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Faculty Recital: John Stetch, solo piano improvisation

John Stetch

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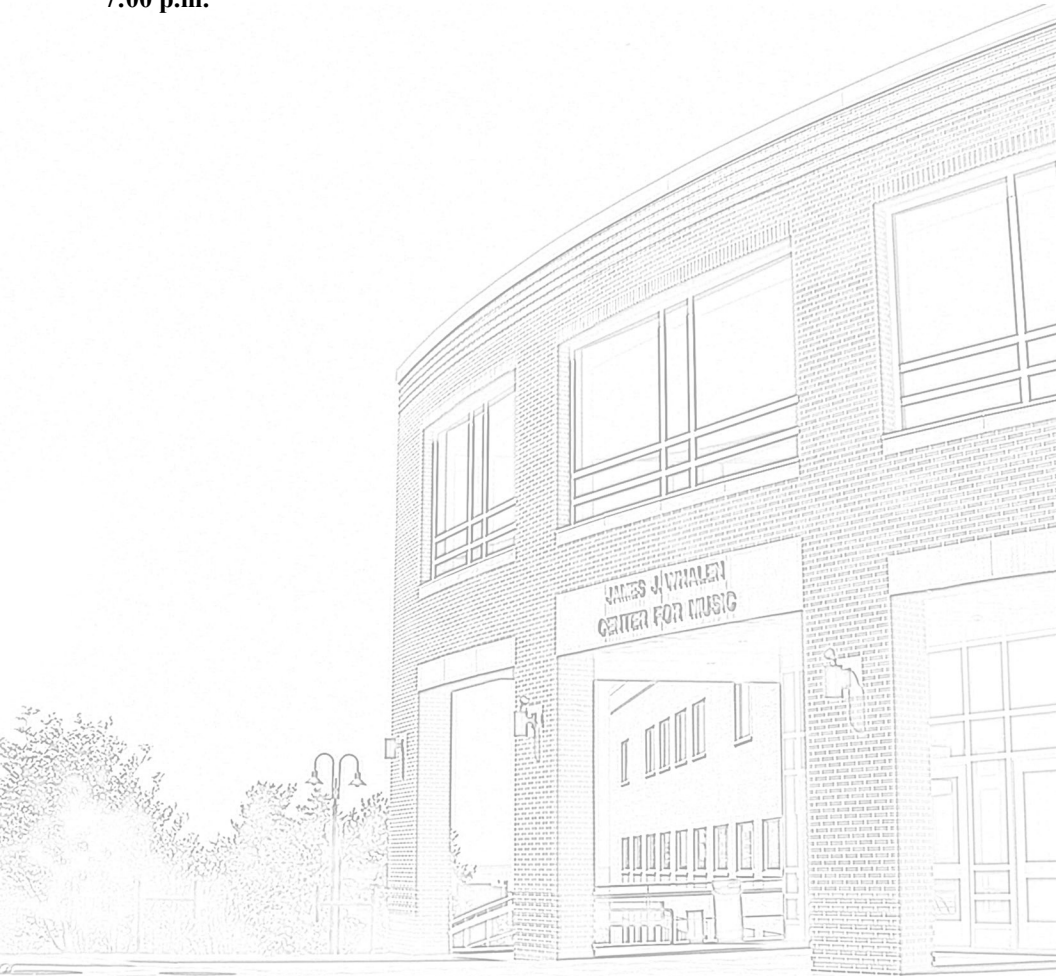
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**Faculty Recital:
John Stetch, solo piano improvisation**

**Hockett Family Recital Hall
Saturday, September 10, 2011
7:00 p.m.**



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

Some Thoughts on Improvisation

Most of the world's best-loved music has been 'composed'. However, in that process, there is inherently some improvisation involved, as it has to start somewhere. Sometimes, when I try to 'compose' in the traditional sense, I get frustrated or stuck with writer's block, and progress get sluggish or comes to a standstill. This is where improvisation comes in handy, but I believe that the process has some pros and cons:

Negatives of Improvisation:

- Not edited, not perfected, must accept unintended 'mistakes' or poor choices
- Could sound like a rough sketch, or limited technically, because only so much can be executed without advance practice
- No chance to reflect back on the overall formal picture and upgrade the logic or flow, or re-design the dynamics, tempos and articulations

Positives of Improvisation:

- Can allow for the possibility of inspired yet fleeting magical moments that would otherwise be lost forever – especially in private, if not recorded or notated immediately
- Full commitment in this mode ensures that there is no writer's block, thus a potentially anxiety-free and labor saving device
- Enables and encourages the intuitive, subconscious mind which can produce some of music's quirky elements or 'un-analyzable' material that might make a piece unique

The other important topic of debate in this area is "What is truly improvised?" Maybe not much. Most pianists who perform, compose and improvise have already studied music for many years, and have practiced hundreds of thousands of phrases, melodic shapes, rhythms, and have experience with trial-and-error experimentation. They already know several different scales and arpeggios in all the keys, and are familiar with typical structures that hold a piece together. Rhythmic coordination and thematic development aren't unknown completely to them, so what hasn't been done before, or, why is improvisation thought of as creative and fresh? I guess that it has mostly to do with how it's all put together, and that each player will have a one-off outlook regarding the expression of their feelings, their personality, and their decision-making style. Even if a musician recycles the same seeds or ideas on multiple occasions, they will come out differently on any given day.

The concert is divided into 2 halves, approximately 30 minutes each, with a short intermission in the middle:

Part One – *Seeds of Improvisation*; short pieces based on small pre-written suggestions of one or a few words each. Examples might include ideas such as D Major, minimal, pointillist, minor and dark, happy, swinging, East European, fast, waltz, odd-meter, odd person, 4ths and 5ths, thematic development, monodic, blues, cell phone, outer space, Bartok, Scriabin, Major 7ths, Bill Evans, cycles, ambient, tonal, and so forth.

Part Two – *Spontaneous Improvisation*; with no pre-meditated thoughts about what will happen.

John Stetch, September 2011

Biography

John Stetch - Pianist, Composer and Educator

Born in Edmonton, Alberta, John Stetch was exposed to the sounds of jazz at an early age. His father always tuned in to the local jazz radio station in the car, had a large jazz record and book collection, and taught Stetch the basics of clarinet. Stetch was probably born with jazz in his blood, as 2 of his uncles were also performers and founding fathers of the Yardbird Suite, now arguably the most successful jazz club in Canada. In his early teens, Stetch remembers reading Benny Goodman transcriptions and Jimmy Dorsey's "Hot Licks", then later switching to alto sax and playing along with Paul Desmond solos and reading out of the Omnibook. By his 2nd year of college, he dropped everything to go from casual 'horn-player's piano' to full-time piano studies.

The Ukrainian community was a huge influence on Stetch as well, and he spent many years singing, playing and dancing to ethnic folk music. His first teenage show-biz experience was playing nearly a hundred gigs with Dumka, a Ukrainian wedding band.

After earning a music degree in jazz piano at McGill University, Stetch began touring and recording across Canada and eventually accumulated 5 Juno Award nominations. He won the Prix du Jazz at the Montreal International Festival and has been frequently recorded by the CBC.

After relocating to New York City in 1993 he became a decade-long sideman with Rufus Reid, and has performed around the world at some of the most prestigious jazz venues. He has recorded and/or performed with Jim Black, Seamus Blake, Javon Jackson, Mark Turner, Jeff Ballard, Jorge Rossi, Charlie Haden, Reid Anderson, Chris Cheek, Gene Jackson, Ugonna Okegwo, Victor Lewis, Ralph Alessi, Hank Roberts, Ben Street, Blood Ulmer, Reggie Workman, Billy Hart and others. He has recently been collaborating with classical and world musicians also, and his recent compositions reflect those flavors. Stetch has been commissioned to write for the CBC Radio Orchestra, the Borealis String Quartet, his own solo performances, and recently performed his *Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano*.

Stetch is one of a handful of jazz artists to have recorded a solo piano trilogy, and with this he received unanimous praise, including Down Beat calling the debut trilogy release, *Ukrainiainsim*, "one of the best solo piano recordings in recent years." *Standards* and *Exponentially Monk*, also part of this series, brought in equally glowing reviews, consistently attesting to Stetch's originality and virtuosity. Now with 11 CDs under his own name, Utne Reader called his music "bold and vital jazz for the 21st century." A Steinway Artist, Stetch has been featured on several NPR shows: "Piano Jazz", with Marian McPartland, "Jazz Set" with Branford Marsalis, "Weekend Edition" with Leanne Hansen, and "Listen Here!" with Neil Tesser and Mark Ruffin. Stetch has brought his own music to such highly regarded venues as The Monterey, Saratoga, and Tanglewood Jazz Festivals, The Gilmore Keyboard Festival, The Chautauqua Institution, The Jazz Standard, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Eastman's School of Music, and Sculler's.

Stetch's 2009 CD – *TV Trio* consists entirely of TV themes from the 70's and 80's. Shortly after being released to radio, *TV Trio* quickly placed #13 on the U.S.A. JazzWeek chart, and remained in the top 20 for a month.

His latest CD, released in August 2011, is entitled "*Fabled States*" on Addo Records, funded by The Canada Council. It features 12 original trio compositions by Stetch, and is assisted by Joe Martin (bass) and Greg Ritchie (drums). John Stetch is currently based in Ithaca, NY, and teaches at Cornell University and Ithaca College.

www.johnstetch.com

Upcoming Events

September

11 - Hockett - 4:00 p.m. - **Faculty Recital:** Wendy Herbener Mehne, flute

12 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - **Faculty Recital:** Nicholas Walker, upright bass

15 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - **Faculty Recital:** Paige Morgan, oboe

16 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - **Harpsichord Recital** with Jean Radice, Mark Radice, Jonathan Riss, Mary Holzhauer, and Clera Ryu

18 - Dewitt Park - 2:00 p.m. - **Founders Day Concert**

20 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - **Faculty Showcase**

21 - Nabenhauer - 8:15 p.m. - Electroacoustic Music Recital

22 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - Benefit Concert for Soo Yeon Kim

24 - Hockett - 4:00 p.m. - **Guest Recital:** Max Dimoff, bass

25 - Hockett - 3:00 p.m. - **Guest Recital:** Angus Godwin, baritone

27 - Hockett - 7:00 p.m. - **Guest Recital:** Trio Montecino

29 - Ford - 8:15 p.m. - **Robert G. Boehmler Community Foundation Series:** Tish Oney, jazz vocalist - *The Peggy Lee Project*. With John Stetch, piano; Nicholas Walker, bass; and Greg Evans, drums.

30 - Ford - 8:15 p.m. - **Robert G. Boehmler Community Foundation Series:** Tish Oney, jazz vocalist - *Tish Oney's Big Band Excursion*. With the IC Jazz Ensemble.