Band Review

Duke Ellington; Cafe Society, New York

The wheels of time are regularly lubricated with irony. Duke Ellington, who has kept a large band together for a longer uninterrupted period than anyone in the history of jazz, and whose own contributions to music have been myriad, now has the most underrated band in the country.

The unit Duke brought into Cafe Society apparently signals the end of the recent slump in the Ellington orchestra. The chief reasons for the resurgence are new drummer Sam Woodyard, who has ignited the other men; the uniquely strong and stable contribution of the returned Johnny Hodges; the fact that Duke and Billy Strayhorn have been devoting more time to refurbishing and adding to the band's book.

The rhythm section is the best Duke has had in some years. Woodyard, formerly with Milt Buckner, swings hard, has good technique, is flexible, and has a considerable amount of imagination. He lacks a degree of subtlety, and sometimes is overloud, but he plays with such emotional conviction and desire that his presence is a continually energizing asset.

Bassist Jimmy Woode is an excellent musician with good tone and beat and constant taste. He also is one of the few jazz bassists really skilled in bowed work.

Duke, I continue to believe, is remarkably underappreciated as a pianist, both as part of a rhythm section and as a soloist. The Ellington two-handed, striding piano is a rare combination of strength and grace.

In the trumpet section, mountain-climber Cat Anderson has retained his stratospheric skills while adding a mellowness and taste that is particularly noticeable in his work with the mutes and plunger. Clark Terry's horn is marked by pungent humor and never-failing sense of swing and his playing becomes more relaxed with the years. Ray Nance didn't solo much on the night under review, but his horn retains directness and power.

The reeds are anchored by baritonist Harry Carney, who plays with a robustness and quality of tone and conception that is the heart of the section. And he occasionally explodes into a booting solo. Jimmy Hamilton's clarinet continues to be immaculate in tone, whistle-clean in speed of technique, and discreetly tasteful in ideas. Russell Procope, whose life story covers much of jazz, is assured and competent if not especially stirring on alto. Mr. Hodges, one of the monumental figures in jazz on his instrument, plays with the suave, liquid legato of yore but more strength has been added. When he really feels like blowing, as in *All of Me, I've Got It Bad*, and the fortunately revived *Jeeps' Blues*, the Rabbit is the biggest you ever heard. Paul Gonsalves' tenor is rich and full-toned in the rhapsodic part of the Hawkins tradition. Sometimes he glides along the surface of a number, but when he digs in, the man wails. The reed section blend as a whole is muscularly smooth.

Of the trombones, the best soloist is Britt Woodman, but on this night, he had few monologues except for Jimmy Hamilton's brisk *Theme for Trambean*. John Sanders is effective on valve trombone, and the sunny Quentin Jackson handles his Tricky Sam-like plunger solos and his other assignments with eloquent aplomb.

The Ellington brass sections during this date were vigorously crisp, climbing, and constantly projecting the feeling of a large reserve of latent power. There are times when the brass seem about to take off through the ceiling—as on *Harlem Airshaft*—and there is sometimes an after-impression that they have. On other numbers, as behind the indomitable Hodges, the brass section surges with a power and pulsation akin to large, long waves on an incoming tide.

The Basie band rocks the blues more dynamically than Duke's, although Duke's men also play the blues feelingly; and the Basie band as a unit swings harder. But the Basie band can't play ballads at all well, while Duke's can. Nor does the Basie book or conception encompass as varied a range of moods, colors, and thematic content as Duke's. Each of these two bands, in essence, is highly effective expression of the two respective leaders' musical personalities and aims, and each is nonpareil at its specialties. But in the current well-deserved furor over Basie, the unique strength of Ellington should not be slighted—as it has been in recent months.

Woody Herman; Basin Street, New York

The "old man" who is younger in wit and warmth than almost all the rest of us has done it again. In just a couple of weeks (at the time of this review) he has recreated another Herd with largely new personnel, and has started shaping it into a fiery, stimulating, gutty ensemble that can wail fiercely, embrace ballads, and relax on the milder jumpers. Woody gives large rehearsal credit, incidentally, to Nat Pierce who "kept giving us the notes for the pieces we didn't have music for, which is like most of them."

The new Herd is still somewhat rough, but already it is only behind Basie and Ellington among current jazz bands in terms of power, unpretentious imagination, and collective passion.

In the rhythm section, Woody has a find in pianist Vince Guaraldi, a San Franciscan recommended by Ralph Gleason. Guaraldi plays with rare economy of means, much warmth and taste, an excellent beat, and a real feeling for the blues vein in jazz. Bassist Monte Budwig is firm and pulsating; and the dedicated young drummer Bill Bradley Jr., while not yet fully secure in his first big band assignment, is meeting the challenge well and should work in even more strongly as he gains experience and confidence.

Woody has one of his best reed sections in years, particularly in terms of solo tenors. Arno Marsh, Bob Hardaway, and Richie Kamuca are all above-average soloists, with Marsh having a slight edge over the other two. Baritonist Jay Cameron, who has been in Europe since 1951, is no Jack Nimitz yet musically, but he's competent. Bass trumpeter Cy Touff is as much of a swinging gas as usual, playing with romping exuberance. The two trombonists, lead man Wayne Andre and Irish-born Bobby Lamb, are good section men but as yet lack solo stature. Among the trumpets, Dick Collins has never blown as consistently well and with as much control as he does now, and this may finally be his year. Also effective in solo is Burt Collins. The rest of the charging, biting trumpet section is composed of Johnny Coppola (mostly lead), Dud Harvey, and Terry Ross (who replaced Paul Seranno). Another important member of the band, newly arrived from England, is Vic Feldman, an imaginative, swinging vibist, who also sits in with authority on drums during some of the small combo numbers, and will soon write for the band as well.

Herman himself continues to be the wittiest, frankest, and most memorable emcee in the business. He is also the most underappreciated of all ballad singers and the only one—except Janet Brace—who looks comfortable sitting down in a chair onstand. He occasionally blows some solo alto saxophone and some happy if somewhat anachronistic clarinet. But most of all Woody's assets, it is his honesty and understanding as a person and his sure-handed skill as a leader that makes this and all of his bands move with a will and a joy few other units approach.

The numbers in the Herman log include the euphoric *Mother Goose Jump;* the still exciting *Four Brothers; Darn That Dream* (featuring Feldman's Milt Jackson-influenced vibes); the jumping *Not Really the Blues* by Johnny Mandel; Horace Silver's accurately named *Opus de Funk*, aptly arranged by Nat Pierce; *Northwest Passage;* Bill Holman's building arrangement of *Where or When; Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* with Woody on alto in a very skilled arrangement by Ralph Burns; *Early Autumn* with a lyrical Richie Kamuca; the roaring *Apple Honey;* the rugged *Squared Circle* with a first chorus written by Dave Cavanaugh and a final chorus by Shorty Rogers; Ralph Burns' affectionate ver-

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