

# DRUM



Angela Gal/The Item

# MAJOR

Lewis Nash of Spring Valley keeps the beat alive and all that jazz

Ted Panken  
For The Journal News

**“W**hen you are rooted, you don't have to be afraid of trying new things,” says drummer Lewis Nash. “Sometimes a little craziness is necessary to break through.”

Nash, who lives in Spring Valley, and an all-star quartet will embody that principle tomorrow through Sunday at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola in Manhattan in a tribute to a pair of late jazz giants — pianist Tommy Flanagan, his employer from 1990 to 2000, and vibraphonist Milt Jackson. The drummer himself embodies the ti-

tle of his 1988 album, “Rhythm Is My Business.”

His style is built on precise technique, unwavering musicality, spot-on time and an in-the-moment imagination that allows him to riff spontaneously on his encyclopedic array of drum vocabulary.

As drummer Andrew Cyrille describes it, Nash is know for “dotting all the i's, crossing all the t's, and coming up with some great inventions in the traditional style of jazz.” He has no peer among his generation at articulating and weaving together rhythmic designs with a clarity and flow that gives listeners the illusion of melody.

Those qualities make Nash an A-list freelancer, both in the studio and on the

bandstand. His 300-plus album resume includes 2004 Grammy-winners by pianist McCoy Tyner (“Illuminations”) and singer Nancy Wilson (“R.S.V.P.”).

Since 1998, he's led groups of New York's finest hardcore jazzfolk on an occasional basis, and has recorded two Japanese-market CDs, “It Don't Mean a Thing” and “Stompin' At The Savoy,” with bassist Peter Washington, his long-time partner in Flanagan's trio, and vibraphonist Steve Nelson, with whom Nash has performed since the early '80s.

Both men will join Nash for the Dizzy's Club gig, along with pianist Renee Rosnes, another bandstand companion of long standing.

“We're not supposed to just stay where

Tommy and Milt were,” says Nash from his home. Just back from a week-long New Year's engagement in Orvieto, Italy, he's preparing for a three-day jaunt to Uruguay with pianist-composer Cedar Walton.

“They gave us a carpet and said, ‘Okay, we're giving you these tools; now what are you guys going to do with them?’”

Billed as the “jazz poet” during his decade with Nash and Washington, Flanagan, who died in 2001, blended elegant refinement with soulful, down-to-earth spontaneity. His touch was singular, his lines long and smooth, his phrasing mercurial and highly syncopated.

“Renee can't approach this music as

Please see DRUM, 2D

# Beating the drums for jazz

DRUM, from 1D

though she were playing the role of Tommy Flanagan in a film," Nash.

"She doesn't have to get into his character, so to speak. She can be herself in terms of *what* she plays, the ideas themselves, whereas the *how* — how she touches the piano and chooses voicings and chords — will probably be heavily influenced by the way Tommy did it.

It was Flanagan's custom to choose an evening's music from his vast well of songs on the spur of the moment, often uncorking long, abstract introductions to keep his young partners on their toes.

"I wish!" Nash laughs, asked if the sets this week will reflect Flanagan's stream-of-consciousness procedure. "But everything depends on how daring you want to be.

"In any musical situation, certain parameters exist, and they force you to get the most out of the least. Within those parameters, you try to be as creative as possible, and not limit yourself to

think in terms of 'this is how this kind of music is supposed to be played.' You jump in with your experience, energy, and focus, and let your ears dictate. All options remain on the table.

**"You have to be true to the spirit of jazz and its lifeblood, without feeling like the innovations of the masters are a ball and chain."**

Lewis Nash

"... Sound can cross genres and styles. It's just a sound. It's your job to figure out how to use that sound tastefully and in context. The more things you've done, the more you'll be able to interject something fresh and creative."

Nash's rhythmic vocabulary includes hardcore standard-setters like Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, Roy Haynes and Philly Joe Jones, abstractionists like Andrew Cyrille and Jerome Cooper, dance-infused grooves from James Brown-style funk to drum-bass and patterns drawn from the African diaspora.

"It's more about trying to recapture the spirit of a particular player than to play something they played," Nash says. "You have to be true to the spirit of jazz and its lifeblood, without feeling like the innovations of the masters are a ball and chain.

"Even when I play swinging, straight-ahead music, I try to in-

terject the energy and swagger of funky rhythms — although when you play the rhythms of R&B and hip-hop on a drumset tuned for playing jazz, the sound is not the same.

"But it's important to be well-versed in these and various world rhythms in order to keep freshness and authenticity in the things you're trying to do. There always has to be a certain sense of freedom."

## If you go ...

**What:** Remembering Tommy Flanagan & Milt Jackson, featuring the Lewis Nash Quartet.

**When:** Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, 7:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. with an additional 11: p.m. show Friday and Saturday. Doors open at 6 p.m. for the 7:30 p.m. set, 9 p.m. for the 9:30 p.m. set.

**Where:** Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola is on the fifth floor of the Time Warner Center at Broadway and 60th Street, Manhattan.

**Reservations:** 212-258-9595.

**Plus:** Down the hall from Dizzy's, at the Rose Theater, a celebration of the jazz culture of Detroit Thursday, Friday and Saturday will feature the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with such Motor City-bred icons as Ron Carter, Yusef Lateef, Gerald Wilson and Charles McPherson.

**Information:** [www.jalc.org](http://www.jalc.org)