, writing music well past his 100th birthday. Friday's concert is devoted completely to Carter's music, with his groundbreaking String Quartet No. 1 (1951) as the major centerpiece.

This bracing and beguiling work introduced what came to be a Carter trademark, a technique called metric modulation. Individual lines shift tempos continuously, obliterating the sense of a single pulse and creating four seemingly independent and simultaneous solos. Like all of his mature work, the piece is about how we experience time in the modern world. 8 p.m. Friday, Schaver Recital Hall, 480 W. Hancock (just west of Cass Ave.), Wayne State University, Detroit. 248-855-6070. www.ChamberMusicDetroit.org (<http://www.ChamberMusicDetroit.org>). \$30, \$15 students. (After Friday's concert, I'll be moderating an on-stage conversation about Carter with members of the quartet.)

- Cellist Joel Krosnick is retiring from the quartet after a remarkable 42 seasons. His replacement, Astrid Schween, will be appearing publicly with the group for the first time on Saturday. She'll join the foursome as a second cellist in Schubert's String Quintet. The rest of the program includes Mozart and Schubert. 8 p.m. Saturday, Seligman Performing Arts Center, 22305 W. 13 Mile Road, Beverly Hills. 248-855-6070. www.ChamberMusicDetroit.org (<http://www.ChamberMusicDetroit.org>). \$32-\$64, \$16-\$32 students.

New Music Detroit: New Music Detroit presents an especially alluring program of emerging composers culled from the group's 2015 Call for Scores Contest. Among the composers represented are Gabriella Smith, Molly Joyce, Rosheanne Etezady, Patrick O'Malley, Sarah Kirkland Snyder and Colin MacDonald. Performers include: Vicky Chow, piano; Ian Ding, percussion; Una O'Riordan, cello; Shannon Orme, clarinets; Erik Ronmark, saxophone;

David Buck, flute; Sheryl Hwangbo, violin; John Madison, viola. 8:30 p.m. Friday, Trinosophes, 1464 Gratiot Ave., Detroit. www.trinosophes.com (<http://www.trinosophes.com>). Suggested minimum donation: \$10.

Contact Mark Stryker: 313-222-6459. mstryker@freepress.com.

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