

Following Shirley's excellent jazz adventure

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*The eagle flies on Friday,
Saturday, I go out to play.*

—“Stormy Monday,”
T Bone Walker

The small group live jazz experience. Lancaster has it.

Strawberry Hill and the irrepressible Dennis Kerek start off each week with the Clyde Lucas power trio, Sundays from 8 p.m. to midnight. The Pressroom offers acoustic piano groups Wednesdays and Thursdays, 7-10 p.m., thanks to manager Larry Hershey's interest and support. Cherry Jubilee's open mic Wednesday night jazz jams feature bartender Judy Hill's thousand-watt smile and double-quick service, 8 p.m. to midnight. The Greenery Restaurant at Boscov's has Saturday afternoon jazz duos from 1-3 p.m. for ladies who lunch. And Joe Sutton keeps the By George Tavern at the Historic Strasburg Inn stocked with guitar and piano combos

Thursdays 7-9 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays 8:30-11:30 p.m. and for

Sunday brunch, 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

But for the last four years, Lancaster's prime jazz party on late Friday and Saturday evenings has been Shirley Fultineer's upstairs lounge at the Belvedere Inn. Shirley's Lounge is like camp to serious jazz listeners: This former party mansion of local tobacco growers from the 1870s has evolved from its recent incarnation as the Harmony Inn into one of the city's busiest upscale restaurants, with two bars, a heated balcony and comfortable volume levels of music throughout most of the upstairs.

Louise Baldwin books the bands and is also part of a team of bartenders that includes her husband, Patrick. The customers, and especially the musicians, respect and love Louise. She has the unenviable job of booking about 20 worthy bands into eight weekend slots, and endures getting politely besieged by too many requests for work from an additional talent pool of jazz musicians—some traveling from counties that have few public playing venues.

RED ROSE JAZZ

Tonight, Lancaster's prodigal son, pianist Fred Hughes, brings his trio back to the Belvedere for a replay following Labor Day's great comeback show. Hughes had not played here for years, having moved to the Baltimore area, and has developed into a nationally known jazz educator and performer. He generates the kind of powerhouse volume from an acoustic piano that can surprise even experienced jazz listeners.

Longtime jazz writer Ben Ratliff once described the legendary McCoy Tyner's playing like this: "He can be considered the living mainline of jazz, definer of modern harmony... the music's deepest colorist, and he conjures up a great thunderous ring from his piano."

The latter part of that description fits Hughes perfectly.

Hughes has a profoundly collaborative relationship with his two

bandmates, bassist Thomas Williams and outstanding drummer Frank Russo. For all the outrageous volume and finger speed he generates, the pianist does not quite dominate the band's long sets. Russo himself plays with Roman-candle intensity, and the emotively stoked repertoire stays on track through the bass player's carefully cooled pulse. Anyone interested in finding out what top-level jazz sounds like should stop by the Belvedere tonight between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m. to hear this trio.

The best of some upcoming performances at Shirley's Lounge might be a month from now on Friday, Nov. 1: A CD release gig by the Dave Wilson Quartet featuring a glimpse of four of the most progressive and least heard local players. Wilson on saxophones will be joined by Steve Meashey on bass, Jeff Stabiley on drums and a return to late evening live music by the much missed Kirk Reese on piano.

Recent individual musical highlights at the humorously named

Crazy Shirley's Lounge have included vocalist Marion "Coco" Coleman's foray into hip hop, Harrisburg guitarist Scott Nelson's jazz-rock explorations with the Chris Santiago Trio, and an appearance by Compound, an easy-going acid-jazz group from York.

The virtues of many of these local jazz cats can be summed up by briefly profiling Robin Church, an amiable local trumpet player who appeared at the Belvedere last Friday with the Tom Pontz Quartet. Church is not a burning virtuoso, but he offers something just as good—a simple, pitch-perfect tone, often plunger muted, without fancy harmonic revisionism or acrobatics. He gives you an honest night's work—three hours of cool, swinging background music, so you can enjoy a restorative evening out with friends.

Give Louise Baldwin credit for booking these fantastic musicians.

The Belvedere Inn is located at 401 N. Queen Street, Lancaster, and like all local jazz venues, has no cover charge.