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David 'Fathead' Newman at U of Maryland

Concert Review by: [Peter Westbrook](#)

Venue: Nyumburu Cultural Center, University of Maryland (College Park, Maryland)

February 14th, 2005 - The **Nyumburu Cultural Center** has been a part of the University of Maryland College Park for 27 years, providing a program of "black social, cultural and intellectual interaction," including lectures, seminars, art exhibits, workshops in the dramatic arts, dance, music and creative writing. Academic courses in blues, jazz, gospel music performance and creative writing are also offered. Nyumburu, ("freedom house" in Swahili) produces the *Black Explosion* Newspaper and is also home to the **Maryland Gospel Choir**. The Center facilities also house the offices of various performing art ensembles as well as organizations such as the African Student Association, The Black Faculty and Staff Association, Dance Afrika! and the Black Alumni Association.



On a chilly Monday evening in February, the Nyumburu Jazz Club presented David "Fathead" Newman and his quartet, Newman on alto and tenor sax and flute; Gene D'Andrea, piano; Kevin Pace, bass; and Ben Tufts, drums. It was a lively evening with an enthusiastic audience of around 200. Newman responded with his unique brand of R & B flavored jazz.

There has been, of late, something of a media buzz surrounding Ray Charles, whose recent passing coincided with the release of the movie version of his life that won Jamie Foxx an Oscar. Newman, a stalwart of Charles' band for



SPOTLIGHT



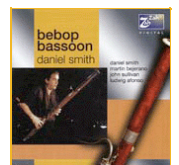
JOEL HOLMES

Eternal Vision
(Independent)



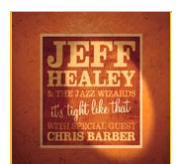
BENITA HILL

I'll See You In My
Song
(Benita Hill)



DANIEL SMITH

Bebop Bassoon
(Zah Zah)



several years, has received some notoriety from all this, especially after his portrayal on the movie. Not coincidentally, perhaps, his most recent CD, **I Remember Brother Ray** on which he plays tenor sax exclusively, is dedicated to Ray Charles and his music, (see www.davidfatheadnewman.com) and on this occasion he featured some of the selections from this recording, along with some earlier favorites.

One does not turn to "Fathead" for cutting-edge innovation or edgy abstraction. One expects strong texas-styled tenor, some soulful alto and a touch of flute exotica. In his notes to Newman's **Davey Blue album**, Geoffrey Hines writes: "A Musicians reputation doesn't always reflect the music he or she actually makes. A case in point is David Newman, who has devoted much of his 50-year career to mainstream jazz and yet is still mostly known for his early R&B playing." This is true in part, but also misses the point. Newman's style is remarkable to the degree that he has been able to integrate these influences. In recent recordings under his own name, Newman definitely works in the jazz idiom, but with a direct, bluesy approach that reflects his lifelong association with R&B artists. That is exactly what we got this evening.

Newman opened the set with *Sunrise*, built around a little tenor riff, then broke out the flute for *Delilah*. Then it was time to invoke Brother Ray, and nothing does that better than *Georgia On My Mind* which Newman gave a soulful reading on tenor. Following this he picked up the alto for his first major hit for **Atlantic Records**, *Hard Times*. The rhythm section, all students in Chris Vedala's jazz program at Maryland, was right with him throughout the evening, with tasty solos from both D'Andrea and Pace. (Vadala, himself a flutist and saxophonist, slipped out of class for a few minutes to check them out. I don't think he was disappointed.)

The second set continued in the same vein. Given the date—February 14th—David felt an obligation to take a crack at *My Funny Valentine*, but quickly moved on to his funky flute feature *Cousin Easeau*, invoked Ray one more time with the even funkier *Hit The Road Jack*, and then mined a bebop vein with Dizzy Gillespie's *Night In Tunisia*, Texas tenor style, with some crisp interjections by drummer Tufts.

Jazz has become such a broad art form that it runs the gamut from the cerebral to the gutbucket. Newman's blend of bebop and funk has a definite place in this spectrum and no-one does it better than he does. I hope I can play half as well when I am 72!

For more information: <http://www.nyumburu.umd.edu/>

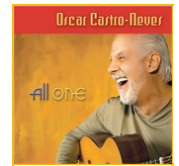
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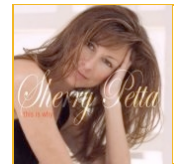
JEFF HEALEY & THE JAZZ WIZARDS

It's Tight Like That
(Stony Plain Records)



OSCAR CASTRO-NEVES

All One
(Mack Avenue)



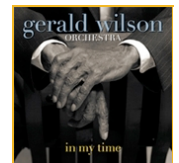
SHERRY PETTA

this is why
(Sherry Petta Music)



SEAN JONES

Gemini
(Mack Avenue Records)



GERALD WILSON

In My Time
(Mack Avenue)



TAMMY HALL

Blue Divine
(elfenworks)