

Garfield the Cat

Jazz keyboardist David Garfield makes a triumphant return, playing twice at the Syracuse Jazz Fest

The New Times Interview By Matt Mumau
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Basking in the cool, placid air of last year's Syracuse Jazz Fest, the West Coast/East Coast Dream Band nearly stole the show from the festival's Friday night headliner, Sergio Mendes and the Brazil 2008. The group covered tunes like Al Green's "Let's Stay Together," which they recorded on the 1997 album Tribute to Jeff Porcaro (Zebra), in memory of the late session drummer and member of Toto, and generally shined with the help of jazz keyboardist David Garfield's high-energy style.

The 27th edition of the Syracuse Jazz Fest, which will be held at the campus of Onondaga Community College, 4585 W. Seneca Turnpike, on Friday, June 26, and Saturday, June 27, starting at 4 p.m. both days, will feature two reprise performances from Garfield's gaggle of musical friends. That dual booking comes with heaping spoonfuls of kudos from festival organizer Frank Malfitano, who rarely gives a band two slots at the fest, but made an exception for Garfield's prowess for stirring up a crowd.

Garfield spoke about his background with the Syracuse New Times during a telephone interview on June 18. Pronouncing great respect for those who stay in the music business despite the inclement weather of the modern industry, Garfield, 52, discussed his nearly 30 years as a professional jazz musician and how it has brought him to the famed Syracuse grandstand.

Born in Chicago, Garfield later moved to St. Louis with his music-loving parents, Sol and Amy. At age 7 Garfield began taking piano lessons, which led him to study music in his free time as a high school student. Garfield formed his own bands, including Karizma, Los Lobotomys, Creatchy and the Cats and the David Garfield Band, a networking experience that has created vast amounts of musical comrades for him.

Garfield has also served as a producer for a variety of albums through his own label, Creatchy, one of his pseudonyms. He has recorded 11 albums, the latest of which, Tribute to Jeff Porcaro Revisited (2005), recaptures the success of the original by offering new recordings of the tunes that honored the late musician.

Thrilled by the upcoming CD release of a collaboration with Smokey Robinson called Time Flies When You're Having Fun, Garfield is also busy working on new albums from Karizma, Los Lobotomys and a solo album for Alex Ligertwood, an accomplished vocalist who has performed with Santana in the past but now sings for Garfield's group. Additionally, Garfield and his ever-

evolving group will travel to Europe, Japan and Toronto following their Jazz Fest show, demonstrating the degree to which Garfield remains one of the busiest and most sought-after keyboardists in the world.

Garfield's band will also perform during an unprecedented jam session dedicated to Hiram Bullock at about 11:30 p.m. on Friday (see a complete Jazz Fest line-up below). Bullock passed away last July 25, following a battle with cancer. Bullock, a musical compadre of David Letterman's bassist Will Lee and keyboardist Paul Shaffer, has been fondly missed since his passing; he is especially remembered by fans of the Jazz Fest, during which he performed in 2007 with Lee.

Admission to the festival is free. For more information, visit www.syracusejazzfest.com. Also, for more information about Garfield, visit www.creatchy.com.



Q: How did you get your nickname, "Creatchy?"

A: When I moved to California in the 1970s I'd just come straight out of high school. I came out with a friend in search of music and fame and fortune, and I let my hair get really long and grew a beard. I was 18 and wild and crazy, so my friend, at the time the drummer in our band, Carlos Vega, coined the nickname "creature," because part of the way I play is kind of wild, like I'm a wild man on the keyboards.

I never was fond of the nickname, but it stuck. Then, down the road, the musicians in Toto kind of softened the name. Mike Porcaro, the bass player for Toto, used to say, "Hey, Creatchy!" Whatever your name was he'd put a "Y" on the end of it, you know? I liked "Creatchy" better than "creature."

Q: You grew up in St. Louis. How did you get into music there?

A: My family was musical, and my grandmother had bought a piano way back in the day in the 1920s—a Steinway—and everybody in that house took piano lessons. My older sister was a pretty active pianist, and it was just a musical environment. We listened to music, my parents appreciated music, and I started lessons. It was around that time music was changing. The

Beatles came out and the Monkees and all that stuff, so you know pretty much music was my big interest.

I started piano lessons when I was little, but when I got a little older I chose drums as my instrument, because at school they didn't have a piano. Then, as rock'n'roll came out, I got a drum set, and drums became nearly my thing for a long time. Piano was just something that I had a foundation on.

In high school I got into the jazz band and started discovering jazz. At that time there were a lot of jazz-rock bands like Chicago and Blood, Sweat and Tears. That was all happening in the early 1970s, so our high school stage band was playing some of that music, and it turned me on to jazz.



I went to some of the big band camps in the summers. There was this Stan Kenton Jazz Camp, and I went to another jazz camp called Interlochen. That was basically my musical training. When I got out of high school I met some local guys who were playing in the clubs. I started hanging out in the clubs and I was just self-taught through summer music camps and through extracurricular programs. I just started working and playing around all the time, and then at the end of the summer I just moved straight out to Los Angeles. I never did go to college. Like I told you, I was wild and crazy, and I started going around town asking people to let me sit in and they gave me a gig, you know?

Q: How did you get to know the members of Toto?

A: When I came out to LA in the 1970s there was a group of musicians that were children of professional musicians. David Paich is the piano player in Toto, and his father, Marty Paich, was a big arranger and composer. There were the Porcaro kids, and their dad, Joe Porcaro, was a studio drummer. Mark and Joe Williams: Their father is John Williams from the Boston Pops. Also Sherry Goffin Kondor and Louise Goffin; their mom was Carole King. So a lot of these kids were second-generation entertainment people.

I was more interested in jazz and fusion at the time, and those guys were also into jazz and fusion, so I met

them. They had their own band, like a garage band. They basically grew out of a high school band that played dances and rehearsed in the garage. They appreciated what I brought from jazz and fusion, and I really appreciated all the knowledge they had about the studio business, the music business, the recording business and the touring business. So we became friends and we kind of admired each other. They often played for Boz Scaggs at that time.

When they started Toto in 1979, we were all around the same neighborhood, the same scene. I was down in the studio when they were doing their first record, and at the same time one of my bands was playing every week, and they would come to our gigs and hang out in the audience. We were kind of copacetic or whatever you'd call it. We were around the same time at the same place, kind of appreciating each other, so that's kind of what grew out of it.

Q: So from there you went on to form your own bands?

A: It took a while before I broke through that wall, but within a little over a year I had my own band and we were getting a lot of attention, and I got the job with Willie Bobo, who was one of the icons in town at the time. From there I went right to Freddie Hubbard's band, and this was all within the first two years that I was in Los Angeles.

Q: Although you played with untold numbers of musicians from that point, you also played with Spinal Tap on *Break Like the Wind*, the 1992 follow-up album to their first film's 1984 soundtrack. How did that come about?

A: My friend Steve Lukather, the guitarist in Toto who I played with and collaborated with for years, was producing a couple cuts on the record, and he let me in. It was real funny, because I had watched the movie and I was kind of a fan, and I came in the studio and I walked right by the guys and said, "Where's Spinal Tap?" I didn't recognize them, because they didn't have any of their makeup on. They're so interesting, because they're witty and they're always making these jokes, and it was funny, because I wasn't even laughing at any of their jokes. Looking back on it I just didn't quite understand their real trip: that they are real esoteric. They're different people in real life than when you see them on the stage.

Q: This is your second year at the Syracuse Jazz Fest. Are you excited to return?

A: It is! Two years ago when Aretha Franklin was there, Frank {Malfitano} had invited me to come, and I was looking into coming just to be there—to hang out as a guest—but I wasn't able to make it due to some conflicts. Then last year was my first year performing there, and my first year at the festival, and we really enjoyed being there. This year we're going to be there for two nights. I understand they don't normally ask people back. It's a real, real honor.

Q: Did you come to know Malfitano through the grapevine of the jazz world?

A: Well, that is a good question. I'm a very good friend of Will Lee's. Will started playing with us with Los Lobotomys back in the 1980s, and we've been collaborating since then. I actually met Frank through Will, and I'd heard about him through the years, because he's a good friend of Will's, and also of Hiram Bullock, another friend of ours who was a friend of Frank's.

He's a real dedicated music supporter, and I don't know how to say it enough: how important people like Frank are. Without them, the music scene is drying up, you know? He's keeping it going, and I can't say enough good things about Frank for his dedication to good music. He's given a lot of people a chance to play, including myself.

Q: During your performance last year at the Syracuse Jazz Fest, you featured Alex Ligertwood on vocals as well as Steve Ferrone, who performed with the Average White Band in the past, on drums. Will those guys return?

A: Yeah. The core band from last year is coming back, and then we'll have Will, who will be with us on Friday night as he was last year, and then Randy Brecker will be with us. We're also including our percussionist, Lenny Castro, who was not with us last year. We decided we wanted to pull out all the stops. Lenny is one of the greatest percussionists in the world. If you look at any record—just Google him—he's played with the Rolling Stones, just anybody: you name it. He's been with us since 1979, so it's going to be a real treat to have him there. He'll be there both nights.

Q: So Ligertwood and Ferrone are the key members of the David Garfield Band?

A: Yeah, that's pretty much what's happening all summer, but the way it works is that I originally had an instrumental fusion band called Karizma. We were quite popular in Japan, and all over the world. Then we also had Los Lobotomys, and that's the band that Will played with and that the members of Toto played with: It was Jeff Porcaro and Steve Lukather. The guys in Toto like to play in that band because they get to play music that they couldn't play in Toto. It was a release for them. So, those were my primary bands, and then after Jeff passed away in 1992 I started a tribute project to him, and I brought in a lot of great vocalists.

I recorded "Let's Stay Together," which is sung by Michael McDonald, and I had Don Henley and Richard Marx and David Pack on backup vocals, and that song became very well-played on the radio. In 1997 it was Top 10 on jazz radio in the states and in Japan. So, what really happened is I needed to find a vocalist to sing "Let's Stay Together" with me {on the road} because that was his song. Alex had just left Santana, and he was an old friend of Steve Ferrone's. They go way back, because they were in bands in the United Kingdom together.

I met Alex through Steve, and I asked him to come down and sing "Let's Stay Together" with us, and it was magic. I basically hired him to come play one song on the gig. It was wonderful. He sang that song the first night and I thought, "Oh, my God!" and then what happened was I started adding Alex on every other song. Like we did "Lowdown" as an instrumental, and then Alex started singing it. One by one we integrated him into every song. Then we started writing together, he and I, so you fast-forward 10 years later and we've got a great repertoire that Alex and I do together.

I really prefer working with Alex and doing our vocal material to doing Karizma's or Los Lobotomys' music, because that music is only instrumental. I really feel that with vocals we reach more people and more people are entertained by our set.

Basically, Alex and I do a lot of gigs, and we use Steve whenever we can, because Steve's also a member of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers right now. When Tom's working, Steve's with Tom, so we have substitutes for him, but when Tom's not working then Steve's there, so we're really lucky that Tom's not working! And if you ever get a chance to see Steve with Tom Petty, he plays that gig unbelievably. He's a great drummer for that band. Steve is one of the consummate all-time, great rock'n'roll drummers.

Q: Scores of interesting musicians perform at the Jazz Fest every year. Did you get a chance to meet any during last year's gig?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. I really had never spent that much time with Sergio {Mendes} before that. We hung out in the hotel and in the lounge and we talked, and he's a very nice man. He was very encouraging. It's funny that as I think about it now I've never called him, but he gave me his

number and told me to call him and get together. I guess a whole year went by and I never followed up on that. But it was wonderful meeting Sergio and hanging out with him.

Ivan Lins is an old friend so it was great to see him again. I met some of his band members there for the first time—the saxophone player and guitarist. When we were in Europe later that year we ran into them again, and then we were at Java Jazz Festival together, and we ended up jamming a couple nights together. It really was fantastic to play with those guys. Ever since we met in Syracuse we kind of had a mutual admiration for each other, so it culminated when we finally got to play together at that festival, in Indonesia of all places.

Then, last year, some of the guys that were playing on Saturday night started showing up at the hotel and we ran into them. Dave Weckl is an old friend of mine, and Mike Stern, I think, and we ran into the guys from Chaka Khan's band: They're friends of ours. It's kind of like an old home week when we're there. Some of the guys, like Lenny Castro, myself and Steve Ferrone—we've played with so many people over the years that wherever we go we run into friends and people we've known.

Q: Anyone you hope to bump into at this year's Jazz Fest?

A: First of all, Randy Brecker's band with Bill Evans. I'm really looking forward to seeing them. I love Bill Evans.

Also, Kenny G. His band members are all friends of mine. We used to tour together. Kenny used to open for us when I was with George Benson, and it will be good to see those guys. I haven't seen Kenny's show in quite a while. He was just at the Playboy Jazz Festival {at Los Angeles' Hollywood Bowl on June 14}.

Kenny gets a bad rap from people, because I think people are jealous of his success. I've known him since he was in Jeff Lorber's band {The Jeff Lorber Fusion}. He's a great guy, and a good player. He's done a lot to popularize jazz and instrumental music. I'm looking forward to seeing his band. They're going to go on right after us.

Q: What do you think is in store for the future of jazz?

A: The whole live music and jazz music world has kind of shrunk in some ways due to the fact that some people have gotten older, some people have passed away, styles have changed, technology has changed. However, people like Frank Malfitano, Randy Brecker, Will Lee and the guys in my band, we try to keep it going and it really becomes a labor of love to keep live music and especially jazz music happening. As you look around and you see what else is going on it's Hannah Montana and Keith Urban. You know what I'm saying.