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WJO honours Babs Asper with two shows

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*David Royal/ Monterey County Herald
Christian McBride and his quintet, Insight
Straight, play the Bemey Theatre this
weekend. (CP)*

Expect to feel a sonic barrage next weekend when the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra celebrates the music of Woody Herman and his Thundering Herds in two concerts and the rumbling bass of Christian McBride hits the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances stage for three concerts.

The WJO kicks off its 2012-13 season with charts from the Herman bands, pre-concert lectures by guest conductor Fred Stride and Winnipeg pianist and band leader Ron Paley, who played bass in the Herd in the early '70s, and a performance of the Herman tune Bijou for the late jazz fan and patron Babs Asper.

The big band featured Herman in the late '90s when it started, says Richard Gillis, artistic director and member of the trumpet section. It wanted to return to the music of the band leader, who was active from the 1930s to 1980s, but it was difficult to find charts.

It was that difficulty in finding Herman's music that kept the WJO from fulfilling Asper's request for Bijou before now.

Stride, a Vancouver composer, trumpeter and band leader, is supplying the music. "He's a treasure; he knows so much about (Herman's) bands," says Gillis, a University of Manitoba music professor.

Despite Herman's long tenure as a musician and big band leader, he is not as widely known as such contemporaries Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

"Woody didn't write a lot of stuff himself; he did some, like his theme At the Woodchopper's Ball, but he had good writers."

"If Ellington didn't write, he wouldn't be remembered as much," Gillis explains.

Stride and Paley will host pre-concert chats about Herman and his music at 1:10 p.m. and 6:40 p.m. on Sunday.

Christian McBride and Inside Straight, a quintet, is a smaller band but it packs a big musical punch with A-list members McBride, Carl Allen on drums, Peter Martin on piano, Steve Wilson on saxophone and Warren Wolf, Jr. on vibraphone.

McBride, a three-time Grammy winner, is one of the best bassists around and a treat to hear. This straight-ahead band will deliver some great blues-based jazz during three weekend concerts.

The WJO performs the Music of Woody Herman and his Thundering Herds, Sunday at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Tickets \$32.50 / \$15 (includes GST) are available at McNally Robinson Booksellers, winniepegjazzorchestra.com, 204-632-5299 or from Jazz Winnipeg.

Christian McBride and Inside Straight concerts are held in the Berney Theatre at the Asper Jewish Community Campus, 123 Doncaster St. Performances are Saturday at 8 p.m., and Sunday at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Tickets, \$38, are available by calling 477-7534 or at www.radyjcc.com/ticketcentral.cfm

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Winnipeg jazz guitarist Keith Price, who plays for an organization called Artists In Healthcare Manitoba (www.artistsinhealthcare.com), has a favour to ask. "We are 10 regular musicians and a whole bunch of summer students who play and sing in hospitals and health-care facilities all over southern Manitoba," he writes in an email.

"The program is amazing because it affects so many people -- patients, staff, and families in a positive way. Just yesterday I met someone in the elevator at St. Boniface Hospital who asked me to come and play for her sister who's recovering from surgery. I played three tunes and chatted and left them, as they said, 'The most relaxed we've felt in weeks!' I have at least one story like this for every day I've played music in a health-care situation.

"Aviva Insurance is giving away \$1 million to charities around Canada based on online votes. Basically, it's a popularity contest. We've asked for \$135,000 to start a full-time music program (six musicians each playing five days a week) at the Heath Sciences Centre."

You can support the program by voting at www.avivacommunityfund.org/ideas/acf13399

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