

Roomful of Blues plays on big band era

Roomful of Blues presented a powerful and impressive concert of blues and swing music at the Cat's Cradle Wednesday night.

The band played a muscular style of blues-flavored jazz that was reminiscent of some of the best big bands of the '30s and '40s, but its style also incorporated more modern blues and rock elements. The band's musical execution was virtually flawless, and the musicians played with a passion that frequently seemed to ignite the near-capacity Cradle crowd.

Roomful of Blues has nine members, including a four-man horn section, and they used their size to create a full, rich sound. The size of the nine-member band falls somewhere between that of a contemporary rock or blues band and that of a traditional jazz big band, and the size of the band therefore allowed it the flexibility to play both types of music. The band played traditional jazz standards, but it also played more recent pieces such as the Beatles' "Oh! Darling." Roomful of Blues offered its own unique versions of these widely disparate types of songs and skillful interpretations made all of the songs in their repertoire fit together gracefully.

The band members' instrumental excellence was the hallmark of their show, and each of the players was allowed to display his skills in turn. Roomful of Blues' lineup featured

David Hester Concert

two saxophones, trumpet, trombone, keyboards, guitar, bass and drums. The band's brass section was sometimes reinforced when lead singer Greg Piccolo played saxophone.

Most of the band members had lengthy solos, and some of these performances shined. Keyboardist Junior Bratley had a stunning solo on "Let The Good Times Roll," for example, and trombonist Porky Cohen also had a particularly fine night. Guitarist Tommy K may have had the finest performance of the evening, however. The young Texan's easy Austin-style riffs were wonderful when he was in the spotlight, and his work was equally impressive when he blended back into the band's ensemble sound.

Lead singer Piccolo also contributed heavily to the overall success of the show. Piccolo has a very powerful and meaty voice, and his singing was strong enough to occupy the musical center of a band that had a number of fine instrumentalists who might overshadow a lesser singer. Piccolo's looks and dress make him resemble a slim Sam Kinison, and his distinctive appearance is matched by his distinctive voice. He displayed



The members of jazz band Roomful of Blues

great vocal control and finesse, and he was able to sing very powerfully without merely shouting. Piccolo's singing worked with and reinforced the instrumental power of the band, and it helped make Roomful of Blues' performance Wednesday night an exciting and enjoyable experience.

Pop music

Music Department professors plan benefit concert of American favorites

By RICHARD SMITH
Staff Writer

Do you ever happily whistle a song's chorus but falter when it comes to the verse? Take heart, for not only are you by no means alone, there are many songs that have come to us down the years known almost solely for their choruses. And some of them will be featured Sunday evening when four members of the Music Department faculty and a guest soprano present "Love: Lost and Found," a

selection of American popular songs. The concert is to raise money for the American Musicological Society 50 Scholarship Fund that aids students in their last year of doctoral research, and is a somewhat rare opportunity to see members of the faculty perform.

"So much of what we do is serious scholarship and serious performance," said department chairman Thomas Warburton, who will accompany on piano. "This will be very

informal, largely because of the familiarity of the songs." Songs featured include those of Stephen Foster, some from the turn of the century and those of Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter and George Gershwin.

Both Warburton and Jon Finson, who will be singing, were reluctant to elaborate any further on the concert's program, in particular on what songs will be featured. "(The songs) have very well-known cho-

rases," explained Finson, "but most people don't know the verses. A song will begin and people will have no idea what it is, but the choruses are still famous today." Finson said they would perform the songs in full in order to give the audience a delightful sense of recognition and surprise. Many of the songs tell wonderful stories — hence the program's title — and, Finson said, "We're going to play them for all they're worth."

It is clear that the concert will be

lighthearted. Period dress will be worn by Finson and guest soprano Ellen Smith-Summers to evoke the parlor-song setting of the times. Accompanying Finson and Smith-Summers along with Warburton are faculty members James Haar and Ingrid Arauco.

Warburton and Finson made distinctions between popular music as it was and as it is now. "Today's popular music is disseminated through commercial recording," said

Warburton. "Much of it relies on electronics, and you really need a band to get the sound right. The parlor piano, where you were able to sing and play for yourself, used to be central to the household, not a stereo system. I would say that there are very few current undergrads who have taken piano regularly, whereas a generation earlier was very different."

Finson put it another way: "Popular music today is popular for a different reason. It is mostly declaratory." Finson gave Joan Jett's "I Love Rock 'n' Roll" as an example. "The music that we're performing is particularly appealing to those who love a good melody." Finson is not dismissive toward today's music: far from it. From Stephen Foster to George Gershwin through to Michael Jackson, Finson says, "American popular music is what we've given to world culture."

"Love: Lost and Found" will begin at 8 p.m. in Person Hall.

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