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Larry Vuckovichs' Lifetime Achievement Award

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In addition to the dozens of albums in his name, and which are without exception, highly rated by the critics, Lazar Larry Vučković has performed and recorded with many great jazz musicians during his career of six decades, such as: Clifford Jordan, Dexter Gordon, Duško Gojković , Lucky Thompson, Philly Joe Jones, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Haden, Tony Bennett, Bobby McFerrin, Slide Hampton, Arnett Cobb, Buddy Tate, Charles McPherson, Eddie, Cleanhead Vinson, Tom Harrell, Curtis Fuller, Mel Lewis, Billy Higgins, Milt Hinton, Scott Hamilton...

He was also a favorite accompanist of legendary vocalist Jon Hendricks, who easily improvised solos from the best be-bop instrumentalists, such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and who is remembered as a lyricist for many instrumental jazz standards.

With Hendricks, Vučković performed at concerts and festivals around the world and released two joint albums.

Unlike other Yugoslavian jazz greats, such as Duško Gojković , Bora Rokovic, and Mladen Gutesa, whose careers began in Yugoslavia, and who later gained their reputations abroad, Vučković made his first professional steps in the jazz cradle, which is the United States of America. He was born in 1936 in Kotor, and his father Milutin from Kotor came to the U.S. in 1910 and for 11 years there worked on ships that sailed for Alaska and as a waiter at exclusive restaurants in California, and as a volunteer of the US military he fought at the European front in the First World War.

The money he earned in the U.S., after returning home, together with his three brothers, opened a factory of olive oil, soap and cosmetics. and during the Second World War, the family Vuckovic supported all resistance movements - both Chetnik and Partisan.

His father helped in the rescue of 17 American aviators shot down over Yugoslavia, hiding one of them for two weeks in the attic of the family villa, while German officers were housed on the main floor.

When the war ended, his father was arrested as a "capitalist" and "associate of the occupiers," the family property was nationalized, and he was saved from being shot, by the intervention of the US government, since he was an American citizen. Milutin left his homeland again and returned with his family to the "new world" in 1951. The first contact Larry had with jazz was during the war listening to the US Armed Forces Radio, and, as Larry said, it was love at first sight, a love that has remained for his entire life.

Considering that in Kotor he learned to play accordion and piano, he immediately tried to perform at least some of what he heard on the radio. The sound of large jazz big bands, for a boy who was taught classics, both literally and in an artistic sense, it meant freedom.

After the family arrived in San Francisco, a city that was a western version of the New York jazz scene, Vuckovich, as a teenager, had the opportunity to listen to all the jazz styles in clubs: from boogie-woogie, traditional New Orleans jazz, swing ... to the then dominant be-bop and the beginnings of avant-garde in performance of the greatest: Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, "Modern Jazz Quartet", the Miles Davis Quintet with John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Don Cherry and Ornette Coleman.

In one jazz club, he met the pianist Vince Guaraldi who became his teacher, and then enrolled in music studies at San Francisco State University. He began his professional career in 1959 in bands led by saxophonists Brew Moore and John Handy, and often accompanied singers Irene Kral and Mel Torme as a substitute for his teacher, Guaraldi.

During the sixties, he led a house trio at the Domicile in Munich, where many great musicians played. After returning to the United States, apart from a lot of studio work, he led bands in clubs in San Francisco and New York. In the 1990s, he was artistic director of Jazz Festival "West Coast" and Napa Valley ". The music of Larry Vuckovich escapes all jazz definitions, which he calls "Beyond Category". Primarily rooted in be-bop, he successfully combines different styles with elements of Balkan music, flamenco, bossa nova, Latin, and Roma music.

Although he left Yugoslavia in his early teens, he has always stayed attached to traditional music whose elements he often uses in his compositions, and the first album released under his name is called "Blue Balkan", which brought him the status of jazz pioneer in world music in America. He most often performs in a trio format, but also leads larger ensembles does teaching and workshops.

Last year he received a significant recognition, the "Buddy Montgomery Jazz Legacy - Jazz Pioneer" award. On Larry's 75th birthday, Gavin Newsome, then mayor of San Francisco, declared December 8th "Larry Vuckovich Day". In recent years he has been living in the Napa Valley, north of San Francisco, along with his wife, singer and percussionist Sanna Craig. His son Alexi Vuckovich is a classical pianist, who also attended SF State, where he earned a Master's degree (MBA) and is currently a much-in-demand piano instructor. He is also an accomplished and creative computer designer, having created several music education apps.