

Chicago Jazz Magazine

www.ChicagoJazz.com
September / October 2009
Vol. 8 No. 5

Nick Eipers' Chicago Sessions

BY RUTH SZE

During last year's jazz fest in Chicago, Nick Eipers introduced a new twist to the idea of subscriptions when he launched his own record label Chicago Sessions.

The concept of the Chicago Sessions record label is simple, find some of Chicago's most creative musicians, have them record original music and distribute the music by subscription to excited jazz fans.

It all sounds like a simple and easy concept but to get an idea and business like this off the ground Eipers has had to dedicate over a year of his life to this project but the music he has helped to create and document it seems is well worth the effort.

Though Eipers had no previous experience running a record label in just a few short months he managed to line-up such artists as Larry Gray, Marshall Vente, Steve Hasimoto, Howard Levy, Paul Wertico, Paulinho Garcia, Pat Malinger and others to record and release new music on his label.

"A lot of people know who I am, but more as a harmonica player than as a jazz composer and pianist," said Howard Levy, one of the artists in the first series of Chicago Sessions. "I think this album will make people more aware of these sides of me. It was a great feeling to record these tunes of mine."

The idea to start a record label and then make it a subscription label dawned on him one day when he was searching for a jazz album to purchase. He realized he often bought recordings from the ECM or Blue Note record labels and even though he may not be familiar with a particular artist he still purchased the music because he trusted the quality and style of those labels. Since he felt as if he was subscribing to ECM and Blue Note because of the quality of the recording why not start a record label that could help promote the talented musicians from Chicago.

Eipers' goal with Chicago Sessions is to bring awareness to the talent of many active jazz artists in Chicago, since he realized that many of them create great music that don't reach large audiences because of the lack of advertisement and promotion. Chicago Sessions enables independent artists to not only create and record original music but by combining all of these recording together on one record label the artists are then adver-

tised to a larger audience by way of print, online and radio.

Of course with such a wide range of talented jazz artists in Chicago, selecting an artist to be on the label can be challenging. Eipers not only relies on his own taste and experience he also consults with an unofficial panel of advisors that offer their suggestions and opinions. Some of the selections were much easier than others. For example the choice of Larry Gray to be the first recording in the series was any easy one. Eipers wanted someone that was creative, had original material and was known the world over. Larry Gray was an obvious choice.

Not only does Eipers handle all of the selection of artists, promotion, marketing and day to day business of running a successful record label he also is an accomplished engineer so he is hands on with all the recording. He coordinates with the artists, sets up the recording schedule and then runs the board and produces the recording. It takes about two to three sessions to record each album, though it may vary depending on the artist. As the producer, Eipers works with the artists in songs and arrangements, but he mostly wants the albums to reflect the artist.

"For series one, each artist was specifically chosen for what they would bring to the label, so my role as producer is generally light," said Eipers. "I want each album to express the artist and their aesthetic, especially since these are their own compositions." Many of the artists who have recorded with Chicago Sessions have praised the way the record label allows them to make their album. "From a leader standpoint, the Chicago Sessions experience was absolutely everything one could ask for from a record company," praised jazz musician Steven Hashimoto. "No interference, no demands other than the expected demands of professionalism and artistic integrity."

Other artists who have recorded albums with Chicago Sessions have also expressed the uniqueness of recording with Eipers' label. Paulinho Garcia has recorded sixteen albums in the U.S., but expressed that his album with Chicago Sessions was different because it consisted of his original compositions, was recorded live in a studio with friends, and was recorded in about ten hours. "Nick gave to all of us in the label a chance to show our music like no one else did," said Garcia appreciatively. "In my case, also the chance to show how great Chicago



Howard Levy recording harmonica for the *Tonight and Tomorrow* CD at Studiomediam. Photo by John Broughton, copyright 2009



Maya Kuper (Studiomediam staff engineer and session assistant) and Nick Eipers, Chicago Session president, producer and engineer. In the background is pianist Dan Trudell. Photo by John Broughton, copyright 2009

musicians are. All the ones who played in my CD did it with no rehearsal and no mistakes, in a truly jazz art form."

Paul Wertico, who has released many previous jazz albums, appreciated Eipers' support and freedom he gave to him and his band. "It's always wonderful to have the opportunity to release new music, and in this case, the music on the CD presents an exciting expansion of some of my previous musical concepts, as well as presenting my great new band," said Wertico.

Howard Levy recalls the recording with Larry Gray and Ernie Adams, when they only had a few hours of rehearsal but ending up playing a lot of spur-of-the-moment tunes. "For *Triosity*, I just started playing with no discussion at all, and what you hear is just what happened between the three of us," recalls Levy.

"This is a very important part of jazz for me—the unspoken communication between musicians where they draw on their life experience, sense of humor, musical vocabulary, tuned in to each with mutual trust."

Though Chicago Sessions was initially a "subscription-only" label, all of the CDs are now available for purchase individually through chicagosessions.com. Eipers hopes that by offering the individual recordings to jazz fans it will help to expose more people to the label and the music it creates. "I hope the jazz enthusiasts of the world continue (and increase) their support of this label and its music," said Eipers. "I have some great ideas for the future, and hope to keep the label going!"

31ST ANNUAL
CHICAGO JAZZ FESTIVAL
PROGRAM INSIDE!