

Classical Jazz at Lincoln Center

Alice Tully Hall/New York

The fifth season of Classical Jazz concerts, and kickoff of the inaugural season of jazz as a Lincoln Center "department" sought to further legitimize America's 20th century music as a high art form (see "News" Apr. '91). The jazz repertory movement spurred on by artistic director Wynton Marsalis and consultant Stanley Crouch delved into the sounds of King Oliver, Kansas City swing, John Coltrane the composer, and Duke Ellington's portraits and suites; (I didn't attend the well-received concert by current divas Shirley Horn and Abbey Lincoln).

Retrospectives are surely due King Oliver, whose few recordings inadequately reproduce the complexity, bristly power, and good-humored bite of his ensemble. With Marsalis, 17-year-old Nicholas Payton, and Greg Stafford taking sharp turns on the double-cornet breaks originally improvised by Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong, Dr. Michael White led a band versed and rehearsed in a style that's come to be considered archaic, despite its similarity to Ornette Coleman's recent polyphonic work. White is a solid, sometimes thrilling clarinetist, and the rhythm section (Wycliffe Gordon, tuba or bass; Don Vappie, banjo; Farid Barron, piano; Herlin Riley, drums) certainly excelled when cut loose from exact recreations of the Creole Jazz Band's three-minute documentations of 1923. Fred Lonzo was a growly tailgater, and Thias Clarke sang two theatrical blues with period conviction.

Kansas City Swing And Shout seemed to miss some opportunities! Though Claude "Fiddler" Williams, with bassist Aaron Bell and guitarist Ted Dunbar, was cracker-crisp and Jay McShann's trio shared the bill, they didn't play together. Underexposed master altoist Charles McPherson had too few spots, and tenorist Todd Williams got more solos than Frank Wess in Moten, Basie, Andy Kirk, and Mary Lou Williams works played by David Berger's resident Jazz Orchestra, which is better at easy swing than raucous shout.

Marsalis and his regular cohorts—the soberly capable Williams, Adderley-influenced altoist Wes Anderson, bassist Reginald Veal, surprisingly thunderous pianist Marcus Roberts—brought smarts, heart, and sparks to the *Coltrane Serenade*, concentrating on Trane's mid-career pieces from "Big Nick" to "Dear Lord." If Trane's spirituality can only be attained through life experience, these young men seem ready to go for it; Wynton himself dug into "Transition." Under-20 bassist Christian McBride was superb with both drummers Billy Hig-



Smarts, heart, and sparks: Wes Anderson, Joe Henderson, and Wynton Marsalis

gins and Roy Haynes; McCoy Tyner was inspired on "The Promise."

The Marsalisites were prominent on Ellington's suites (*Liberian and New Orleans*) and portraits, but Wess, McPherson, Marcus Belgrave, Lew Soloff, Art Baron, Britt Woodman; Norris Turney, Kenny Washing-

ton, Sir Roland Hanna, Milt Grayson, Andy Stein, Steve Nelson, and Wild Bill Davis also had features. How could we hear these charts so faithfully executed except through programs like Lincoln Center's? If there's no other answer, many thanks for the great music. —Howard Mandel

Umbria Jazz '91/ Umbria Jazz By The Sea Perugia/Fano, Italy

After 14 years, the Umbria Jazz Festival has evolved into at least three, and possibly more, festivals, each with its own (sometimes crosscutting and/or interrelated) theme.

Longest established here has been the mainstream component, this year featuring such reliable veterans as Hank Jones and John Hendricks; the swift, busy, but uninvolved guitar of Joe Pass; the swift, fiery, and exciting trumpet of Red Rodney (with young Chris Potter showing real promise on sax); and the classical variations on piano standards (Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way," Waldron's "Soul Eyes," Tatum's "All God's Chillun" . . .) from Kenny Barron in daily sets dedicated to former boss Stan Getz. Representing the youthful agenda were "Jazz Futures" Roy Hargrove, Marlon Jordan, Antonio Hart, Tim Warfield, Benny Green & co. Media coverage notwithstanding, what I heard were dully competent, fairly calculated solos, music fashioned as carefully as their wardrobe. Personally, I was overwhelmed.

Also on tap was a current of electricity. The Hancock/Shorter/Clarke/Hakim Quartet, amplified to the max, seemed content to *play at* the music (and giving the audience an impression of having a good time) rather than *create* some. Ornette's revised Prime Time alternated between a surprisingly mellow modesty and a grand clutter, including acoustic guitar and piano/synth for new, transparent colors. Ornette blends into the ensemble more now, but the parade of three-minute arrangements made one wish for some old-fashioned, all-stops-out blowing. Brooklyn's M-Basers blew jazzy solos from Steve Coleman, Greg Osby, and Robin Eubanks over endless rumbling rhythms evoking Hendrix and George Clinton, long jams that could raise the Dead—but how is this more cutting-edge than the original Mahavishnu Orchestra? What a remarkable lack of compositional thought for a group this large. At least the Zawinul Syndicate, for all their flamboyant theatrics and pretentious rock attitudes, resembled a *band*.

Most interesting, as usual, were the in-betweeners. Like the Dave Holland Quartet, which used real songs, not just strung-together riffs, and created a wider, deeper range of expression, allowing M-Base drummer Smitty Smith to play with textural ingenuity and altoist Coleman to melodicize,

à la Paul Desmond (that's a compliment). Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy provided the wildest sets of the fest. Decked out in red-satin tuxes, their infectious stomps (like "Honky-Tonk" and Junie Lunceford's "Siesta In The Fiesta") and uncloying Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson covers shone. (Top honors go to Stanton Davis' underrated, rip-roaring trumpet, Bob Stewart's heroic tuba, and Steve Turre's savvy trombone and arrangements.)

Quatre (a Euro-supergroup of Enrico Rava, Franco D'Andrea, Miroslav Vitous, and Daniel Humair) found new pockets of lyricism in unpredictable improvised areas. Don Grohnick forsook his frequent electronics for a cache of Blue Note-ish, interestingly craggy tunes, featuring tenorman Joe Henderson (a national treasure) and Randy Brecker's laserlike trumpet. Michel Petrucciani was a crowd pleaser, now offering an accessible Brazilian/Caribbean groove, but the "Round Midnight" encore proved the pastel synth moods superfluous when Petrucciani wants to play jazz piano. Likewise, James Moody's relaxed mastery and warm wit on a long tenor blues—one of the single



Dove Hoffand: wider, deeper

best moments of the fest—outshone the questionable "contemporary" effects that popped up in his group's music.

One important sub-theme was the many free concerts in the open-air piazzas, highlighting Italian bands (the best being the Furio Romano Quintet's cool yet biting approach and folkish interludes—including an ocarina/tuba duet, the comfortable swing of the Gianni Basso/Oscar Valdambri Quintet, and the Wayne Shorterisms and John Scofieldisms of leader Francesco Santucci and guitarist Rocco Zifarelli in an otherwise bland pop-jazz setting), organist Jimmy McGriff's wail, Tuck & Patti's thirtysomething songbook, and the peripatetic Olympia Brass Band from New Orleans and their local counterpart, the Ambrosia Brass Band. And a special bonus was Chicago's

Fellowship Baptist Church Choir, 75 voices strong, whose sincerity and power was breathtaking, whether amidst the elaborate artwork in the basilica of St. Peter's or on an unadorned stage.

This year the Umbrians traveled eastward to the Adriatic resort town of Fano to inaugurate a three-day Umbria By The Sea. Besides the gospel choir, McGriff, and Hendricks, there was a boatride with the funki-fied Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and a satis-

ying set of swing era vets, where Al Grey's gruff trombone stole solo honors from Benny Carter and Sweets Edison, supported by Marian McPartland, Milt Hinton, and especially Louie Bellson's spring-water clear brushwork. The seaside, with its tremendous fish cuisine and small-town charm, is a far cry from the spectacular vistas, winding narrow cobbled streets, and pastas of Perugia, but both love jazz, and know how to show it.

—Art Lange



Rocco Zifarelli
Lyndon

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Nel jazz rock troviamo maestri come i transfughi del pianeta Weather Report, Scott Henderson, John McLaughlin, Paco De Lucia... e ci fermiamo altrimenti lo spazio non basterebbe a citarne i più importanti. Nonostante questa partenza ad handicap, il chitarrista Rocco Zifarelli riesce nell'improbabile compito di debuttare creativamente con 'Lyndon', opera che esplora il concetto 'fusion' a 360°. Furiosa l'apertura di 'Pacman', dove il sostegno ritmico è impressionante (Pippo Marino al basso e Paco Sery del gruppo di Joe Zawinul alla batteria), mentre il sax di Stefano Di Battista appronta un crescendo da KO. Energico e raffinato il resto di 'Lyndon', che evidenzia la buona vena compositiva di Zifarelli (tranne 'Havona' di Jaco Pastorius). La tecnica sopraffina dei musicisti, in primis la chitarra di Rocco, è la ciliegina di questa squisita torta. G.B.

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