

Nishs Niche

ENTERTAINMENT, JAZZ, LIVE MUSIC, LOS ANGELES, MUSIC

WEST COAST JAZZ SHINES AGAIN AT THE LIGHTHOUSE CAFÉ

The Gary Herbig & Bill Spoke Quintet

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by Karen “Nish” Nishimura

Earlier in 2016, pre-La La Land, I went to The Lighthouse to hear The Gary Herbig & Bill Spoke Quintet. It was a typical scene that had been trending for years in live jazz; the club managed to reach half capacity mid-way through the second set and the audience was mostly seniors and regulars, and a few tourists that wandered in for happy hour. That night I sat at a front row table, the right side of the stage, unknowing it was pre-Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone.

Cut to post multi-award winning musical “La La Land,” which shines its beacon on The Lighthouse Café in Hermosa Beach, and I’m back to hear The Gary Herbig & Bill Spoke Quintet. It’s the “Happy Hour” show and at first, I notice the regulars and seniors seated at the prime tables and bar stools ordering drinks, food, and happily anticipating the show. The club was only a quarter full when I arrived, but it was already a bigger crowd than the last time I walked in.

Sebastian, your dream is coming true!

At 6:00 P.M. the band took the stage and the downbeat opened the set to the Wayne Shorter tune, “Angola.” The jazzy sound waves must have signaled out an invitation to the folks walking Pier Avenue as the people started wandering into the club. After a while, I realized how fortunate I was to arrive a bit early because I sat at the same table I had a few months ago that is now the spot that Ryan Gosling sat in “La La Land” as Sebastian, the struggling musician. I couldn’t help feel a little like Ryan’s character who dreams of the resurrection of jazz in Los Angeles, as I see the club fill with a mixture of South Bay locals, tourists, and jazz lovers. I also notice Gloria Cadena (91), the jazz booker for The Lighthouse, welcoming the guests personally table to table and inviting them to come



Gloria Cadena – © Nish

back for the upcoming jazz shows Saturday and Sunday. She's been working continually to keep jazz alive at this club that was once the home of jazz music royalty seven nights a week. It didn't take long before the club was full of guests enjoying the music and atmosphere.



Bill Spoke, drummer and band co-leader with Gary Herbig (sax) assembled a mix of **Hard Bop** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_bop), **Post-Bop** (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-bop>) and Modern Jazz style tunes that pleased established jazz fans and the random tourist alike. My personal favorite of the night was the band's performance of "Soul Leo," a Post-Bop tune composed by Mulgrew Miller. "Soul Leo" has a smoking boogaloo beat that Bill on drums and Igor Kogan on bass lay down solidly while the Mitch Manker on horns and Gary on sax take turns streaming in melodic, interpretive solos. Mike Saul on keys fills out the song in bright rhythmic piano backgrounds and solos. "Soul Leo," as performed by the band, is one of those songs that make you fall in love with jazz at first sight and keeps you hooked.

Bill Spoke – Drums–
© Mark Sonners

"No Room For Squares" by Hank Mobley was the perfect selection for Gary Herbig's superb sax solos, while Bill tosses in vignettes of drum solos (trading

4s) here and there, segueing to each player. Mitch Manker on trumpet and flugelhorn was an audience favorite playing a kaleidoscope of horn solos during both sets that drew enthusiastic applause. Even the jazz newbies learning the tradition of applauding solos were naturally drawn to do so for Mitch. Mike Saul, a recent addition to the band, also wowed the crowd with his energetic style on keys. Mike is a musician possessed by the music when he gets up on his feet and puts his whole body into his piano solos. What a joy it is to hear and see how all of these jazz musicians channel their talents fully into the breath of each tune.



Gary Herbig, sax– ©
Mark Sonners

Rounding out the first set of eight selections was a modern jazz tune "Tumbleweed." The intricacies of jazz drumming are done adeptly by Bill Spoke throughout out the tune. This is where Bill not only provides the backbone but also the skeletal system that frames the song. Supported by the amazing jazz virtuoso stylings of Igor on bass, "Tumbleweed" rolled through solo and verse from Gary on sax, Mike on keys, and Mitch on trumpet.



Mitch Manker, trumpet, Igor Kogan, bass
– © Nish

The second set was as satisfying and entertaining as the first. The energy in The Lighthouse pulsed like a steady heartbeat as the crowd filled tables and barstools to hear jazz while sipping wine and cocktails. A contrast to the tourist bars nearby where jukebox music is just background noise behind the loud conversations of drinking guests.

The highlight of set two was "Lost," a beautiful song by Wayne Shorter. The back and forth solos of Gary on sax and Mitch on flugelhorn were nothing short of musical conversation. In jazz terms, it's called "question and answer" when soloists' parts complement each other and bring depth to the composition. It's one of the many reasons I love jazz; how music without vocals can tell a story and evoke deep emotion.

It's evident that West Coast jazz is making a comeback at The Lighthouse thanks to Gloria's dedication to booking great jazz bands like The Gary Herbig & Bill Spoke Quintet. The show Wednesday night made new jazz fans and delighted many long time jazz lovers, including myself.

This article is a "Part Deux" of a story I wrote a few weeks earlier, "[A Modern Musical Shines Light on a West Coast Landmark](https://nishsniche.com/2017/02/21/a-modern-musical-shines-light-on-a-west-coast-landmark/)."

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For more a listing of upcoming shows at The Lighthouse Café, go to [thelighthousecafe.net](http://www.thelighthousecafe.net) (<http://www.thelighthousecafe.net/calendar.html>)

The Gary Herbig & Bill Spoke Quintet is:

[Gary Herbig \(http://garyherbig.com/html/bio.html\)](http://garyherbig.com/html/bio.html) – Sax

[Bill Spoke \(http://www.mccmusic.com/billspoke.htm\)](http://www.mccmusic.com/billspoke.htm) – Drums

[Mitch Manker \(http://www.loveinthemusical.com/players/mitch_manker.html\)](http://www.loveinthemusical.com/players/mitch_manker.html) – Horns

[Igor Kogan \(https://www.koganigormusic.com/bio\)](https://www.koganigormusic.com/bio) – Acoustic Bass

[Mike Saul \(http://www.mikesaul.net/musicforhire.html\)](http://www.mikesaul.net/musicforhire.html) – Keys

For information on upcoming shows go to their [Facebook Page \(https://www.facebook.com/gbjazz/\)](https://www.facebook.com/gbjazz/)



Mike Saul, keyboard–
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