

Valentine's Day is approaching. Love and the scent of chocolate is in the air.

On Friday, February 7th, the Kalispell Downtown Association is hosting their 3rd annual Chocolat Affaire starting with a chocolate walk from 5 to 7pm with various downtown businesses opening their doors to say thank you with chocolate. To continue the festivities, from 7 - 10pm there will be romantic dance music at The Red Lion Hotel with The Cocoanuts. The Cocoanuts are legendary pianist Billy Wallace (piano), Jay Thomas (sax and trumpet), Chuck Kistler (bass), Neil Batterson (drums) and Miriam Singer (vocals).

Denver pianist **Billy Wallace (piano)** got his extraordinary chops during the vibrant years of jazz in Chicago and on 52nd Street in New York. In Chicago, Billy played and recorded with artists such as Illinois Jacquet, Von Freeman, Billy Mitchell and Charlie Parker (Parker's last night in Chicago). In New York, Billy worked with Clifford Brown and with Max Roach (recording the exceptional "In 3/4 Time"). He accompanied singers such as Carmen McRae, Anita O'Day, Johnny Hartman, Arthur Prysock and Lou Rawls. Billy Wallace has toured Europe and Japan, and enriched the jazz scenes in Seattle, Las Vegas and now Denver. He is a gifted jazz pianist utilizing unique beautiful harmonies and a vast repertoire.

Chuck Kistler (bass), a graduate of the Berklee College of Music, appears regularly with many leading northwest groups. He has accompanied Eartha Kitt, Petula Clark, Ernie Watts and Kurt Elling. He played bass with Diane Schuur's band at the Whitefish Performing Arts Center in March, 2013. Seattle Jazz bassist Chuck Kistler has shared the stage with Eric Alexander, Ernie Watts and Kurt Elling.

Jay Thomas (sax, trumpet, flute) "He's a very melodic player in the tradition of Chet Baker and Zoot Sims. He likes to 'sing a song'," Jim Wilke, KPLU Jazz Northwest. When Jay was a senior in high school, he received a Down Beat scholarship to the Berklee School of Music. From Boston he moved to NYC in the late 60's and spent the 70's in the San Francisco area. When he returned to Seattle in 1980, his father Marv had bought Parnell's jazz club where where Jay got to hear Ornette Coleman, work with Cedar Walton and sit in with Zoot Sims, Sonny Stitt and Chet Baker.

Like his mentor, the legendary Floyd Standifer, Jay Thomas enjoys the rare talent of being equally skilled on the trumpet and the tenor saxophone. Jay also plays the alto and soprano saxophones, flugelhorn and flute.

In his own words, "I try to play pretty, yes. It's a balance between having some fire and also some beauty behind it. My outlook is that there's too much 'loud' in this world. I like 'soft.' It's very sexy and sensual."

Miriam Singer (vocals) is the singer of Singer & Simpson, though John sings too. Like her namesake in the torah, Miriam leads the women in song. She studied voice for many years with a vocal guardian angel Merry Kimball who also taught *Smash* star Meghan Hilty. Miriam has worked with Jay Thomas, Billy Wallace, Doug Montgomery and Floyd Standifer.

Neil Batterson (*drums*) plays percussion and drums with Cocinando Latin Jazz Orchestra and Nova Combo. He is a former Jazz Radio show host for WPKN in Bridgeport, Connecticut.