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JAZZ REVIEW

Dizzy Gillespie, the Man and the Music

By **PETER WATROUS**

Sometimes concerts break up into small parts of great brilliance, and Jazz at Lincoln Center's "Dizzy's Big-Band Bop," the opening concert of its season and a tribute to the orchestral work of Dizzy Gillespie, did just that. The pianist John Lewis and the vibraphonist Milt Jackson, members of the Modern Jazz Quartet as well as original members of the Dizzy Gillespie big band of the middle 1940's played so quietly and so logically and with so much authority that they threatened to leave everybody behind. Chucho Valdez, the Cuban pianist, constructed extraordinary rhythmic solos that had the audience cheering. And Wynton Marsalis, the artist director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, performed the ballad "I Remember Clifford"; full of sighs and pearly notes, it was mature.

But the concert, on Thursday night at Alice Tully Hall, came with a central idea: to take on the lesser-known orchestral music of Gillespie, who died in 1993. The first Gillespie big band, convened in 1945, codified many of the rhythmic innovations of

be-bop — an argument can be made that no jazz movement has had its confirmation until it has been orchestrated — and its music in many ways is a tribute to both Gillespie's compositions and the whole process of taking a melody and making it orchestral. On several pieces the melodies split up and went around the orchestra; on pieces arranged by Tadd Dameron, the melodies stayed buttery and simple.

And the arrangements usually had a portion of Gillespie's endless sense of jazz's wonder and possibility. One tune left the last chord as pure dissonance, exactly what harmony rule books tell writers to avoid. "Jessica's Day" kept its harmonies relatively simple. Several tunes used Afro-Cuban rhythms to enrich jazz's rhythms and to complicate the structural progression of tunes. On "Ow!" the trumpeters Jon Faddis, Mr. Marsalis, Ryan Kisor and Marcus Printup challenged one another on a series of short solos. And on "One Bass Hit," while the bassist Rodney Whitaker improvised, little whispers of big-band riffs chuckled.

As well as the Lincoln Center Jazz

Orchestra performed — and the show, which sold out for three consecutive nights, received a standing ovation — it was still individual performances that made the concert ring. The rhythm section of Mr. Whitaker on bass and Lewis Nash on drums swung so hard on a medium tempo version of "Emanon" that Mr. Jackson exclaimed "Oh Lord!" and Mr. Lewis laughed. Mr. Faddis, a scholar of Gillespie's music, captured the sheer inventiveness of Gillespie as a soloist, with wild jumps and screeches and high-speed juxtapositions of texture and velocity.

During the second half of the show, Mr. Marsalis sang the novelty tune "Umbrella Man." Gillespie, who was one of jazz's great links to vaudeville, loved humor and oddities; Mr. Marsalis, in his great seriousness, is the opposite. But he sang it, and fooled around with Mr. Faddis, who is Gillespie's heir in humor as well as music. By then, Gillespie's great understanding of American culture, the play between virtuosity and humor and the embrace of so much of modernity's possibilities, had made itself clear.