



While balancing life as a father and a musician, Charles McPherson is finding a creative relationship between the two.

McPherson in tune as jazzman, dad

By **GEORGE VARGA**
Pop Music Critic

As one of the jazz world's most acclaimed alto saxophonists, Charles McPherson usually spends several months each year performing at concerts and festivals across the nation and in Europe and Japan.

But when he is at home in San Diego,

DATEBOOK

Charles McPherson, with Greg Kurstin, Tony Dumas and Charles McPherson Jr.
8 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday, Elario's, Summer House Inn, 7955 La Jolla Shores Drive, La Jolla. \$10. 459-0541.

McPherson must balance his artistic pursuits with the similarly demanding role of being a father to his 3½-year-old daughter, Camille. Doing both simultaneously with an equal degree of heart, soul and patience is not easy, as the critically heralded musician has learned.

"It's easy to be one or the other," he said. "You can be the father and a regular guy. Or you can be the mad, crazy neurotic who is so selfish and self-absorbed, and who does

what he does at the expense of the world and the lives of people around him to produce wonderful art.

"To me, it's easier to be extreme. The hardest for me is to be balanced and a good person, a good father and a good son. I've done both. I've been the wild, crazy person before, really doing a bunch of questionable stuff. But trying to walk the line between both worlds, and partake of both worlds, is an art in itself that really requires organization and artful living."

McPherson, who rose to fame in the '60s performing with modern-jazz pioneer Charles Mingus, lives with his family in University Heights. He usually takes care of Camille during the day, while his wife, Lynn, conducts classical piano lessons. His nights are often spent composing.

Child's play

Camille's influence is readily evident on her father's latest album for the Arabesque Jazz label, his 25th solo release since his 1964 debut. Titled "Come Play With Me," the nine-song album includes such animated McPherson originals as "Fun House" and "Jumping Jacks," as well as the ballad "Blues for Camille."

"Since I'm dealing with a child, my consciousness is often on that level," said the mustachioed musician. "I thought I'd use that viewpoint and look at things in a child-like way, and that mood spills over when I'm ready to write.

"Now, instead of writing a dark tune, it's maybe a tune a child might like, or has to do with the vibe of being with a kid. It takes a lot of energy, but it brightens your spirit. And I have a whole new lease on life."

Camille will be present for at least one performance by her famous father when he makes a rare local appearance with his quartet tomorrow and Saturday at Elario's in La Jolla.

Family affair

The shows will be a multigenerational family affair, since his drummer at Elario's will be his son, Charles Jr., 35, who recently recorded a "soul-jazz" album at Elario's with his own band and is seeking a record deal. Also scheduled to attend at least one Elario's show is the elder McPherson's mother, Elizabeth, a longtime La Jolla resident, and the younger McPherson's daughter, Naomi, who turns 3 next month.

"Camille loves to go to clubs and hear me

play," her proud father said. "And her attention span for her age is really good. She'll be able to hear at least a whole set, generally, before she gets tired. And she's transfixed. She listens for an hour quietly, which is better than some grown people."

McPherson's 1995 touring itinerary included dates at the Chicago Jazz Festival, the Detroit-Montreux Jazz Festival, the San Francisco Jazz Festival and the Playboy Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl, where several reviews hailed him as the standout soloist on a two-day bill that featured dozens of jazz luminaries.

"The real irony for me is that foreign countries seem to have more of an interest in jazz, and that the money that is made is made abroad," said McPherson, who will return to Europe and Japan for tours next year. "It's still not widely accepted in the U.S., I guess because it's too esoteric. It would be nice if there were more interest and respect for jazz here.

"It's a multidimensional music, and it's treated almost like a bastard. And jazz makes it *in spite of America*, not because of it. That's the way it is, but it just makes me stronger in what I do."