

JazzReach Takes to the Streets

When Hans Benjamin Schuman graduated from Boston's Berklee College of Music in 1990, he headed to New York to seek fame and fortune, or at least a regular paying gig. Reality proved much different.

"I had a choice," Schuman said. "I could play brunch gigs and complain or I could take action and do what I could to increase awareness. Today I don't know of any other organization in the national arena that tours with educational programs like ours. JazzReach is unique in that way."

As drummer-turned-nonprofit-artistic-director, Schuman has operated Brooklyn-based JazzReach since 1994, entertaining and educating students from coast to coast on the many colors of jazz.

Schuman recently hosted a JazzReach benefit that featured Bruce Hornsby's trio with Christian McBride and Jack DeJohnette, a longtime JazzReach board member. Performing to a sold-out house at B.B. King's club in Times Square, Hornsby debuted material from his forthcoming jazz CD, *Camp Meeting* (Sony/Legacy).

JazzReach held a similar benefit concert in 2005 featuring John Scofield, Jason Moran and Kenny Garrett. But the organization's bread and butter is its resident group, Metta Quintet, which plays up to 50 concerts a year to rapt student audiences. The group, which features Marcus Strickland (saxophones, clarinet), Helen Sung (piano), Mark Gross (tenor sax), Joshua Ginsburg (bass) and Schuman, recently released its second CD, *Subway Songs* (Sunnyside).

"The goal is to present programs that are as immersive as possible so that we can convey information in a context that is rich with music and images," Schuman said of JazzReach's mission. "We think of our programs as theatrical presentations. We contextualize the music to illustrate the evolution of the music. It's relevant to what the students learn in school."

To that end, the Metta Quintet intertwines live performance through multimedia presentations that include archival video footage, photos, narration and even some clever digital techniques. For JazzReach's latest program, "She Said/She Says: The History And Status Of Women In Jazz," the live Metta Quintet backs vocals prerecorded by Lizz Wright. After a lengthy dissertation on such female innovators as Ella Fitzgerald, Lil Hardin, Sarah Vaughan



JazzReach Metta Quintet: Helen Sung (left), Marcus Strickland, Mark Gross, Joshua Ginsburg and Hans Schuman

and Betty Carter, Wright sings in the style of each vocalist with Metta Quintet as her live supporting cast.

Other JazzReach programs include "Get Hip!" (targeting students grades 3-5), "Stolen Moments" (grades 6-12) and "Hanging With The Giants," an animated feature that introduces kindergartners to larger-than-life versions of Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis.

"The goal is to foster a greater awareness and appreciation for the art form," Schuman said. "I look to Metta Quintet as a way to shine a light on JazzReach. Metta Quintet is the official jazz ensemble of JazzReach."

But even with a live jazz quintet to heighten presentations, Schuman faces musical barriers of the hip-hop and pop variety. How does he change hearts and minds?

"By performing live, we try to project an image of accessibility as well as one of refinement and sophistication," he said. "We are not trying to convert them; we want jazz to be part of their consciousness."

JazzReach raised \$100,000 for its 2006 operating budget, and though fundraising and raising awareness is never easy, Schuman loves his work. "To see and hear the students respond as positively as they do is fuel," Schuman said. "There have been times in the summer when my job is mostly in the office. That can make me question what I am doing. But as soon as we get back in front of an audience and we hear them, you know it is worth it. To see and hear the response from kids keeps me going."

—Ken Micallef