

Asheville Jazz Orchestra: The best group you've never heard of

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The golden age of jazz ended decades ago. The roar of the mighty big band, with its blaring horns and seductive grooves have largely become a thing of the past. Fortunately, there are still such ensembles sprinkled throughout the world that preserve the rich musical heritage of Big Band literature from the 30's, 40's, and 50's in today's world. One such musical entourage is the Asheville Jazz Orchestra, which I had the privilege of hearing this Monday.

The group, which performed at the Rocket Club, was everything a true big band should be – five saxes, four trombones, four trumpets and a full rhythm section. The ensemble's size was every club owner's worst nightmare – 17 musicians that would have to get paid. This is the primary reason you don't see big bands anymore. Simply put, it is more economic to hire a jazz duo, trio, or quartet. This is a shame, though, since the Asheville Jazz Orchestra proved to their audience the intensity and

musical tour de force a big band can provide to its listeners.

The repertoire selection was of the highest caliber. The Duke Ellington classics, "In a Mellow Tune," "Take the A Train," and "In a Sentimental Mood," proved to be the highlights of the evening. The latter of the three was especially enjoyable, as it featured Asheville sax master Frank Southecorvo. Southecorvo, the whale of the saxophone family, managed to make the beast sound sexy and inviting. "In a Sentimental Mood," is one of the best jazz ballads ever written, and Frank's rendition on an instrument traditionally not put in the spotlight proved to be one of the most seductive and bluesy solos I've heard by any musician in quite some time. Trumpeter Rich "Big" Wiley, a Maynard Ferguson Big Band alumni now based in Asheville, also pushed the boundaries of the his axe by playing crystal clear fanfares in his solos that blasted out of the stratosphere. Aimee Sullivan, the orchestra's second alto saxophonist, also impressed the audience with her dexterity and lightning fast chops.

What impressed me the most about the

Asheville Jazz Orchestra, however, was the fact that the ensemble as a whole was so tight. While every member of the group proved to be a soloist of the highest caliber, there true strength was in being strong ensemble players. At several moments in the performance, I didn't hear 17 musicians on the stage. Rather, I heard a single instrument that was a life force shouting the spirit of jazz in a glorious and triumphant fashion.

I did have one complaint about the performance. Almost no one was there to see it. There were easily more people on the stage playing than there were in the audience. It really is disheartening when the best musicians in Asheville go unnoticed. Despite the meager size of the audience, they were an enthusiastic crowd, always at the edge of their seats waiting for the next note. The Asheville Jazz Orchestra brought down the house. Only problem was, it was too small of a house. So next time you're in Asheville, avoid seeing one of the more "critically acclaimed" bands that performs at the Orange Peel but can't even get their instruments in tune, and go witness the true talent that is the Asheville Jazz Orchestra.

STUDENT CELEBRITY LOOKALIKE OF THE WEEK



B-plus list celebrity Seth Rogen (right) has become one of Hollywood's shooting stars over the last two years, thanks to roles in the comedy hits *Pineapple Express*, *Knocked Up*, *Superbad*, and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. Rogen has made the everyman look sexy, even to the point that it is almost believable that he scored Katherine Heigl in *Knocked Up*. Benefitting from this phenomenon is sophomore Robert Northington (left), a history major from Winston-Salem. "Sometimes when my friends are drunk they will call me Ben (Rogen's *Knocked Up* character) on accident, it's crazy," said Northington.

