

# music

## RISING STARR RETURNS HOME

BY BRUCE EATON

For any jazz musician west of the Hudson River (or, for that matter, the Ganges) the spectre of New York City looms large. Sinatra was surely right: *If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere*, and the tune is no different for aspiring jazz musicians: if you want to truly make it in the jazz world, you've got to prove yourself in the Big Apple. No matter how big you are in your home town, or even your country, all roads in the jazz world ultimately lead to Manhattan.

One local musician who heard the siren call from the concrete canyons is Kenmore native Eric Starr. A fixture on the area music scene for over a decade, the thirty-two-year-old drummer and composer packed up and headed down the Thruway four years ago. In December, Starr

returns for a performance that is both a celebration and a progress report. With an acclaimed recording in hand, and a top-notch band featuring world-renowned players, by all accounts the headline of the current Starr report should read "Going strong." Buffalonians can hear for themselves on when The Eric Starr Group makes its first appearance at the new Tralf.

Recorded in New York, London, and Buffalo, Starr's first disc *She* showcases a trans-global blend of Brazilian and straight-ahead jazz, with nods to the genre-bending influences of Sting and Pat Metheny. Two names leap right out from the credits. The first is Dominic Miller, long-time

guitarist with Sting. "I was thinking outside the box," Starr relates. "Dominic is originally from Argentina. I thought his style would be perfect for what I wanted to do."

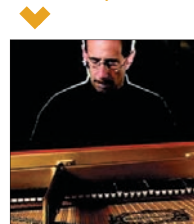
How did an unknown American musician get a big-time English-based

player into the studio? Starr travelled to London, tracked down Miller at a gig at the Pizza Express, and introduced himself. Miller liked what he heard and signed on, joining the English saxophonist Iain Bellamy, most noted for his work with Bill Bruford's Earthworks and Gil Evans. Why import a saxophonist when there's seemingly a great one on every other street corner in New York? "Iain is one of my two favorite players in the world. I grew up listening to his music," Starr explains. Listeners will undoubtedly understand his reverence as Bellamy will be with the Starr band at the Tralf, along with noted jazz pia-

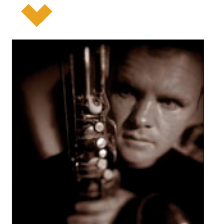


THE ERIC STARR BAND PERFORMS AT THE TRALF ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18TH AT 8 P.M. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL THE TRALF BOX OFFICE AT 716-854-3068.

Pianist Andy LaVerne.



Saxophonist Iain Bellamy.



nist Andy LaVerne.

One of Eric Starr's key collaborators is already well known to area music fans: his older brother, vocalist Nelson Starr. Perhaps best known for his work with the popular nineties rock group The Tails (Eric was the drummer), Nelson's vocals are absolutely essential to the sound of *She*. Laid-back and romantic, he steers clear of the lounge mannerisms that plague too much jazz vocal work today, breathing a worldly sincerity into the compositions and playing perfectly off Bellamy's solos. Nelson also contributed to the stellar production of *She*, which flat-out sounds like a major label project.

The creation of *She* has served several purposes for Eric: "It's a way to get my music heard, to make a statement, and, in the process, bring out my musical voice." Growing up in a musical family (his father, Nelson Sr., played trumpet with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra and contributed a solo to *She*), Starr listened to hard bop and Latin jazz as a youngster and eventually studied with Joe Morello, the longtime member of the Dave Brubeck Quartet who propelled the group's classic recordings, including *Take Five*. By his mid-teens, Starr was playing professionally in a myriad of settings that would eventually include the Buffalo Philharmonic and combos with local jazz legends Sam Noto and Don Menza. By the time he moved to New York, "I had done everything musically in Buffalo I had ever dreamed about," Starr confesses.

Paying the rent in New York is the first challenge of any musician. While his wife Katherine works as a physical therapist, Starr freelances at projects ranging from a rock-influenced group led by Ezra Reich, son of the modern composer Steve Reich, and trio work with pianist David Budway (who plays with violinist Regina Carter). He's also put his knowledge into print, authoring *The Everything Drums Book* (Adams Media). Along the way, Starr has been gathering notice for his own work: his group kicked off the release *She* by selling out a concert at the renowned Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse at Lincoln Center last February.

We've all heard the one about the local musician who heads off to New York, Nashville, or Los Angeles brimming with optimism and then quietly retreats to his hometown, dreams unfulfilled. Starr's brief return is something different: proof that his musical journey has many miles to go.

BRUCE EATON IS A JAZZ PROGRAMMER AND CRITIC LIVING IN BUFFALO.

Vocalist Nelson Starr.



Bassist Nori Shiota.



## WORKING IT

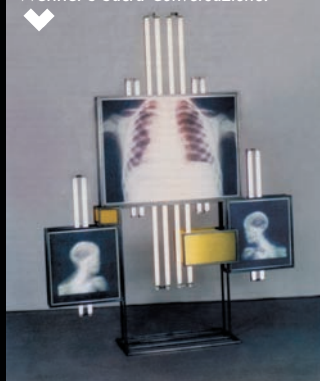
BY ELIZABETH LICATA

The name might not be sexy, but the work is seductive, tactile, and mysterious. *In the Workspace*, at CEPA through December 17, features an extremely diverse group of artworks made by artists who have had residencies in New York State's distinguished artist workspaces.

Artist workspaces have traditionally been incubators for new projects, work that an artist might not otherwise think of making, or be able to make without technical help. Artists spend time in places like Dieu Donne Papermill to see if their concepts can be realized through the art of handmade paper. Women's Studio Workshop has always encouraged artists to explore the concept of the artist's book (as well as other media). Harvestworks specializes in electronic media. And Sculpture Space—well, the name gives it away.

**SCULPTURE SPACE—WITH ITS LARGE, ECHOING STUDIO EQUIPPED WITH FORGES, TRIP HAMMERS, SAND BLASTERS, AND OTHER HEAVY METAL ACCOUTREMENT—IS NOW FINDING THAT VISITING SCULPTORS ARE JUST AS LIKELY TO BE KNITTING AS WELDING.**

Wegner's *Sacra Conversazione*.



Intriguingly, however, Sculpture Space, the Utica, N.Y.-based workspace, with its large, echoing studio equipped with forges, trip hammers, sand blasters, and other heavy metal accoutrement—perfect for putting together huge monoliths of steel—is now finding that visiting sculptors are just as likely to be knitting as welding. Recent residencies have included sculptors who garden, sculptors who photograph, sculptors who perform. Sculpture can be anything now, as artist Rainer Maria Wegner demonstrates in the work from his Sculpture Space residency now up at CEPA.



Abraham.

Wegner's constructions are based on x-rays of his own skeletal structure, handsomely mounted in steel display boxes. These are not monoliths: they are human-scaled, filled with delicate, glowing forms, testaments to vulnerability and mortality. Knowledge of the personal history behind these images adds to their emotional resonance. Wegner is a child of post-war Germany whose unhappy mother left him outside in the rain in his carriage. One of the central x-rays in the exhibition is of Rehner's chest at seventeen months, taken

during the resulting attack of pneumonia. But it doesn't take even this much knowledge to automatically think of sickness and death when viewing x-rays, and, in this case, placement in an industrial steel framework with exposed florescent lights adds to their disturbing power. The steel structures were constructed at Sculpture Space. The x-ray transparencies were fabricated at Lightworks, a nearby artist workspace that has long fostered innovation in photography.

*In the Workspace*, along with Carolee Schneeman's *Eye Body*, is on view at CEPA Gallery, 617 Main St. through Dec. 17. Call 856-2717 or visit [www.cepagallery.com](http://www.cepagallery.com).