



Photos: MARK LUDAK / For the Daily News  
Jazz trumpeter and film scorer Terence Blanchard came in from Harrisburg to record.



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## JAMMIN' AT THE STUDIO

### LOCAL PRODUCER SNAGS NATIONAL JAZZ MUSICIANS TO RECORD BET SHOW HERE

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TOM EMMI stood next to the grand piano inside the Milkboy Recording studio and surveyed the setup.

Lights. Cameras. No action.

It was 4:45 p.m. and Emmi, dressed in black pants and a gray sweat shirt, had a session of BET Jazz's "Studio Jams" to tape. Emmi produces

the show through his company ACE Entertainment. He was 45 minutes behind schedule. But if he was flustered, he didn't show it.

"Just waiting on Bobby," Emmi had said calmly, 35 minutes ago.

"Bobby" is contemporary jazz pianist Bobby Lyle. Rain delayed Lyle's flight from Houston. And once he landed at Philadelphia International Airport, he'd have to plow through Friday afternoon rush-hour traffic to reach the Milkboy Recording studio in Ardmore.

But the other cats were already in the house. Celebrated jazz trumpeter and film scorer Terence Blanchard was chilling in the studio lounge, chowing down a Subway tuna hoagie. With him were members of his band, drummer Kendrick Scott and guitarist Lionel Loueke, who, in an impressive feat of manual dexterity, was eating his sandwich and holding his guitar at the same time.



Lionel Loueke, part of Blanchard's band, is taped for "Studio Jams."

Also floating around were percussionist Edgardo Cintron and bassist Chico Huff, both of the locally based Latin jazz band Cintron.

"Studio Jams" is the brainchild of Emmi, 47, of Narberth, a former Comcast Corp. executive who is a songwriter, music video director - and the 1972 New York state accordion champion.

The concept: Bring together jazz and blues musicians who rarely play with each other, give them two hours to develop three or four songs, record the process and show it on TV.

"It truly is reality television," Emmi said.

Now in its second season, the hourlong show airs three times each Thursday and Sunday on BET Jazz: The Jazz Channel, available in parts of Philadelphia on Time-Warner's Urban CableWorks system.

The first episode aired in July 2003 and featured Tuck Andress, the guitarist from Tuck & Patti, and Joey DeFrancesco, the Hammond B3 organ phenom from Philly.

Other shows have featured Stanley Jordan, Michael Wolff, Rick Braun, Vernon Reid, Will Lee, Jeff Bradshaw and George Shearing.

If Emmi knows a musician is playing in the area or passing through, he contacts them about participating in "Studio Jams." The idea of creating music with new people - some of whom they may idolize - along with

exposure, is incentive enough. The musicians aren't paid, though some travel expenses may be picked up, Emmi said.

"It's a fun thing to do," said Blanchard, who had come in from Harrisburg to record with Lyle. Playing with other musicians on the spur of the moment is challenging, too, Blanchard said. And the trumpeter - who has scored several films for director Spike Lee, been nominated for four Grammys, a Golden Globe, an Emmy and won numerous jazz magazine awards - said he liked being in the background for once.

"As a band leader I don't get a chance to do many side gigs."



House engineer Michael Nuceder checks things from the booth.

Blanchard and company warmed up as they waited for Lyle. It was 5 p.m. Lyle's party had called 30 minutes ago to double-check directions. They should have been at Milkboy by now.

With Blanchard taking the lead, the musicians vamped on a Latin groove. Cintron, the percussionist, was in a small room off the main studio, surrounded by timbales, congas and bar chimes. Huff, the bassist, sat next to Blanchard. Loueke, the guitarist, faced the trumpeter from across the studio a few feet away. To Loueke's right was Scott, the drummer.

The grand piano seat next to Blanchard remained empty. As if not wanting the instrument to go unheard, Blanchard put down his trumpet, sat at the piano and played along with the music.

Lyle arrived at 5:10 p.m. Once he'd settled in, Emmi, who has shot 17 segments of the show, was ready for business.

"Four songs, that would be great," Emmi told the musicians as two cameramen bustled about the studio.

"The process is what we're interested in," Emmi said. "I don't care what you play, just play it well."

The first tune was "Yesterdays" by Jerome Kern. There were no charts, but everybody knew the song. Rather than the usual 4/4 meter, the musicians opted to take it at a more daring 7/4 pace.

Questions cropped up: "How do we get out of it?" "Can I solo in 7?"

They started, stopped. "I'm just trying to figure out where these changes come in."

More discussion about when to change back to 7/4.

"Guys, we have five more minutes of rehearsal on this," Emmi said.

The first take ran more than eight minutes. Blanchard took a blistering solo. Inside the control room, behind a long bank of knobs, dials and buttons, Michael Nuceder, the house engineer, nodded approvingly to assistant engineer Cody Cichowski.

Take two sputtered. The musicians tried again. This time, it was much tighter. Afterward they gathered in the control room and listened to the playback, joking and laughing.



Bassist Chico Huff (left) and percussionist Edgardo Cintron (second from left) of the local Latin jazz group Cintron confer with Blanchard (center) and cameraman Michael Vecheskey.

"It's taken on a life of its own," Lyle said. "Are you guys ready to go on the road?"

At 6:15, work started on the session's second song. First order of business? Pick a song.

Sade's "Sweetest Taboo" was considered, then rejected. The band decided on a Lyle original, "Timbuktu."

"The groove on this . . . remember that tune 'Poinciana'?" Lyle asked, referring to pianist Ahmad Jamal's signature song from the late 1950s. "It's busy, but kind of packed at the same time."

This time, charts were handed out. The band quickly rehearsed and reeled off two takes.



Pianist Bobby Lyle and the other musicians are given two hours to develop three or four songs, then they record the show.

It was 7:15 by the time rehearsal started on a smooth, bossa nova-flavored piece by Blanchard from an upcoming Lee film. But there was a problem. Huff, the bass player, had an 8 p.m. gig in Wilmington, about 45 minutes away.

"I don't want to leave," Huff said.

The cameras rolled. Huff stayed, unleashing a dazzling solo.

"It's a testimony to certain level of musicianship in the band to take it and make it happen," Lyle said afterward as Blanchard and company packed their gear.

"It's a jam session," he said, "with organization." \*

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