

Christopher Schink

Adding Weight to Watercolors

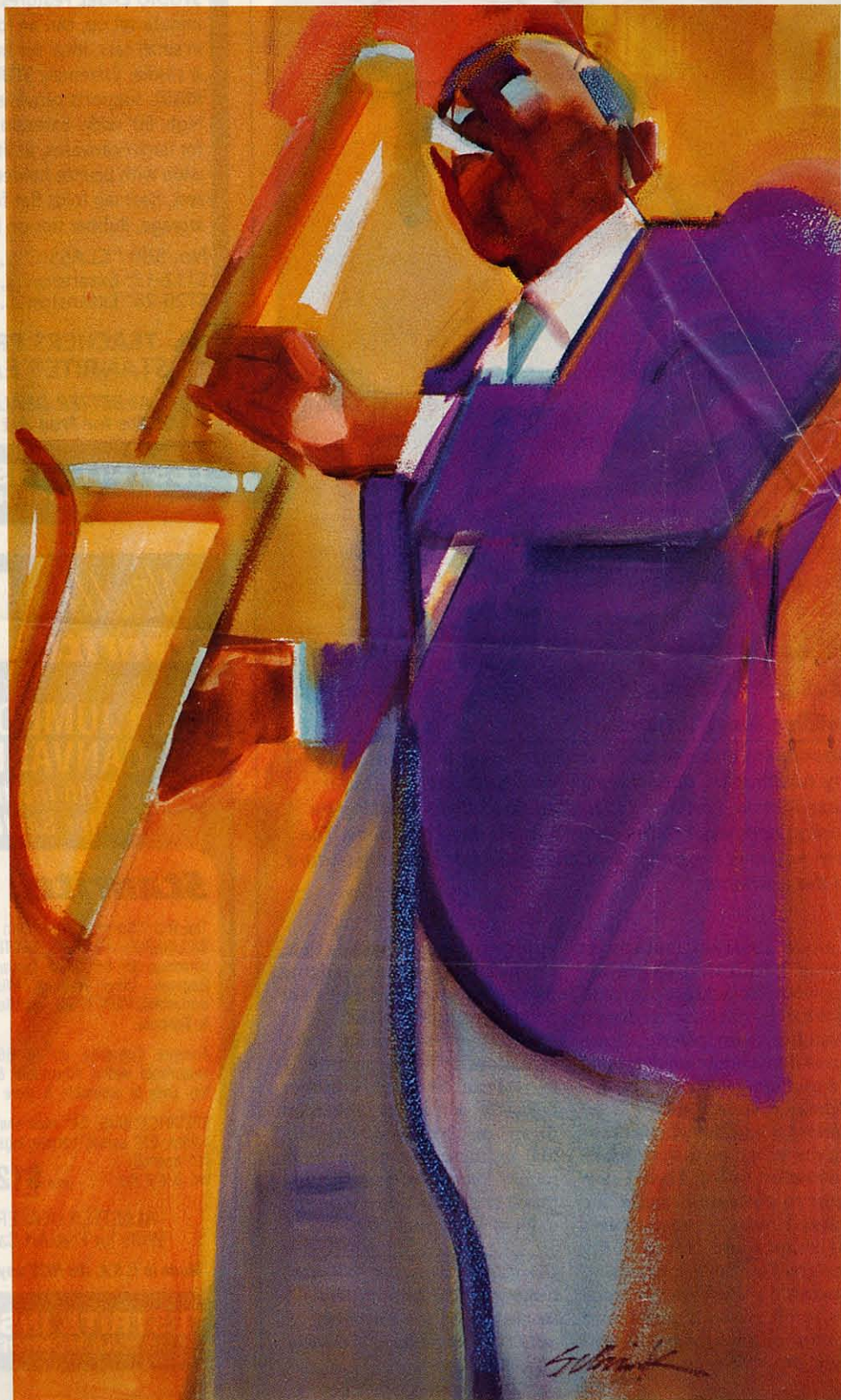
Most of my paintings are built around figures—often classical and jazz musicians. My goal is to capture their involvement in playing and the sense of interplay between them. So to be successful, the figures must have the feeling of weight, power and drama that I associate with the music. I've tried using transparent watercolor alone, but it doesn't have the solidity I need. That's why I often add acrylic or gouache and Caran D'Ache crayons to achieve my desired effects.

Define Space and Color

I always start these pieces with watercolor. I work fairly directly, and the medium's fluidity allows me to quickly capture the major spatial divisions and general color relationships. With watercolor, I'm able to produce subtle gradations of

Gaining Intensity

Layering transparent watercolor tends to darken, rather than intensify, the base color, so I often use acrylics to enhance color intensity. In Magenta Tenor (watercolor, acrylic and crayon, 38x24), for example, I selectively added orange acrylic to the right side of the painting and the area above the saxophonist's head. This brightened those negative spaces and brought them forward.





Creating a Seamless Combination

*If you understand the media you're using, you can combine them so that their differences aren't obvious. For example, in *Yellow Jive* (watercolor, acrylic and crayon, 24x34) the blue stripe on the far right is watercolor while the one in the middle is acrylic. Finally, the blue stripe partially hidden behind the musician's head on the far left is crayon.*

color and value that would be impossible to achieve with other media. But because I know that I'll eventually be adding acrylic, gouache or crayon to these paintings, I can be casual in my execution, without having to immediately resolve all technical problems.

When my basic shapes and color areas are in place, I begin to use acrylics to adjust the value and color relationships. For example, in *Yellow Jive* (above), I widened the space behind the figure on the right to create a better balance. In *Magenta Tenor* (at left), I beefed up the thin watercolor wash in the musician's coat with acrylics to produce a feeling of solidity. I also exploit acrylics' opacity because it can heighten the intensity of watercolor passages, without having the color darken or get muddy.

After I've fine-tuned the color and defined the shapes, I turn to Caran D'Ache Neocolor II crayons to add accents, intense, pure colors or darks. You can see these touches in *Yellow Jive*, where I used crayon for the bright yellow on the saxophone mouthpiece, then echoed this yellow in the thin line on the musician's jacket. I also used crayon to add

the thin blue accent between the red and black stripes on the right of the painting.

Tricks of the Trade

Of course, making the various media work together requires adjustments in my color mixing. To lighten opaque, pure colors, you add white (not water), making the resulting mixture appear not only lighter and less intense, but cooler and "chalky." I compensate for this temperature change by adding, in addition to white, small amounts of yellow or other light, warm colors. By subtly adjusting the intensity and temperature of these opaque additions, I can make them indistinguishable from the adjoining watercolor passages.

Once I learned to combine these media effectively, I discovered that I can use them in very specific ways. I'm not interested in merely experimenting with materials—I already know what I want to say in my paintings, and I've found that mixing media is the best means of saying it. ☺

Northern California-based Christopher Schink is a well-known watercolorist and workshop instructor.