

*Industry Q&A:*

# Mitchell Feldman

*by Tad Hendrickson*

**Name:** Mitchell Feldman

**Position:** Owner of MFA  
Jazz Radio and Promotion



Paul Trantlow

**M**itchell Feldman has been lucky enough to be professionally involved with jazz in some capacity every day of his adult life. He started doing jazz radio and journalism at the University of Georgia and produced the Southern premieres of the Sam Rivers-Dave Holland Duo and the Art Ensemble of Chicago there in 1979. He was a jazz journalist and editor from 1980-85 in Atlanta. From 1985-89, he ran the jazz-world music label CMP Records in Germany and covered the jazz scene there for *Down Beat*. From 1989-96, he was on staff as a publicist at The 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, Symphony Space and a classical music PR firm in New York, also writing bios, liner notes and other copy for Jazz At Lincoln Center, Blue Note and others. After a brief stop at ECM at BMG Classics, he lived in Italy from 1999-2003, covering the jazz scene there and elsewhere in Europe for *Down Beat*, among other gigs. He's been

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in Denver since January 2004, working on the re-launch of the jazz label Synergy Music and launch INDIEgo Jazz Promotions. After the parent company suspended its operations to focus on its core business in March 2005, he returned to doing jazz PR and radio promotion on his own as Mitchell Feldman Associates (MFA).



Michael Fitts

**JW: How has the transition been back to MFA after INDIEgo and Synergy?**

MF: Thankfully both seamless and painless. I don't have a mail room, art department, tech support or an assistant, but I was fortunate to open shop with the retainer to continue promoting the British label Dune Records in the U.S. and another to do radio promotion for the Colorado label Capri Records. The Jazz Gallery in New York has hired me to conduct an international media campaign in advance of its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season this fall, and I'm midway through a promotion of Israeli saxophonist Anat Cohen's debut CD. I could use a few more short-term projects like Anat's, but I really can't complain.

**You typically work with smaller boutique labels and emerging artists. Why not go after bigger fish?**

Major or major indie labels either have outstanding people in-house – like Terry Coen at Palmetto or Garrett Shelton at Sunnyside – or long-standing relationships with firms like Groov Marketing. Over the years I've done a lot of work for Blue Note and ECM, and both labels know I'd jump at the chance to work any release they'd send my way. But I'm not going to actively pursue this when Mark Rini and Josh Ellman, whom I respect tremendously, have a history of delivering superb results for them. Sure, I'm friends with decision makers there, but if I were them I'd be taking the same "why fix a wheel that ain't broke" or "why change a horse in midstream" attitude.

**You're relatively new to the world of radio promotion. How's it going? Have you been welcomed into the fraternal order or hazed like a punk rookie?**

Yeah, I'm the "new kid on the block" having just celebrated my first anniversary as a radio promoter. But it's funny – other than you, and now me I guess, there's very little crossover between the worlds of jazz press and jazz radio. Before INDIEgo my only contact with the jazz radio was a friend, Erica Linderholm, who worked for GRP and later Atlantic.

But let's be real: Despite our desire to see ourselves as a close-knit community dedicated to the common cause of getting jazz on the airwaves, times are tough. There's a limited amount of work and when it comes down to it everyone has to look out for No. 1. That said, over the past few months since hanging out a bit during IAJE 2005, Mark Rini and Garrett Shelton, whom Neil Gorov and Dick LaPalm mentored, have been incredibly supportive of and

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helpful to this "rookie." Rather than see me as a threat, they've hipped me to stations I should service, given advice freely and helped me put things in perspective. I appreciate the sense of camaraderie developing between us. We trade the CDs we're working and I look forward to our email exchanges after the weekly charts come out – I'm really as fired up about seeing where their projects landed as I am about mine. This is a healthy kind of competition I've jokingly referred to with Mark as a race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit with me being the long shot. I'm also obviously grateful to everyone at JazzWeek for reviewing CDs and performances by artists I represent and for news and feature coverage of my promotion activities that has helped establish me with the jazz radio community at large.

## What have been some of the biggest obstacles?

*"Programmers I have developed a personal bond with over the past year know I've never asked them to audition a CD that didn't contain quality music and I never will, although I know not everything I send will work for them."*

I haven't encountered anything I'd call an obstacle, but I'm frustrated I've been unable to connect at all, let alone establish a rapport, with influential programmers at important stations in major markets. Building a relationship is difficult if one gets no response to repeated emails and voicemails and there are people I've never heard back from, who've not added any of the 15 titles I've serviced over the past year despite the fact that several could have fit into their station's "sound." Adjusting one's service list to best suit the characteristics of a specific CD is one of the basics of promotion, so if a station gets something from me I've done some research and obviously there's a decent chance the music will work within its format. Seriously, why waste my time, their time and a client's money sending something that will just end up in a used record bin?

Programmers I have developed a personal bond with over the past year know I've never asked them to audition a CD that didn't contain quality music and I never will, although I know not everything I send will work for them. I'm not the most patient person, and I just hope that doors will eventually open.

## Have you been happy with how Mediaguide is working?

Absolutely, especially since nothing I tracked charted at JazzWeek until their data was used to count spins! I start every day by putting my espresso pot on the stove, checking my email and seeing how much airplay CDs I'm tracking got the previous day. A few bugs still need to be worked out, and I miss the date-specific search feature in the first version that will eventually be available again. But these airplay reports are an invaluable resource that can help distributors and labels zero in on retailers – and artists or agents in on clubs – in markets where CDs have received heavy airplay. I'm one of Mediaguide's "power users" in our format and I've been involved in a few situations where music from current CDs featured on NPR or used as the bed for a station promo have triggered false spins. Hiring [former WRTI music director] Frank Johnson as their jazz point person was a great move since Mediaguide now has a dedicated staffer to monitor these anomalies and other things which demon-

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strates they're committed to and appreciate the importance of our genre.

## What do you think is radio's biggest strength?

Its immediacy, its presence and the reactions it inspires in active listeners, which most jazz fans are. When I hear something I like for the first time on KUVU, if I'm not at home and can look the title up on their website, I'm on the phone asking the on-air host "What was that?!" I can't tell you how often my take-out food gets cold because I've stayed in my car to hear the end of a song. Within 24 hours of being featured on NPR, an artist's CD can be catapulted into Amazon.com's Top-100 and experience a significant spike in downloads at iTunes. Radio is clearly still a powerful medium.



Michael Fitts

**At Soweto Kinch's gig at The Jazz Gallery last December, you talked about how amazing it is to work with a hot artist. Would you say he's been your biggest artist to date?**

Doing Soweto's PR in the U.S. is one of the highlights of my 25 years as a publicist, which includes representing world-renowned artists like Keith Jarrett and Alfred Brendel. My part was convincing people to check out someone they'd never heard of, but Soweto would not have received the coverage he has were he not a charismatic artist doing something totally fresh and original. Getting results like that and the 14+ week runs on the JazzWeek chart debut CDs by Denver bassist Ken Walker and Manuel Valera en-

joyed are what make putting in 15-hour days and working weekends worth it. Helping raise their profiles and that of other emerging artists or ones deserving wider recognition like Anat Cohen is a major reason I'm in this business, and why I enjoy promoting smaller labels and artist-produced CDs. I love hearing from a client that they got a call or email from someone who heard their music on the radio halfway across the country. It's like a Master Card moment.

## What are you listening to right now that has you excited?

Babatunde Lea's and Gary Burton's new CDs. Keith Jarrett's new solo improv CD and Trio by Tomasz Stanko's rhythm section with the unpronounceable Polish last names on ECM. A CD-R of a session by an incredible straight-ahead singer, Roberta Gambarini, that's being shopped around at the moment, rough mixes of Jazz Jamaica's forthcoming CD featuring ska-jazz versions of Motown classics, and the recording debut of Peter Apfelbaum's New York Hieroglyphics Ensemble that will be coming out on Act Music & Vision in the fall. **JW**