



Boz Scaggs performs at 8 p.m. at Bergen Performing Arts Center, 30 N. Van Brunt St Englewood. \$29-\$99. Call (201) 227-1030



ED MURRAY/THE STAR-LEDGER

Singer and guitarist Grover Kemble gets into the groove. Kemble played with pianist Jerry Vezza, and bassist Steve Freeman, right, at Shanghai Jazz in Madison on Friday

A little of what you fancy

Kemble's variety show at Shanghai Jazz offers swing, folk and bossa nova

BY ZAN STEWART
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

As he said during Friday's opening set at Shanghai Jazz in Madison, Grover Kemble likes to have a little something for everyone.

"I don't want anyone going home disappointed," he said.

The guitarist and singer made good on that promise by offering some good swinging stuff, folk and pop songs done jazz style, a calypso and standards done as bossa novas, among others.

He had help in this venture from an ace trio of Jersey-based jazzmen: pianist Jerry Vezza, bassist Steve Freeman and drummer Tom Sayek. All three appear on Kemble's CD, "Live at Shanghai Jazz" (Shanghai Jazz/Groverman).

Parsippany resident Kemble is a well-known Jersey artist who led Grover, Margaret and Za Zu Zaz from the late 1970s through the 1990s. The group opened for Count Basie, played the Newport Jazz Festival and recorded the 1999 "An Evening With Za Zu Zaz" CD (GMZZZ).

Kemble drew on his years as an artist and entertainer when facing the boisterous crowd, many of whom seemed to be there simply to eat and gab. He gave lively, humorous introductions to each song, delivered his numbers with pizzazz and occa-

sionally shouted out brief bursts like "Here we go" as a number switched aspects. These amiable spoken passages and his vital interpretations gave those who listened a top-drawer showbiz evening.

The opening Lennon-McCartney classic "Things We Said Today" showed exactly what Kemble brings to the table. Taking the tune at a medium swing tempo, the leader sang in a slightly twangy, endearing voice, employing a deft rhythmic feel. After a couple of choruses, he scatted, using syllables you might have heard from Dizzy Gillespie or Ella Fitzgerald. The rhythm section simmered in accompaniment.

After Vezza's melodically potent, easy-swinging improv, Kemble soloed on his nylon-string, solid-body guitar. He coaxed forth a rich, softly gleaming tone, playing alluring chordal passages and persuasive single notes.

The leader approached the evergreen "Out of Nowhere" as a percolating bossa. The rhythm and Kemble's liberties with the theme gave it a fresh feeling. Freeman's solo, with its fat bottom tones and crisp upper ones, was a winner.

"(I'm Just a Poor) Wayfaring Stranger," which the guitarist learned from the great Burl Ives, also had a swing feel, which remade the folk classic. Kemble's country-style voice fit perfectly.

He shifted his sound slightly for the traditional

calypso, "All I Had was 50 Cents," from his Shanghai Jazz CD. Also from the recording was the motors-along title track, a blues with one lyric that went "sweet and sour, savory soy" — saluting the restaurant's Chinese cuisine — and another, "Hi de-ho, hoy, hoy, hoy," a nod to the great Cab Calloway. Kemble also treated listeners to a fun tale of the problems encountered when overindulging in drink, "Gimme that Wine."

Vezza, Freeman, and Sayek shone in a spirited version of "Who Can I Turn To?"

Kemble also performs Jan. 31, 9 p.m., at Lockwood Tavern, 77 Route 206, Stanhope. No music charge, no minimum. Call (973) 347-0077 or visit barones.com.

Upcoming at Shanghai Jazz, 24 Main St., Madison: 6:30 tonight, guitarist John Zweig; tomorrow, 7 p.m.; guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli; Thursday 7 p.m., pianist Morris Nanton's trio; Friday and Saturday, 7-10:30 p.m., drummer Winard Harper's group; and Sunday, 7 p.m., Vezza's trio and singer Kira McCarthy. All shows: No music charge; \$20-\$30 minimum at tables, \$10/bar. Call (973) 822-2899 or visit shanghaijazz.com.

Zan Stewart is The Star-Ledger's jazz writer. He is also a musician who occasionally performs at local clubs. He may be reached at zstewart@starledger.com or at (973) 324-9930.