

Obama's theme of hope reflected in jazz

By Howard Reich
TRIBUNE CRITIC

Anyone who has attended jazz concerts in the past year likely has encountered music dedicated to—or inspired by—President-elect Barack Obama.

Last summer's Chicago Jazz Festival premiere of pianist Vijay Iyer's "Far From Over," for instance, represented a high point in the newly emerging Obama-jazz genre.

But the work that will be unveiled in Chicago on Inauguration Day at the Morse Theatre commands particular interest, and not only because it's conceived as an ambitious, 45-minute suite. More important, "Sounds of Hope" is being created by two of this city's more prominent musical conceptualists: percussionist-bandleader Kahil El'Zabar and composer Elbio Barilari.

Any opus with their names on it instantly commands attention from connoisseurs. Moreover, they'll be joined by a large group of noteworthy Chicago musicians, including percussionist Ruben Alvarez, trombonist Jeb Bishop and drummer Ernie Adams.

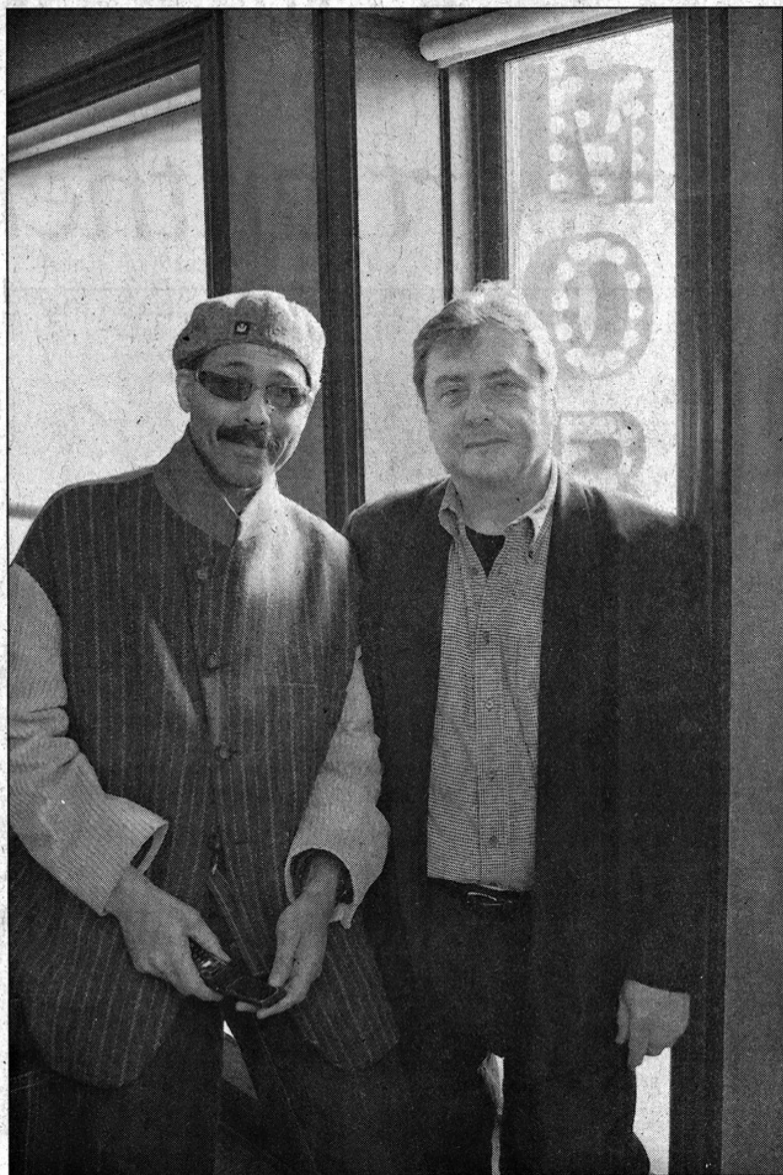
With both El'Zabar and Barilari still at work creating a piece that will be partly composed, partly improvised, it's too early for the artists to offer many details on "Sounds of Hope." But both composers envision their suite as a reflection of one of Obama's central themes—expressed in a distinctly American art form, jazz.

"We're taking this message of hope that Obama is bringing to America, and exploring it in music," says Barilari.

"The idea is that Obama represents something bigger than himself: all of this hope, all of this new energy. ... And we think that jazz represents the core of that energy."

The creative impulse and free improvisation of 21st Century jazz, in other words, aptly captures the spirit of Obama's ascent, say the composers.

But "Sounds of Hope" also picks up on an Obama theme in a more literal way, as well. For in bringing together musicians from various



Kahil El'Zabar (left) and Elbio Barilari's "Sounds of Hope," like many others, is inspired by President-elect Barack Obama.

'Sounds of Hope'

Inauguration Day jazz

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

Where: The Morse Theatre, 1328 W. Morse Ave.

Tickets: Free; 773-654-5100 or themorse.com

sicians] crowd, the beboppers, the white-experimental scene....

"We don't see why we can't bring those people together."

What matters most, of course, is how the final product sounds. El'Zabar and Barilari each are writing two of the four movements, but each composer will contribute to his partner's score.

As of this writing, the composers



Maggie Brown's own repertoire is expansive, but expect classics by her father, the late Oscar Brown Jr., at her Checkerboard Lounge performance Sunday.

looking," says Barilari. "It needs to be something very precise [in sentiment] but not very concrete [in mundane details]."

"Of course, we can't have a text that talks about Obama. The words need to be more open or general."

Perhaps they should consider drawing from some of Obama's oratory—the man clearly knows how to turn a phrase.

Also worth catching:

Frank D'Rone: 9 p.m. Friday and 8 p.m. Saturday at the Green Mill Jazz Club, 4802 N. Broadway; \$12; 773-878-5552. In an era of over-emoting crooners and would-be scat singers, Chicago vocalist D'Rone shows how it's done. If anything, he has become increasingly subtle and sly with the passing years, his phrasing and sense of time well worth savoring. And did we mention that he plays jazz guitar with remarkable facility?

Eliane Elias: 8 p.m. Friday at the Morse Theatre, 1328 W. Morse Ave.; \$35; 773-654-5100 or themorse.com. Appearances by the Brazilian pianist-vocalist have been frustratingly rare, making this a welcome occasion to catch her. That she'll be appearing at the Morse Theatre, a sumptuous new venue that's ideal for acoustic jazz, only adds to the appeal of this show. Expect to hear music from Elias' two recent CDs:

9050. The larger-than-life tenor saxophonist has been appearing in bands led by various Chicago musicians in recent years, but not so often at the front of his own. This time he'll step forward, performing original music in a group staffed by guitarist Jeff Parker, percussionist Dushun Mosley and bassist Brian Smith.

Maggie Brown: 7:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. Sunday at the Checkerboard Lounge, 5201 S. Harper Ct.; \$10; 773-684-1472. Perhaps no singer working today champions the socially conscious music of Oscar Brown Jr., more fervently or persuasively than his daughter Maggie. Though her work spans the jazz repertoire, Oscar Brown classics are likely to figure prominently.

Kurt Rosenwinkel: 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 4 p.m., 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Sunday at the Jazz Showcase, 806 S. Plymouth Ct.; \$20-\$25; 312-360-0234. The guitarist has been on the rise in recent years, on the strength of several critically acclaimed recordings. He'll lead a quartet.

Chuchito Valdes Quartet: 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. Saturday at the Morse Theatre, 1328 W. Morse Ave.; \$25-\$30; 773-654-5100. No, he's not a colossal piano virtuoso on the order of his