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Looking over his shoulder... and liking it

By: **Chris Smith**

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SUPPLIED PHOTO Goldberg's trio performs March 10 and 11 at the Berney Theatre.

Aaron Goldberg likes a challenge, and for a jazz pianist, that means leading a trio.

The New York-based musician has played in many configurations -- his tenure in saxophonist Joshua Redman's band, for example -- but he likes the "combination of opportunity and challenge" in leading a trio where he takes on the "main melodic and conceptual roles."

"The attention is more on me than if I play with a horn player or a singer," Goldberg says in a telephone interview from New York before his trio of bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Greg Hutchinson travels to Winnipeg for three shows, March 10 and 11.

"I try to come up with self-expression," he says of a format that boasts some of jazz's greatest players. "You feel their weight," he adds, "and the responsibility to play the music in a different way. Some tunes are virtually untouchable; you can't copy your heroes' best work. I'm looking over my own shoulder.

"My trio concept is collaborative, conversational. The sound of the band is determined by who I'm playing with," he says.

He has performed in a trio with Rogers and drummer Eric Harland, and was part of a recent trio with drummer Ali Jackson and bassist Omer Avital in which the longtime collaborators finally released a CD, *Yes!*

Each has its own sound, he says, "of mutual musical comfort. I tailor the material to a group sound."

"Jazz thrives in an intimate setting," Goldberg says, "in a conversation with the musicians and the audience that works better in a club.

"But in a concert setting, you get a better piano," he jokes.

Goldberg gets the best of both worlds when he plays the Berney Theatre, home to the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series. The 200-seat theatre has an intimacy like a club, but with a good piano.

The pianist says the trio will perform "a mix of my own compositions and arrangements of material from all over the world, and a few jazz standards done in my own flavours."

Working as a musician has given Goldberg a chance to travel the world and visit every state except Alaska. He remembers his only visit to North Dakota, in 2000 as a member of Redman's band, as much for being driven past missile silos as for the music.

The band was booked for a Labour Day weekend jazz festival that the North Dakota Museum of Art, on the campus of the University of North Dakota, put on as a fundraising event. The fest lasted only two years, but Goldberg "wouldn't have made it to North Dakota without that gig."

The Aaron Goldberg Trio performs Saturday, March 10 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, March 11 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the Berney Theatre at the Asper Jewish Community Campus. Tickets, \$36 (students \$20), available by calling 477-7534 or online at www.radyjcc.com/ticketcentral.cfm

Former Winnipeg pianist Michelle Grégoire returns to town March 18 to perform with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra in its nod to the legendary New York nightclub the Village Vanguard.

Saxophonist Dick Oatts and drummer John Riley of the storied Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, which for the last four decades has taken the Vanguard stage on Monday nights, will perform with the WJO.

The WJO performs at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sunday, March 18, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Tickets, \$29.50 / \$15, are available from winnipegjazzorchestra.com, 632-5299, McNally Robinson Booksellers and at the door.

Another former Winnipeg pianist, Earl MacDonald, associate professor and director of jazz studies at the University of Connecticut, will be back home and performing at Mardi Jazz, March 13.

Officially, he'll be here to adjudicate high school bands at the Manitoba Band Association's Optimist Jazz Festival, but what jazz musician can ignore a chance to play for the hometown fans? MacDonald will perform with bassist Steve Hamilton, saxophonist Greg Gatien and drummer Curtis Nowosad at Centre culturel franco-manitobain at 8:30 p.m.

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