*JazzNights (60)*

Mike Longo began playing the piano at the age of three. By the time he was a teenager, this precocious pianist had caught the attention of future jazz icons Cannonball Adderley and Dizzy Gillespie. His close, and long relationship with Mr. Gillespie lasted till Dizzy’s death in 1993. Mike was pianist in Gillespie’s All-Star Band, and pianist and musical director of the Dizzy Gillespie Quintet – quite a compliment considering the long line of excellent pianists in Gillespie’s groups, Bud Powell, John Lewis, Duke Jordan, and many other great ones.

Mr. Longo wears many hats – pianist, writer, and educator, for example, and his music has many sides to it. Thus, *Float Like a Butterfly* is a gentle treatment of originals and standards – not the lamentable “smooth jazz” = “jazz light” by any means, but definitely quiet overall (hence, I guess, the title). Another side of Mr. Longo appears on his most recent CD, the excellent *A Celebration of Diz and Miles.* A theme that runs through all his work is a reverence for the music created – not too strong a word here – by Mr. Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clarke and a few others. On *A Celebration*… Longo, West, and Mosca play five Gillespie tunes, including my candidate for the most beautiful jazz tune ever, Con Alma. This trio is no mere “tribute” band. Although they do use these great tunes as starting points, mining their energy and complexity, they have much to say about them themselves and are thoroughly in the modern idiom. This CD definitely Stings Like a Bee, to steal the second half of Muhammad Ali’s great couplet.

*A Celebration* was recorded in the John Birks Gillespie auditorium in New York’s Baha’i Center where Mr. Longo produces weekly Tuesday night sessions and often performs himself in small groups or with his larger New York State of the Art Jazz Ensemble.

Mr. Longo on Dizzy Gillespie: "Oh, Man! Well, what I learned from Dizzy I could have practiced with anybody, practiced until you're blue in the face and you would have never got that. Dizzy was not just a genius, he was beyond a genius. He was a master and a messenger in terms of music.”

Drummer Ray Mosca and bassist Paul West have their own long and distinguished histories in this music. Mr. Mosca studied as a young person with the great Jo Jones, and became the drummer in one of the Billy Taylor trios (with renowned bassist Henry Grimes), and played in both the George Shearing and Dorothy Donegan groups. Mr. West began his musical life as a highly honored teenage classical violinist and conductor. As a jazz bassist, he’s played with all the great jazz pianists – Tommy Flanagan, Barry Harris, George Cables, Kenny Barron, and Billy Taylor, to name just a few, - and, of course, with Mike Longo.

So, join us in March for what will surely be an evening filled with both jazz history and remarkable musicianship.

Here are just a few CD recommendations:

Mike Longo (with Dizzy Gillespie): *Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac* (Impulse, 1967), Portrait of Jenny (Perception, 1970)

With Paul West and Jimmy Wormworth, *Float Like a Butterfly*, (Consolidated Artists, 2007)

With Ray Mosca and Paul West: *A Celebration of Diz and Miles*, (Consolidated Artists, 2012)