

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

New Noise and Sings Like Hell

S.B. Events and Series that Seriously Rock

By Josef Woodard

L.A. LOGBOOK: While the state of jazz concerts in Santa Barbara is slim pickings this season (apart from the Jazz at the Lobero series), local jazz fans and addicts (there is a difference) can appreciate the advantage of living within driving distance of the big city to the south. We wouldn't want to live there, but L.A. sure is chock-full of cultural enticements. Take, for instance, two of the more important "jazz" events of the SoCal year, the return of Keith Jarrett, in trio mode at Royce Hall last week, and a three-night world premiere opus by one of L.A.'s few world-class jazz residents, Wadada Leo Smith, downtown and downstairs at the Disney Hall's REDCAT black-box theater.

Jarrett's trio delivered a surprisingly down-the-middle set list, framed by "Green Dolphin Street" and "I Thought About You," but with the usual richness, virtuosity, and subtle exploratory zeal. Jarrett once again showed why he's our greatest living jazz pianist. From the "perchance to dream" department: Could Jarrett one day head up the highway a bit and play the Granada Theatre, in either trio or solo mode? Hope springs eternal. Meanwhile, we can savor his L.A. jaunts and unstoppable discography, just expanded with a strong two-disc solo set, *Rio*, recorded only last April in Brazil.

Quite simply, Smith's courageously ambitious, five-hour and 21-movement "Ten Freedom Summers," which had its three-night world premiere at REDCAT last weekend, is a landmark cultural event this season, on whatever coast. This is Smith's grandest effort yet, a broad canvas dealing with the Civil Rights movement, but in poeticized musical terms, and for both jazz and "classical" forces (his Golden Quartet, with Anthony Davis, John Lindberg, and Susie Ibarra, and Southwest Chamber Music), a difficult blend to succeed at. But he has managed the feat, idealistically and brilliantly.