



Confessions Tour

MADONNA

 **UNITED
CENTER**

JUNE 14TH
ON SALE THIS FRIDAY @ 10AM

Tickets available at all [ticketmaster](http://ticketmaster.com) outlets or on-line at Ticketmaster.com and LiveNation.com. Charge by phone (312) 559-1212.
For Complete Tour & Fan Club Information, visit: www.confessionstour.com & www.madonna.com
Produced by The Next Adventure (A Live Nation Company)

The Meter

themeter@chicagoreader.com
www.chicagoreader.com/TheMeter

The Jazz Posse

A sudden dearth of venues inspires jazz and improvised-music promoters to band together.

By Peter Margasak



Mitch Cocanig, Ken Vandermark, Dave Rempis, Josh Berman, Mike Reed

If you're a glass-half-empty type, it hasn't been hard lately to find evidence that Chicago is inhospitable to jazz. The old Velvet Lounge is shutting down at the end of the month—the venerable South Loop club is scheduled for demolition to make way for condos. The 3030 performance space in Humboldt Park closed in September due to zoning problems, and for most of the past six months the long-running Wednesday-night jazz series at the Empty Bottle has been preempted by rock shows. And the annual Empty Bottle Festival of Jazz and Improvised Music, where for almost a decade some of Europe's finest mingled with the best Chicago had to offer, is missing from the club's upcoming shows list.

But the truth is that the local scene is as strong as ever, and these kinds of setbacks are nothing new. Since the early 90s, when Ken Vandermark's regular gig at the original HotHouse in Wicker Park became the nucleus of a young free-jazz community in Chicago, up-and-coming musicians have relied on the kind of venues that are likely to fold if audiences dwindle or property taxes jump—Urbus Orbis, Xoinx, the Nervous Center, the Candlestick Maker, and many others have all come and gone. There is something noteworthy about this round of bad news, though, and that's the coordinated response to it. Vandermark, saxophonist Dave Rempis, drummer Mike Reed, and cornetist Josh Berman, along with fan-turned-booker Mitch Cocanig, have formed a cooperative called Umbrella Music that will help bookers and presenters share resources, cross-promote concerts, and organize extended engagements with visiting musicians. Members of Umbrella are the prime movers behind new series at the Hideout, the Storefront Theater, and 3030's successor, Elastic.

The Umbrella musicians began plotting the co-op with Michael Orlove of the city's Department of Cultural Affairs and John Corbett, Vandermark's former cocurator at the Bottle, in late 2002 but got sidetracked by a campaign to persuade WBEZ to broaden its jazz programming and play more local artists. This fall, alarmed by the rapidly shifting landscape of the Chicago scene, they reconvened. There was no telling when or if the Velvet would be ready in its new location on Cermak—and there still isn't. "The Bottle was doing less improvised music, and it wasn't clear if 3030 was going to reopen," says Vandermark. "So it was like 50 percent of the gigs threatened to disappear."

Reed asked Hideout co-owner Tim Tuten if his club could help pick up the slack, and Tuten jumped at the chance. "I've been wanting to do jazz, and I felt it was important for the Hideout to

participate in it," he says. He approached Vandermark about playing a month of Wednesdays at the club—as part of a residency series that had previously featured mostly indie bands—and Vandermark offered to book an ongoing weekly engagement instead. The new series, called "Immediate Sound" and curated by Vandermark and Cocanig, started April 5, and the Hideout has committed to it for at least six months. Vandermark has also invited local musicians to DJ before and after the sets. "We want to make it a more socially connected thing," he says.

In December, on Orlove's advice, the Umbrella folks also talked to Patrick Daley, director of the Gallery 37 Center for the Arts, who wanted to program music at the center's Storefront Theater. Within two days of meeting they were working on a plan. The Storefront's new "Downtown Sound Gallery" series starts May 1 and runs the first and third Mondays of each month. The shows will be free, though the musicians will get paid. Each performer must write new compositions for a new group, so what could've been a simple showcase for working bands is instead a grassroots commission series. "We wanted to stay true to the idea that this space is a place to learn or create, as a student or as a professional," says Daley. The series begins with a four-concert trial period, and the Umbrella group has picked the artists for those dates. If all goes well the program will continue in the fall, and artists can submit proposals to Umbrella.

In March the Elastic Arts Foundation, which ran 3030, started putting on shows at its new Logan Square space, and after a six-month hiatus Rempis has resumed his Thursday-night improv series there. Reed and Berman also continue to book Sundays at the Hungry Brain, which has become a social hub for the local jazz community. The musicians say they make as much in pass-the-hat donations there as they would at a comparable club with a cover.

This month's visit by the excellent Scandinavian group Atomic is an example of Umbrella's strengths at work. On April 21 and 22 they'll record a live album with Vandermark's band School Days at the Green Mill, and on the nights before and after those gigs, members of both groups will play at the Hideout, Elastic, and the Hungry Brain. Similar plans are shaping up for this fall, when Vandermark's ten-piece Territory Band reconvenes to record a new album and perform in Millennium Park. The Umbrella guys are also revving up the promotional machine, pooling e-mail lists and printing flyers and posters that list a month of shows at a time.

Umbrella isn't the only game in town—several series that aren't directly affiliated with the group are also going strong. Since the fall percussionist Michael Zerang, trombonist Jeb Bishop, reedist Jason Stein, and bassist Nate McBride have been booking Mondays at Silvie's Lounge under the name "Eight Million Heroes." Keyboardist Jim Baker has a Tuesday quartet gig at Hotti Biscotti, and in January pianist D Bayne started a Monday series at the Morseland. Even the venerable Monday improv sessions at Myopic Books have been resurrected by cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm, electronicist and koto player Brian Labycz, and bassist Jason Roebke.

The Empty Bottle remains a player too—it recently hosted Fred Anderson and Hamid Drake opening for drummer Steve Reid with Four Tet's Kieran Hebden. Instead of setting aside every Wednesday, the club's now restricting itself to occasional jazz shows and making room for them wherever they'll fit. The festival that isn't happening this spring may end up on the books for the fall. "Jazz is very important to the Empty Bottle and to me," says owner Bruce Finkelman. "We want to continue to help the jazz scene grow in Chicago as much as we're able."

Vandermark says his move to the Hideout doesn't mean he's embittered by the Bottle's choices. "Whatever the changes in activity over there, they did present this stuff at a loss for ten years, and I'm not interested in turning my back on that," he says. He's also glad that the upheavals in the scene have inspired people to pull together. "The holes that were there are suddenly getting filled," he says. "I think it's because we took it seriously, but in half a year things have really changed in a good way. If I'm energized personally, it's because I've realized how much is at stake."

Look Who's Reuniting Now

Touch and Go turns 25 this year, and to celebrate the label is throwing a three-day outdoor concert. The shows will be on September 8, 9, and 10, and organizers hope to use the city lot across from the Hideout. Twenty-five bands will play; confirmed acts so far include Calexico, the Black Heart Procession, Ted Leo + Pharmacists, the Shipping News, the Rachel's, and Shellac. Scratch Acid and the Didijs will reunite for the occasion, and more reunions may still be announced. Tickets, including three-day passes, go on sale late this month; watch the Reader's Early Warnings page for the on-sale date. ☐

Bob Mehr is on vacation.

The Treatment

A day-by-day guide to our Critic's Choices and other previews

friday7



Anti-Flag

ANTI-FLAG Pittsburgh punk quartet Anti-Flag tend to catch a lot of shit for being sloganeering and didactic, but that's mostly from grown-ups and magazine editors. If hip-hop is the CNN of the streets, as Chuck D once said, then Anti-Flag is the Pacifica of the cul-de-sac. Like the majority of their fans, the group is young, angry, Mohawked, and white, with a dogged hatred of authority and firm convictions about what's fair and what's not. Though their seventh album and major-label debut, *For Blood and Empire* (RCA), features cover art that harks back to the Reagan era, its messages are explicitly of the here and now. Most of the songs, with titles such as "Depleted Uranium Is a War Crime" and "Project for a New American Century," are about the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It's their best effort by far, righteously thriving on discontent and pick slides, with tight, puncturing riffs that are half UK spot and half Gilman fist in the air. The Casualties, Unseen, Smoke or Fire, and the A.K.A.s open.

► 6 PM, Logan Square Auditorium, 2539 N. Kedzie, 773-252-6179, sold out. ☐ —Jessica Hopper



Big Buildings

BIG BUILDINGS Chicago's music scene has a bench so deep it's possible for any of a dozen bands at any given time to blindsides you with something that'll make you wonder where on earth that came from. This local quartet, formed about five years ago, had a not especially auspicious start, slowly and unobtrusively getting better and better across an EP and a full-length. But their second album, *Water Everywhere* (Stars/No Stars), is my favorite local rock record of this young year—and I think it'll stay that way well into the fall at least. I've compared their studied sloppiness to *Exile on Main Street* in the past, and other writers have thrown some Wilco-age around, but having seen them in the very friendly confines of Cal's some months back, I'm going to have to add some other markers: a wired-up Grateful Dead, a hippified Loaded-era Velvets (say, if Lou Reed had left and Sterling Morrison had taken the reins), and a puppyish R.E.M. around the time of their 1981 Athens bootlegs. (Maybe some of those Peter Buck-Keith Streng collaborations too.) They have an absolutely joyous infatuation with their own grainy lo-fi ululations throughout *Water Everywhere*. This show is a release party for the album; they'll be joined by an array of guests including John Roeser of Hot Dog City and Fast Product and Dave Callahan of the Drovers. The Safes open. ► 10 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, 773-227-4433, \$8. —Monica Kendrick

RAMATOU DIAKITE Ramatou Diakite is every bit as powerful a singer as fellow Wassoulou wailers like Oumou Sangare and Nahawa Doumbia (if a bit sweeter), but she's undermined by the production on her U.S. debut, 2003's *Maba* (Second Moon). Some tunes retain the circular grooves that define Malian music, but most have slick, incongruous flourishes: "Dream" is saddled with noodly electric guitar leads and quasi-Asian accents, and the title track is a blues-pop confection featuring harmonica by Charlie Musselwhite and an awful cameo by New York singer Keith Paine. There's nothing inherently wrong with trying to nudge a musical tradition into a new context, but this feels more like a hijacking. Playing first is Markus James, a Virginia-born musician who joined traditional Malian players to record his 2005 album, *Timbuktoubab* ("toubab" is Wolof slang for "whitey"), on his own Firenze Records.

► 10 PM, HotHouse, 31 E. Balbo, 312-362-9707, \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. —Peter Margasak
continued on page 6