

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, MAY 22, 1995

Duo Displays Connectedness

JAZZ REVIEW

Denny Zeitlin doesn't exactly fulfill the mannered, Barbra Streisand-"Prince of Tides" image of a psychiatrist. Tall, angular, white-bearded, his long body jack-knifing across the piano keyboard, Zeitlin looks more like a mad musical scientist, single-mindedly in search of the missing chord.

But a psychiatrist is what he is, and a jazz pianist as well, faithfully pursuing both professions since the '60s. Zeitlin's performance at the Jazz Bakery Friday night was a rare opportunity to hear him working the musical side of his faculties in tandem with a performer who is perfectly suited to his exploratory style of playing—bassist David Friesen.

Both artists are gifted, cutting-edge soloists whose interaction with each other seems to occur on an almost symbiotic plane of connectedness. In a program ranging from a gently grooving standard, "The Touch of Your Lips," to a passionately up-tempo rendering of Miles Davis' "Deception," the duo played a series of improvisations in which implication and inference took precedence over straight-ahead, declamatory statement. Zeitlin's piano soloing, for example, rich with contrasts of color and texture, told its stories in a non-representational language of clustered harmonies and fleet bursts of melody. Friesen, meanwhile, spun out bass lines that skipped over and through the pulse, generating tremendous forward momentum.

—DON HECKMAN