

JAZZ CULTURE

This is the website of The Jazz Culture Newsletter, seen in 80 countries every month spreading and sharing news of jazz life. This week covers Charles McPherson's Quintet at the Jazz Standard and an Obituary for Mark Murphy.



Charles McPherson with Rudy Tucich, and son Chucky McPherson

THE CHARLES MCPHERSON QUINTET

Caught the Charles McPherson Quintet at the Jazz Standard, October 25, 2015 with Jeb Patton, piano, Billy Drummond, drums, Ray Drummond, bass, Brian Lynch, trumpet. Mr. McPherson has added to the book of standards with two songs he led off with, "Marionette," and "The Song of the Sphinx."

"Marionette" at about 200=quarter note has a vevy melody, a celebratory piece. Another title might be "Ode to a Dancer," specifically one of Mr. McPherson's daughters, who is a ballerina. As if a jack in the box had been released, the song seems to bounce with inner springs and joie de vivre, capturing the spirit of a young child running free in a playground. Lynch played a fluent solo swinging to the subdivisions as if flying on a green day in spring—mostly circular seconds, becoming more modern in the second chorus with some jubilant top notes and swaying lines, with wider intervals finding melodic ideas with more

of a triplet feel and prancing agility. Mr. McPherson gave justice to the song title and released his energy with rhythmic brilliance. The piano and bass accented the second beat of the measure. It was like dancing at high speed, chasing a headlong and unattainable object. Jeb Patton's personality suits this song, spraying out modernistic lines sometimes repeating a lick that accented the downbeat and then flying up the keyboard. Mr. Ray Drummond's solo was very melodic and his textures were sensitive, bringing in his lower register at the end.

"The Song of the Sphinx" has a beautiful melody that expresses mystery, ancient heritage, and allure with all the charm of music. The Introduction and section A are mostly seconds, In section B the intervals widen dramatically and there is a punctuated fall in the motif that repeats, the rhythm section playing accented notes. Mr. McPherson led off doing an improvisation that seemed to capture three worlds, that of the ancient Sphinx, the undulations of life on a desert and the influence of jazz, sometimes injecting the blues. The song reflects McPherson's lifelong pursuit of philosophy, perhaps because music connects the particular moment to the universal—both emotionally and spiritually. Lynch used bigger, more dramatic and brassier colors, a more aggressive and direct punctuation, reflecting stylistic influence of Diz and Miles Davis's tone quality. Patton seems to have grown as a stylist. He is more assertive and incorporates more ideas from modern classical music with a jazz rhythmic feel and sometimes playing close clusters, always showing influence of double handed chording (perhaps Monk), finally arriving at a lovely variation theme. Ray Drummond's tone is very sweet, and also fits the mystery at the center of the song, dancing gracefully, creating interesting arcs.

"Love Walked In," by Gershwin at about 160=quarter note was next. This song is usually played as a ballad, but this tempo brought out the inner joy. The group created a delicately swinging and engaging rhythmic emotion and the song floated, as the bass played on top of the beat, the drums complemented the bass, and the piano comping effervescently on off beats. Mr. Billy Drummond was very centered and yet uplifting. Lynch's solo was happy as if he were surprised contrasting sudden high notes with slurred quarter notes. McPherson doubled through then cut the time in

two, playing notes that swooped up with his own special flair, a personal extension of the kind that Bird used to play. The sensitive band responded like litmus paper. McPherson's central melodic ideas were surrounded with floral runs, flying through registers, feeling the rhythmic subdivisions, and at the same time giving the effect of not being totally in control of his emotions, knocked a bit off balance, as it were, by Love walking in, and ending his solo in his lower (and full) middle register. Jeb Patton's playful and loving personality suited the song well. He followed with a long string of triplets, usually seconds and thirds and was given great support by the Messrs. Drummond. Ray Drummond caught the wonder and delight of a person unexpectedly encountering love, playing around the upper notes of the chords. Then the band traded 8's, McPherson with some wide (two octave-to a fifth) intervals showed variety in his contrast of rhythmic values—sometimes holding a note for four beats, and contrasting that with a flurry of 16th notes, with a number of upward swoops and a beautiful tone quality.

"Lover" was played at 300=quarter note. In the introduction, Billy Drummond was crisp on drums with a foreboding power, and Patton lightly comping. McPherson sounded bold and played through the changes which are often step-wise in this song, invisibly because his ideas were melodic, and he is an expert at moving from key to key at humming-bird speed. He could hear so far ahead and played with the excitement reminiscent of Bird. Lynch floated through the changes, basically like Ellington's 'boy with horn,' happy as long as he could keep playing, and at the end of his solo he quoted the melody. Mr. Patton made short licks the used stop time provided by Ray Drummond and cut it in two, but with a passion that fulfilled the song. Mr. Drummond played a drum solo that was quite sophisticated using impressionistic colors with a lot of triplet figures that he added levels of volume, the melodic pitches of the drums, and maintained the steady tempo characteristic of very few drummers today.

"Humoresque," by Dvorak, featuring Jeb Patton. Mr. Patton did a solo number on a famous song that Art Tatum did a masterful recording of. Vladimir Horowitz, considered one of the great classical pianists of all time, memorized two minutes of Mr. Tatum's work, and after playing it proudly for him, Mr. Tatum sat down and improvised 20 more choruses on the spot. Vladimir held up his hands in surrender. Mr. Patton did a lovely job on this number, with a personal interpretation and mastery of the technique of stride piano. Mr. McPherson congratulated him, noting "this is one young man who has done his homework."

"Blues" at 106=quarter note. Mr. McPherson is a well known master. He immediately played a four chorus solo. His interpretation was reminiscent of Vladimir Horowitz's approach to certain classical pieces, a shadow imbuing the interpretation with great power, of having walked in the Valley of the Shadow as it were, and the aftereffect of surviving the ordeal. Lynch played and showed he had done some homework on the blues, playing the blues scale with ease, colorful flares, a good solo. Bed Patton used a fuller darker tone in his lower middle register with good articulation and showed that in jazz, that like all good music covers the extremes of the emotional spectrum, the genre requires the ability that the artist stretch from joy to heartbreaking despair, or at least its reflection, in one second. Ray Drummond played a blues solo that showed his ability to do intricate ideas with soul. Mr. McPherson and Mr. Lynch then played the out chorus together. Mr. Chuck McPherson came to sit in later, but unfortunately, this writer missed him.