

# Claudio Roditi Wraps Up Jazz And Strings Series

By CHUCK OBUCHOWSKI, Special To The Courant  
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— "Claudio for president!" someone shouted as trumpeter Claudio Roditi returned for a second set at the Asylum Congregational Hill Congregation Church in Hartford Saturday.

"Of the Musicians' Union?" the Brazilian-born brassman replied, with mock surprise.

Roditi was in town to celebrate "Clifford Brown with Strings" – joined by members of the **Hartford Symphony Orchestra** – for the final performance of this season's HSO Jazz and Strings series. His ebullient solo style and broad stylistic range connect Roditi neatly to Brown's trumpet lineage. And while his commander-in-chief musical abilities may have provoked the fan's "president" cheer, Roditi humbly and repeatedly acknowledged his debt to the Hartford Symphony musicians onstage for their contributions.

He gave special thanks to drummer Gene Bozzi, principal timpanist in the HSO, who founded this unique jazz series. Roditi also praised pianist Walter Gwardyak – the only other non-HSO musician onstage – for his arrangements of pieces from the 1955 "Clifford Brown with Strings" recording.

Neal Hefti, best known in jazz circles for his work with **Count Basie** and **Woody Herman**, arranged and conducted the string section on Brown's original sessions. Those arrangements sound a bit saccharine to modern ears. Gwardyak has developed a strong rapport with the HSO string players since he began writing for them some years ago. His arrangements reflect

that understanding, plus an awareness of all the lessons learned about such collaborations over the ensuing decades.

Even a simple ballad treatment of **Jerome Kern's** "Yesterdays" benefited from subtle yet poignant flugelhorn embellishments, followed by a brief string interlude, then an impassioned conclusion from Roditi.

Gwardyak's handiwork was more noticeable still on "Joy Spring," one of Brown's most famous compositions. The original version of this tune did not include strings; it featured the famous quintet the trumpeter co-led with drummer Max Roach. Here, Gwardyak transcribed Brown's recorded solo for the 14-piece string section – and they pulled it off in all its bluesy, hard-bopping glory.

The program also included four arrangements by violist Steffen Drabek, who led the Bremen Philharmonic Strings on "Smile," a project with Roditi in 2007 for Nagel Heyer Records. These tunes added a welcome contemporary dimension to the concert. Roditi's only original composition, a cheerful samba called "The Monster and the Flower," was among this foursome. The exciting rhythmic interplay between the composer and Bozzi recalled Roditi's guest appearances with Samba Brasil, a Connecticut Latin jazz ensemble Bozzi co-founded in 1991.

Bozzi took turns with Roditi introducing song selections. His trap work – much of it on brushes – kept things swinging all night. During an unusual treatment of Freddie Hubbard's "Sunflower" (another Drabek arrangement), Bozzi switched to hand percussion, playing the African dumbek and djembe in combination. Roditi – who turns 65 on May 28 – responded joyfully, sounding every bit as convincing as he'd been during the previous tune, a light-as-a-feather reading of "Stardust."

Pianist Gwardyak and bassist Edward "Rick" Rozie rounded out the rhythm section. Both sets began with a piece for jazz quartet, without strings. Rozie's longtime service to the Hartford Symphony made him a formidable soloist with a bow, but his pizzicato playing was equally proficient, evidence of his many

years on the Hartford jazz scene.

The Asylum Hill church sanctuary poses unique sonic challenges. Sound technician Ken Trestman deserves special mention for having been able to achieve a very satisfactory audio balance between the jazz instrumentation and the strings, while also managing to keep echo effects to a minimum.

HSO Jazz and Strings plans to reprise its celebration of Art Pepper's "Winter Moon" – featuring reed player "Sweet" Sue Terry – as part of this year's Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz. The performance is slated for Sunday, July 18, in **Bushnell Park**.

Hartford Symphony President Kristen Phillips announced on Saturday that planning for next season's HSO Jazz and Strings series has begun; all events will take place at the Theater for the Performing Arts at the Learning Corridor in Hartford, she said.