

California Jazz Foundation Membership
Fundraiser at Vitello's

The California Jazz Foundation has held several fundraisers but this one was specifically to gather new members to the organization. Vitello's was crowded with jazz fans who came to enjoy the music, the delicious buffet and contribute to an organization that was specifically set up to assist musicians and singers with financial, medical or social service needs. It was a long afternoon, but I came away totally impressed with the musicians and singers who performed, and the great turnout of jazz fans.

As I took my seat the first group, Chace Morrin's Latin Connection was onstage, filling the room with great Latin rhythms. Wearing a jaunty black hat, the very young Chace Morrin sat at the piano, very comfortable as a leader, with a nice sense of humor. They were just finishing up "Anthropology," which sounded great. Ann Patterson was introduced and after some banter with Morrin, they began "So What," with Patterson on flute. Morrin has got this Latin beat, the pulse right on. He's a very accomplished pianist and there's no doubt that he's got a future in the music business. The young sidemen, Fernando Gomez-drums, Daniel Feldman-congas and Doug Walker-on bass were all terrific musicians, who played with dynamic enthusiasm. The arrangement was unusual but very effective. Patterson was unable to stay longer because was headed to the Stacy Rowles Tribute at the Musicians Union.

The next group played "Black Orpheus," with the addition of sax man, Bob Sheppard. The band was totally supportive as Sheppard filled Vitello's with a steadfast yet explorative approach. He was playing with Morrin's group for the first time, but you'd never know it. Sheppard created a gust of marvelous notes and emotion in the room. Morrin followed in a quieter but no less fulsome piano solo. He was confidence personified. Walker, Feldman and Gomez took the tune to a quieter place for a moment before Sheppard returned. Outstanding! The crowd cheered and applauded wildly. Sheppard looked to Morrin, asking, "What do you want to play?" Morrin quickly responded, "Seven." Looking a bit surprised Sheppard replied, "Oh! Okay, do your think and I'll just kind of play in the weeds over here." It was a funny moment and of course, the tune was not a problem for Sheppard and this young group. It has a fine Latin sensibility while Morrin kept steering it into bop territory. Sheppard's husky tenor added aggressive runs and slurred notes as the drummers added flashy beats along the way. It was a terrific display of talent from everyone on stage. Wow! The audience applauded and wanted more and that's exactly how to do it. Keep your eye on Chace Morrin and his Latin Connection. This is one hot band!

Next up was Bill Cunliffe, bassist Chuck Berghofer and drummer Peter Erskine, who began with a sublime "Like Someone in Love." Bob Sheppard joined them on the next tune (unfortunately I can't remember the tune and didn't jot it down). They all displayed incredible skill and joy as they played, either solo, or when Erskine and Sheppard formed a brief duo. I was sitting there thinking, Why doesn't *everyone* like this

music? They made up a fantastic jazz quartet that anyone would be happy to hear. Sheppard left the stage and Bill Henderson came to the stage and sat on a stool and began "Daydream" with gorgeous accompaniment from the trio. Cunliffe was especially sensitive to Henderson's slower pace on the ballad. The crowd seemed mesmerized by Henderson's artistry and applauded wildly. He began another tune but at one point said, "I forgot the words," but it didn't matter. The audience clapped along as Henderson improvised a bluesy anthem and sure enough, it was great.

Pianist Eric Reed, bassist Hamilton Price and drummer Kevin Kanner performed a short but zesty set. The event had Brad Williams, a KKJZ DJ as the host and he did a great job, to keep things moving along in a very busy afternoon. He introduced Edy Bronston, President of the CJF, who gave an update on the Foundation's activities. It was time for a break as the next band set up. The salads, pastas and pizzas that Vitello's provided were delicious and plentiful.

John Daversa's Progressive Big Band was new to me. I'm very sure I had never heard this band or I would have remembered it. There was a lot going on with the 17-piece group so my notes weren't that great and frankly I was really engrossed in the band and the interesting tunes and arrangements played. Daversa got the band going by playing his trumpet followed by a longish solo from bassist Jerry Watts. "Don't Jive the Hit Man" was roaring like a subway train coming down the track, so you can hear it and feel it coming. There's a rush of ensemble playing then individual solos and comping then the roar comes again. Daversa returned with a melodic solo, before more tension was created. The sound is pure energy, burning up the molecules in the air. I liked it a lot and so did the audience.

"Funky Camels" began with Gene Coy on drums using soft mallets skittering across drums heads to set the scene. A bass clarinet was prominent for a bit. Again, the tune started at a deliberate, measured tempo, with some individual instruments showcased briefly before the ensemble moves on. This is a restless group, moving along like animals looking for prey, conserving their energy for now. A trombone solo cuts through the air then another. This is not swingy, danceable music; it's more intellectual in nature and requires more active listening. Visually I could imagine camels moving along a shifting terrain. Or not. Something was happening every moment, alternating soft then hard notes. It was a powerful piece of music, totally engrossing. The last tune the band played was "You May Think You're Funny," with Jeff Babko at the piano in a boppish mood, with the rhythm section. It was pretty hot stuff, fast nicely intricate for a few minutes before the ensemble joined in. A wave of dissonance emerged among spots of simple clarity, with solos interspersed. The band gathered strength as it moved along, creasing incredible tension. There was a long cadenza before a riotous close. This was good, tough music, involving players and audience alike. The audience was attentive and responsive to everything that was happening on stage. Daversa is a thoughtful, original creator. He doesn't want to produce easy-listening music. He wants to challenge the audience and he showed that expertly with a short but quite thrilling set. The members of the band included: Dave Pittel, Rob Schaer, Ron King, Bijon Watson-trumpets; Bill Booth, Vikram Devasthali, Charlie Morillas, Craig Gosnell-trombones; Jeff Driskell, Phil

O'Conner, John Yoakum, Nancy Newman-saxes; Jeff Babko-piano, Jerry Watts-bass, Gene Coy-drums.

The rest of the afternoon was a blur, but a happy blur. Pianist John Beasley and guitarist Larry Koonse did a short set, then the Jon Mayer Trio, with Chris Conner and Devin Kelly, did a short set. Judy Wexler sang King Pleasure's "Tomorrow's Another Day," with a nice solo from Saxophonist Rob Kyle. Vocalist Mark Winkler sang Bobby Troup's very clever "Hungry Man." Robert Kyle and vocalist Carol Bach-y-Rita closed the afternoon off with a beautiful tune, which she sang in Portuguese. Kyle's sax added variety and texture. Bach-y-Rita's voice carries well with good projection. It was a nice ending to a very full afternoon of music. We wish the California Jazz Foundation a lot of success with their endeavors.

Myrna Daniels