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A Record Label's Legacy Is Celebrated and Reimagined

The legacy of Blue Note Records cuts a wide swath through music history, from the boogie-woogie bustle of Meade Lux Lewis to the folk-stirred pop of Norah Jones. But the

MUSIC REVIEW

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label's core identity rests on a remarkable body of recordings made in the 1950s and '60s. It's only natural that "Legends of Blue Note," a concert presented by Jazz at Lincoln Center on Thursday night, would focus chiefly on that era, if only as a ratification of its enduring appeal.

What Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra offered at the Rose Theater, though, was considerably more than a history lesson or an exercise in brand reinforcement. Unveiling nearly a dozen new arrangements of songs from the Blue Note catalog, the band sounded energized and challenged. Its performance, over the course of a brisk two hours, was deeply impressive.

Mr. Marsalis assumed his customary role as master of ceremonies and featured soloist — his trumpet choruses on Jackie McLean's "Appointment in Ghana" marked the first blast of improvisation — and he wrote three of the concert's arrangements. The rest of the program involved pieces arranged by others, notably several members of the band.

The saxophonist, clarinetist and flutist Ted Nash contributed three of the most ingenious arrangements, packing each with incident and drama. His version of Wayne Shorter's "Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum" was especially memorable. It began at a low simmer, with a sinuous line for piano, bass and bass clarinet; then the band landed on a richly detailed chord, and the trombones played the melody in unison.

Later, after sure-footed solos by Mr. Nash and the bassist Carlos Henriquez, there was a witty allusion to clomping, anachronistic swing.

"Legends of Blue Note" will be repeated tonight in the Rose Theater, Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center, 60th Street and Broadway; (212) 721-6500, jalc.org.

"Trompeta Toccata," a Kenny Dorham composition, was equally arresting in its new incarnation, courtesy of the trombonist Vincent Gardner. Enlarged into a brassy fanfare, it featured a bravura lead convincingly tackled by the trumpeter Sean Jones and an Afro-Caribbean coda involving just bass, percussion and the stomping of feet on the stage.

The saxophonist and clarinetist Victor Goines did his strongest work as an arranger on "The Moontrane," by Woody Shaw. With its modal underpinnings, the piece encouraged some spirited rhythm section playing, especially during an exploratory

Legends of Blue Note

Rose Theater

solo by the alto saxophonist Sherman Irby. It also accommodated a trumpet round table, with concise commentary by Mr. Marsalis, Mr. Jones, Ryan Kisor and the evening's most reliably rewarding improviser, Marcus Printup.

Of course Blue Note encompassed more music than this during the '60s alone; to be considered remotely comprehensive, the concert would have had to flirt with boogaloo (a

great idea for this band) and free jazz (a not-so-great idea).

But there was no claim to comprehensiveness, nor was there a need for it. Even as the band marched offstage to a street-parade version of Horace Silver's "Cape Verdean Blues," there was a sense that the musicians could have kept tilling similar ground with strong results.

Mr. Marsalis — who, by the way, declined to mention his own status as a Blue Note artist — might even consider a sequel to the concert. There's no shortage of material to draw from, or talent with which to transform it.



Members of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra at Rose Theater on Thursday night, performing new arrangements of music recorded for Blue Note Records in the 1950s and '60s.

Nan Melville for The New York Times