A trio of skillful female photographers who specialize in shooting jazz artists hold exhibit at Baruch College

Enid Farber, Fran Kaufman and Lena Adasheva share their work as part of the college's Milt Hinton Jazz Perspectives series

By Greg Thomas - NEW YORK DAILY NEWS (November 12, 2012)

Jazz photography makes music — the art of the invisible — clear for all to see. A current exhibit at Baruch College, featuring the work of three notable female photographers, brings to life the lives and artistry of today’s jazz musicians.

The exhibit, which runs through Dec. 12, is a component of the college’s annual Milt Hinton Jazz Perspectives concert series. The composer and pianist Dr. Eugene Marlow is the senior co-chair of the series.

“It’s our 21st season. Every year we come up with a central theme,” Marlow says. “This year, I thought it would be appropriate to focus on Women in Jazz. That’s why the whole season, with three concerts and one exhibit, has this focus.” (In December, the pianist Renee Rosnes and drummer Cindy Blackman will have concerts.)

“Through the curator, Dr. Sandra Kraskin, who runs the Mishkin Gallery, I invited the three New York-based photographers: Enid Farber, Fran Kaufman, and Lena Adasheva.”

Best known as one of the most beloved and respected bassists in jazz history, the late Milt Hinton was also a master photographer. When asked about influences, each photographer mentions Hinton’s name.
Kaufman and Adasheva also look to legendary jazz photographers Herman Leonard and William Gottlieb, among others. Farber spotlights the work of iconic music photographer Jim Marshall and Henri Cartier-Bresson, the father of photojournalism.

Farber has been shooting professionally for over 30 years. Her work encompasses images of jazz, reggae and African musicians, and adheres to a key tenet of Cartier-Bresson’s: the decisive moment. “I’m not conceptual like Annie Leibovitz. I am primarily a reactionary photojournalist,” she explains. “I love and cherish that decisive moment.”

To get the just-right instance, “I’m absorbing what’s going on, the atmosphere visually, with senses heightened, observing so intently. Then you feel in your bones that split micro-second when you push that trigger.

“It’s that moment that’s got its DNA imprinted on it and won’t be repeated again,” says Farber.

Her shot of Nancy Wilson in the exhibit is an example. “She won’t have on that dress, shaking hands with the audience, with those people behind her, again. That’s when those elements come together and make a photo unique.”

Kaufman’s been a jazz fan since her teens. She “started going out to jazz clubs practically every night and would take my camera with me,” after transitioning from a corporate job 15 years ago. “I’d give photographs to jazz musicians and get to know them. It evolved. When you really love something you find your way into it,” says Kaufman.

She works mainly in black and white because it “leaves more to the viewer’s creativity.” Kaufman takes performance shots, but her “real preference is photographs made behind the scenes. I love to understand how things get made, how people work, and how people live.”

Kaufman’s behind-the-scenes images have been featured for over five years in the monthly jazz publication Hot House, where she’s a contributing photographer.

“If I had to choose between a concert where everyone looks gorgeous, with their makeup on, and their best clothes, or a sound check where people are in their blue jeans and leggings, I’ll take the sound check or the recording session.”

Her exhibit photograph of saxophonist Joe Lovano and vocalists Natalie Cole and Lizz Wright at the rehearsal of the 2011 WBGO Champions of Jazz Benefit is a model illustration.

“I’m very honored to be a part of this exhibition, with such established photographers as Fran Kaufman and Enid Farber,” says Adasheva, 31. She started taking pictures of musicians as a student in Moscow.

“After a few years of shooting rock and pop concerts,” she says, “I felt like there were certain programs and patterns that people followed on the stage. But in jazz you never know what was going to happen. The musicians are talking to you, and giving you a part of themselves, right now. It is really ‘life music.’ This is what attracted me so much.”

Her style goes beyond documentation to show what’s special about a musician, and what she feels about their music visually. For instance, when she took a dramatic photo of pianist Vijay Iyer, the flow of light represented inspiration, whereas the overall composition, in an empty hall, symbolized the lone journey of the artist.

Her award-winning shot of trumpeter Tom Harrell “expressed for me his life and what he was going through,” recalls Adasheva. “This curtain that was so big when compared to him; it was kind of pressing him down. That was like the trouble he was going through to express his music.”

YOU SHOULD KNOW
Women in Jazz: Photographs by Lena Adasheva, Enid Farber and Fran Kaufman
Gallery hours: Tues., Wed., Fri.: noon to 5 p.m.; Thur.: noon to 7 p.m.