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MAKOTO OZONE

BY KEN DRYDEN

Rich Big Band for the first time. Also, I loved the music of Henry Mancini. I met Henry about six months before he passed away. He loved the tango that Burton and I played as a duet.

TNYCJR: Who were some of your mentors in Japan and how did they inspire you?

MO: My most important mentor was Tadao Kitano. He was my teacher since I was in the seventh grade. He had a big band called Arrow Jazz Orchestra. He passed away a few years ago, but the band is still going strong in the Osaka [Western Japan] area. He was one of the most advanced arrangers and composers. He never stopped studying and checking out some new music until the time he couldn't play any more.

The lessons were so cool. We were supposed to do our lesson at Yamaha studios, but we always met at

someone knocked on the door and asked me to come play piano in the ensemble room. When I got down there, there were about 10 black kids getting ready to play. I was the only non-black. I got so excited to play with real black musicians for the first time. When I started to play—we played “I’ll Remember April”—I was almost in tears as this band was swinging so hard and sounding so powerful. My whole body got filled with joy in two bars. It was Marvin “Smitty” Smith on drums, Donald Harrison on alto, Branford Marsalis on tenor and Wallace Roney on trumpet. There also was Terri Lyne Carrington, Jeff “Tain” Watts, Walter Beasley and more. That’s when I first got the

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