



MPBN's Rich Tozier Host of Jazz Tonight – Sundays at 9:00 pm

Experience welcomes Rich Tozier to the Behind the Mic series and discovered what fostered his love of music and what he believes are the driving forces behind jazz today.

When did you first discover jazz and your love of music?

I think I've liked jazz since I was a kid and saw *Pete Kelly's Blues* when I was about 10, back in '55. The score was mostly what we might nowadays call Dixieland. Of course, back then, I didn't consider myself a "jazz buff," but the music affected me emotionally, and has ever since.

What jazz performer have you seen live that really made an impression on you?

I still regard catching the Jimmy Smith Trio down at the legendary Lennie's-on-the-Turnpike in Peabody, Mass., one sultry Saturday evening in 1967, as one of the high points of my life. Jimmy was in top form that night and really got down to business after midnight. If my memory is accurate, he kept the place going until about 2:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

Where would a novice listener start their journey on understanding and appreciating jazz?

That's hard to say. A passion often comes out of nowhere and catches you by surprise. You encounter something, and you ask "What is *THAT?*" You have no idea. You just know you love it and want more, and the more you get leads you ever farther along the primrose path.

You listen, and then your curiosity makes you want to find out more about how it came to be. The journey can also start with another type of music, and before you know it, you're deep in the heart of jazz.

Do you play an instrument or have you ever aspired to do so?

I can't read a note and have never made the attempt to make music. I'm just a buff who enjoys sharing the pleasures of this fascinating and seductive music. That may seem quite passive, but there you are. I feel fortunate to be in a position here at MPBN where I can spread the message to others.

How do you create your playlist for each show?

It creates itself. I'll have a featured artist or recording(s) in mind before actually doing the show, but once it's started, my moods and instincts kick in and lead me on. I once prepared a detailed playlist beforehand, and felt quite stifled – no, suffocated – when it came time to produce the show. The playlist evolves most naturally and honestly when it's somewhat improvised, like the music which the show celebrates.

Who are some contemporary performers that you feel are on their way up?

The bassist-composer Esperanza Spalding is doing some very interesting work. She has an encyclopedic knowledge of all types of music and is a fearless natural. The music just pours out of her. She already is somewhat of a star, but I think she has a lot more to say, and much farther "up" to go.

The vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant is a fresh new voice, but she reveres the tradition, too, as evidenced by her recent *Woman Child* CD. Pianist-composer Emily Bear just turned 12 and seems to be a bona fide prodigy, or at least Quincy Jones thinks so, and that's good enough for me. Is it a coincidence that these are all women? I don't know, but they're the first who come to mind in answer to your question.

The music is evolving globally, and that's a good thing because that's its future, but I often wonder whether the golden days of the major innovators – the Ellingtons, the Armstrongs, the Coltranes and Monks – are over. This is not to say there is a lack of creativity or that wonderful music is no longer being made, but the giant steps seem to have been taken. I hope I'm wrong about that.

This past April, MPBN aired our Music That Moves Me testimonials. What piece of music has most moved you and why?

The Charles Mingus album, *Mingus Ah Um*, was the one which "officially" birthed me as an obsessive jazz lover: I had never heard anything as emotionally daring, soulful and human. Afterwards, everything seemed to be different: That was about 40 years ago, and I'm still surprised when I listen to it.

Thank you Rich! ■