

# AROUND TOWN

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## Three masters and a rising star

*The National Theater and Concert Hall's Summer Jazz Party is back in full swing this year with a lineup of major jazz stars*

BY DAVID CHEN  
STAFF REPORTER



Pianist Hiromi Uehara's compositions blend jazz, fusion, classical — and even elements of heavy metal and progressive rock.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL THEATER AND CONCERT HALL

A jazz journeyman, a direct musical link to John Coltrane, a pianist destined for stardom, and one of the most distinguished jazz vocalists today.

This year the National Theater and Concert Hall's (NTCH) Summer Jazz Party (夏日爵士派對) boasts its most impressive lineup ever, with saxophonist Kenny Garrett kicking off the series tomorrow night, and pianists McCoy Tyner and Hiromi Uehara, and singer Dianne Reeves appearing over the next four weeks.

"We've gone back to the mainstream," says Tung Shuen-wen (董舜文), a jazz saxophonist and teacher who serves on the National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Center's (國立中正文化中心) committee that selects performing artists.

In past years, the CKS Cultural Center sought to have a balance of famous and lesser-known but accomplished jazz artists, Tung says. It invited major American jazz musicians such as saxophonist Joe Lovano and vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, as well as lesser-known but equally accomplished artists from places such as Europe and Australia.

It might have been the best of both worlds for local jazz fanatics, but feedback from general audiences was less enthusiastic, according to Tung. They wanted to see more of the "masters." Does this reflect more discerning, more mature tastes in Taiwan? Perhaps, Tung says, but what Taiwanese audiences clearly want is more "entertainment."

And entertainment they'll get with these four artists, Tung promises. This year's performers strike the right balance of musical virtuosity and showmanship, he says, noting saxophonist Kenny Garrett's performance in Taipei in 2005. "He got everyone up and dancing, and made [the National Concert Hall] look like a dance hall."

Garrett returns tomorrow night to get the party started once again. The 47-year-old, who is considered one of the preeminent alto saxophonists in jazz today, has long been known as a musical explorer, having played and recorded with a long list of major figures in jazz, including Miles Davis, Art Blakey and Bobby Hutcherson, as well as pop musicians such as Sting, Peter Gabriel and hip-hop artist Guru.

An avid traveler, Garrett is interested in Asian cultures and music and has visited Taiwan several times. Garrett became a fan of the Taiwanese Aboriginal singer Difang (郭英男), whose music he discovered on a past visit. "Usually when I go to a new country I buy some indigenous music ... this is how I came to know Difang," he said in a brief e-mail interview. Garrett composed a song dedicated to the Amis singer, which appears on his 2003 album *Happy People*.

Garrett said his travels to Japan and South Korea led him to believe that "China is the source of Asian culture," an idea that influenced his latest album *Beyond the Wall*, which was inspired by a three-week trip to China.

One musical hero and past collaborator of Garrett's is McCoy Tyner, who performs on Sept. 5. Viewed by musicians and critics alike as the consummate pianist, Tyner helped to shape modern jazz as part of the John Coltrane Quartet in the 1960s. His rhythmic and percussive approach led to a new vocabulary for jazz piano, which is demonstrated on such classic Coltrane recordings as *Impressions* and *A Love Supreme*.

After his tenure with Coltrane, Tyner became an accomplished composer and performer, releasing more than 80 albums to date and earning four Grammy awards. In the 1970s he broke new ground with his Grammy-nominated *Sahara*, an album that incorporated African influences. Tyner's recent work includes a Latin album and arranging for big bands.

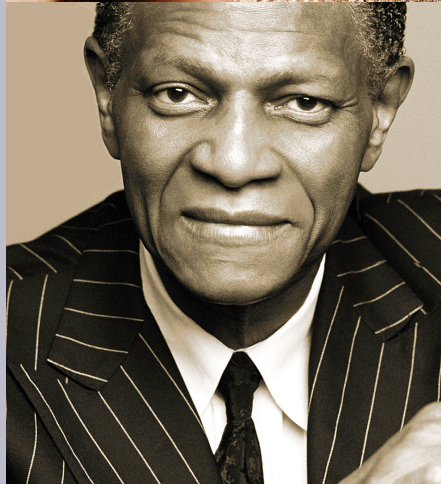
On the other end of the spectrum, Hiromi Uehara of Japan, who performs in Taipei next week, could be the jazz pianist of the future. Uehara started out as a child prodigy, and at the age of 17, a chance meeting with pianist Chick Corea in Japan led to an appearance with him on stage the next day. Now 29, Uehara has won praise from jazz critics for her technically brilliant and passionate compositions, which blend jazz, classical, fusion and progressive rock.

The series concludes on Sept. 15 with American vocalist Dianne Reeves, who is perhaps best known as the featured singer on the soundtrack to the George Clooney film *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Reeves' voice often invokes comparisons with Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn, and she is the only artist to have won a Grammy Award in any vocal category three years in a row. Reeves, who keeps a full touring schedule, is particularly renowned for her engaging live performances.

"The truly great and fun part of these jazz musicians [is that] they can interact with the audience, something you'll never get from the CD," says Tung.

But it's not just about coming and soaking it all in. The concerts give Taiwanese audiences a chance to respond in a live setting and share "their culture" with the performers, he says.

The 2008 Summer Jazz Party 2008 also includes performances from two local jazz groups, Delta on the Main Street Jazz Band and Sizhukong (絲竹空), who perform next Friday and Saturday at the Experimental Theater (實驗劇場).



Top: Grammy-Award winning vocalist Dianne Reeves was the featured singer in the George Clooney film *Good Night and Good Luck*.

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN LANTRY, COURTESY OF DIANNE REEVES

Center: Pianist McCoy Tyner helped shaped modern jazz as part of the John Coltrane Quartet.

PHOTO BY GENE MARTIN, COURTESY OF MCCOY TYNER

Bottom: Saxophonist Kenny Garrett makes a return appearance tomorrow night at the National Concert Hall.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL THEATER AND CONCERT HALL

## Jazz appreciation from local musicians

The chance to see a legend like McCoy Tyner perform live is an exciting prospect for Taiwanese jazz fans, and perhaps even more so for musicians. The *Taipei Times* spoke with a few local jazz musicians, who gave their take on this year's performers at the National Theater and Concert Hall's 2008 Summer Jazz Party.

Kenny Garrett, who performs tomorrow night, "carries the [John] Coltrane spirit, but brings it to the alto sax," says Tung Shuen-wen (董舜文), a teacher and saxophonist for Taipei combos JEG (這個爵士樂團) and the Rich Huang Jazz Band (黃瑞豐爵士樂團). Tung observes that Garrett is constantly looking for "new sounds," which explains in part his interest in Asian music.

Pianist Hiromi Uehara, who performs this coming Thursday, displays a very physical approach to her instrument. She plays as "if she were trying to push [it] away," says Tung.

Peng Yu-wen (彭郁雯), whose jazz fusion group Sizhukong (絲竹空) performs next week at the Experimental Theater (實驗劇場), agrees. "Her technique, her expression is very powerful ... she sometimes sounds like a metal band," she says. Peng, who also teaches jazz, notes that Uehara plays standards in a very "stylish" way, and admires the Japanese pianist's "courage" in creating her compositions.

McCoy Tyner, who plays on Sept. 5, developed the "textbook" style of piano accompaniment for modern jazz during his time with the John Coltrane Quartet, says Tung. Tyner's style is distinctive for his rhythmic style of playing. "He treats the piano as a drum set," says Peng. And if you watch him carefully, says Tung, "you'll notice that he's a fast player, but you won't feel the tempo." Despite Tyner's percussive style of playing, his sounds come out as a "melody line," he said.

In addition to her personal touch, Dianne Reeves, who performs on Sept. 15, is a technically brilliant singer, says Tung. "She's great at controlling her intonation. She can jump around her range, from high to low and [with precise pitch] ... she sounds like a perfectly tuned instrument."

But come performance time, don't get caught up thinking about the musician's styles and technical abilities. Tung's advice? "Just get into the mood."

— DAVID CHEN

### SCHEDULE:

Tomorrow at 7pm  
Kenny Garrett Quartet

Thursday at 7pm  
Hiromi Uehara Quartet

Aug. 29 at 7:30pm  
Delta on the Main Street Jazz Band

Aug. 30 at 7:30pm  
Sizhukong

Sept. 5 at 7pm  
McCoy Tyner Trio

Sept. 15 at 7pm  
Dianne Reeves

### PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** 2008 Summer Jazz Party (夏日爵士派對) featuring Kenny Garrett, Hiromi Uehara, McCoy Tyner, and Dianne Reeves

**WHEN:** Tonight through Sept. 15

**WHERE:** International acts at the National Concert Hall (國家音樂廳); local acts at the Experimental Theater (實驗劇場), 21-1 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)

**ON THE NET:** event.ntch.edu.tw/2008/JAZZ

**TICKETS:** NT\$600 to NT\$3,000 for international acts; NT\$500 for local acts. Tickets are available through NTCH ticketing or online at [www.artsticket.com.tw](http://www.artsticket.com.tw)