

Three-Decade Celebration

Cool Gets Hot

West Coast Jazz gets a five-day tribute

BY JOHN ROSS

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

"WEST COAST Jazz" — the label conjures up cool, contrapuntal riffs sailing out of a laid-back beachfront bistro, the Pacific surf curling into the pris-

Postwar America was still a decidedly two-coast continent, not yet hooked up by coaxial cable. News, particularly musical, traveled slowly, and California's modern jazz history didn't hit its stride until the arrival of East Coast bebop legends Charlie "Bird" Parker and Dizzy Gillespie at Billy

THE definitive date and place for the birth of West Coast Cool was just down the Los Angeles coastline where Howard Rumsey's "Lighthouse All-Stars" hosted a Sunday Hermosa Beach jam session (Marlon Brando sometimes sat in on bongos). According to Ted Gioia's scholarly "West Coast Jazz" (Oxford, 1992), Rumsey shuffled his house band on or about January 1, 1951, substituting a group starring Shorty Rogers for a quintet of Central Avenue beboppers led by the venerable Teddy Edwards. And the rest was history.

For the recording industry, then riding the 12-inch LP boom, the Cool groove rang up healthy jazz sales. Capitol, Contemporary and World Pacific labels signed up the Cool schoolists below the Tehachapis. In the Bay Area, the fledgling Fantasy label cranked out weirdly tinted plastic discs featuring such acolytes as Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond, Cal Tjader and Vince Guaraldi.

The "West Coast" image sold to the rest of the country featured bikinis, beaches and shiny California cruisers. As William Claxton, the premier album-cover photographer and designer on the coast, recently wrote in "California Cool" (Chronicle Books, 1991), "We created a cool look [to mirror the music] ... we created California Cool."

Hollywood hyped "West Coast Jazz" with the slashing scores of such bad boy and girl flicks as "The Wild Ones" (Leith Stephens-Shorty Rogers) and "I Want to Live" (Johnny Mandel-Mulligan).

Between 1952 and 1960, California Cool toiled relentlessly up and down the coast between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Shelly Manne recorded four albums on Turk Street at the Blackhawk — and the commercial success of the music eclipsed many black players in both cities. Teddy Edwards and Bay Area altoist Pony Poindexter went unrecorded in this period. "There's no question that the people who made the most money on West Coast Jazz were white," observers Gioia, though there was some crossover success.

By 1960, West Coast Jazz had become clichéd, its "neophonic" piano-less experimentation dead-ended when juxtaposed against the abrasive new way-out blowers such as Los Angeles home boy Eric Dolphy and the much-reviled-at-the-time Ornette Coleman. In the end, the ranks of the practitioners of West Coast Cool thinned precipitously.

KIMBALL'S West Coast Jazz Festival celebrates three decades of perambulations among the jazz worlds of Los Angeles and the Bay Area, Portland, and points north, and follows on the heels of similar reunions this year in Chicago and at the Hollywood Bowl.

The affair has been orchestrated by gadfly pianist Larry Vuckovich to honor a debt to the music. Vuckovich, who arrived in San Francisco's Sunset district from the Serbian side of Yugoslavia in 1951, first heard West Coasters Hampton Hawes and Carl Perkins on Pat Henry's jazz show, and their playing shaped his style.

The festival begins Wednesday with "Bay Area Afterhours — A Salute to Jimbo Edwards' Bop City," a repeat of the standing-room-only "Bop City Reunion" at San Francisco's Club 36. Invited guests include singer Sweetie Mitchell, original Bop City drummer Dick "Sputnik" Berk, and Bop City proprietor Edwards, 81.

On Thursday, "The Great West Coast Bassists" features Leroy Vinnegar, master of the walking bassline and now an Oregon resident, and Vernon Alley, a musician at the heartbeats of Bay Area jazz for five decades. His house band at the Blackhawk defined

jazz for a generation. Also appearing are Peeewe Claybrook, Vince Catolica and Luis Romero.

Friday launches "L.A. Weekend" with a double bill starring the Harold Land Quintet (with trumpeter Oscar Brashear) and a quartet headed by Conte Candoli, the septuagenarian ex-Stan Kenton trumpeter with a strong Dizzy streak in his playing. Land, one of the few California tenor players to eschew Lester Young's light-fingered stream of blowing, has been a fixture of the Los Angeles bop, hard bop, neo bop and post bop scene since he joined the Max Roach-Clifford Brown Quintet in 1955.

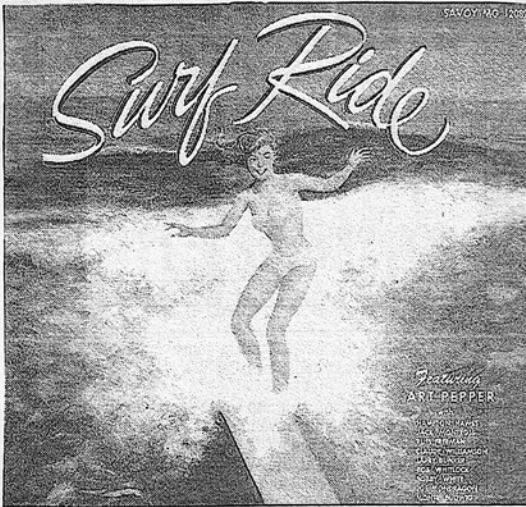
Saturday, "The L.A. Tenor Giants" spotlights Land, Red Holloway, and altoist Collette.

It also honors the memory of Bob Cooper, who was originally booked to lead the line-up. Cooper starred with Kenton and at the Lighthouse and was a backbone of the Southern California jazz community for 40 years until had a heart attack August 4 on the Santa Monica freeway on the way to a performance.

Sunday's "San Francisco-L.A. Jam" will pit Holloway, a bluesy, Chicago-born, Los Angeles-based tenor player, against Bay Area big band blower Chuck Travis.

Filling out the rhythm section: Gene Wright, the hard-driving ex-Brubeck bassist, and Dotty Dodgeon, legendary bop drummer who motors up from Monterey.

Vuckovich provides the piano-istics. One supplementary enticement: "Remembering North Beach Jazz and Poetry" will spotlight Beat matriarch Ruth Weiss.

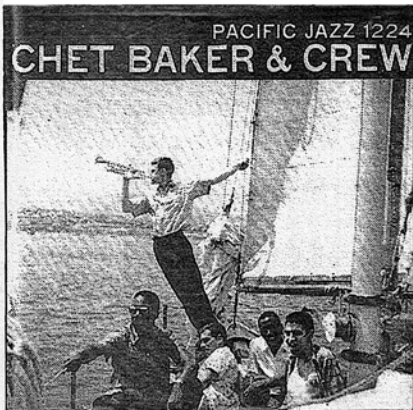


Harvey Ragsdale did the painting for this Art Pepper album cover

tine sands at sunset. But the real West Coast Jazz was a lot grittier and rooted in the realities of the street than the Hollywood hucksters chose to depict on the palm trees and cheesecake-adorned album covers of the era.

It's this raucously urban, eminently two-tone music that flourished in California from the end of World War II to the beginning of the Vietnam War that Kimball's East will celebrate when such seldom-seen Los Angeles-based monsters as Harold Land, Buddy Collette, Conte Candoli, Leroy Vinnegar and Red Holloway invade the region Wednesday through next Sunday.

The West Coast Jazz Festival runs Wednesday through next Sunday at Kimball's East, 5800 Shellmound Street, Emeryville.



William Claxton took the photograph for this Chet Baker album cover