Miles Osland celebrates Memorial Day with a new release

By Kim Thomas

“You know, anybody can play a composition and use far-out chords and make it sound wrong. It’s making it sound right that’s not easy.”

— Thelonious Monk, 1961

Every community needs community organizers, and the music community has one in Miles Osland. As the area’s master of saxophone technique and jazz improvisation, Osland’s position as Professor of Saxophone and Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Kentucky gives him a unique opportunity to become affiliated with the best students and the best musicians that our part of the world has to offer.

As such, Osland has been the mastermind of many and varied collections of musicians over the last 20 years, being affiliated with the great local artists such as everyone’s favorite horn player, Vincent DiMartino, and backing up names like Ray Charles, Linda Ronstadt, Rosemary Clooney, and even Mel Torme. He has published over 75 articles and reviews on saxophone technique and jazz improvisation.

On Monday May 25, his OSLANDALEY Jazztet will be celebrating the release of their first album recording, called Evidence, the title tune by Thelonious Monk. The OSLANDALEY Jazztet — made up of Miles Osland on saxophone, Raleigh Dailey on piano, Danny Cecil on bass, and John Willmarth on drums — will be performing from 8-9, then the Bluegrass Area Jazz Ambassadors (a 17 piece big band, of which Osland is the artistic director) will be performing 9-10pm at Comedy Off Broadway, where they regularly play Mondays in various incarnations. The Evidence CD will be for sale and signature and the jazztet will be performing songs from the recording.

Osland is married to a fellow saxophone virtuoso and UK Professor, Lisa Osland. They met while attending Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York and have been married for 20 years. Sitting in their backyard, surrounded by rhododendrons and listening to wonderful kickback tunes by Van Halen and James Taylor, the conversation sparkled with talk about how music impacts our lives and reliving which live concerts each of us had seen. He said that the most important consideration when accompanying singers is “you have to know the tune; and more importantly, you have to know the spaces!”

Why was he named Miles? “Well, it’s interesting,” he says, I’m adopted, and the story goes that my adopted father saw Miles Davis in San Francisco a couple months before he and my adopted mother received me, and he was so inspired by seeing Davis that he named me Miles. So, yes, I guess I had to become a jazz musician. Neither of my parents had any musical background whatsoever. I have a secret fantasy that I’m the product of some great jazz musician’s one-night stand,” Osland laughs.

Everyone is influenced by everybody but you bring it down home the way you feel it.

— Thelonious Monk

He says of the OSLANDALEY jazztet, “there’s no intimidation, we’re not hardcore, in fact we’re pretty mainstream and have a lot of influences, good melodies.” Osland explains that their version of Evidence is nothing like Thelonious Monk’s original. “We put our own unique stamp on it. All our music pivots upon, though, and focuses on Raleigh’s compositions — it’s his contribution to the group’s music that really makes us unique.” All the players came through the UK system, but they share one key ingredient, “Longevity, which really helps us gel, since Raleigh, Danny and John have been playing together as a trio for a long time … I may be the front man, but we really are a group. Look at it this way, you can think of us as a dollar, and we all are quarters.”

“Raleigh and I have been playing together as a duo for 10 years — we made a recording (titled Inclusivity) about 5 years ago.” Of course, Osland didn’t begin his music career as a jazz saxophonist. “I am actually a classically trained musician, and wanted to pursue a career as a symphonic clarinetist, but jazz was just too much in my blood.”

Osland says his west coast upbringing — he grew up in Escondido, California and then enrolled in Cal State Northridge for undergraduate study before he attended the Eastman School in Rochester — affects his approach to jazz. “On the west coast, it’s more democratic, with the focus being on the group; in the East Coast, the priority is more about the individual artist.”

So why have the release party of Evidence at Comedy Off Broadway? In one form or another — duets, trios or his group with Vince DiMartino called DOJO and big bands — Osland has played at Comedy Off Broadway on the last Monday of the month for the past eight years. “Since we are ready to take the summer hiatus, Vince is out of town, so it’s the perfect time to celebrate the release of OSLANDALEY’s debut album, Evidence. We have been doing this for 8 years and we want to make it known that something is happening at Comedy Off Broadway — it’s a treasure that people don’t know about.”

Apart from performing, it is apparent that Osland enjoys scores of his musical satisfaction from teaching. He loves working with students and seeing them improve, “sometimes immensely, in just a semester … sometimes the students don’t see it as easily as the teacher.” He attributes much of his students’ success to wife and colleague Lisa, “she directs the sax quartets and also teaches students one-on-one in the studio.”

His advice to aspiring jazz artists is simple, “All I can say to young musicians is: follow your passion!” Miles says two of his favorite quotes are: “all music swings” from Leonard Bernstein, and “all music is beautiful” from Billy Strayhorn (Duke Ellington’s orchestrator/co-composer).

Josephine Abercrombie Endowment for Jazz Study

In a day and age when it’s tough to come up with funding for the arts, Osland emphasizes his profound appreciation for the Josephine Abercrombie Endowment for Jazz Study at the University of Kentucky which funds the recording efforts. “None of the money from the album goes to me, it all goes right back into the Endowment, for the benefit of the students.”

Nine of Miles Osland’s previous CDs were recommended for Grammy nominations by Seabreeze Jazz, a well-respected jazz recording company out of Los Angeles. Since Osland himself is a voting member of the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences, he laughs, “So I know we’ll always get at least ONE vote!”

Raleigh Dailey

Raleigh Dailey is Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies at the University of Kentucky. He has performed and appeared as a clinician frequently in North and South America, Europe, and Asia / He was the recipient of the 2000 AI Smith Fellowship for Musical Composition sponsored by the Kentucky Arts Council, and his compositions and arrangements have been performed by numerous collegiate and professional jazz ensembles.

Dailey is given credit by all three other men in the group for the being the crux of their musical mystique, but like many a virtuoso, he’s a man of few words when it comes to talking about himself. Curious about the title tune, I asked him if it was originally written as a piano piece, or if it was originally intended to be played as an ensemble. He advises, “Evidence was
written as an ensemble piece originally and my arrangement of it initially was for a jazz fusion group I had called PrimeForm. However, it turned into more of a Latin piece with this group."

His history with Osland goes back over a decade. “Miles and I began playing when I moved to Lexington in 1998 — since we’re all associated with UK, we naturally began to play together and form our own sound. My favorite thing about the group and record is that the guys are willing to play so much of my music. I write a lot, and it’s great to have a group to write for that you know can play anything.”

His advice to young musical hopefuls is not surprising. “Practice!!! Well, besides that — learn as much about everything as you can — all different kinds of music, but also other art forms — visual arts, literature, film. He also offers a spirited outlook on what can be discovered locally. “I would want the readers to know that creative, improvised music is alive and well in Lexington if you know where to look!”

DANNY CECIL

Bassist Danny Cecil has been performing and recording in central Kentucky since 1999. In addition to work with the quartet, Cecil plays bass in the DiMartino/Osland Jazz Orchestra, the Raleigh Dailey Trio, What Happened When, the Andy Mason Group, SoundFoundry, the New KY String Ticklers and the Bluegrass Collective. He also plays in the UK Symphony Orchestra and the orchestra for Paragon Music Theatre productions. Danny studies music at the University of Kentucky and is also an avid bicyclist and visual artist.

Cecil explains that his first instrument was actually voice. “Betty Sue, you may know her,” he says kiddingly (Betty Cecil is a longtime member of the Lexington Singers and sings next to me every Sunday in the Central Christian Chancel Choir), had Courtney and I singing in the church choir at a pretty early age, although I was apparently singing and humming before I could even talk. She’s told me that story a lot through the years, music was just a natural thing. Of course, she was playing piano in church and around the house and singing and playing records, so we sort of grew up around music. As for first instrument, piano lessons came around 9 or ten. Through the years I played a slew of different instruments, but didn’t start playing the bass in earnest until I was 25 and living in Seattle. I had finished my Biology degree from Marquette and moved west (just like the song says) to “find myself” or some silliness like that, and just decided to start playing the bass. It was an immediate ‘lightbulb’ experience, and changed my course from science to music.” He adds jokingly of course, that was “probably the dumbest decision of my life (haha).”

Cecil’s career in music then just sort of evolved, but not without the support of his open-minded and artistically appreciative parents. “I was out west, working days practicing nights, and was sort of miserable. I knew I loved music but didn’t really think of it as a career path, especially with this other life in science, but eventually it just made sense. I got even more serious about playing, and Dad came to town and stayed with me and I told him that I felt like I needed a change. He was very open and supportive, although he must have cringed inside. I moved to KY the following summer and enrolled at UK, started playing in town and with a good jazz quartet in Cincinnati and it just sort of happened. I’m coming up on ten years this summer as a “professional,” whatever that means.

As for Miles, Cecil made an appointment to speak with him in July of 1999. “We talked some and I played a little, and he told me they could use a bassist at UK and that there was a place for me if I wanted it. I did, and started as a 26 year-old freshman that fall. I met Raleigh shortly thereafter; he was a doctoral student at the time, playing in the jazz ensemble, and we eventually started doing duo and trio gigs together. I have learned more about jazz by playing with Raleigh than any other musician. I met John (Willmarth) 2002/2003 after he moved back from Iowa, and we started playing together with Raleigh and Ross Whitaker (Sexual disaster quartet guitarist) in a fusion band called PrimeForm and in the DOJU (Dimartino Osland Jazz Orchestra) rhythm section about six years ago. We also play as the Raleigh Dailey Trio regularly (recording this summer!).”

“I think of this album as a launching pad or foundation for a building or some such. It’s our first and I feel like one can hear in this a focusing of a sound, a concept, with eyes and ears toward the future. I’m excited to think of where we’ll go (hopefully get out of town more often to play) with the band and the next albums. If everyone stays in town, I think we’ll have a band that can stick around for a while and entertain audiences with some forward-leaning jazz music.”

Cecil adds that “RD has been writing a ton, enough for another full-length album. I’ve also been writing, trying to come up with something that won’t embarrass me when I hand it to the guys. Miles probably told you we’re looking to record the Jazztet again this summer. It’s just nice to be a part of a working band with these heavyweight musicians. I’ve learned a lot and am so happy to be included in the group.”

JOHN WILLMARTH

Willmarth has played drums and jazz music since he was in high school back in Arlington Heights, IL (suburb of Chicago). He graduated from UK with a Music Education degree in 1997 and from University of Iowa in 2000 with a Master of Arts in Percussion Performance. “I’ve been in Lexington ever since. I teach percussion at Lafayette High School, private lessons at Don Wilson Music, and drumset and jazz vibraphone at UK. That’s my connection to Miles and the gang.” He and his wife, Sharon, and I have a 6 month old baby boy named Jonah and are proud new parents.

Willmarth also serves as adjunct faculty at University of Kentucky. When asked what is different about playing drums in a jazz group versus an orchestra, Willmarth be considers the fact that, “In an orchestra, you play a written part. The composer of the piece has dictated exactly what the performer is to play. In most jazz situations, if there is music, it only provides a loose framework. It is up to the musician to provide the rest. The composition is a vehicle for the musician to express him or herself and to interact with each other. Each situation is equally challenging and rewarding."

“We’ve played together in different forms for years. When Danny and I began to teach at UK, it became a golden opportunity for us to form a faculty group.” When pressed to name his favorites, he’s appropriately jazz-like: the answer is open to change and mood. “It depends on what day you ask me! I will say that Raleigh is one of my favorite composers. One of the best things about this group is the opportunity to perform his original material. Raleigh is a gifted composer and his material has helped give the group a unique sound and direction.

His influences of late are Antonio Sanchez, Jeff Ballard, Bill Stewart, Vinnie Colaiuta, and Jim Black. “But my all-time favorite drummer is Tony Williams and my all-time favorite musician is Chick Corea. My favorite tracks on our album are the live ones (Witchita Mind Control and A.1R). I find that I often prefer live jazz recordings to studio recordings. I think it captures the sound of the group and the interplay of the musicians much better than the studio environment. If you haven’t heard Chick Corea’s new live recording with the 5 Peace Band … get it … it’s sick!!!”

Willmarth honors the title tune of the Evidence album which of course gets its name from a composition “by one of the great jazz pianists and composers, Thelonious Monk.” He advises young musicians who may want to become professional artists someday to “Do your homework. Study the masters. Understand the commitment it takes to be good at what you do and be patient and persistent. Also, the label ‘jazz’ can be misleading. It’s a generic term that doesn’t really describe the style very specifically. I think sometimes people hear the word “jazz” and they have a preconception of what the music is going to be. ‘Jazz’ could mean anything from Dixieland to free jazz. It’s a very broad spectrum. OS兰DAILEY is influenced by all kinds of jazz music and many other styles as well. When you hear us, you’ll notice a variety of grooves including funk, Afro-Cuban, fusion, Brazilian, gospel, and free.”

If you show up at Comedy Off Broadway on Monday night, Osland, Dailey, Cecil and Willmarth will convince you that indeed, it’s musically good for your health to be called ‘sick.’ There, they look forward to sharing their new work with fans and will be eager to share the CD, ready to sign copies, Osland assures, “with Sharpie in hand!”

Comedy Off Broadway, Lexington Green, Monday, May 25, beginning at 8pm. OSLANDAILEY. Reservations 271.JOKE $8 cover.
CRITICS’ PICKS MAY 21 - MAY 28
ACE IS YOUR OWNER’S MANUAL FOR THE BLUEGRASS.
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO GO/SEE/DO IN THE NEXT 8 DAYS.
DAILY UPDATES AT ACEWEEKLY.COM.
HOURLY UPDATES AT TWITTER.COM/ACEWEEKLY.

1. Ace Reader Jason Oney (and a few of his friends) managed to Save Chuck. Thirteen more episodes have been ordered by NBC.

2. There is a new movement to “SaveEarl,” (My Name is Earl) but it hasn’t gained any real traction among the Ace Readers.

3. New to Twitter this week (since last week’s coverstory): @GovSteveBeshear; @DianeLawless; and @JimGrayLexKy. Welcome to the new era of Twitter Transparency.

4. The town elders are in Madison this week. Executive Coach Louis Allegra posted this from the trip: “Best immediate idea would be to engage NextGen men and women in the creation of Lexington’s future.”

5. Lex Tweet of the week: @GoTreadGo Can always tell when a new boss joins Twitter. Word up, we got to move more units of Mr. Bubble; get on the Twitter, sir!

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

POETRY Holler Poets Series 13 featuring Liz Mandrell, Dean Crawford, Englishman. 8pm, Al’s Bar.

MEETING Preserve Lexington to discuss the recently announced LFUCG inventory of Historic Downtown Properties.

THURSDAY, MAY 21

GIGS Ben Sollee, Anni Rossi at the Dame.

THURSDAY NIGHT LIVE The Big Maracas. Cheapside Park. 4:30pm - 8pm.

FRIDAY, MAY 22

FOOD Wine Tasting at Wine + Market. This week, Argentina. 5pm to 8pm. 486 W. Second Street (corner of 2nd and Jefferson).

SATURDAY, MAY 23

POOLAPALOOZA Chilly nights may make for cold water, but it’s time to Swiiiiim. Southland Aquatic Center. Noon to 4pm.

…ALSO ON SATURDAY

MUSIC Lexington Singers Pop Concert, Opera House, 3pm.

SUNDAY, MAY 24

RED MILES BLUES FESTIVAL Red Mile Round Barn 1pm to 11pm. Featuring Lil Ed and the Blues Imperials; The Robbie Bartlett Band and more. $10 at the gate.

MONDAY, MAY 25

MUTT STRUT Lexington Humane Society

This annual walk benefits Lexington Humane Society. 9am to noon. Keeneland Race Track.

…ALSO ON MONDAY

MAYDAY COOKOUT With Blue Suckers, Golden Rod, Spooky Qs and Alegionnaire, CD Central. Limestone. Noon.

JAZZ The OSLANDAILEY Jazztet 8pm - 9pm, then Bluegrass Area Jazz Ambassadors (a 17 piece big band) 9pm - 10pm at Comedy Off Broadway.

TUESDAY, MAY 26

CD RELEASES INCLUDE Black Moth Super Rainbow Eating Us; Marilyn Manson High End of Low; Michelle Shocked Soul of My Soul.

DVD RELEASES INCLUDE The Closer (4th Season); Law & Order SVU (9th Season); New in Town.

THURSDAY, MAY 28

HEAR YE, HEAR YE! TOWN CRIER EL and F Gallery’s Small Projects Accelerator has hired a Town Crier who will read (as proclamation) a condensed version of Dudley Webb’s letter to the City Council at various spots in downtown Lexington from noon to 1pm. For the finale, the document will be posted on the public information kiosk, corner of E. Main St and Quality Street (next to Gray Construction).

…ALSO ON SATURDAY

MUSIC Lexington Singers Pop Concert, Opera House, 3pm.

FRIYDAY, MAY 29

TASTE OF THE BLUEGRASS This annual fundraiser for God’s Pantry kicks off the Summer Season of philanthropy and good food for good causes. $65/per person. 7pm to 11pm. Keeneland’s Keene Barn. For advance tickets, call God’s Pantry at 859.255.6592.

DEADLINES: NOON every Friday for the following week’s edition. Info should be e-mailed to acelist@aceweekly.com. No phone calls. No faxes. No kidding. If you have an activism/advocacy/meeting/rally item, email editor@aceweekly.com. Listings are included on a first-come, first served critics’ pick basis, as a service to Ace readers. Submission does not guarantee inclusion (but it sure helps).
Angels and Demons The Catholic church wasn’t happy with the film. But rather than deal with it, they just ignored it and prayed it would go away, like they do with their other problems Cinemark Fayette, Regal, Woodhill

Dance Flick You knew this was coming, didn’t you? The whole suburban-girl-goes-to-the-hood-and-outdances-everyone-in-the-club genre was getting a bit ridiculous. So movies like Save the Last Dance, How She Move, Stomp the Yard, Honey, and You Got Served have been deserving of such treatment. This might mean another franchise for the Wayans family. We all remember the first Scary Movie movie as being very ridiculous but also on the mark, but once they sold off the franchise it got really bad. This first installment might be worth wasting $10, though. Cinemark Fayette, Regal, Woodhill

Ghost of Girlfriends Past According to rumor, the common thread of Matthew McConaughey’s ex-girlfriends is that they will always remember Matthew’s legendary bad body odor. That’s a ghost that keeps on giving. Cinemark Fayette, Regal

Is Anybody There? A Michael Caine movie! Just realize, this guy has no standards when it comes to choosing scripts and stated openly he will take a movie based on the location of the filming alone. Kentucky Theatre

Terminator Salvation If the movie execs were savvy, they would put the video of Christian Bale’s tirade in the closing credits. That would put asses in the seats. Everyone wants to see that more than all the Transformers that are trying to extinguish the human race. Cinemark Fayette, Regal, Woodhill

X-Men Origins Wolverine Please outpace all box office records so that Hugh Jackman will think he’s too BIG to host the Oscars next year in case they ask him again — which they probably will. Idiots. Cinemark Fayette, Regal, Woodhill