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Tuesday, December 30, 2008

10/16/2008 9:37:00 AM

COVER: Multimedia Modernist

In her music and in her art, Kathy Kosins grooves to a jazzy vibe.

Suzanne Chessler

Special to the Jewish News

Melodies linger on - and then transform - through the talents of jazz singer-songwriter Kathy Kosins. While change is at the heart of any jazz performer, she is taking the sounds into a new dimension to express them on canvas.

Kosins, a Ferndale resident and recording artist who travels more than 180 days each year for stage shows, long had painting as a hobby but is about to turn those expressive qualities into another serious phase of her working life with her first exhibit.

"Jazz in the Abstract," running Oct. 24-Nov. 29 at State of the Art in Ferndale, will be launched with a first-day reception and second-day performances to call attention to what inspired the images as well as what listeners will find on her new CD.

"As a singer and songwriter, I've always worked in a collaborative format, joined with musicians, arrangers and writers," says Kosins, who reveals that her artistic interests reside in the Modernist movement reaching from the 1940s to the 1960s.

"The artwork is really an extension of my performances; only instead of collaborating with people I know, I'm collaborating with deceased jazz musicians, such as Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell and John Coltrane.

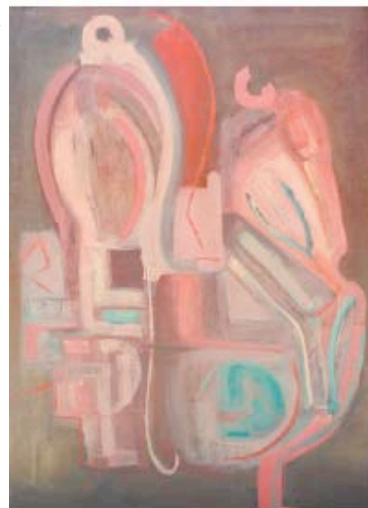
"As I listen to the recordings of these jazz greats, I become a visual extension of what I hear them play. The paintings are by my own hand, but I feel as if the musicians are communicating through me, guiding my strokes on the canvas. When I go to paint, I don't have any preconceived ideas, and it's like I'm on automatic pilot."

Kosins, whose recent performances have reached from the intimacy of clubs

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Kathy Kosins: Melody Becomes Harmony Becomes Melody



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like the Jazz Standard and Birdland in New York City, the Dakota Jazz Club in Minneapolis and the Jazz Bakery in L.A. to the large expanse of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., will be showing 25-30 paintings, some originally seen at a home party to which she invited State of the Art gallery owners Nicole Raffail and Veronica Lujic.

"One painting, All Blues, which also will be offered as lithographs, was inspired by Miles Davis," Kosins explains. "One of his most famous compositions had the same title, and I was listening to it while I was at my easel.

"There are lots of shades of blue in this particular piece, and the process all came through me very fast without any realization of what I was doing."

Another painting, Seeing Jazz, essentially was inspired by Charlie Parker's music, albeit with influences of other musicians. 52nd Street recollects the New York City thoroughfare formerly lined with jazz clubs.

"The artwork is very abstract, and the music is abstract as well," says Kosins, who uses acrylics often enhanced with layers of modeling paste. "My biggest goal is to get some nice reviews off of this show and submit myself to galleries in some of the bigger cities where I sing."

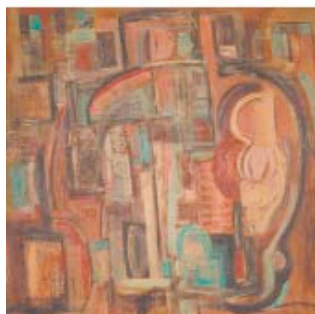
The artist took up painting some 15 years ago, just waking up one morning with the idea. She attended classes at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center and formed a group that still meets there to paint together.

Kosins, who sang in the choir at Southfield High School, started her musical career as a backup singer for Don Was - former Oak Parker Don Fagenson of Was (Not Was) - as he entered the rock scene. Was introduced her to free-style jazz.

"I began writing R&B and pop music for various groups and moved on to jazz with the idea that I would pitch those songs to established artists," Kosins explains. "Instead, I wound up using them for my first CD, All in a Dream's Work.

For a time, Kosins sang with Johnny Trudell's band and then moved on to work with the J.C. Heard and Nelson Riddle orchestras. Later, she decided to become a bandleader and hire musicians as she got bookings around the country.

An opening act for the likes of composer-pianist Marvin Hamlisch, pop/jazz-singing quartet Manhattan Transfer and jazz greats Cassandra Wilson,



Kathy Kosins: Top to bottom, All Blues; Improvisation; 52nd Street; Seeing Jazz.

"Jazz in the Abstract" runs Oct. 24-Nov. 29 at State of the Art, 918 W. Nine Mile Road, in Ferndale. Hours are 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays and 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. The opening reception runs 6-10 p.m. Friday, Oct. 24. Vocal performances will be held 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 25, with reservations at \$10. (248) 582-9999. Copies of Kosins' new CD, Mid-Century Modern, are available through her Web site, www.kathykosins.com.

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James Moody and the late Maynard Ferguson, Kosins' 30-year career has included bookings at the Detroit International Jazz Festival, Tanglewood Music Festival and the Ocean Beach Jazz Festival in San Diego.

"Because I was doing the legwork getting the bookings, I developed a class called 'Gainful Employment and the Art of Hustling the Gig,'" says the artist-performer, invited to lecture for colleges and entrepreneurial organizations. "It's not enough to practice. We have to know how to go out and find work."

Kosins asserts she inherited her selling skills from her late father, popular men's clothier Harry Kosins, and is using those skills to market her most recent CD, Mid-Century Modern, on Mahogany Jazz Records.

"I did the recording in Los Angeles with Eric Harland on drums, Larry Koonse on guitar, Tamir Hendelmen on piano and Bob Hurst on bass," Kosins says.

"I sought obscure jazz songs that haven't been done to death, and I found songs first recorded between the 1940s and early 1960s, including 'You Better Love Me While You May,' 'You Fascinate Me So' and 'Social Call.'"

Kosins, who defines herself as a wandering Jew too nomadic for marriage, is working on a new show that spotlights songs associated with an animated film character, Betty Boop, created by Jewish brothers Max (producer) and Dave (director) Fleischer in the 1930s.

"The title of the show will be The Songs of Betty Boop, but I will not be emulating the style presented on film," Kosins says. "I will have a revue with singing supplemented by talk about the music trivia that go along with each number.

"During 10 years of research, I've found wonderful songs that were written for and performed in many Boop films. Because of the influence of Jewish songwriters, I hope to present this show at Jewish venues."

When she is not working on music or painting, Kosins likes tending to her garden, cooking and hosting friends. Her green thumb brought a beautification award from the city of Ferndale, where her home is filled with Modernist furnishings.

"I'm attracted to the Modernist era in all phases of my life because of the minimalist - with sometimes contrasting intricate - qualities in each work," says Kosins, who soon will be appearing at the Folly Theater in Missouri. "Whether in song, artworks or the comfort of home, Modernism clearly expresses who I am."

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