

Brownstone puts Worcester's jazz scene on the map

Jack Wertheimer's labor of love rescues local artists from obscurity

By Chet Williamson

Started as "kind of a lark" three years ago, **Jack Wertheimer, Brownstone Recordings is putting Worcester on the jazz map.**

Brownstone's first release was singer Jim Porcella's *Sneak Preview* in 1992. Before this year is out, some 20 albums will be listed in their already impressive catalog.

Brownstone is Wertheimer's labor of love. A graduate of Berklee College of Music, Wertheimer ran a jazz school for five years at Jack's Drum Shop in Boston. Since coming to Worcester almost 20 years ago, he has been a force in the local jazz community. He produces the popular Jazz at Sunset series at New England Science Center and is the Monday-morning host of *A Tasteful Blend* on WICN, 90.5 FM. He retired as the executive director of the Worcester Comprehensive Child Care Center in 1993, but Brownstone has given Wertheimer a new career.

"Initially, I began without the thought of having a record company," he said. "I was friends with Jim Porcella and I thought he sounded really good and he should put a recording out. We talked about it, went ahead and learned about putting out a record.

"The time when I started thinking about this as a reallabel was in about '94. I put out Cecilia Smith's in '93 and I also recorded Eugene Maslov that year but did not master it or do anything with it. I retired in November of '93. Paul

Broadnax and I then talked about a CD, and I think from that point on the idea of a label began to take shape. We released Paul then Lisa Thorson, Rob Levit and Miteh Seidman. They all came in fairly quick succession. At this point I started thinking, 'Yeah, this thing could be real.'"

Brownstone functions on what Wertheimer calls "creative financing" to get the job done. Employing a local coterie of hand-picked professionals such as engi-

neer Peter Kontrimas, graphic artist Peggy Isaacson and photographer Chris Navin, Brownstone produces quality products consistent in look, sound and feel.

"My own background is acoustic jazz, based in the Bluenote tradition," Wertheimer said. "I was not looking to make a quick buck. I wanted to establish a catalog in the tradition of great jazz labels."

Brownstone bills itself as "New England's Voice of New Mainstream Jazz."

With the recent releases by two Worcester-based jazz artists, singer Monica Hatch and guitarist Jack Pezanelli, and a soon-to-be-released CD by trumpeter Tony D'Aveni, the banner could read, "Worcester's Voice of New Mainstream Jazz."

Worcester native Pezanelli, who returned to town after having toured with the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Jimmy Giuffre and Astrid Gilberto, organized a session with bassist Michael Moore, pianist John Arcaro and drummer Jimmy Madison with the intent of producing a demo to shop around.

"All of them had a standard businesslike

arrangement for people like me who are unknown in the record world," Pezanelli said of his inquiries. "When Jack called, he just went, 'Hey, I love it.' He just sounded real. So I figured why not go with the guy who's a couple of blocks away?"

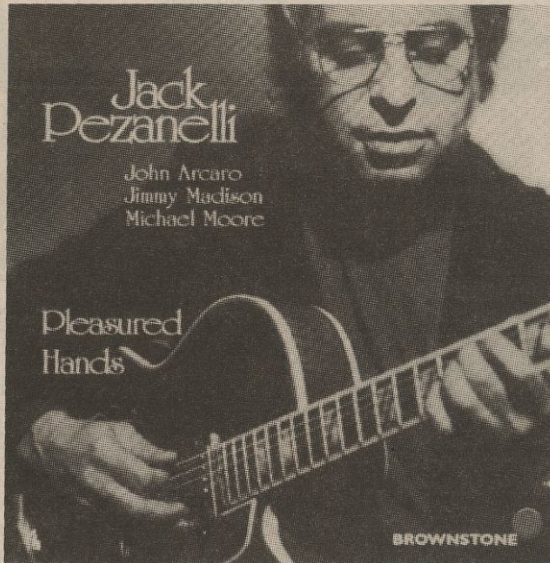
Pezanelli's release *Pleased Hands* is a free-blowing session with liner notes supplied by Lany Coryell, who writes, "The tunes are first rate ... and they are played by some of the best jazz musicians to ever come down the pike."

Monica Hatch, who conducts the jazz vocal ensemble at Clark University, is a new voice on the local music scene. Her disc *If You Never Come to Me* features eight standards and four Brazilian tunes with the assistance of an ensemble from Rio de Janeiro.

"I was totally knocked out by Monica Hatch's recording," Wertheimer said. "She produced that herself, as did Jack and Tony. I knew Monica was working on one. But the quality of her singing — I mean, she has just matured so much and done such a great job. She has a marvelous voice."

Tony D'Aveni, 32, is a brilliant trumpet player whose sound crackles with the fire of Lee Morgan. A product of the prestigious North Texas State, D'Aveni is also a recipient of two National Endowment grants to further his studies in jazz.

"He's a guy that should have much greater recognition," Wertheimer said of D'Aveni. "His recording is going to knock everybody out."



Jack Pezanelli's new CD.