

PERFORMANCE

Wynton Marsalis Quintet

The Wynton Marsalis Quintet, fronted by the Grammy winner and his older tenor and soprano-playing brother, Branford, proved to be, by anyone's measurement, the most progressive, innovative and sheerly interesting of the musicians at the World Showcase of Jazz, held June 2 at Walt Disney World's Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida.

The post-bop gang of five, led by the young trumpet master, gradually eased into the free zone. Shouting his stratospheric sustain notes point-blank into the microphone, Wynton guided the new mainstreamers to tension, then released it and kicked back into the build-up.

The Quintet's first composition, an untitled Wynton piece, contained some Branford tenor maneuvering and a solo spin by pianist Kenny Kirkland, probably one of the more underrated jazz pianists of our time. Moving the group into a straightahead feel, Kirkland dropped in some octave statements during his long upward climb, and later descended the keyboard in the same manner, grabbing clusters with his left hand.

"Sister Cheryl," the melancholic Tony Williams tune that Wynton recorded on *Jazz at the Opera House*, was given an equally sensitive treatment. After the two-horn unison head, Wynton employed a strikingly warm tone to bottom out during his improvisation, raising his eyebrows over long or particularly tricky passages.

Branford, inexplicably staring at his feet during the greater part of the set, brandished a soprano for his solo turn and produced some sweetly mellow and intricate lines.

Third up, "Monk's Mood" was served by the Quintet as a series of intriguing, suggestive state-

ments propped against some complex stop-time play. Branford's tenor and Wynton's trumpet poured out measured phrases—some in unison and others not.



photo by mike barfield

Charlie Chaplin's "Smile" closed one of the shortest sets (read: Marsalises can't play too long for this writer) I've had the pleasure of listening to. The muted Wynton opened softly with the melody, playing off Kirkland's tinkling and drummer Jeff Watt's brushing before moving into non-stop improvisation. Kirkland then single-noted it for a while, and bassist Charles Fambrough (a big man for a big axe) began to dig in.

Finally Branford got his turn on tenor. Against a double-time tempo, he sprayed on a few well-spaced notes. The obvious contrast became more apparent as the saxophonist touched down less often and with an ever-greater distance between notes. As naturally as if it were written, Branford doubled up, vamped, and set out again.

Before leaving the stage, the band played a theme written by Wynton while the trumpeter thanked the attentive and appreciative audience.

The Wynton Marsalis Quintet, whose appearance at Epcot was a real coup on the part of Disney programmers, proved once again that American mainstream jazz is alive and well. Here's to its continued good health.

—philip booth

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