

ON STAGE

Marsalis brings magic to Memorial Hall

Looking at the expressions on their faces, you would think the audience was watching a magic show. And in a way they were.

There is a definite magical feeling flowing through the crowd when Wynton Marsalis plays.

Marsalis' Monday night concert at Memorial Hall was a true jazz experience. Most jazz shows these days are prepared and executed like rock and roll shows; the tunes are short and standardized with little inspired improvisation. Monday night was just the opposite.

Marsalis and his outstanding band opened with their famous "Majesty of the Blues." Marsalis briefly introduced the tune with his quiet Louisiana voice as the soft murmur of excitement shot through the audience.

The rendition of "Majesty" was wonderful, and after it, he performed a few more of his own compositions before getting into the standards.

Marsalis introduced his "Death of Jazz" by explaining that funerals in New Orleans begin sadly and then end with a happy celebration. Reginald Veal then began the intro into the tune and the band followed shortly with a fantastic rendition.

The band followed with a happy, bouncy New Orleans bit that nearly got the audience out of their seats.

After a 15-minute intermission, Marsalis and the crew came back with more than an hour of throw-you-on-the-floor, make-you-swoon jazz. They kicked off the second half with the guru of swing, Duke Ellington. This band really made themselves sound straight out of the '40s.

ANDREW CLINE Concert

Marsalis' and trombonist Wycliff Gordon's performances with mutes were absolutely astounding. Marsalis' growling sounded like a sweaty woman yelling at you to come back onto the dance floor after she just wore you out trying to teach you some new moves.

The rendition of Ellington's blues was hot — it was practically the definition of sensual. Marsalis knows the difference between sensual and vulgar; he wrote the book on playing sensually. The piano sounded like individual water drops tinkling over a waterfall, then dancing the rest of the way down the river.

Marsalis led the band from Ellington to modern ballet flawlessly. Such changes in style may tend to throw some musicians away from smooth transitions, but Marsalis and the band knew what they were doing.

They played "Some Present Moments of the Future," which is the third movement of a new ballet Marsalis recently composed. The movement consisted of three pieces: "Buddy Bolden," "Swingtown" and "Highrise Riff."

"Buddy Bolden" is about the first jazz musician. Marsalis said that Bolden could play so loud in New Orleans that he could be heard across the water in Algiers. The tune was also about the "other things" besides music that Bolden was known for.

The piece was a Marsalis solo that blared through the hall so loudly that

it would have woken up anyone in Old East and Old West if they were still occupied.

"Buddy Bolden" demonstrated Marsalis' mastery of his instrument and his lungs and lips, even though he wasn't playing with his own trumpet. The jazzman broke his horn a few days ago and was playing with a borrowed one. His improvisation was so astounding that I literally became dizzy. I've never had such a feeling of complete absorption into the music of a concert before.

The rest of the ballet was mostly a soft swing melody that was reminiscent of Ellington's 1940s work. Marsalis and Gordon performed a soothing duet that was truly incredible. After a short drum solo by Herlin Riley to quicken the tempo, the swing swung faster and the band took off.

Todd Williams and Wess Anderson traded wildly swinging sax solos while Reginald Veal superbly walked his bass all over the hot tune. The piece ended with the band fading softly into pieces and oh so gently punctuating the sweet ending.

As the band left the stage, the crowd left their feet. A sad thing about most contemporary jazz audiences is that they usually can't tell the difference between a truly great performance and one that is just loud and jumpy.

The best part of the show, as every great performer knows, should be saved until the end. That's just what Marsalis did. After saying goodbye, he brought the rhythm section back and played an utterly stupefying "Embraceable You."

After the crowd left, Marsalis did his usual: He came to the backstage



Wynton Marsalis performs at Memorial Hall

door and hung out with the remaining fans, signing autographs, answering questions and posing for pictures.

The compliments paid to Marsalis as he shook hands and listened to eager speakers after the concert can best sum up his performance. The words: "awesome," "excellent," "astounding," "incredible" and "amazing" were repeated over and over. They were all accurate.

Even with a substitute trumpet,

Marsalis played better than any musician I have ever seen. His band, especially Gordon and Anderson, showed why the best trumpeter in the world chose them to accompany him. They were utterly fantastic.

If you get the chance, see Marsalis. The \$16 tickets did not do the band justice. They were and are well worth the price of an average rock and roll show. And the music is 100 times more fulfilling.

Unique trio of Kiwis 'ready to fly' at the Cradle

The Verlaines

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Wouldn't you expect a really good mixed drink from a graduate of bartending school? Or a decent face-lift from an M.D.?

Well, in the musical world, Graeme Downes, lead singer and songwriter of the Verlaines, proves that having a Ph.D in Music makes for interesting twists and complex arrangements that enliven pop music's basic formula.

Hailing from New Zealand, this three-man band is making their first trip to North Carolina. The tour boosts their fifth album, *Ready To Fly*. Released last year on Slash records, it marks the beginning of a seven-record contract with Slash. Their previous record was the well-acclaimed *Some Disenchanted Evening*. Downes says

TINA PIFER Concert

Ready To Fly is their most polished effort, yet they'll perform old tunes too when they visit the Cradle Saturday.

Overall, The Verlaines sound nothing like anything you've ever heard — bits and pieces may remind you of something familiar, but The Verlaines add enough original touches to make their sound completely unique. Three kinds of horns, a sax, clarinet, harp, violins, cello and double bass all make guest appearances on *Ready To Fly*. However, the heart of the music lies in the talents of Downes' lead guitar, vocals and keyboards, Mike Stoodley's bass, and Gregg Cairns' drums.

Composing songs comes easy for Downes, and he likes to experiment with odd time signatures, tempo shifts, and chord changes. Often, one song may combine all three elements plus the extra instruments and lengthy vocals. As a result, each song keeps your ears on their toes.

"Gloom Junky" on *Ready To Fly* contains complex musical combinations alongside rich guitar work. The chord changes take you by surprise; an electric violin hits the notes in the "down" scale that pervades the song. Similarly, on "Tremble" and "Overdrawn," Downes sings several lines of lyrics going "down" the musical scale.

Although all of the album's songs deal with heartache, most of the melodies stay uplifting, so you're not worn out listening to twelve songs about lost love. For example, on "Such As I," Downes sings "I've been under a spell so that I just might as well have been tied like a dog to your gate," while a chorus of perky horns adds a bit of swing to keep the song light. Horns do the same on "Inside Out" whose lyrics sound show-tunish when Downes sings "So go the way of all clouds babe ... blow away."

Three songs most unlike the rest include the bluesy "See You Tomorrow," with its message, "I need a twenty-four hour holiday before I can face you." On the "prettiest" tune, "Moonlight On Snow," harp and violin strings replace guitar strings, along with a piano accompaniment. When Downes' slow vocals cease at the song's

end, the instrumental part could pass for classical music.

My favorite is "Hurricane." It's got the fastest tempo and wild guitar strumming, yet for some reason it's the song on which the band sounds the most relaxed. Staying with the "bad love" motif, Downes sings: "Now I'm picking through the wreckage since that hurricane named you passed through."

Among Downes' songwriting influences are Randy Newman, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young. One reviewer wrote "Downes' songs feature some of the best throwaway and put-down lines since mid-'60s Dylan." Other reviewers have called the music "intellectual," "intelligent pop," and a "thinking man's band." That's what you get from a group whose leader wrote his dissertation on 19th century Mahler, and whose band name comes from Paul Verlaine, a 19th century French poet.

The Verlaines are well worth a listen. Playing live, they'll sound different because they won't have the extra instruments. Downes says they have to "reassess" their music for live performance; it'll "change color." But he assures that the music will be

danceable with plenty of guitars and drums.

As for future plans, the band will finish their American tour and then head to Australia. Afterwards, it's back to work on another album. Downes is happy that he's not a music student anymore; with his doctorate out of the way, he can finally devote all of his time to The Verlaines.

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