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The Spirit of Detroit by Marshall Fredricks | Dave Krieger

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Palmer Woods Goes Be Bop

By: Maureen McDonald



February 19, 2008

How many times does this happen on a tour of home? A jazzman shakes his head bee bop style in sheer delight for an appreciative audience. Then he blows hard on his clarinet, and sets feet tapping to the tunes of Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington and Hoagy Carmichael.



No, this is not your run of the mill home tour. More than 130 people packed the living room of Helene White's 12,000-square-foot home on Jan. 26 for the second installment of "[Music in the Homes.](#)" a six-concert series produced by Barbara and Spencer Barefield and hosted by the Palmer Woods Association that continues this weekend.



The sell-out performance by the Charlie Gabriel Quartet featured Taslimah Bey. The series replaced the Palmer Woods annual home tour this winter and is a smashing success.

"People love New Orleans jazz. Especially when they can hear these warm, personal tones of acoustic instruments without amplification. It's a throwback to parlor concerts of the 1890s and the rent-raising parties of the Depression-era," says Larry

Gabriel, Charlie's cousin, and author of a new book about six generations of Gabriel musicians called Daddy Plays Old Time New Orleans Jazz.

Music as it was intended

During last month's concert concert, Charlie Gabriel, 75, shared bits of memories about composing artists, gigs he's played since age 11 and thoughts on New Orleans. He was joined by Taslimah Bey, pianist, ragtime researcher and teacher at Cody High School in Detroit; bassist Marion Hayden, a member of Straight Ahead jazz musicians; and drummer Djallo Djakate Keita, who once toured with Martha Reeves and the Vandellas.

"We listened to music as it was intended. Not a sound out of place. No loud laughter. No cigarette haze. Just musicians and audience interacting," says Jim Hatch, a Troy real estate appraiser came with his wife Trudy to hear jazz and spy inside an elegant Tudor Revival mansion in the spectacular Detroit subdivision.

The "Music in Homes" offers five venues in homes and one dinner dance at the historic Detroit Golf Club. Tickets are still available for the dinner dance April 26 with Straight Ahead Trio and the May 24 concert with Spencer Barefield and Donald Mayberry. Tickets for the February concert with the Peter Psarianos Trio and March with the Jannina Barefield Duo are sold out.



"The whole neighborhood has become involved in making food, selling tickets, inviting friends, even moving furniture out so crowds can come in," says Barbara Barefield, co-founder of the [Creative Arts Collective](#).

The appearance of Charlie Gabriel's Quartet on Craig Fahle's Detroit Today show on WDET-FM created an instant surge in ticket sales. WDET, Goodwill Printing, B & D Garden Design, Grosse Pointe Collection and Be Well Medical Center served as

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sponsors. Next year the group hopes to get grants to better fund the musical performances.

Better than a potluck



Such ideas bode well for the city at large, according to Michael D. Whitty, business professor at the nearby University of Detroit-Mercy. "A lot of smart neighborhoods are adopting moveable feasts of musical and culinary culture. It is an upscale version of the community potluck," Whitty says.

"Neighborhood concerts invite people to break away from the isolation in their homes, the

lonely communion with the idiot box," he adds. "People find out they have much in common with one another."

Nearly everyone attending tapped tap toes and clapped hands to Charlie Gabriel's rendition of "Bill Bailey" and "When the Saints go Marching In." Larry Gabriel danced through the audience with a white Grand Marshall's umbrella to the tune of Bourbon Street Parade.

Pianist Bey offered lessons in W.E.B. Dubois' theory of double consciousness. She said some songs, such as "Maple Leaf Rag" start out as very bright marches, revealing a diminished chord that depicts the pain of being human in race-conscious America.

Members of the harmonically integrated communities Palmer Woods, Green Acres, University District and Sherwood Forest shared bourbon chicken and Mardi Gras fare during the music break.

Will it spark home sales? Even if it doesn't, Kenan Bakirci, longtime Palmer Woods Realtor and homeowner says the series "reaffirms the joy of living in the city, preserving these great architectural jewels."

In fact, the whole vibe that January day about "preservation," both in the flavor of Preservation Hall-style jazz and in the conversations about historic neighborhood.

Spencer Barefield, a lifelong resident of Palmer Woods and musician, said he's been dedicated to the presentation, preservation and creation of jazz since 1978. He loves the new venue which he calls successful beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

"We're just starting this series. It is .. our way to restore the spirit, the positive light of the city, into each others lives," he says.



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