

# JazzTimes

AMERICA'S JAZZ MAGAZINE

## New York Nights

THE OUTRAGEOUS,  
UNCENSORED ORAL HISTORY  
OF SEVENTH AVENUE SOUTH—  
THE BRECKER BROTHERS'  
ERA-DEFINING CLUB



MARCUS MILLER



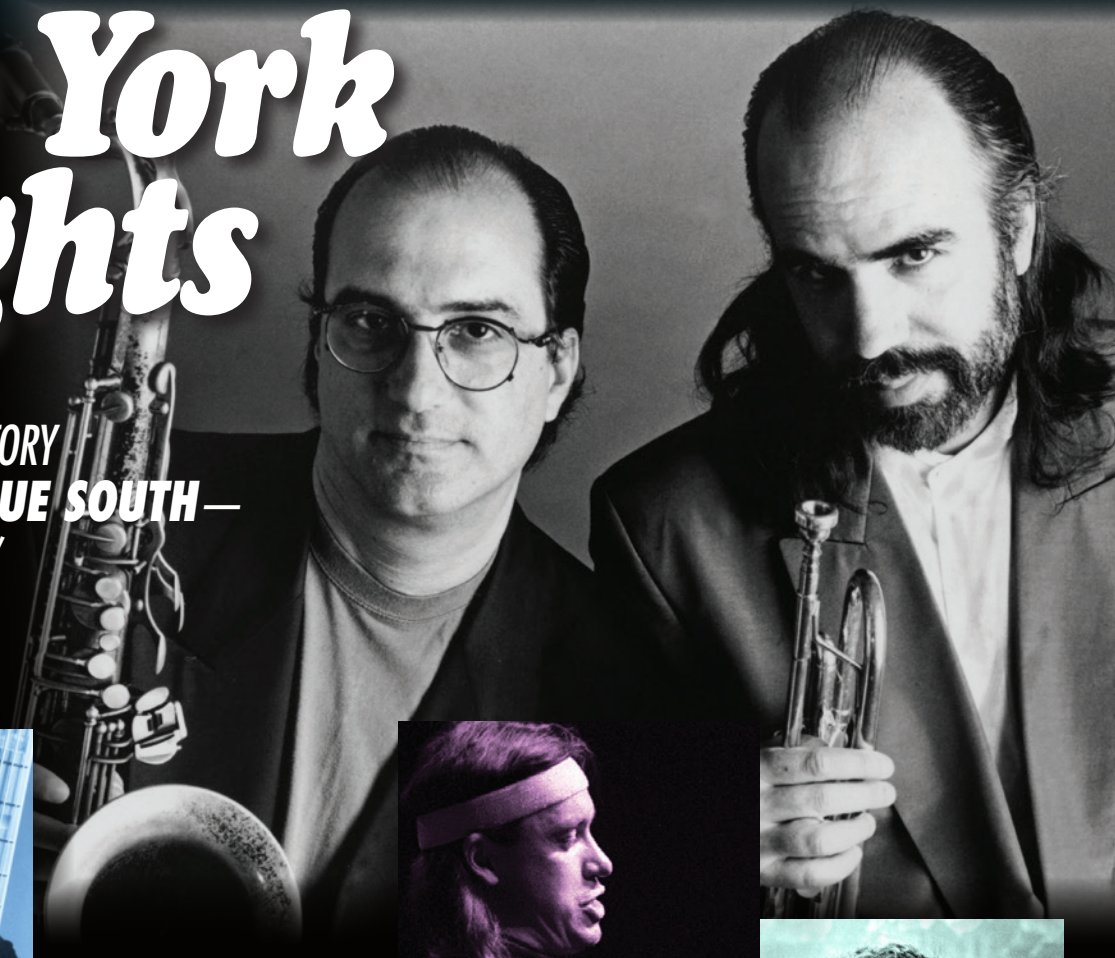
JOHN SCOFIELD



JACO PASTORIUS



MILES DAVIS



# SEX, DRUGS & JAZZ

By Shaun Brady

THE ORAL (AND NASAL) HISTORY OF **SEVENTH AVENUE SOUTH**—  
**THE BRECKER BROTHERS'** HARD-PARTYING, BAND-BUILDING,  
ERA-DEFINING NEW YORK CITY NIGHTCLUB





► With Miles Davis and Chaka Khan hanging at right, the Brecker Brothers tear up the upstairs music venue in 1981. Pictured are saxophonist Michael Brecker, guitarist Kazumi Watanabe and bassist Marcus Miller. Drummer Richie Morales is obscured; trumpeter Randy Brecker is out of frame



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATE GREENFIELD & RANDY BRECKER

**A** unique meeting place for jazz cats, fusion pioneers and in-demand studio musicians, Seventh Avenue South, located at that thoroughfare and Leroy Street in Manhattan's West Village, became one of New York City's hippest hangs for a hectic decade. Michael and Randy Brecker, along with a restaurateur and educator named Kate Greenfield, owned and operated the club from 1977 to 1987, where it became a convergence point for everyone from Cedar Walton to Jaco Pastorius, Miles Davis to Chaka Khan. It was also the launch pad for several notable groups, including Steps Ahead, the Bob Mintzer Big Band, Pastorius' Word of Mouth, the 24th Street Band with future David Letterman band members Will Lee and Hiram Bullock, and Marcus Miller's Jamaica Boys. It was also a hub for, in the words of more than one of its regulars, "sex, drugs and jazz." Here is the story of Seventh Avenue South in the words of those who lived to tell its often-riotous tale.

**RANDY BRECKER (TRUMPETER, CO-OWNER):** Mike and I became friendly with a guy named Bob Cooper, who managed a club called Boomer's on Bleecker Street that was a cool hangout. It was somewhere you could really feel comfortable, have a drink, listen to music, see other musicians—where you weren't just asked to leave after the set. Several months after it closed,

[Cooper] found a space that he thought might be suitable to resurrect a club, and he needed a modest investment.

**KATE GREENFIELD (CO-OWNER):** I was working in the Brooklyn Criminal Court in a counseling program, but I was very interested in food and I had a little bit of money saved up. I decided I wanted

to open a restaurant. It was just one of those things; at any moment we could have not done it, but we just kept moving forward. [Cooper] was supposed to know the business and teach me, since I was going to be the working partner with him, but it became apparent that he didn't know as much as he professed to know. He would show up in the middle of the day with a racing form and a bag of chips. So we gave him some money and bought him out.

**BRECKER:** Mike and I were meant to be more or less silent partners, but it ended up that we weren't so silent. Our modest investment increased by leaps and bounds. That's really how it started. It was a mere accident and it continued for 10 years.

**DAVE LIEBMAN (SAXOPHONIST):** Sam Rivers had Studio Rivbea and Rashied Ali had Ali's Alley, so it wasn't unknown for musicians to have a club. But in that generation, for that kind of music, it was probably the first one—maybe the only one.



► Co-owner Kate Greenfield, second from left, hangs with friends upstairs during the club's opening week in 1977

**BRECKER:** It was two floors. The music [space] was on the second floor and held about 120 people, and there was a long bar à la Bradley's downstairs with a little section where people could sit and a couple of tabletop video games and stools around. The first floor became the hang if you didn't want to go upstairs and listen to the music.

**WILL LEE (BASSIST):** I would sit in the back and play *Missile Command* all night. They had a great sit-down Atari arcade game that was built into a table. They also had a jukebox. I think the most played record there of all was probably [hums] "Blue Train." Of all the tunes that were played on there, I think that one set the atmosphere that defined the way that room felt. It was just chill.

**LIEBMAN:** The upstairs and the downstairs were two different worlds. Downstairs it was people drinking and hanging and getting high. Upstairs it was no different, but we had music. [laughs] We had an excuse.

**BILL CHERRY (BARTENDER):** I was working at Barbara's, a small jazz club on West Third and Thompson, after [the Upper West Side jazz club] Mikell's. Kate got to know me and mentioned that she and Randy and Michael were opening a spot, and asked if I would be interested in getting involved from the ground up. I had a following, and in the bar business if you have a bartender that has a following you can start with at least something going on until you can build it up.

**STEVE FERRONE (DRUMMER, THE BRECKER BROTHERS, AVERAGE WHITE BAND):** Bill Cherry was the real jazz bartender. He was such a cool guy. He had the Afro and everything, like a Snoop Dogg character, if you want to put him in modern terms.

**JASON MILES (COMPOSER, PRODUCER, KEYBOARDIST):** To me, Bill was the first social-media dude. He brought people from Mikell's with him down to Seventh Avenue South. People used to follow bartenders around. Bartenders were almost the leaders of their own clan.

**LEE:** There was always a Bill Cherry party going on. He wasn't a crazy, wild guy. He was just a really sweet, sensible guy who made you feel at home, and a lot of us wanted to feel at home.

**MARCUS MILLER (BASSIST):** If you had a gig at Seventh Avenue South, during your break you could walk three blocks to Sweet Basil or one more block up to the Village Vanguard to see who was hitting over there, so maybe you could catch 10 minutes of somebody else's set. There was a lot of crosspollination. It was a really vibrant community, and Seventh Avenue South was at the center of it.

**PETER ERSKINE (DRUMMER):** Mike and Randy were living the dream. They created a place where like-minded, like-souled musicians could play.

**BOB MINTZER (SAXOPHONIST):** The majority of the clubs in town were run by proprietors that had very specific likes and dislikes when it came to jazz music, so they booked accordingly. But Seventh Avenue South was wide open. Every kind of music imaginable was played in there, and I think they hired acts based on the merit of the music alone.

**LEE:** This was a time when going into a nightclub meant there was so much cigarette smoke that you were going to have to have your clothes dry-cleaned just from walking in. It was very difficult to walk in and hear lame music. It was one of the places that you could count on to hear great, great stuff. It wasn't a snobby place where every note you played was being judged, or a place where the music was so loose that it ended up being valueless. There were probably more good notes per capita played there than anywhere.

**JOHN SCOFIELD (GUITARIST):** To me, it was the center of the jazz world at that time. There was the Village Vanguard, but this was the real contemporary jazz scene in New York. It was a time when fusion music didn't have the bad reputation that it got after smooth jazz came along. It was still cutting edge. It was also a meeting place for jazz musicians and studio musicians; there's always been a big overlap between those worlds. So it was a place not only to hear great music but also to be part of the music world.



**BRECKER:** You'd be downstairs and see Cecil Taylor hanging out with Hiram Bullock. It was a melting pot of different styles of music.

**FERRONE:** It was a mixture of what I, being from England, would call "jazzers," and studio musicians. Some nights you'd go down there and Max Roach or Dexter Gordon would be playing, and then you'd have Jaco Pastorius and the Brecker Brothers. Some of the greatest players that New York had to offer were Seventh Avenue South guys.

**MILLER:** Downstairs was shoulder to shoulder with cats talking stuff to each other. Lenny White would go up to somebody and say, "Man, you wasn't swinging last night." It was real and unfiltered, especially when it's late at night and everybody's uninhibited. It was more of a street mentality than a school mentality.

**BRECKER:** I can't say we were very hands on. We would play there a lot, and that was our main function. We put bands together and would either play as the Brecker Brothers or as the Seventh Avenue South All-Stars, which featured people like Cedar Walton, Slide Hampton, Reggie Workman and Al Foster. We also played there quite a bit with offshoots of the Average White Band. It was an exciting time for experimentation.

**MINTZER:** It was never my intention to have a big band. Just on a lark I called all the guys that were playing there, never imagining that they'd all be interested in doing this and they were, to my surprise. One of the first big band gigs I did there, the club was full of people and the energy was incredible. Dave Liebman was in the audience and couldn't control himself—he stormed the bandstand and grabbed David Sanborn's soprano and started playing.

**JACQUI SMITH PERRINE (WAITRESS):** My first husband was Eric Gale, the guitar player, and when we split up I moved to the city and needed a job. Eventually Michael and I had a relationship for many years. But I had a very good ear for music, and there was a period of time where I actually booked the place. At that time we were closed on Monday nights and Jaco, as he was wont to do, showed up at the club wanting to do a gig. I said the only thing we could do would be to open on Monday night and do a special show, but we couldn't do any advertising—we'd just have to announce it during Don Grolnick's show that weekend and do it by word of mouth. So Jaco ended up naming the band Word of Mouth.

**MIKE MAINIERI (VIBRAPHONIST):** The first band I put together there was with Michael Brecker, Steve Gadd, Don Grolnick, Eddie Gomez and myself. We had an offer to go to Japan because a young lady was broad-

casting a radio show from Seventh Avenue South and she was working with some promoters in Japan. [The Japanese record label] Nippon Columbia heard the group and liked it very much and offered us a deal. At the time I was signed to Warner Bros. in the United States as a solo artist, so I couldn't call that band the Mike Mainieri Quintet. I gave it the name Steps, and then we called the group Steps Ahead when we were signed to an American label.

**LEE:** I played there a lot with the 24th Street Band, which later became the Letterman band. Paul Shaffer coproduced our second album and we became so close that he saw an opportunity to turn that band, as it was breaking up, into his band for *Late Night With David Letterman*.

**MILLER:** I would hang out there with the guys who became the Jamaica Boys, Lenny White and Bernard Wright. I also played with a group led by a couple of really popular studio singers, Frank and Babi Floyd. Charley Drayton, who was probably 14 at the time, was the drummer, and Bernard, at 16 or 17, was playing keyboards. And everybody would come down to hear the kids play. They called us the Nursery Rhyme Band because we were so young.

**MAINIERI:** It was a great place to play. Half of the audience were musicians. When the place was packed, there was so much energy. What I remember is this rush: You just didn't get that in other clubs. But I just remember we'd come bursting out, and it didn't just have to do with the drugs—though that was prevalent. There was so much excitement and electricity in the air some nights.



▶ The Brecker Brothers perform, c. 1980





➤ (clockwise from above) Stevie Wonder and friends dig the music, c. 1980; R&B vocal group the Persuasions get the audience involved in '80; co-owners Randy, Kate and Michael (from top) make the cover of *Performance* in March 1979; Miles and Chaka Khan check out Marcus Miller in '81



**PAGUITO D'RIERA (SAXOPHONIST, CLARINETIST):**

One of my first gigs in New York City was at Seventh Avenue South. Back in Cuba everybody was crazy about the Brecker Brothers, so to have the opportunity to work in a club owned by them was tremendous. And then I invited Randy to play on my second LP for CBS. It was the only time in my life that I hired the owner of a place that I was going to be playing. I paid him like \$50. Mike was in the audience—he wanted to check out who the hell this Cuban was who hired his brother to play in his own club.

**SCOFIELD:** I was playing with my trio with Steve Swallow and Adam Nussbaum, and Stevie Wonder came in. There were about four people in the club, and after the first tune he clapped real loud and he



looked around—well, he didn't look around, but he realized he was about the only guy in there. Afterwards I'm sitting in the bathroom stall and Stevie comes in with one of his guys. As they're leaving he says, "You know, when you listen to music like this ..." and then the door closed and I didn't hear what he said. So I don't know if he liked it or not. I'm still wondering.

**WYNTON MARSALIS (TRUMPETER):** We were booked to play New Year's Eve in 1982. One couple showed up the whole night. The lady of the couple said, "If you guys ever get known, we can look at it one of two ways: Either we were the dumb couple that came or we were the lucky ones." And we played for them the entire night.

**GREENFIELD:** Watching Wynton start his career was really exciting. If one of those young people asked for a drink at the end of the night, I would only give them milk and cookies. I was so self-righteous, while at the same time I was being so ridiculous.

**MARSALIS:** It was a lifeline for us. They gave me a gig when nobody knew who I was. I'm forever grateful to the brothers for that.

**GREENFIELD:** When Cissy Houston would sing at the club, Whitney Houston was a young teenager and she would sing backup. All the record company people would be there to hear her, way before she became famous.

**BRECKER:** Nile Rodgers would come down and hang when he got done producing or playing in the studios. He was a great Pac-Man player.

**GREENFIELD:** There were a lot of *Saturday Night Live* after-parties because Mike and/or Randy would be playing. We had a party for Joni Mitchell when she was on *SNL* and I made a guitar out of chopped liver. John Belushi lived right down the street, so he used to come in at 2 in the morning and say, "Give me a bottle of scotch!"



**BRECKER:** Belushi and [Dan] Aykroyd had their own [Blues Bar] during the Blues Brothers era, but after that closed they would come down and smell like they'd been up for a few days.

**ERSKINE:** I remember seeing a lot of my jazz heroes at Seventh Avenue South. Cedar Walton was playing there one time and I was champing at the bit to sit in. He invites me onto the bandstand and calls "All Blues," this jazz waltz. So I played it, and afterwards Cedar complimented me and I said, "Thanks. I was really hoping we were going to do something in 4." I wanted to show off what I thought was my Elvin thing. For years afterward, every time I'd run into Cedar he'd say, "You remember that night at Seventh Avenue South when you sat in and afterward you said, 'I wish we'd played something in 4/4?'" And he'd cock his head and say, "That was some funny shit."

**BRECKER:** We had Joe Henderson at the club one weekend with his "All-Girl Rhythm Section." That's how his manager insisted it be billed, [so you can see] how much things have changed since then as far as women in jazz goes. Joe's nickname was "The Phantom," and sure enough, Saturday night—no Joe. I was still at the club at 4:30 a.m. or so, closing up, and up the back stairs comes Joe. He goes into the little dressing room behind the stage and I hear him playing, so I opened the door and he said in that soft-spoken but super-articulate voice of his, "Ahh, Randy, I thought I'd get here early and practice a while." He thought it was 4:30 in the afternoon! Just 12 hours off.

**FERRONE:** One night I was standing at the bar and there was a tap at my shoulder. I turned around and it was Grady Tate. We were chitchatting, and next thing I knew there was a tap on my other shoulder and it was Max Roach. Behind the bar there was one of those gunslinger mirrors where you could see who was standing behind you, and I remember looking up at that mirror and there was Grady Tate and Max Roach having a conversation and me standing in the middle. That moment is emblazoned into my brain.

**BRECKER:** [In 1981] Eliane Elias had just relocated from São Paulo and played at the club with Eddie Gomez and Peter

**"I WAS 18, 19 YEARS OLD; I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON. I JUST ASSUMED IF YOU WERE A MUSICIAN, BY THE TIME YOU HIT 28 OR 29 YEARS OLD YOU'RE GOING TO START ACTING A LITTLE WEIRD. I DIDN'T KNOW WHY CERTAIN DRUMMERS WOULD HAVE TO GET DOWN AND ADJUST THEIR BASS DRUM PEDAL BETWEEN EVERY SONG. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT'S HOW YOU DID YOUR COCAINE."** —MARCUS MILLER

Erskine. I usually didn't do this, it was someone else's job, but I paid her. It was something like \$500 for the trio—cash. A few minutes later she came over, and in her broken English explained that right after I paid her, Chet Baker gave her a sob story about how his girlfriend had kicked him out so he didn't have a place to stay. She was a big fan and was starstruck, so she gave him the money. The next morning I was walking to a session on 49th Street, when who turns the corner walking in my direction on the other side of the street? Chet! Out of the corner of his eye he sees me, turns around and starts walking quickly in the other direction.

**SCOFIELD:** I remember the night my daughter was born. After my wife had given birth at St. Vincent's Hospital a couple of blocks up from the club, they went to sleep, so I decided to stop by and celebrate for a second. Chet Baker was there, who I idolized. He asked how I was doing and I said, "Great, Chet, my wife just had a baby, our first child." And he goes, "Really? John, can I borrow a hundred dollars?" As if I hadn't said anything.

**SMITH PERRINE:** I don't want to use the word "steal," but Gil and Anita Evans were my neighbors in the Village and the Gil Evans Orchestra used to play at Sweet Basil every Monday night. I convinced them to come and do Monday nights at Seventh Avenue South.

**MINTZER:** I remember playing with the Gil Evans band there. I had all the great writing he had done for Miles in my head and [I was excited to play] these elaborate, 20-page arrangements. So I show up and

each tune was maybe three lines of music, just a scratched-out head arrangement; there was a total lack of any discernible structure, but that's what Gil wanted. He went in there to have this improvisatory large ensemble where things unfolded based on the decisions of the players, with very little in the way of instruction.

**MILLER:** I sat next to Gil one night when Jaco was there. Jaco would play this vibrato-laden melodic stuff and Gil would start chuckling to himself. I asked him, "What do you think, Gil?" And he said, "Man, it's just so unabashedly romantic, it's cracking me up."

**BRECKER:** Jaco played quite a bit, though that was kind of a sad state of affairs towards the end of his career, when he was hanging in New York and didn't really have a place to live. People would always come because it was Jaco, but it was a tough time for him.

**GREENFIELD:** Oh, my God, talk about lunatics. But when [Jaco] played we had to have people standing on the stairs stopping people from coming up.

**FERRONE:** Jaco would wander in and whoever was playing, he would just walk up onstage and plug in and sabotage their entire set.

**MILLER:** I'm playing the middle of a song and I see the head of a Fender Jazz bass coming up the stairs in front of the bandstand. It was Jaco balancing his bass on one hand coming up the stairs to announce his arrival. He walked straight onto the stage, plugged into my amp, turned all the knobs up to 10, and we had a jam session. Whatever I was doing

before he arrived turned into what he wanted to do, which was fine with me.

**MIKE STERN (GUITARIST):** One time Jaco got pissed off and threw his bass down the stairs. He came to my place after that and got on the phone with Kevin Kaufman, who used to repair all of Jaco's basses. Jaco was winking at me as he said, "I had a little accident at Seventh Avenue South and can't seem to get a sound out of this bass." Meanwhile, Kevin told me he broke the thing into three pieces and sent it to him in a large shoebox.

**SCOFIELD:** I played there a bunch with the Gil Evans band, and we were all hanging out in this little back room. Sanborn said, "Listen guys, I've really changed my thing. I've been drug-free for two months now." And Jaco goes, "Free drugs! Where?" That was an ill omen of things to come.

**LIEBMAN:** Miles came down and heard Scofield there with me. Afterwards we hung out and I said, "You like the guitar player?" He said, "No." I told him, "He's gonna be your next guitar player."

**"ONE NIGHT MICHAEL [BRECKER] WAS PLAYING AND MILES CAME DOWN. CHAKA WAS THERE AND MILES SAID TO HER, 'LET'S GO UPTOWN AND SHOPLIFT!' MILES DAVIS AND CHAKA KHAN—LIKE NO ONE'S GOING TO NOTICE YOU." — CO-OWNER KATE GREENFIELD**

**SCOFIELD:** I don't remember [Liebman] saying that, but I know he introduced me. Miles said to me, "You sound great, kid." And I said, "Oh, Miles, it's so great to meet you. You're my idol." And he said, "Shut the fuck up."

**BRECKER:** Once Miles discovered the place he would come down quite a bit and wreak havoc with the waitresses.

**SMITH PERRINE:** Miles could be quite rude, but I wouldn't take his shit. He was standing next to me and said, "I want to eat your pussy." I looked at him and said, "No you don't. It stinks." And he said, "I like you, smarty-pants." He called me smarty-pants every time he saw me after that.

**ERSKINE:** When he lobbed that ball over the net, Jacqui smacked it back double. I think Miles was even kind of shocked. Everyone was proud of her.

**THOM BEERS (PRODUCER, *Deadliest Catch, Monster Garage*):** I was the bartender in the service bar upstairs, so I served all the musicians. Miles drank the most disgusting drink in the world: Grand Marnier in a brandy snifter with Coca-Cola. It was gnarly.

**GREENFIELD:** One night Michael was playing and Miles came down. Chaka was there and Miles said to her, "Let's go uptown and shoplift!" Miles Davis and Chaka Khan—like no one's going to notice you.

**CHAKA KHAN (VOCALIST):** I used to take Miles there often. That was our little clique. We were sitting right in the front one night; we could see right up everybody's noses. I think we were pretty high and the Breckers were playing. They were smoking, and then when they ended there was that moment of silence before everyone knows they've ended and starts clapping. When that

moment of silence came, Miles said, "Them white boys can't play no horn." I was like, "Beam me up, Scotty. I'm ready to go now." Miles had no filter. He embarrassed me a lot, but I loved that.

**GREENFIELD:** Chaka was hanging with me at the club, and a friend called and told me that she was with Sarah Vaughan at Mikell's. I said, "Chaka would love to meet Sarah Vaughan!" It was very sweet watching Chaka Khan be totally starstruck.

**KHAN:** Kate introduced me to Sarah Vaughan and she just treated me like a fly on the wall. I said, "Fuck that," and went back up to her and said, "At the risk of you killing me, I have to tell you how much I

love you and how much you've influenced my life." We started talking and became friends of a kind.

**GREENFIELD:** Of course we sat there and snorted coke for a couple hours. Sarah Vaughan didn't have to teach us how to do that. I can clearly remember her putting it on her little pinky nail and quietly snorting it. You could hardly hear her doing it.

**KHAN:** That was the peace pipe. It was a way of ingratiating yourself with someone—you got a little blow, you were in.

**MAINIERI:** It was a place to go and drink, and it was a time when there was a lot of medication going on. People were not sober then, let me put it that way. If you mix all those elements together, you can really stir the pot. It was a sensual place to be.

**BRECKER:** It was kind of a den of iniquity.

**MILLER:** I was 18, 19 years old; I didn't know what was going on. I just assumed if you were a musician, by the time you hit 28 or 29 years old you're going to start acting a little weird. I didn't know why certain drummers would have to get down and adjust their bass drum pedals between every song. I didn't know that's how you did your cocaine between songs.

**HAL GALPER (PIANIST):** There would be so much of it that it would be stuck in your socks and in your hair. Once, I was going to the bathroom and Randy started following me. I had to turn around and say, "Randy, I'm just going to take a piss."

**FERRONE:** One night Randy and I just got completely wasted. He ran into the bathroom and was in there a bit long, so I went in after him and climbed up on the sink to look over the stall. Randy was there throwing up, and I was like, "Hey, Randy, what are you doing?" And he made this lasso motion with his hands, finished throwing up and said, "Right, let's go back and get started again."

**STEVE GADD (DRUMMER):** That was before everyone knew that cocaine could be addictive. In other words, it was still a party. Everyone was having a ball.

**LEE:** This was a crazy time. I remember waking up one morning and I had passed



out in the club, and they had locked the doors with me in it. So I wake up next to my bass case to the smell of carpet cleaner, right in time to make my jingle.

**FERRONE:** I remember playing with the Brecker Brothers and [keyboardist] Mark Gray had a seizure, I guess. The dressing room was a tiny little liquor cabinet back behind the stage, and Mark Gray was back there in this collapsed state.

**BRECKER:** Something Mark ingested didn't quite agree with him. He could play but couldn't hold his head up, so I had to hold him up by his hair during his piano solos.

**MARSALIS:** I didn't really witness that. I saw so much alcohol and drug abuse in the scene I grew up in, it didn't have any allure for me. We were trying to find some women. I was 20; that's what I was thinking about.

**BRECKER:** I was living alone in a nice high-rise apartment in Waterside, right on the East River, and doing a lot of sessions. Some nights I didn't make it down to the club, and around booty-call time, like 3 a.m., after writing some music I'd call the club and get Jacqui on the phone. I knew her very well and she had a great sense of dark humor. Some of my nefarious "chicks" we gave rather sarcastic, admittedly demeaning nicknames to: the "Magpies," the "Beached Whale," the "Kodiak Bear." They were on the D list, but what can I say—it was 3 a.m.! So I'd call her and ask who was there, and she'd give me a rundown using the nicknames and I'd say, "OK, put the 'Beached Whale' on the phone," and I'd have that girl come over for a little late-night fun.

**SMITH PERRINE:** There were these two skinny girls that always used to put that song "I'm Special" [the Pretenders' "Brass in Pocket"] on the jukebox and dance around. They were always scantily clad and they went home with everybody. I think everybody had them—including Michael. That's part of being with a musician. We used to call them the "Skank Sisters," but that could have just been what the waitresses called them.

**GREENFIELD:** I've been clean almost 33 years, so it seems like a different lifetime. We were

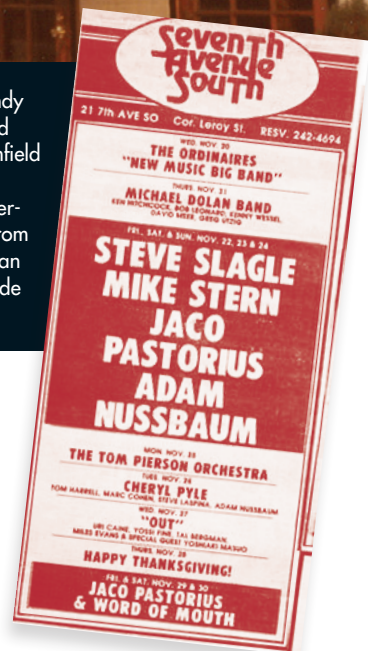


wild and crazy, but we thought we were cool. There were many times leaving there at 6 or 7 in the morning.

**SMITH PERRINE:** There'd be lines of cocaine on the Pac-Man machine at night, when it was closed to the public. We'd be leaving and it would literally be daylight. That was the worst feeling on the planet. You prayed that it was raining when you walked outside and people wearing business suits were going to work while you were still in your smoke-covered clothing from the night before.

**FERRONE:** I was surprised at how many people managed to actually survive those years. We were all really worried about

➤ (top) Randy Brecker and Kate Greenfield live it up in 1980; advertisements from 1985 and an iconic façade beckon



Mike, and here we all are, partying like crazy, going to bed at 5 in the morning.

**SMITH PERRINE:** Michael, for a long time, was a [highly] functioning addict. Don Grolnick, who was Michael's closest friend and loved him like a brother, wrote him this heartfelt letter, and then Don and I found this place in Florida and got Michael to go there and get clean and sober. That was the beginning of the end for Michael and I—he eventually married his drug therapist. But if that's what it took, that's what it took.

**GREENFIELD:** Michael got clean in 1980 and he helped a lot of us. Michael was so special, and to watch him evolve—not that we weren't interesting, nice, talented people when we were getting high, but it was really nice to get to know people once you can get the drugs and alcohol out and really see the

**BRECKER:** I wasn't quite that bad. I weaned myself off everything a little later, but the last couple years of the existence of the club it became kind of an AA hangout, which if you're trying to sell booze isn't such a great idea.

**STERN:** The vibe changed as Mike changed. He got sober and totally turned his shit around. They tried to keep it happening but the business was rough. I remember Mike was really upset about it because he thought it was an amazing place.

**MILES:** Seventh Avenue South basically went out with a whimper. It didn't go out with some big bang.

**SMITH PERRINE:** Having become a restaurateur after it closed, I don't know how it ever made money. I don't think it was managed well. It's amazing that it stayed open as long as it did.

or didn't want to do it anymore. I was hiding in the office and knitting after I stopped drinking and drugging, and you can't really run a jazz club hiding from everybody. Mixing jazz and money is an interesting recipe. It was like we were supposed to throw the party every night. I had enough checks that I couldn't cash to wallpaper a small room. Once the party was over, it was really over.

**BRECKER:** It never was a moneymaking endeavor—far from it, unfortunately. About a month after the club opened, Mike and I each took a \$100 bill out of the cash register, and that was the *only* money we ever took out of that club in 10 years!

**ERSKINE:** We started playing some other places but they were never as much fun. We all miss it, but it was kind of insane for Mike

**“I PLAYED THERE A BUNCH WITH THE GIL EVANS BAND, AND [I REMEMBER ONCE] WE WERE ALL HANGING OUT IN THIS LITTLE BACK ROOM. [DAVID] SANBORN SAID, ‘LISTEN GUYS, I’VE REALLY CHANGED MY THING. I’VE BEEN DRUG-FREE FOR TWO MONTHS NOW.’ AND JACO GOES, ‘FREE DRUGS! WHERE?’ THAT WAS AN ILL OMEN OF THINGS TO COME.” —JOHN SCOFIELD**

sensitivity that makes people drink and drug the way we did. It was almost like knowing people two different ways.

**ERSKINE:** When Michael cleaned up, it was kind of a seismic shift. A lot of people realized we had to stop doing this stuff. I remember speaking with Bob Mintzer and thinking how great it was to be hanging out at the club and actually talking about real things.

**FERRONE:** When Mike came out of rehab, there was another club around the corner called 55 Grand, which was a renowned drug hangout. Mike [wanted to go], so I thought, “I’ll wander around there and keep an eye on him.” Mike stood very nervously at the bar drinking water, and of course I got involved in all the debauchery. At some point in the evening Mike would go home and I’d end up staying until all hours. The same thing happened the next day, and three nights into that I said, “You’re wearing me out with this. I get wasted every night while you test yourself to see if you can get through it.”

**BRECKER:** After a few years we tried to sell the place and a guy came in and restructured it, but he never followed through and bought the place. He didn't pay any taxes the whole time he was in there, so we got stuck with those, too.

**ERSKINE:** I remember Stix Hooper had a gig, and when he went to play the place was taped and padlocked for non-payment of something, or someone didn't get bribed the right amount, so they shut it down. That was near the beginning of the end.

**BRECKER:** Eventually we lost the lease. The guy who owned the building was a fan so he was very kind to us, but at one point he sold the building to two Indian gynecologists who were getting divorced. The wife ended up with the club in the settlement. Mike went to try to talk some sense into her, but she really knew what she had. That was the crowning blow.

**GREENFIELD:** When I got clean in 1983, I came to the realization that we couldn't

and Randy to be able to furnish that place for so long for so many people, and I'm sure they got tired of it. Barely a trip to New York will go by when I won't find myself walking down there and looking at it from across the street to see what it is now.

**LEE:** I'm not a nostalgic guy, but every time I drive past where that club was I get a really sad feeling that it's not there anymore. It's one of the places that should have continued forever.

**GADD:** We sort of took it for granted when it was happening, but when you look back, they had created a little landmark.

**BRECKER:** I think we'd had enough of the club business. It was just costing too much money, as much fun as it was. Other clubs that opened, like the Blue Note, were a little more serious, and it was hard to compete. We were still a homegrown operation and couldn't afford to keep putting money into the place, so we finally had to bid a fond adieu. **JT**



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