

# Hepcats jazz up the Holiday Inn

BY TIM COVERT

New Waterford native Kirk MacDonald returned to Halifax Sunday night for a smoking show with some of the most incredible jazz talent the province has to offer.

Macdonald joined with Anil Sharma on drums and Skip Beckwith on bass at the Halifax Holiday Inn. The second set of the evening featured MacDonald reunited with his teacher, Dalhousie Professor and Saxophonist god,

Don Palmer. The combination of these artists was akin to oxidation — sometimes a slow burn, sometimes a raging fire.

MacDonald was in Halifax for the dual purpose of promoting his second release, *Reminiscence*, and to record the night for the CBC stereo show "All the Best."

His urgent splurges of toneful sound were the dominating force of both sets and one could become completely absorbed in the wave after wave of music rushing over the audience. MacDonald played an alto saxophone for the first set as the trio ran through some standards. Of the four tunes chosen, "Bye Bye Blackbird" and Monk's "Rhythmanique" stood out. Both tunes have the right combination of saucy melody and breakneck speed to showcase not only MacDonald's abilities, but those of the rest of the trio. The hiss of Sharma's cymbals hovered above his truly incredible rhythms and casually wrought percussive masterpieces. Skip Beckwith's

steady, neverending bass lines were punctuated by head-bobbing and the occasional "Yeah!" as one of the group would distinguish themselves. His solos were expert and contained some very moving climactic tones.

Energy seemed to flow through the group with the facial contortions of Beckwith augmenting the quiet intensity of Sharma, all the while feeding off of MacDonald's nodding, furrowed expression. The only drawback of the main set was that on quiet passages, one could hear the pads clicking on MacDonald's sax; it was a bit annoying and only served to draw attention away from his sound.

The second set was much the same as the first. Macdonald switched to a tenor and Palmer joined to form the quartet, bringing his soprano and alto into the mix. This seemed to throw off the balance of the first set, but this was compensated by the interesting pairing of the twin saxophones.

The pieces in the second set included some of MacDonald's own compositions. "Kirk's Happy Blues" (renamed "Kirk's Blues" because of the recession) had a darting melody line and some fine melding of sound between MacDonald and Palmer. This continued through MacDonald's "Monkey's Uncle" and developed into a lengthy engaging conversation between the two horns in "Lover Man." In the closer, Cole Porter's "I Love You," the musicians soloed out until Sharma was left to do an at first sparse, then roaring, improvisation that built up to the close of the show.

It was honestly amazing. You'd have to listen to the show to get the full effect. And you can. "All the Best" is on CBC stereo Sundays at noon, and excerpts from the show will be played later in the fall.



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Like teacher, like student: Don Palmer and Kirk MacDonald

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