JAZZ REVIEW

Marsalis and His Band Rework Monk and Others

BY PETER WATROUS

Wynton Marsalis reconceived his recent project, added the clarinetist Michael White and performed the music of Jelly Roll Morton and Thelonious Monk and his own music for a show at Alice Tully Hall on Saturday night. It was hard not to get the idea that there wasn’t much ambition in the program, which is part of the Jazz at Lincoln Center series; Mr. Marsalis is soon to release his reworkings of Monk’s music.

He and the band recently finished a month’s worth of concerts across the country, and for the first half of the show the group didn’t have the coherence that a working band usually has. The performances didn’t always hold together; the improvisations went on too long, drifting from the point of the compositions and giving a sense of disjunction to the performance. Oddly, though it used to be one of the best rhythm sections in jazz, the rhythm section didn’t always sound locked in.

The music progressed in the second half. Mr. Marsalis’s reworkings of Monk’s melodies and his formal restructuring of the compositions were often stunning. On “Four O’Clock,” Mr. Marsalis reharmonized the melody, adding dense dissonance with high notes played by Young Anderson on soprano saxophone. The piece opened into a duet between the bassist Reginald Veal and Mr. Marsalis, which ended up being one of the more exciting moments of the night with Mr. Marsalis contrasting snake-like runs and emotional, sparse melodies. Blues phrases and riffs led back to the melody.

On Mr. Marsalis’s “Black Coders From the Underground,” an old composition that he had reworked, the saxophonist Victor Gomes, playing soprano, started a group dissonance by repeating phrases, inching them along by changing a few notes. He was after intensity, and he got it. Mr. Marsalis and his group played an other original piece, based on gospel harmonies and rhythms that built pressure, fanning his trumpet with a derby mule and using a few notes, he had the audience cheering. When it was over, the audience jumped to its feet for a standing ovation.

In the Mood for Festivals
At Jazz at Lincoln Center

BY BEN RATLIFF

A new season that promises more of what worked in the past.


A theme of romance through the 2006-07 season for Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis, its artistic director, said in an interview yesterday.

Another theme, though unstated, might be consolidation. The schedule for the season, from October to May, promises more of what has worked before: festival programming by co-ordinating the booking of Rose Hall on three performance spaces; a concert by the audience favorites Dave Brubeck and Ramsey Lewis; the return of the ever-popular Duke Ellington to the reperatory rotation; more concerts of Afro-Cuban, Spanish, and Brazilian jazz hybrids; and a few landmark concerts stemming from the gospel tradition, which seem likely to generate audience interest.

But back to romance. In addition to the Valentine’s Day concerts — organized into a Festival in February, including an “Ellington Love Songs” program at Rose Theater and a concert by the singers Kurt Elling and Nancy King in the Allen Room — Mr. Marsalis and many of the season’s concerts will have “specials” of a man and a woman” in their programming. Among these are a concert of new music commissioned from Frank Foster, the former Baste band saxophonist and arranger, which will follow a love-story narrative; and a singer-with-big-band show, “Best of the Big Bands,” with Freddy Cole and other vocalists. Presumably the Brazilian Festival in May 2008, including concerts by the bona-fide singer Rosa Passos and the composer and performer Ivan Lins, will contain some romance as well.

Last year Marsalis said that the John Coltrane Festival particularly stood out as a success. It is Coltrane’s music was approached from different perspectives in different halls. So next season, as he explained, there will be more such programming. First will be the “Golden Past” festival, celebrating jazz composition. The focus would be on Gil Evans, and the focus will be on three nights of his music — “The whole scope of it.” The music was also said, “not just what he did with Miles Davis” — played by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Mr. Marsalis’s brother, the saxophonist Branford Marsalis, is to lead a band for two nights of Mr. Evans’s small-group jazz in the Allen Room.

As part of the “Gospel Jazz Festiva” in April 2008, Wynton Marsalis will write a work commissioned by Jazz at Lincoln Center for the 20th anniversary of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, based in the church’s Mass; it will involve the church’s full choir, as well as the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and will be performed at Rose Theater and at the church. During the same weekend, the pianist Eric Reed will collaborate with the gospel singer Edwin Hawkins in the Allen Room.

Also in April, Wynton Marsalis and the Spanish pianist Chano Dominguez will reprise “De Cadillac a New Orleans,” a jazz-flamenco work written by Mr. Dominguez and presented in 2003. Mr. Marsalis said that it deserved a better performance and a better hearing, as well as a live recording.

The Hall’s Neuhu Ertuga jazz Hall of Fame, Mr. Marsalis said, was becoming a greater part of the concert scheduling. This year’s inductees, Cliff Rimmer, Benny Carter, Charlie Christian, and Django Reinhardt, will be subjects of concerts. The concerts will go beyond their own repertoire, he suggested, with actors playing the musicians through various stages of their careers.

There will be continued Latin jazz, but after the current season, the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra — the house Latin jazz orchestra led by Arto O’Parrill since 2002 — will end its affiliation with Jazz at Lincoln Center to tour on its own, said a representative for Jazz at Lincoln Center.

New schedules for the organization’s 22 educational programs, as well as nightly bookings at its jazz club, Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, will be released in the spring. Tickets for all the concerts were held at Rose Theater and the Allen Room go on sale today, at www.jalc.org.