

L.A. Jazz Scene / May 2014

Jazz Around Town

By Scott Yanow

The California Jazz Foundation (www.californiajazzfoundation.org) was formed eight years ago with the very worthy goal of helping jazz musicians who are in distress with everything from medical problems and rent payments to getting the artists groceries. At their annual fundraiser/luncheon, they gave their first annual Nica award (named after Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter) to Ruth Price. Always a fine singer, Ruth Price has done a great deal to help jazz, both behind the scenes and in running the Jazz Bakery. So many of us would not have had the opportunity to see numerous great jazz musicians perform in Los Angeles if Ruth had not booked them and brought them here. In the period since the original Jazz Bakery closed, she has continued to present major jazz talent in several venues in L.A. while waiting for the Bakery's new home to be ready to open.

At the Hyatt Regency Los Angeles Downtown, a documentary film was shown about Ruth Price's life. There was also fine music from Dwight Trible (who sang an emotional ballad while accompanied by pianist John Beasley), pianist Mike Lang, drummer Gerry Gibbs (leading a quartet with tenor-saxophonist Teodross Avery that played jazz versions of pop songs), and the Clayton Brothers (a sextet in this version that was scheduled to include pianist Billy Childs, Rickey Woodard on tenor, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos and drummer Paul Kreibich). I did not get to see the former group but I was lucky enough to see the night's musical highpoint. The Heath Brothers with pianist Tom Ranier, bassist Tony Dumas and drummer Albert "Tootie" Heath was outstanding. Jimmy Heath (playing tenor exclusively) proved to be an ageless wonder. Now 87, Jimmy Heath played with as much power, creativity and endurance as he did 40 years ago when he was in the middle years of his 70-year career. He did not sit down once during the performance, he talked and walked without any difficulties or hesitant moments, and his tenor playing was timeless. Heath could have passed for 50. The memorable set included "On The Trail," "You've Changed," an original based on "Autumn Leaves" and a medium-tempo blues.