

Party time: Benny Green Trio to light up Ann Arbor



Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press Staff Writer 1:45 p.m. EDT March 24, 2016



(Photo: Ron Jones)

JAZZ

Pianist Benny Green joined the faculty at the University of Michigan in 2014, but he has kept a low profile locally, and opportunities to hear him have been scarce. On Saturday, however, he brings his A-list trio with bassist David Wong and drummer Rodney Green to the Kerrytown Concert House. Lucky us.

At 52, Green embodies the best of the jazz mainstream. He swings deeply at any tempo and invests a ballad with honest emotion, while the blues are never far from the surface in his improvisations. He has a lickety-split technique, but his ability to get around the piano swiftly isn't nearly as important as the tradition

that's embedded in his DNA. His best work projects a charisma, joy, spontaneity and a personalized take on the music that he inherited from his elders. Green earned his position as a standard bearer the old-fashioned way, apprenticing with Betty Carter, Art Blakey, Freddie Hubbard and Ray Brown. He has put in roadwork with myriad other leading figures and recorded prolifically as a sideman and leader.

Green's latest CD, "Live in Santa Cruz" (Sunnyside), made my Top 10 last year. Featuring Wong on bass and Kenny Washington on drums, the disc digs into a rewarding program of Green's original compositions with an inspired spark of creativity. There's fire, grace, in-the-moment invention and an attention to detail that comes across not as pedantic fussiness but as a subtle mark of expression in an idiom that has a lot of life left in it.

7 & 9 p.m. Saturday, Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor. 734-769-2999. www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com (<http://www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com>). \$20-\$35; \$10, students.

Like a lot of young Detroit-bred jazz musicians, drummer Thaddeus Dixon is active on a lot of fronts. He makes a living performing, producing and writing for a variety of contemporary R&B and pop artists, such as Meghan Trainor, Bryson Tiller, Deborah Cox, Teedra Moses and others. But Dixon also remains a dynamic jazz drummer, and this weekend, he's leading a promising quartet of like-minded peers, including saxophonist Marcus Elliot, pianist Mike Jellick and bassist Josef Deas. Want to hear the kind of jazz musicians Detroit continues to nurture? Here's one way.

9 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Cliff Bell's, 2030 Park, Detroit. 313-961-2543. www.cliffbells.com (<http://www.cliffbells.com>). \$10

CLASSICAL

It's hard to believe that violinist Gil Shaham has been on the scene for more than 25 years. At 45, he projects boyish enthusiasm, and he has always balanced his flawless technique and sunny disposition with thoughtful musicianship. In an unusual Saturday program, co-commissioned by the University Musical Society, he plays Bach's monumental "Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006," while video artist David Michalek provides projected images to complete a multimedia experience.

8 p.m. Saturday, Hill Auditorium, 825 N. University, Ann Arbor. 734-763-2538. www.ums.org (<http://www.ums.org>). \$12-\$60.

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