

Jazz greats take to the stage in HCMC



Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter

American Jazz great Wayne Shorter is set to perform with pianist Herbie Hancock and musicians from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz at the Ben Thanh Theatre in HCMC tonight Nov. 26.

The next leg of the tour will take them to Hanoi on Tuesday.

Thanh Nien reporter Thuy Mien got the chance to interview him. Excerpts:

Q: Did you know much about Vietnam before you came here?

A: This is the first here for me. I have received information from news and maybe some movies like Full Metal Jacket. In the United States, I've seen people from Vietnam who are more true in real life to what I see in Vietnam now.

Q: What brings you to Vietnam, a country that's jazz still an undiscovered musical genre, not many people can understand or enjoy it? How can your friends and you to ease the difference between U.S. and Vietnam culture, and so Vietnamese can enjoy the beauty of jazz?

A: When you see a musician playing jazz and you see a musician's behavior, the behavior is a subsidiary side effect or an additional language. For instance, I've watched many movies from Asia with no subtitles and all kinds of movement. I ask, "What is the point? What is the ultimate point?" The point is always desire, love, success, and desire for better life. Even sometimes those movies like Bruce Lee, I look for the basic, universal, human element and behavior – desire for love, happiness, family, and marriage. Many other things are distractions and are superficial. But when I come here, I see the truth in your eyes. In my room, I look at myself and

we feel the same thing. There is something amazing going on now here because we see for ourselves now. There is beauty going on here. Nothing can stop this beauty. I see the motorcycles. They have choreography, rhythm, and improvisation. It's beautiful.

Q: You mentioned a lot about the imaginary in jazz in the press conference. Could you imagine the future of jazz?

A: Jazz is like the little adopted child who has to grow without a father and mother and become strong. The commercial music like pop, hip-hop, and rock, seem like they have a father and mother. The father and mother are the market. Jazz has to be self-independent and original. Lyrics like "I love you" are lies. But in jazz, the music has patience and consideration. If the young people hear jazz, they will realize it's almost like me and my Honda. Thousands of Hondas are doing the dance of life – a ballet of life.

It's the same. How do you know when to go and stop? You don't know everybody in Vietnam. There are strangers, but there is consideration. And you hear the music of jazz. That's the same in their music. Some classical music is the same tune. I don't think in Vietnam you are going to be satisfied with only simplicity.

When a person hears jazz, you start to decide for yourself instead of someone telling you. You hear on the radio mostly simple music. Simple is familiar and comfortable. In jazz, you don't know what to expect. Today, Americans don't know what to expect in the Middle East, Iraq, and Iran. They don't know what to expect. The simple popularity of pop, which is familiar and safe, cannot help Americans to be thinking individuals. The pop market rules totally. You need more individual independent thinkers to think, decide, and use the imagination to know how to deal with the unknown and the unexpected. We don't have in universities classes like Unexpected 101. In jazz, you become like Zorro and quick with the unexpected.

Q: Can you share your feeling when you knew that you have been awarded the Grammy for Album Algeria with Thanh Nien readers?

A: When I was at museum in Tokyo, a woman came to tell me that I won a Grammy. I felt it was a success for Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Bud Powell; and many musicians who never received and also for people and countries I have never been to, who may be writing, doing films, writing poetry ... for the development of all cultures, film, ballet, novel, not only for the best-sellers.

Q: Some argue about whether Wayne Shorter's primary impact on jazz has been as a composer or a saxophonist? Can you describe yourself?

A: No, I think I am a musician telling stories, that's what a jazz artist is. I am now composing music for an orchestra, and people seem to be interested in short stories, but these are long...

Reported by Thuy Mien