

Modern Jazz Quartet excels

by Carl Matheson

To a jazz musician with a social conscience dress is a matter of great importance. When here recently, Earl Hines clothed his musicians in matching blue blazers and white-on-white shirt-tie combinations to reinforce the band's image as a slick and unabashedly pretentious Las Vegas show group. Dizzy Gillespie sidemen were covered in the angry colours of the street while, in front of them, Dizzy preached love and Ba'hai goodwill among men.

The New York Modern Jazz Quartet came out on stage last Monday, however, dressed neither to kill, impress nor scare. Horn player Frank Wess and drummer Richard Pratt bedecked themselves, respectively, in a sweater that I remember giving to my grandfather for Christmas 1972 and a shapeless object that is ironed by having rocks dropped on it by launderer-

balloonists. Pianist-leader Roland Hanna and Czech bassist George Marog dressed more formally but certainly no more showily. The Quartet appeared at the Cohn to be listened to rather than to be ogled. From the music that they produced any audience could derive more entertainment than fun watching the most exhibitionistic of the show bands. The undeservedly, but not unexpectedly—for jazz still has not acquired prominence in Halifax—small crowd at the Cohn was impressed. It knew it had seen one of the highlights of the Cohn's brief existence.

The band concentrated on its music. Its singlemindedness extended to the introduction of songs. Roland Hanna talked very briefly about the programme for a brief period at the beginning of each of the two sets. His brevity in no way caused a feeling of coldness or austerity; most in the audience were charmed by his warmth and

refreshing lack of egoism. Once players and pieces were introduced the band set itself to its music. Few non-musical sounds were uttered after that save for the occasional guttural grunt of an intent performer.

The music that the band did content itself to play was effectively chosen. During the course of the evening each musician had ample opportunity to display his abilities and affinities, each composition showing some diverse facet of his talent. In particular, Hanna's playing exhibited a great variety of styles. For much of the concert his hands caressed the keyboard, creating harp-like arpeggios and rich chordal textures somewhat in the manner of a composite Keith Jarrett-Art Tatum. When called upon, as he was in "Autumn Leaves," he had at his command a percussive wrist stroke with which he punctuated an extremely palatable high-velocity be-bop solo. Also, during Miles Davis' "All Blues," he emitted—to the surprise of many in the audience—a grinding four-to-the-bar jungle-mouthed blues solo. Of course his classical training and sense of taste prevented the solo from being entirely bathed in raunch but its well-executed controlled rancidity was much appreciated by the ecstatic throng.

Frank Wess, on alto solo and flute, was also a many-sided performer. His playing ranged from the lyrical and ethereal flute passages in Hanna's "Night Of The Dancers" to a wonderfully-hydrogenated greasy sax solo on "All Blues." Even when not soloing he stood out, sucking his gums with a strange mixture of vacancy and pensiveness while, oblivious to the

audience, he stared at a vacant seat at the other end of the auditorium. He had his music and his empty seat—some say that it was in aisle 2, row W; I am not sure. In any case, what more could one want?

In spite of its being an excellent showcase for individual talent, the band's performance revealed the quartet to be an extremely cohesive unit. The band's unity went beyond rhythmic tightness and on-stage communication. It could do so because several of its original numbers were written for a quartet of four separate musicians rather than for a variety of soloists backed by a rhythm section. Pieces like "Night Of The Dancers" and Wess's "Placitude" were orchestral without being ponderous. During these compositions the group transcended the traditional jazz styles to become a complex intra-related, and, at the core, beautiful organism. Standard meter marcation so that Marog and Pratt could each play a more creative role, Marog using bowed and chordal bass figures and Pratt often resorting to gong and cymbal flourishes to build and relieve tension.

The band was hot—spiritually if not frenetically. The audience was aware of the energy radiating from the stage and the members in turn felt this energy as it was reflected back upon them. Hence they put a constant increase of creative joy into the performance until the joy was all but tangible. When the band members had taken their last deep bow and walked off—not to take a loudly requested encore—there remained some energy. This concert, because of its excellence, will be remembered. That is certainly more than can be said of many of the past concerts at the Cohn.



by Andrew Gillis

Exodus Bob Marley/Island

Bob Marley remains the most important figure in West Indian music (and one of the most important in Jamaican politics) with his seventh Island album, **Exodus**, which was released late this past summer. But it is no longer politics or straight reggae which fills Marley's repertoire.

Without making the spiritual thrust of reggae seem too abstract and intellectual a concern, it was hard to look at Marley's albums favourably until now. Each one was more embarrassingly political than the last, save for **Bob Marley Live**, recorded in England at the time of **Natty Dread** and never pushed as a big seller in Canada. For listeners here it was somewhat hard to identify with "this morning I woke up in a curfew"; only songs like "I Shot The Sheriff" (**Burnin'**) or "No Woman No Cry" (**Natty Dread and Live**) were either universal enough in revolutionary zeal or un-political enough to connect with North Americans.

Exodus features Marley's hottest band, with the Barrett brothers on bass and drums, and two pop love

songs on side two, each one worthy of Toots or Jimmy Cliff. They are "Waiting In Vain" and "Turn Your Lights Down", and with "Jammin'" will likely form the sales appeal of this record. They are all great. Also the very lowdown title cut—which sounds like the "dub" reggae music recorded by Big Youth—is good with the turntable pitch control wide open. (People like Big Youth, apparently, get stoned and swim out to sea as far as they can. Then they try to get back to shore alive.)

Singin'

Melissa Manchester/Arista

Melissa Manchester and other girl singers from the northeast are probably about to take over the entire record market. There's Phoebe Snow, Bonnie Raitt, the divine Miss M, and also Streisand, Laura Nyro (still around) and more soul singers—Natalie Cole and even Vickie Sue Robinson can sing like crazy—than you can shake a tailfeather at. When Melissa piles up session musicians and her own piano for her new album **Singin'**, who can complain?

I can't, but I want to try. The songs on this record are good. The

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