

RUSS LONG TRIBUTE

It was a magical evening – the kind of celebration usually missed by the honoree; an event that often happens after one is gone rather than on hand to enjoy and appreciate the accolades. Not this time. The time was right and “Save That Time” we did. The reference, of course, is to one of the many gorgeous songs written by incomparable pianist/composer/arranger/singer Russ Long,

whose Tribute took place at Jardine's on August 6th. The idea was hatched by cornetist Gary Sivils and bassist Gerald Spaits, Long-time associates who decided that the participants should be those who had worked closely with Russ – fellow composers, singers, musicians. Of course, if everyone who'd ever played/sung/written with Long had

been invited on stage, we'd still be there holding forth. Choices were made and plans began to take form. All of the rehearsals were held at Gerald and Leslie's home; we would run into each other as we came and went, and everyone was delighted to be a part of this long-overdue homage (a true check-your-ego-at-the-door gathering). When zero hour finally rolled 'round we were as excited as if we were playing the Palladium and, indeed, we were surrounded by the kings and queens of our pro-

PHOTO BY MATTHEW PEAKE



Marilyn Maye, Julie Turner, Carol Comer, Karrin Allyson with Russ; Steve Rigazzi looks on



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Stan Kessler

fession...top tier musicians, singers, fans, friends, family – SRO, the room was bulging at the seams. As for the featured guests, Gerald, Paul Smith, and alternating drummers Ray DeMarchi and Tommy Ruskin comprised the superb rhythm section; Gary lent his mellow sound to several tunes and doubled as master of ceremonies; four fabulous horns – Charles Perkins (woodwinds), Stan Kessler (trumpet), Dave Chael (tenor), and legendary Arch Martin (trombone) formed the line that sanctified Spait's arrangements of Long's compositions "E-Train," "Slidin'," "Can City," "Spider," "Meat Loaf," and "Parallel." Kessler also blew away "Woodland Park," and "Shoemaker" – and Perkins killed with "Bebedo" and "Minor Poet." Note: If errors are found in the aforementioned tune list, blame my archivist, Pauline. We were blessed to have both Karrin Allyson and Marilyn Maye in town to lend their stellar chops to the occasion, Allyson wooing with "I Didn't Know About You" (a selection which bore Russ's accompaniment on her first CD) and Maye wowing with a clever medley – "I Love You" and "All of You," the latter infused with

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PHOTO BY MATTHEW PEAKE

Ray DeMarchi

A
BIOGRAPHY
OF
RUSS
LONG
BY
GARY SIVILS



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"In 1957, when Russ was 16 or 17 years old, a senior in high school, I got him a job at the 111 Club, 111 East 13th Street. He worked there his senior year, six nights a week. No bass player: piano, drums, tenor sax, he played bass lines on the piano with his left hand. Then he went to the Jungle Club in downtown Kansas City, and worked there a year. After that he went with a territorial band, a jazz band, the John Beecher Band. This was two years of one night gigs, on the road. He returned to Kansas City after this, and was at the Fandango Club, at 26th and Troost. Claude "Fiddler" Williams and Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson played with him.

"He then went to Omaha for two years with his own group. Julie Turner and Tommy Ruskin may have worked with him a little bit then. After this, he moved to San Francisco for four years, living in the Haight-Asbury district. He played in some rock bands. He had a Farfisa organ where you stood to play. He would play bass with his left hand. This was towards the end of the psychedelic period in San Francisco.

"He was then hired to work at the big Playboy Club in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. It had a Las Vegas style showroom. He was there from 1973 until 1981. This was the house trio with Mike Barnett, a bass player, and Charles McFarland, both from Kansas City. They accompanied all the big stars up there, including Joe Williams. That is where Joe got Russ' tune "Save That Time", which he recorded (*Here's to Life*, Joe Williams with the Robert Farnon Orchestra, 1993, on the Telarc label).

"He came back to Kansas City in 1981. He played in the lobby at Crown Center for two years with his trio with Gerald Spaits and Ray DeMarchi. They then played the Vista for a year, returning to the Crown Center for two years after that. Kim Park was on that gig. Later the trio played at the Alameda Plaza (now the Intercontinental)."

Sivils adds: "That night at Jardine's, I've never seen anything like it in my forty-plus years here. What a tribute! And Butch Berman, who financed Russ' *Never Let Me Go* CD, was there, and they have arranged for the same seven piece band to go in the studio (Soundtrek) and record these new arrangements of nine of Russ' songs." :||

Russ Long Tribute, *continued*

special lyrics apropos of The Man and his Music. She closed with a tender "Never Let Me Go." Julie Turner, whose symbiotic relationship with Russ covers several years and incarnations, also sang her fanny off via the aforementioned "Save That Time," and "Keep the Legend Alive." I delivered a couple of songs Russ and I wrote back in the 70's



PHOTO BY MATTHEW PEAKE

Paul Smith

– "I Remember," and "I Need Your Love." As the evening drew to a close, our indomitable guest of honor yielded to incessant thunderous applause and, unencumbered by his oxygen purveyance, ascended the stage where he proceeded to dazzle us with "Kidney Stew," "How Did we Get Out Here?," "Fool's Paradise," and "Anytime, Anywhere." Cue the carpenters – the rafters are destined to disengage. Although every artist in attendance would love to have participated, each seemed to understand that this was a Tribute not a session, and that their presence was an integral part of the encomium; everything and everyone coalesced to provide our guest of honor a glimpse of the incalculable love and respect



PHOTO BY MATTHEW PEAKE

Gary Sivils

he and his music evoke. Times like these remind me of how much I love our jazz community. People like the Jazz Ambassadors, who work so hard to keep the art/artist visible and viable; the superlatively talented musicians/singers/composers/arrangers; the joints and yes, the joint owners; the aficionados who are so loyal, generous, supportive, downright sweet; our city, about which we complain – but it's just small enough to make an event like this special to all who were privileged to be present, and just big enough for our entertainers to realize that they can – and do – hold their own with anyone, anywhere, anytime. So say we all.

—Carol Comer

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