

# JD Walter at Jazzway

Late in March, the folks who live on the hill (Howard Katz and Marianne Matheny-Katz) brought the talented, innovative JD Walter Quartet to Jazzway 6004. The group, with JD Walter on distinctive vocals, Jim Ridl on piano, Boris Kozlov, playing electric six-string bass, and the fabulous Ari Hoenig on drums, treated the audience to an extensive set of imaginative improvisations.

The group's upbeat version of "Bye Bye Blackbird" began with Walter dueling with Hoenig, then yielding the floor to the man on the traps, who delivered a scintillating solo. Gina's favorite number of the evening was the romantic ballad "I Was Telling Her about You," which spotlighted Walter's sonorous timbre, remarkable control of pitch and vibrato, and compelling way with a lyric. The audience was spellbound by Walter's dramatic singing and Ridl's piano artistry.

The "sidemen" are stars in their own right: Kozlov recently won a Grammy for his recording with the Mingus Big Band (which he leads); Ridl works regularly with Dave Liebman and Randy Brecker, among many others; and Hoenig is among the most sought-after young drummers on the scene.

But the star of the show was clearly Walter, who despite his immense talent and magnetic presence, remains little known. His command of standards---and his ability to re-make them in his image---is impressive enough; but he is also an accomplished composer, and he offered the audience several examples of his work that night---to marvelous effect. Speaking of effects: Walter's mastery of vocal effects is perhaps his most impressive and unusual ability. At first I wondered why he paid so much attention to his echo and reverb, and questioned why he didn't dare to go "naked," as it were, in this small room. But my questions vanished when, as an



PHOTO BY NANCY GRABOSKI

**Grammy winner Boris Kozlov trades riffs with JD Walter at Jazzway 6004 on March 26th.**

encore, Walter launched an unaccompanied solo, layering and layering his voice again and again into a dazzling improvised symphony. The JD Walter Choir blew the room away! Then I understood that his loopers and phasers didn't subtract from his performance, but only multiplied its power.

The concert provided ample reason why, in the March issue of *JazzTimes*, renowned jazz vocalist Kurt Elling named Walter as one of his favorite singers. I dare say most of the audience left the concert feeling the same way.

Kudos to Marianne and Howard for supporting the art form and opening their home to the jazz patrons of Baltimore.

— Gina, with Mark Osteen