

Hartford Courant October 12, 2009

Frahm, HSO Salute Getz, Sauter 'Focus' On Oct. 16 At Asylum Hill Congregational Church

Owen McNally

Just a year before his death in 1991, legendary tenor saxophonist **Stan Getz** told a reporter that the record he was proudest of was "Focus," his remarkable 1961 collaboration with arranger- composer Eddie Sauter in a seven-part, third-stream suite for string orchestra.

Getz's biographer Donald L. Maggin, in "Stan Getz: A Life in **Jazz**" (1996), declares that the Getz/Sauter jazz-with-strings project — one that was most reluctantly approved by commercially cautious recording executives — "created the most fully realized third-stream record ever made."

Declaring that "Focus" is "in the class of Bartok, Schoenberg and Stravinsky," critic Richard Palmer in 1987 wrote that the album "remains the only instance thus far when jazz met **classical music** and achieved something both unique and absolutely successful."

In the latest installment of percussionist- educator Gene Bozzi's ongoing tributes to classic "jazz-with-strings" recordings, the acclaimed tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm, a jazz rhythm section and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra's core string orchestra perform the "Focus" material Friday at 8 p.m. at Hartford's Asylum Hill Congregational Church. Frahm, who grew up in **West Hartford**, will be right at home cast in the leading role as Getz.

In the concerto-like format, Frahm will improvise over often highly emotional, broad- sweeping moods, thick textures and resonant timbres. And, most especially, he'll be navigating the sophisticated, modern writing by the often underrated Sauter (1914-1981).

Best known for his commercial success in the 1950s with the popular Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, which was often dismissed as big band lite, Sauter also arranged for Red Norvo, **Benny Goodman** and Artie Shaw, plus varied freelance ventures for stage, film and TV.

Bozzi, who is both a jazz drummer and the timpanist for the HSO, initiated the

string series with an acclaimed salute to the famous "**Charlie Parker** with Strings" recordings. Those now-canonized studio sessions from 60 years ago featured Bird in flight over a lush orchestral backup. For the two Parker with Strings performances in Hartford earlier this year, alto saxophonist **Kris Allen** performed as Bird accompanied by a string quartet consisting of HSO personnel and a jazz rhythm section. Working from the Verve recordings, pianist/composer Walt Gwardyak arranged the charts for the string quartet.

What makes the Getz-with-strings tribute unique this time out is that the HSO's 15-piece core string orchestra will be playing parts originally orchestrated by Sauter himself.

After hearing that the original score for "Focus," along with other papers, had been donated to Yale's Music Library, Bozzi was able to obtain copies of the original material from the Sauter archives in New Haven. "Originally, I was thinking we would do this with just string quartet accompaniment, but when I listened to the recording I realized that there just would be too many notes missing if you reduced it to a string quartet," Bozzi says.

Bozzi plans to open the concert with "Focus," but also present selections with Frahm swinging with just a jazz rhythm section, a quartet featuring Bozzi on drums, his HSO colleague Rick Rozie on bass and Frahm's own pianist, Spike Wilner.

behind Frahm's tenor and the rhythm section, there will be a tribute to Getz's bossa nova artistry, including such mega-hits as "Desafinado" and "The Girl from Ipanema," both by Antonio Carlos Jobim.

For the grand fina

At Frahm's suggestion, other selections may include "Early Autumn," an indelible masterwork and dramatic breakthrough solo for Getz in the late 1940s with the **Woody Herman** Orchestra. Plus, "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)," the subject of a classic, searing, mano a mano exchange between Getz and **Dizzy Gillespie** in 1953.

On the "Focus" recording, Getz waxes lyrically on "Her," his moving dedication to his then just recently deceased mother, Goldie, dead at 54 of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. And in his freest, most frenetic playing, done literally with visions of **Ornette Coleman**'s free jazz music dancing in his head, Getz unleashes motific improvisations on "I'm Late, I'm Late," scurrying brilliantly over drum accompaniment.

The tribute to Getz and "Focus" is part of the "2009-2010 Asylum Hill Concert Series." Tickets: \$25. Information: www.ahcc.org and 860-278-0785.