

Guitars gone wild: Bernstein & Napoleon team for duets



By Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press Staff Writer

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(Photo: John Rogers)

JAZZ

Every time guitarist Peter Bernstein shows up in metro Detroit, great musical things happen. Most recently, he teamed with the great Detroit-bred bassist Ron Carter at last summer's Detroit Jazz Festival to play an afternoon of sublime duets to honor Jim Hall, Bernstein's one-time teacher and Carter's old friend and colleague.

This time around, Bernstein, 47, is taking up residence at Michigan State University in East Lansing for a week of concerts, teaching and statewide touring with MSU students. Bernstein's appearance is part of an ambitious jazz residency program made possible by a recent \$1-million donation to the music school from MSU Federal Credit Union. Bernstein is the third and final national star to do a tour of duty at MSU during 2014-15, after bassist Christian McBride and trombonist Robin Eubanks.

Bernstein's official duties on campus don't start until Monday, but he'll team this weekend with guitarist Randy Napoleon for an evening of duets at Kerrytown Concert House in Ann Arbor. It's a promising gig of like-minded musicians. One of the leading guitarists in jazz, Bernstein has funneled all of his influences — Grant Green, Wes Montgomery, Hall — into a personal voice notable for its lean melodic integrity, swinging momentum and natural blues impulse.

Widely recorded and traveled, Bernstein has worked with a long list of top names, from Sonny Rollins and Lee Konitz to Bobby Hutcherson, Lou Donaldson, Joshua Redman, Brad Mehldau and Jimmy Cobb. In addition, he coleads a dynamic cooperative trio with organist Larry Goldings and drummer Bill Stewart.

A decade younger, Napoleon is a local boy made good: Raised in Ann Arbor, he's having a notable career, traveling the world with singer-pianist Freddy Cole and working with others like Benny Green, the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra and crooner Michael Buble. Napoleon, who recently joined the faculty at MSU, also favors cleanly melodic lines, a strongly swinging beat and distinctively purring tone.

8 p.m. Friday, Kerrytown Concert House, 415 N. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor. 734-769-2999. www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com (<http://www.kerrytownconcerthouse.com/>). \$5-\$30.

Bernstein will also perform with the MSU Jazz Orchestra I led by Rodney Whitaker at 8 p.m. March 6, Fairchild Theatre in the MSU Auditorium on campus in East Lansing. \$10; \$8 seniors. 517-353-5340. www.msu.edu (<http://www.msu.edu/>).

Patti Austin's voice can do just about anything you would want it to -- swing easy, strut with soul, shout the blues, caress a ballad like a lover, dig into the core of a lyric and come out the other side with the truth. She's headlining a show this weekend that promises to resonate deeply with Detroit: "Oh, Freedom!" a musical retelling in song and spoken word the sweeping 500-year history of African-Americans. A lot of talent seem to have had a hand in creating "Oh, Freedom!" — Austin, the musical producer Sanchez Harley, actor-playwright Barry Scott. The show draws on texts by Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King and others, and the music ranges from African chants to spirituals to Ellington. A 75-member chorus will be on hand and featured performers include Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Thornetta Davis, Marcus Belgrave and Joan Belgrave and more.

The program is part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. 7 p.m. Sunday, Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway. Ticketmaster: 800-745-8000. www.ticketmaster.com

CLASSICAL

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra's 2¹/₂ week Tchaikovsky Festival comes to a conclusion with the fifth and sixth programs led by music director Leonard Slatkin. Tonight and Friday, the orchestra tackles two evergreens, the popular Symphony No. 4 and the beloved Violin Concerto (with soloist Julian Rachlin). The opener is the "Polonaise from Eugene Onegin," the most successful of the composer's operas.

On Saturday and Sunday, cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan joins the fray to perform the rarely heard "Nocturne for Cello and Orchestra" and the well-known "Variations on a Rococo Theme." The festival ends with the Symphony No. 2 and one final bang: the "1812 Overture."