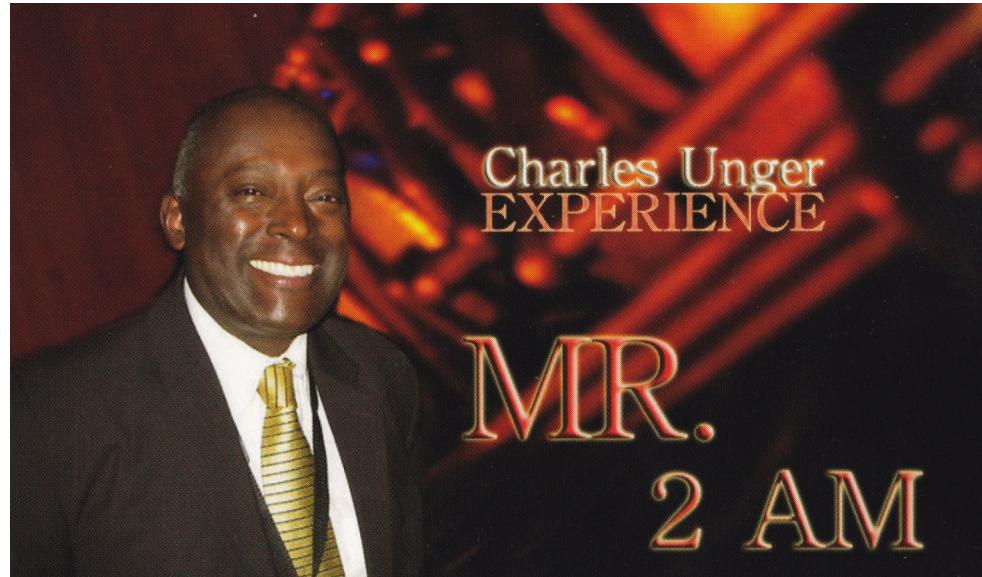


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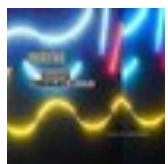
Mr 2 AM



Around the World



Paris Calling



*Wayne Bang
Chocolate Trills*

San Francisco Jazz Legend saxophonist, band leader, composer and painter

A major force in the music scene of the San Francisco Bay area for the last 40 years, saxophonist Charles Unger is a musical institution. He is known for his exuberant style and talent, and for a stage show that is unforgettable.

A regular performer at various San Francisco clubs, Charles is an innovator in the genres of Jazz, R&B and World Beat. Charles, who plays alto, tenor and soprano Saxophones, was deeply influenced by the seminal works of artists such as Coleman Hawkins, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Grover Washington, Kenny Garrett and Lester Young, but has also drawn on a lifetime of experience playing with top level musicians the world over. Charles brings an undeniable sense of joy to his performances, with a smile that welcomes even the most recalcitrant listeners to the party, then proceeds to open up avenues of music that are enjoyable for the uninitiated and the aficionado alike.

In San Francisco, Charles plays every Wednesday and Friday evening at Les Joulins Jazz Bistro (where he has performed for 17 years), leading a jazz band that includes his wife Valencia on vocals on Friday evenings. He also performs every Sunday evening at Rasselas and the first Saturday of each month at the Sheba Lounge.

Charles Unger is a great player who loves what he is doing. Music for him is a spiritual mission and a quest for a kind of secular redemption that he has pursued since he was a child — one that sustains him and has brought him a wealth of knowledge and experience.

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Countless jam sessions over the years have provided Charles with a wealth of many artist and musician friends of various disciplines, and hundreds of songs that influence the way he approaches life and people. He has worked and toured with many of the Bay Area's top performing artists and musicians, literally learning on the spot what works and what doesn't. He has played and opened for major artists such as Pete Escovedo, Stix Hooper, Louis Madison, Maxine Howard and Richard Howell.

On requests for private events, Charles puts together a wide range of bands – be it Jazz, World Beat, Blues or Dance with R&B, Funk and/or Motown.

In July 2011, Charles toured Europe for the first time since 2005, performing in Sweden, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Paris and the South of France. A month earlier, he released his fourth album, *Mr. 2 AM*. A colorful set of jazz, World Beat and R&B, the album features the Charles Unger Experience with the leader stretching out on tenor, alto and soprano. “*Mr. 2 AM* was in the works for several years,” recalls Charles. “It is very much a labor of love. Keyboardist Sam Peoples and I have been playing together for more than 20 years. He was a major help with this recording, and both bassist/guitarist Jon Reppetto and bassist Tony Saunders were very giving of their time and effort too.” Also featured on the date is drummer Andy Marchetti and pianist Eugene Pliner.

Mr. 2AM has the group performing 11 of Charles Unger's originals, including two versions (one live and one in the studio) of the title cut. The music is bluesy, at times funky, atmospheric and infectious. Whether it is the modern blues “San Francisco After Dark,” the danceable “Sometimes It Doesn't Rain,” the picturesque “Magic Dancer,” or the catchy “Place Pigalle,” *Mr. 2 AM* contains accessible music that puts the spotlight on the musical talents of Charles Unger.

Charles Unger is a man of the world. “On my father's side, we are an Afro-German mixture of people, Afro-Jewish mixture. My first influence was my father. Charles' father, who is 86, was a songwriter and vocalist. “He loves all of the old cats like Nat King Cole, the big bands and the standards of the 1930s and '40s. He is also a big Billy Eckstine fan. He played all kinds of music and always recognized his European heritage. I've never wanted to be pigeon-holed in any one thing.”

Born in Montgomery, Alabama to a military family that moved often, Charles grew up in Riverside, California from the age of 7. “It was part of the great migration out of the south,” Charles says. “My family migrated north to Chicago. My immediate family was one of the few branches that wound up coming west.”

Since grade school, Charles was exposed to a lot of different kinds of music. “Riverside was quite a musical neighborhood when I was growing up with street festivals, juke joints, and lots of trios. I heard my next door neighbor, Stan White, play Hammond B-3 organ often.” Charles started off on clarinet in fourth grade. But the first time he heard an R&B honking tenor sax being played live, “it was love at first sound.” He switched to sax in seventh grade and played with Lloyd Mummert, one of the premier music teachers in Southern California. Charles played in the high school marching band, and gained experience performing at parties. “My first real musical jobs were blues gigs with Freddie Howard, playing straight ahead 12-bar blues all night long - Muddy Waters, Albert King and Howlin' Wolf.”

After graduating from high school in 1970, Charles moved to San Francisco. He attended City College, San Francisco State and the Dick Grove School of Music where he took courses in arranging and composing. Charles joined David Hardeman's big band, worked with the Magic Colors Band for a couple years, and freelanced. In the mid-1970s, he formed a group called Pizzazz, playing R&B and funk. In 1979, Pizzazz became the Charles Unger Experience. He has used that name for his bands ever since. His first recording as a leader was 1985's *Paris Calling*, which features his wife Valencia on vocals. More recently, he recorded *Around The World*, a contemporary and funky R&B set. “It's a hybrid of some of the kinds of music I enjoy playing, sometimes using Caribbean or African rhythms. I love playing music that is highly rhythmic.”

Charles has spiritual views on music: “I look at music as a catalyst for bringing different people together and breaking down barriers that separate us from our oneness and our humanity. I try to put that into my music as a way of relating that we all share this beautiful planet together and that we are all on the same road, are all the same people, and are all family. If I can break down barriers through music, then I will have fulfilled my destiny.”

The saxophonist loves living in San Francisco. “A lot of great musicians come to San Francisco, some staying for a long period of time. It's a wonderful place to live.” He is involved in putting together a youth orchestra that gives underprivileged kids the opportunity to play jazz, and he is a painter and an artist in his spare time.

With the release of *Mr. 2 AM*, it is a sure bet that Charles Unger's reputation as a powerful saxophonist will be spreading far beyond San Francisco.

What people say about Charles Unger Experience



"As a listener, I love it when I can see the passion in the music, even with my eyes closed. Few players can emote through their instrument as well as Charles."

"As a musician, I crave the experience of watching players who care enough and dare enough to make each song a special event. Charles and his band never fail to add extra value to every piece."

**Bert Brown, sound engineer at the White Horse, Black Mountain, NC,
where Charles played in July and December 2010**

I was immediately struck by the intonation of the tenor sax and the ease with which Unger and his band, The Experience, moved through Carlos Santana's "Europa." Since then I have seen them at both Sheba and Rasselas. Every time, it's been a thoroughly enjoyable experience. With jazz, they say it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. These guys swing, and they do it in a way that incorporates a range of influences. The music moves and is inflected with a Latin groove and a Middle East undercurrent that creates a melancholy feel so sensuous a person can't help but be moved.

The New Fillmore, May 1, 2011, MUSIC | Anthony Torres

Charles Unger has performed for numerous years at Les Joulins Jazz Bistro on Ellis, and the Rasselas Jazz Club on Fillmore, to the delight of regulars, tourists, purists and jazz aficionados alike.

Eric Smith, Beyond Chron, Edgetone Records

For more information and music samples, please visit: www.charlesungerexperience.com.

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Scott Yanow's Review of *Mr. 2 AM*



Charles Unger has been an important musical force in the San Francisco Bay area for the past 40 years. Although he has been featured in many settings, he is best heard as the leader of the Charles Unger Experience where he plays tenor, alto and soprano saxophones in addition to contributing his originals. While he has performed in many different musical idioms (including Latin jazz, African, Mid Eastern and smooth), his main focus on *Mr. 2 AM* is on bluesy jazz and funk.

On most of these selections, Unger is joined by keyboardist Sam Peoples, bassist Jon Reppetto and drummer Andy Marchetti. When Reppetto switches to guitar, Tony Saunders plays bass. Pianist Eugene Pliner is also utilized on some selections.

Charles Unger is the main voice throughout and he contributed all 11 selections. The CD begins with the first of two versions of his minor-toned blues "Mr. 2 AM." This rendition was recorded live at San Francisco's *Rasselas* (Unger's regular gig each Sunday evening) and is quite atmospheric. While his warm tenor is heard on the title cut, the funky "Journey To Sausalito" has Unger sounding equally skilled on alto. "San Francisco After Dark," a modern blues, has fine work by the leader on both tenor and soprano along with a good spot for Peoples' keyboards. "The Rogue" is a one-chord jam that finds Unger getting his message across with both forcefulness and sensitivity.

"Sabbatical For Love," which has Unger on keyboards and strong guitar from Reppetto, is as funky as the danceable "Sometimes It Doesn't Rain." "God Has The Perfect Personality" has a rhythmic melody and lyrical tenor from Unger. Both "About Last Night" (filled with melodic and soulful tenor) and the catchy blues-based "Place Pigalle" feature plenty of fine playing by Unger. He plays both tenor and alto via overdubbing on the second version of "Mr. 2 AM" and finishes the CD by introducing the picturesque "Magic Dancer" and the rhythmic "Quasi Tempo."

The music on the enjoyable *Mr. 2 AM* is consistently danceable yet filled with excellent jazz solos by Charles Unger, a saxophonist who deserves to be much better known.

Scott Yanow, author of ten books including *Trumpet Kings*, *The Jazz Singers*, *Jazz On Record 1917-76* and *Jazz On Film*

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