

Shaw swings through the Palms

Concert review by Ken Meyers

I must admit to having some initial reservations when I learned that the Woody Shaw Quintet would be appearing at the Palms so soon after a similar appearance one year ago.

The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, I was uncertain if Edmonton jazz fans might take this superb musician for granted because of his fairly recent appearance, and thus not lend their support.

Secondly, there was question as to whether Shaw and his associates could match the excellence of their performances last year.

Any doubts I may have had were quickly quelled Saturday evening as the Woody Shaw Quintet shifted into overdrive and gave Edmonton one of the finest nights of music in recent years.

I stress the artistic aspect, for these players transcend the category of mere musicians, and are contributing significantly to the evolving history of the jazz art form by developing a style that is singularly unique.

Ann Casson wings to success

Theatre review by Shawna Vogel

Northern Light Theatre has done it again. I wondered if it would be able to live up to the reputation established with last season's spectacular *Piaf*, but its current production, *Wings*, starring Ann Casson, leaves no doubt.

Wings, directed by Scott Swann, is the story of Emily Stilson, a woman who incurs brain damage from a stroke. It is the traumatic struggle of a courageous woman trying to piece together her mind.

The play opens with Mrs. Stilson sitting alone, reading, in a spotlight on a sparse stage. A clock ticks, then stops. We see that Emily feels something is about to happen, but what? There is a sudden flash of lights, a piercing noise, Emily bolts upright, and we are thrust into the middle of her frazzled brain. In the background of this brilliant set, doctors and nurses race back and forth. We hear muddled sounds of the hospital intertwined with the vocalized racing of Emily's mind.

During the course of the play, we move from inside Emily's mind, which can still perceive normally, to the outside, hearing the garbled sounds

Shaw's development of the usage of the pentatonic scale creates a dichotomy of music that appears harmonically and rhythmically complex, while at the same moment being almost surrealistically primitive. His improvisations alternate between long articulate explorations into the extensions of the prevailing harmony, aggressively short and choppy statements closer to the parent tonality, and smooth modalic melodies. As a result, the listener has few preconceived notions of what to expect. He leaves himself open to the improvisational statements of Shaw, who dips into his palette and ushers the audience through a kaleidoscope of colors.

Saxophonist Carter Jefferson has to be considered a technical monster on his instruments. The minute Jefferson steps onto the stage, the audience's excitement mounts in anticipation of something very special happening. His technical wizardry is surpassed only by his ability to assimilate the musical direction of his leader in the usage of the pentatonic scale in improvisation. While Woody's melodic ideas are directed more at wider intervals, Jefferson's statements

masquerading as words. We see and feel the frustration as she searches for simple words like "toothbrush". We understand her confusion of not being understood.

Ann Casson is magnificent. One rarely sees such a strong, devastating, and complete performance. Every emotion can be read and every thought process can be followed by watching her face. Another actress may have needed to show some physical effects of the stroke to strengthen the character portrayal, but not Ann Casson. Honestly, any attempt to describe Casson's performance does not do her justice.

The backdrop is an ingenious system of mirrors which initially divides the set into two distinct parts; Emily's mind and her physical presence. The reflections are skillfully used so we see two things happening at once. The set reinforces the alienation of Emily's mind from her speech. It allows fluid movement from inside and outside her head, and subtle transitions from hospital to outdoors.

The set, lights and sound come together flawlessly to emphasize the impact of the script and the performances. Once again, Northern Light Theatre proves that it will not settle for second best.

usually tend towards the smoother and more melodic, although he does introduce many avant-garde techniques into his playing.

In my opinion, the spark-plug of the band is pianist Larry Willis. Willis is a new member of the band, replacing *Rosewood* and *Stepping Stones'* pianist Onaje Allan Grumbs. Although Willis lacks some of the tonal control and sensitivity of his predecessor, this is more than amply compensated for by the aggressiveness of his approach. When listening to Willis, an inevitable comparison with McCoy Tyner comes to mind. The similarity, and Willis' compositional expertise, makes his contributions to the group significant ones.

Although bassist Stafford James' association with Shaw goes way back, he has only recently rejoined the quintet. He is an awesome technician, rhythmically infallible, musically sensitive and innovative, and he adds another compositional dimension to the group.

Last, but certainly not least, is the multi-talented Shaw veteran, composer-percussionist Victor Lewis. If Lewis isn't considered one of the top drummers on today's scene, I would be surprised. With his technical authority, bodily independence, and startling polyrhythmic sense, he provides that solid base which is so essential for his colleagues' improvisations. As if this is not sufficient, he is, in my estimation, the group's finest composer.

Although each of these men proved themselves truly creative professional musicians in their own right, what was most impressive was their interaction on the ensemble level. It is indeed a pleasure to hear a band this well-rehearsed and able to assimilate ideas as a group. The group floated effortlessly through a variety of styles, moving from hard swing to aggressiverock, and then to robust, free-wheeling Latin tunes, a genre which seems to have become a trademark of the Shaw sound. Shaw's band also showed their professionalism by acknowledging their audience's approval with a very unassuming brand of showmanship, something terribly lacking in jazz performances.

Saturday's audience was also treated to the vocal stylings of Edmontonian Judy Singh. I applaud Woody and the band for accompanying Judy on such standards as "Green Dolphin Street," "I Should Care," and Horace Silver's luscious "Peace."

The Palms Cafe was filled to capacity, and many would-be patrons were unable to gain access. All that can be said to those unfortunates is, next year, don't leave it until the last night.

ART OPENINGS

TONIGHT, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6

8:00—10:00 P.M.

at the Students' Union Building

Students' Union Art Gallery

Swiss Photographers from 1840 Until Today

— over 300 photographs by 117 photographers documenting the history of photography in Switzerland.

— Wine and Cheese Served

L'EXPRESS

(SUB's New Deli & Coffee Bar)

— drawings by Edmonton Artists LEE BALE, DON BERGSON, and ALAN BROWNOFF.

— Complimentary Coffee and Pastries

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